Rethinking Past and Future:
Identity and Trauma in Contemporary Afrodiasporic Women's Speculative Fiction

by
Eva Wühr

Declaration

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification. This thesis/dissertation has also been presented at the University of Hamburg in terms of a joint-/double-degree agreement.

December 2021

Abstract

This thesis explores the distinctive ways in which contemporary Afrodiasporic female authors of speculative fiction imagine, think about, and portray diasporic identities, cultural hybridity, and personal and collective colonial and postcolonial traumas. The thesis focuses on the healing from trauma which emerges in the realms of intersectionally oppressive systems. To do so, it engages in five female centred Afrofuturist novels, a group of texts which I call Afrospeculative trauma narratives: Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories,* Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*, Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*. It examines how female writers of the African diaspora use speculative fiction's conventions, blended with African cosmology, to portray diasporic identity configuration and ways to healing during and after traumas distinct to the Afrodiasporic community. My reading of the novels carves out what I call a transformative Afrodiasporic trauma theory, which expands on currently predominant Western trauma concepts, which are deficient in representing and accounting for female Afrodiasporic experience. Thus, this thesis contributes to a revised approach of literary trauma studies, originally conceptualized in the edited collection titled *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory* by Michelle Balaev. This new model goes beyond conventional, assimilationist Eurocentric trauma theory, and celebrates multiplicity, fluidity and plurality, instead of being pathologizing. Moreover, the thesis outlines female-authored Afrofuturism's potential to fill gaps emerging in the realms of both realist or mimetic fiction and conventional science fiction, as, in offering alternative representations, it revises and subverts traditionally male- and white-centred science fiction and transcends realism's conceptual limits in representing traumatic experience. Being linked to both historical trauma and the speculative, and highlighting formerly silenced and marginalized voices, thus drawing a counter-narrative to traditionally male- and white-centred texts, the novels offer themselves as a way to speak for, and to, the forgotten or marginalized, to commemorate a traumatic past, to critique a present which is not sufficiently different from the past, and to envision a more equal future. Using the concept of trauma as a complex, culturally specific tool, the thesis explores how the five novels respond to, and position themselves, within the discussion on hybridity, diasporic identities, and trauma healing, thereby showcasing the genre's healing potential. It specifically emphasizes Afrofuturism's potential to have a cathartic effect on posttraumatic societies through reader empathy and identification as well as intragroup support through Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela's concept of 'bibliotherapy' and Griffin's 'textual healing', thus highlighting the general significance of the imagination and narration for working through traumatic memories. The novels examined in this thesis offer new ways of conceptualizing the connection between cultural trauma and historical memory, providing interesting and important perspectives on trauma, rich resources for healing, and important insights into the connections between colonial histories, enslavement and the disembodied Self, which may lead to a new understanding and a raised awareness around trauma and the possibilities for recovery, yet also allegorically portray that history has not yet been adequately resolved and must never be forgotten, as it shapes both present and future. Thus, considering both historical, transgenerational and personal and collective neo-colonial traumas and their healing through memory-work, "actively forgetting" and the configuration of multiple identities or assemblage, the thesis highlights how Afrofuturist literature disrupts the traumatic silence with which many contemporary, posttraumatic societies, such as the United States, are still yoked.

Kurzbeschreibung

Diese Arbeit untersucht anhand vier frauenzentrierter afrofuturistischer Romane, wie zeitgenössische afrodiasporische Autorinnen spekulativer Fiktion diasporische Identität, kulturelle Hybridität und die persönlichen und kollektiven kolonialen und postkolonialen Traumata innerhalb hegemonischer Systeme und deren Heilung darstellen. Diese Gruppe von Texten bezeichne ich als afrospekulative Traumaerzählungen: Octavia Butlers *Kindred*, Jewelle Gomez *The Gilda Stories,* Helen Oyeyemis *The Icarus Girl*,Nalo Hopkinsons *Brown Girl in the Ring* und Nnedi Okorafors *Who Fears Death.* Es wird untersucht, wie Schriftstellerinnen der afrikanischen Diaspora die mit der afrikanischen Kosmologie vermischten Konventionen der spekulativen Fiktion verwenden, um diasporische Identitätskonfigurationen und Wege zur Heilung während und nach traumatischen Ereignissen innerhalb der afrodiasporischen Gemeinschaft darzustellen, und so eine sogenannte afrodiasporische Traumatheorie herauszuarbeiten. Diese erweitert die derzeit vorherrschenden westlichen Traumakonzepte, welche nicht ausreichend sind, um die explizite afrodiasporische Erfahrung von Frauen darstellen und erklären zu können. Somit ergänzt diese Arbeit einen fortschrittlichen Ansatz im Feld der literarischen Traumastudien, welcher in der von Michelle Balaev herausgegebenen Sammlung „Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory" erstmals konzipiert wurde. Dieses neue Modell für diasporische Identität, Trauma und dessen Heilung geht das über die konventionelle, assimilatorische eurozentrische Traumatheorie hinaus und zelebriert Vielfalt, Fluidität und Pluralität, anstatt diese zu pathologisieren. Darüber hinaus skizziert die Arbeit das Potenzial von von Frauen verfasstem Afrofuturismus, Lücken zu schließen, die historisch sowohl im Bereich der realistischen oder mimetischen Fiktion als auch der konventionellen Science-Fiction entstanden sind, da Afrofuturismus durch alternative Darstellungen traditionell männlich- und weiß-dominierte Science-Fiction-Literatur untergraben, sowie die Limitiertheit des Realismus in der Darstellung traumatischer Erfahrungen, überschreiten kann. Als Gegendarstellung zu traditionell männlich- und weiß-zentrierten Texten befassen sich die behandelten Romane sowohl mit historischen Traumata als auch mit dem Spekulativen, und bieten so ehemals marginalisierte Stimmen eine Plattform. Des Weiteren erinnern sie an eine traumatische Vergangenheit, kritisieren eine Gegenwart, die sich nicht ausreichend von der Vergangenheit unterscheidet, und erträumen sich eine bessere Zukunft für ehemals Vergessene und Marginalisierte. Unter Verwendung des Traumakonzepts als komplexes, kulturspezifisches Instrument untersucht die Arbeit, wie die vier Romane sich innerhalb der Diskussion über Hybridität, diasporische Identität und Traumaheilung positionieren, um so das Heilungspotential des Genres aufzuzeigen. Die Arbeit betont ausdrücklich das Potenzial von Afrofuturismus, eine kathartische Wirkung auf posttraumatische Gesellschaften zu haben, welche sowohl durch Leserempathie und -identifikation als auch, im Rahmen der Bibliotherapie durch sogenannten „intragroup support" entstehen kann, und unterstreicht damit die allgemeine Bedeutung der Vorstellungskraft und der Literatur für die Verarbeitung traumatischer Erinnerungen. Die untersuchten Romane bieten neue Konzeptualisierungsmöglichkeiten für kulturelles Trauma und historisches Gedächtnis, interessante Perspektiven auf Trauma und dessen Heilung, sowie wichtige Einblicke in die Zusammenhänge zwischen Kolonialgeschichte, Versklavung und dem entkörperten Selbst, die zu einem neuen Verständnis und einem gesteigerten Bewusstsein für Trauma und die Möglichkeiten der Heilung führen können. Sie stellen außerdem allegorisch dar, dass die Kolonialgeschichte noch nicht angemessen verarbeitet wurde und niemals vergessen werden darf, da sie sowohl Gegenwart als auch Zukunft prägt. Unter Berücksichtigung sowohl kollektiver, historischer, transgenerationaler als auch persönlicher, neokolonialer Traumata und deren Heilung durch Gedächtnisarbeit, „aktives Vergessen" und die Konfiguration multipler Identitäten hebt die Arbeit hervor, wie afrofuturistische Literatur die nach wie vor vorherrschende traumatische Stille einiger zeitgenössischer, posttraumatischer Gesellschaften brechen kann.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Chapter One:
Introduction

As humans, it has historically been our lot to suffer – and to make each other suffer. In varying degrees, suffering befalls both individuals and collectivities, and it is an experience that is often carried through generations. When crossing a certain threshold of perceived severity or intensity – be it, for example, in the realms of slavery, genocide, exclusion, abuse or rape – identities may become fragmented and trauma occurs. When not adequately dealt with, trauma can sabotage our growth, diminish feelings of self-worth, and hinder the maintenance of personal or collective identities. Instead, feelings of shame, guilt, detachment, alienation, and self-loathing prevail, which often prevent the person or group in pain from leading what is generally considered meaningful and successful lives. Over time, the conceptualization of trauma has evolved "from its original meaning of physical injury to that of psychological disorder and, more recently, to that of cultural phenomenon" (Arva 5).[1] What is defined as 'cultural trauma' occurs when members of a group or collectivity feel "they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander et al. 1). It is this notion of structural, cultural and social trauma, and its healing, that this dissertation is concerned with in its examination of five female-centred Afrofuturist novels: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991)*,* Helen Oyeyemi's *Icarus Girl* (2005), Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) and Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* (2010). The central question I examine in this thesis is how contemporary female authors of the African diaspora use speculative fiction's conventions to portray "identity configuration" (Schachter) and ways to healing during and after structural traumas distinct to the Afrodiasporic community.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), psychiatrist and philosopher Frantz Fanon claims that people of African descent who are voluntarily or forcefully dispersed all over the world have lost a sense of community and belonging. Instead, they are alienated from each other and their own history and identity. This Fanonian view might have inspired the often-interchangeable use of the terms 'trauma' and 'diaspora' in literary, cultural and sociological research, especially when talking about the African diaspora.[2] Bülent Cercis Tanritanir writes in

---

[1] When I talk about 'culture' in this dissertation, I am referring to the collective identity that members of a social group have constructed for themselves and which is based on common denominators, such as language, ethnicity, mentality, art, or ways of living (A. Assmann 13). The notion of unity and homogeneity the term 'culture' conveys has been rightly critiqued for being excluding, fictitious and essentialist. Yet, for lack of a more encompassing vocabulary for the manifold, hybrid and heterogeneous ways individuals relate to each other across difference, we cannot dismiss the term completely.

[2] Throughout this dissertation, I will use a definition of the term 'African diaspora' provided by the African Union, which refers to "peoples of African origin living outside the continent, irrespective of their citizenship and nationality and who are willing to contribute to the development of the continent and the building of the African Union". This definition

his essay "Diasporic Trauma or Traumatic Diaspora?" that "life in diaspora is considered to be one of the main reasons for cultural trauma or vice versa. Cultural trauma is a kind of diasporic result and a natural resource of diaspora, so it is believed that there is a mutual cause-and-effect between the two" (103). Colonialism and the African slave trade, which resulted in the worldwide African diaspora today, and which were characterized by various forms of structural violence and human rights abuse, again leading to civil war, poverty, abuse, and political misrule, are "massive, continent-wide experience[s] of deep social trauma" (Kurtz 425). As a direct result, constituted within life in diaspora, prejudice, exclusion, racism, and alienation have come to be regarded as ongoing and continuously perpetuated social traumas in our modern, neo-colonial societies (Adams). Against the background of this crucial interrelation between colonial and neo-colonial or postcolonial dimensions of structural trauma, Pier M. Larson notes about the interdependence of memories of trauma and collective identities that

> [m]ost ethnic minorities anchor their collective identities in the remembrance of past and present [experiences of trauma]. Victims of social trauma and their descendants often engage in purposeful and explicit remembering as a form of empowerment and identity formation … Informed by this commonly accepted relationship between trauma and identity in the West, historians of identity in the African diaspora have emphasized how Africans and their descendants in the Americas forged a sense of community from and through the shared trauma of bondage and exploitation. (335)

Paradoxically, and irrespective of the pain and destruction bound up with traumatic experiences, trauma can thus function as a source of community, cultural identity, and social solidarity. Instead of being inherently destructive, as it is often defined in theories of trauma in the West, trauma thus should be perceived as a *constitutive* source of cultural transmission.

Modern Afrodiasporic literature originates in this context. For a long time, especially male African and Afrodiasporic writers, such as Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon, and William E.B. Du Bois, as well as literary and cultural critics, have "characterized their experience as fragmented" (Kurtz 425). "[F]ully aware of, and focused on, the fragmenting effects of trauma" (425), they have centred their work on the traumatizing effects of colonialism, hegemonic oppression and historical discrimination experienced by people of colour. Thus, African and Afrodiasporic authors have rendered trauma their primary theme. It has even been theorized that "nearly the whole range of African literature in the second half of the twentieth century is traumatic" (Eaglestone 76). These efforts to put the experience of suffering and trauma onto paper have manifested in so-called "trauma narratives". The goal of these trauma narratives, as Laurie Vickroy writes, is not to provide readers with the sort of comprehension that can only be a product of actual experience, but to articulate and represent the voices of marginalized individuals by making readers "experience emotional intimacy and immediacy, individual voices and memories, and the sensory responses of the characters" (xvi).

---

includes, among others, African Americans and African Canadians, as well as Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-British individuals – the Anglophone speech community of the African diaspora, on which I will focus in this dissertation. Of course, the cultural identities within the African diaspora in general are varied and rich and must not be conflated.

A specific form of literary production from within the African diaspora, which articulates and represents both the voices of marginalized individuals and the collective trauma of slavery, (post-)colonialism, diasporic living and cultural hybridity from a non-Western and non-realist point of view, is called Afrofuturism. This literary mode, where immortality, time travel, spirit possession and vampires are logical forces, has emerged as a response to conventional, predominantly white- and male-centred speculative fiction and imagines new and transformative ways of forming diasporic identities. By confronting a silenced, traumatic past through framing it into narrative, Afrofuturists visibilize the variety of histories and experiences of Afrodiasporic subjects often neglected in Western historiography and shape their trajectory for the future. In other words, they reclaim the past by creating and envisioning alternative, more inclusive futures for Afrodiasporic individuals, while simultaneously critiquing the present.

There is a reason why Afrodiasporic authors often turn to the speculative to express their concerns about our reality. As a genre, speculative fiction, and by extension Afrofuturism, often engages with issues thematically related to what underlies colonialism, in particular, and imperial projects in general – for example invasion, domination, extermination and appropriation. In a very real sense, Afrodiasporic individuals thus are, as Mark Dery puts it, "the descendants of alien abductees; they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare…; official histories undo what has been done; and technology is too often brought to bear on black bodies" (180). [3] Thus, Isiah Lavender III argues, in essence, that "all black cultural production in the New World is [speculative fiction]" ("Ethnoscapes" 187), thereby linking African American and, by extension, wider Afrodiasporic experience to the speculative. Lavender believes that connecting the metaphysical with the physical to confirm white, Western identity, thereby denying black and diasporic identity, has always been a demonstration of power. Africans living in Western countries have had no choice but to accept the resulting, twisted version of reality. Thus, the experience of black[4] people in Western countries is inherently defined by alienation (187). Tate similarly argues in his interview with Mark Dery, when he states that "Black people live the estrangement that science fiction writers imagine" (212). He continues that black sci-fi texts relate to the ways in which being of African descent in America, and thus being alien and alienated, is in fact an experience of science fiction (208). For Tate, black diasporic experience *is* alien experience.

The connection between alienation and speculation becomes especially visible when engaging speculative fiction's unique ability of cognitive dissonance. Inherently, speculative fiction contains elements that are

---

[3] When I use quotes by scholars who refer to 'Afrofuturism', 'science fiction', 'magical realism', or any other subgenre of the umbrella term 'speculative fiction', it can be reasoned that the terms can be used interchangeably with, or replaced by, 'speculative fiction'. In this dissertation, which is concerned mainly with the past and future, I do not want to foreground "science" and technology as a necessary feature of speculative or science fiction – instead, as the term 'Afrofuturism' already indicates, I explicitly focus on the temporal, futuristic aspect of speculative fiction.

[4] My thesis does not engage race in a way that necessarily requires the capitalization of the word "black" as a marker of African American cultural identity. Instead, in this thesis, the word is used as a designation for people of African descent living both in Africa and all over the world.

profoundly alien to the reader. Within these alien situations, socio-political concerns may be explored in new ways. Science fiction is thus productive of alienation: it evokes the feeling that the story world is familiar but somehow "not our world". This demands a specific imaginative activity that realist fiction does not – a speculative engagement with how the world the narrative is set in works and how it relates to our own world. Speculative fiction hence inspires readers to review our current reality, think in innovative ways and take appropriate action. Rooted in the experience of alienation, both science fiction and Afrodiasporic literature "could supply or reflect the altered content and perspective that social transformation requires. Science fiction sometimes does; Black American writing almost always has", John Pfeiffer writes (187).

Here, it is important to dwell for a minute on the two genres' growing popularity. Matthew Omelsky observes that the popularity and production of science fiction has become a "continent-wide phenomenon" (34) since the beginning of the 20th century. Farah Jasmine Griffin notes likewise that the growing "popularity of Black women's literature for individual readers, book clubs, and self-help groups" over the last decades is striking (543). Thus, as speculative fiction dominates in popularity in genre fiction, and thus may reach a broad readership, combined with a growing interest in black women's literature, Afrofuturism's transformative potential as a healing force can be considered as substantial. This is especially important when juxtaposing Afrofuturism's potentials with the ones realism and conventional science fiction offer. Sherryl Vint writes: "As much as realism is insufficient for representing African-American [and, by extension, Afrodiasporic] experience of the past, the dominant conventions of sf are insufficient for representing an African-American [or Afrodiasporic] vision of the future" (246). These gaps can potentially be filled by Afrofuturism, as I will discuss in what follows.

However, in addition to Vint's observation regarding the deficiencies of realism and conventional speculative fiction, I would like to propose a third dimension: mainstream Western (literary) trauma research cannot adequately account for the specific experiences of Afrodiasporic individuals, and diasporic individuals generally. As Stef Craps puts it, the "founding texts" of trauma theory in the Western tradition

> fail on at least four counts: [1] they marginalize or ignore traumatic experiences of non-Western or minority cultures, [2] they tend to take for granted the universal validity of definitions of trauma and recovery that have developed out of the history of Western modernity, [3] they often favour or even prescribe a modernist aesthetic of fragmentation and aporia as uniquely suited to the task of bearing witness to trauma, and [4] they generally disregard the connections between metropolitan and non-Western or minority traumas. (2)

Western trauma treatment emerged in a Western context, from Western researchers, designed for Western trauma survivors, not accounting for the multitude of cultural differences in experiencing and dealing with trauma.[5] As Claire Stocks puts it, "[t]he assumed homogeneity of the survivor group implies that methods employed for healing … are equally applicable to the survivors of other traumatic encounters" (76). Here I

---

[5] I deliberately refrain from using the word 'victim' in the context of trauma, as it implies pathologization. Instead, I use the more positively connotated and life-giving term 'survivor' to convey the transformative and empowering potential the process of overcoming trauma may carry.

would like to introduce a fifth dimension: classical Western trauma theory mostly focuses on individual trauma and has long disregarded collective experiences thereof. This dissertation thus asks the following question, among others: how can one deal with structural trauma on a personal level when it is, in fact, not a personal phenomenon? As Lisa Woolfork notes, trauma has been clinically considered private in Western trauma research, while collective traumatic events, such as slavery (and, by extension, colonialism) were "highly visible, public, self-reproducing system[s]" (3). Thus, the current Western conceptualization of trauma as "ephemeral and unapproachable" does not consider the personal and collective, and the contested meanings of these systems (3). Concepts emerging from Eurocentric settings of trauma theory are thus not necessarily appropriate for the experiences of people socialized in different spaces, with different histories of colonialism.

To a certain extent, I agree with the Western idea of trauma as being personal and playing out differently in each and every one of us. I believe that the individual needs to work towards an identity that is more enabling after trauma. Yet, the individual is never separated from others – it is individual people who collectively make a society. As the diasporic authors I work with in this thesis show, trauma can and must deviate from being treated as an individualist phenomenon and be considered as a collective experience as well. Thus, I believe that the protagonists and their experiences are part of a larger, oppressive structure (even though they are certainly also traumatized as individuals). Therefore, my understanding and focus of trauma is distinctly collective. I am looking at individuals and their experiences as representative of a larger whole and at trauma in terms of structure and community. This also means that despite the work the protagonists do to overcome their traumas, they remain in a fundamentally traumatized society that is haunted by exploitive structures such as racism and sexism. This implies that working through individual trauma is insufficient, since people on both ends of trauma – perpetrators and survivors – need to deal with it to work towards lasting transformation.

I am aware that some readers might find this contradictory and put forward the argument that the thesis is too heavily attached to the notion of the individual, the literary protagonist-character, and individual modes of healing, locking it into a version of trauma theory that it claims to overcome. This unresolved tension, some might argue, is also constitutive of the fiction itself, suspended between the genre of the novel, which has emerged historically as a codification of an individual experience, and Afrodiasporic collective modes of expression, which have persisted within and despite historical trauma. Yet, I argue that this thesis proposes a radical renovation of the very paradigm of trauma theory particularly *because* of this seemingly unresolved tension between universality and specificity. The individual protagonists – women of the diaspora – are written into the Afrodiasporic narratives I am analyzing in this thesis as entering the text from a different position, as part of a community: that of the perceived Other, always part of a larger system of disenfranchisement. Thus, the way in which these diasporic authors depict the protagonists is that the individual is always taken as part of the community. They are tied to and representatives of their communities and therefore different from mainstream characters. In other words, protagonists by these diasporic authors enter the texts as individuals whose relations to their community are central for their identity. This premise of characters standing as synecdoches for a community is constitutive of the Afrospeculative trauma theory I am attempting to outline. It also justifies (and even demands) a structural approach to the texts, which focuses mainly on the macro-

analysis of power systems, thus largely remaining at the level of plot and character, instead of descending deeply into close textual analyses, stylistics, formal devices and the linguistic constitution of the texts.[6]

Being linked to both historical and structural trauma and the speculative, Afrofuturism can potentially revise all three above-mentioned dimensions: the deficiencies of realism, conventional speculative fiction, and mainstream Western (literary) trauma theory. First, the mode can move beyond generic constraints of conventional speculative fiction, which has often neglected the voices of people of colour and women (cf. Barr; Bould). In the world of literature, many black female characters are still written from the perspective of a male and white gaze, and women of colour often take the roles of marginalized characters. Subsequently, research on black female speculative literature is still deficient and lacking in depth. According to Sandra Jackson and Julie Moody-Freeman, "even with the growing evidence of black contributions to the sci-fi genre as well as studies of blacks in sci-fi literature, television, and film, a concentrated focus on the black imagination and sci-fi is absent.… [That] reminds us of the continued work necessary to fill the gaps in the field" (*The Black Imagination* 130). Correspondingly, Omelsky states that the prospect for black speculative fiction looks promising, but academic attention lags behind (34). As the visibility of black female speculative fiction and the representation of women of colour continues to be rather small, the topic of black female identities and its relation to trauma in Afrofuturism is particularly significant and needs further critical analyses. Ground-breaking Afrofuturist authors such as Butler, Gomez, Hopkinson and Oyeyemi have already helped to shape the field by critiquing and diminishing the marginalization of women and people of colour in speculative fiction. This dissertation aims at contributing to the work they have already done.

Second, Afrofuturism problematizes and subverts the assumption that conventional, realist modes of historical knowledge are an appropriate medium to represent traumatic experiences specific to Afrodiasporic individuals. Instead, Afrofuturist narratives underline the relevance of alternative modes of comprehension and representation in the endeavour to express such traumatic events which might be unavailable to both realist narratives and historiography. As I have established so far, Afrodiasporic experience is tightly linked to both the experience of trauma and to the mode of the speculative. Hence, to complete the triangle of Afrodiasporic experience, trauma and the speculative, it is only logical that Afrofuturism is especially suited to represent and deal with the experience of trauma, especially in the realms of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. Afrofuturism is an excellent medium for challenging dominant societal structures and discourses, as it is not limited to a single perspective. The genre has a much broader field of play to approach the "unspeakable" believed to be inherent in colonial and postcolonial trauma, compared to realist literature. As the mode enables the illumination of controversial issues from different, creative standpoints through estrangement,

---

[6] For an investigation adopting a very different, performance-oriented approach to explore this relation between individual and community, see Tatjana Pavlov-West's recently published *Images of the Wounded Mouth: Dissonant Approaches to Trauma in Literary, Visual and Performance Cultures* (2020).

Afrofuturism is especially qualified to grapple with the alienation and trauma experienced by Afrodiasporic individuals in our current neo-colonial reality. Thus, by employing the fantastic, by setting their narratives in the past, the future, or an alternative present, Afrofuturists compellingly display and represent the distinct Afrodiasporic experience of trauma and alienation.

Third, as classical Western trauma theory cannot simply be exported to the specific needs and context of Afrodiasporic subjects, Afrofuturism reveals new ways of thinking about trauma and its healing. It is here that a distinctly Afrodiasporic trauma theory emerges. This theory is intriguingly portrayed in the five novels examined in this dissertation. By employing Afrodiasporic women as protagonists, the five novels present a state of traumatic cultural in-betweenness, thus creating a body of literature which accounts for the distinct culturally heterogeneous experiences of women who face the effects of colonial and postcolonial trauma. They either understand the body as a means to bridge the gap between a traumatically repressed past and our oppressive present, such as in *Kindred* or *The Gilda Stories,* or underline cultural and spiritual practices to know and comprehend the traumatic past, such as in *Brown Girl in the Ring, Who Fears Death* and *The Icarus Girl.* This consideration of the past as present and the two as mutually meaningful, as well as the inclusion of the corporeal dimension, the body, in the mental capacity of memory in the effort to come to terms with a traumatic history, is, I propose, a distinctively Afrofuturist and Afrodiasporic approach to trauma. The historical complexities of colonialism and diasporic living demand a new approach to trauma and the various forms of identity formation in the African diaspora. Trauma studies in literary criticism have long mainly fostered the idea of trauma as inherently "unrepresentable" or "unspeakable" and the inadequacy of language to represent actual experience in pairing neurobiological theories with semiotic theories (Balaev 1-2). Recently, though, a shift in literary trauma theory has brought forth a more pluralistic model of trauma, which places "more focus on the particular social components and cultural contexts of traumatic experience" (3). Through the process of reflecting on and theorizing trauma and the possibilities of healing in diasporic literature, these new approaches enrich and encourage us to reassess and reframe our understanding of current trauma theory. Thus, I place this dissertation in the tradition of literary critics who have contributed to the collection titled *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory,* edited by Michelle Balaev, who "explore both how and why traumatic experience is represented in literature by combining psychoanalytic theory with postcolonial theory or cultural studies" – an undertaking which is paired with an increased scepticism regarding the prevalence of pathological concepts of trauma, and which generates more diverse ideas about the interconnection between experience and language (Balaev 3).

By illustrating how literary works by Afrodiasporic authors can reframe conventional trauma theory from an Afrodiasporic perspective, I seek to contribute to the above-mentioned dialogue to talk about trauma and diaspora in literary trauma theory. I will do this in three ways: first, by acknowledging the impact of various forms of injustice, discrimination and suffering on both individuals and communities. As Craps argues, breaking with the Eurocentric tradition in examining Afrodiasporic literature "requires a commitment not only to broadening the usual focus of trauma theory but also to acknowledging the traumas of non-Western or minority populations for their own sake" (423). Similarly, Stocks argues that to "comprehend the effects of

trauma upon the individual subject, some appreciation of historical, social and cultural specificity is essential" (77). Second, I will contribute to revised contemporary approaches to literary trauma studies by analysing the ways in which Afrodiasporic authors convey traumatic memory. As Larson puts it, "[t]aking historical memory seriously entails moving beyond the comfortable territory of European languages to work earnestly in vernacular languages and to carefully excavate African cultures for traces of the past" (361). This entails a research approach which allows "interpretations and reconstructions of contemporary data to be shaped by historical experience in African narratives, vocabularies, artistic expressions, ritual practices, and embodied sentience (such as spirit possession)" (361). While Chapters Three and Four on Butler's *Kindred* and Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* in this dissertation will be concerned with the "excavat[ion] [of] African cultures for traces of the past", Chapter Six on Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* will investigate, among other foci, the role and significance of creole language. Third, on a broader scale, I will add to a revised approach to literary trauma studies by considering the role of literature, especially speculative fiction, in representing traumatic experience. In doing so, I will propose a model of trauma and its healing emerging from Afrofuturism which goes beyond conventional Western trauma theory, and which celebrates multiplicity, fluidity, and plurality, instead of pathologizing the affected individual or group. As I aim to show, Afrofuturism can offer significant insights into recurring difficulties that Western trauma theorists encounter. For example, the question of how to represent trauma, which is inherently unrepresentable, the problem of decoding trauma across several cultures, the mistake of dealing with collective and personal trauma separately, and the numerous opportunities to heal from transgenerational historical trauma, which persistently linger in our current societies in the form of oppression, marginalization, prejudice, and discrimination. Of course, Afrofuturism does not offer straight solutions to all these problems, but it offers useful perspectives and rich resources for healing, as well as important insights into the connections between colonial histories, which may lead to a new understanding and a raised awareness around trauma and the possibilities for recovery.

In *The Trauma Question,* Roger Luckhurst aims at expanding an emerging canon of "trauma fiction", which includes works that deploy particular narrative strategies to depict trauma, and argues that the dominant direction of research has caused "the aesthetic means to convey the singularity of a traumatic aporia [to] become highly conventionalized, the narratives and tropes of traumatic fiction easily identified" (89). Thus, "trauma has become a paradigm because it has been turned into a repertoire of compelling stories about the enigmas of identity, memory and selfhood" (80). As Dave Gunning has reasoned, Luckhurst's mapping of trauma can trace how representing trauma can be uncoupled from a literary device, and instead be posited as a literary device itself (126). Trauma as a literary device can then be combined with other literary devices from the speculative tradition. Remembering that modern Afrodiasporic literature originates in contexts of trauma, using trauma as a literary device is in line with what Henry Louis Gates Jr. proposes, that "we must turn to the black tradition itself to develop theories of criticism indigenous to our literatures" (25). Trauma as a literary device is at the root of the five Afrofuturist novels which I will examine in this dissertation. For example, it is evident in the form of time travel in *Kindred,* the *abiku* in *The Icarus Girl*, vampirism in *The Gilda Stories,* Vodun spirituality in *Brown Girl in the Ring* and sorcery and dystopia in *Who Fears Death*. Using the concept of trauma as a complex, culturally specific tool, which I am proposing for these five novels, enables us to

encompass issues examined by female Afrofuturists in three traditions: first, as I have spelt out before, in the tradition of speculative fiction, for example when examining the boundaries of categories such as human and non-human as well as dystopias as imaginations of the future. Second, employing trauma in the tradition of Afrodiasporic literature allows us to investigate the role of memory, self-authorization, subjectivity, and agency. Thirdly, in engaging trauma in the tradition of feminist literature, gender constructions and conditioning, power relations and intersectional oppression can be explored.

Stella Setka has coined the term "phantasmic trauma narrative" (93) for the unique form of Afrodiasporic cultural production which aims at recording traumatic history by using culturally specific modes of the speculative to engage the traumatic past and to give a platform to those marginalized by Western historiography. These phantasmic trauma narratives are characterized by the goal to uncover how Eurocentric historiographic accounts have been privileged over the trauma claims of marginalized ethnic minorities (95). Setka emphasizes the importance of those Afrodiasporic epistemologies, as "they provide an added critical purchase on the historical recovery work that neo-slave narratives … seek to achieve; that is, they recover the slave past, but they do so on Afrocentric terms" (95). In this dissertation, I will broaden Setka's idea of phantasmic trauma narratives into what I call "Afrospeculative trauma narratives". In my understanding, the mode of Afrospeculative trauma narratives includes the cultural products of Afrodiasporic artists that represent and critique the effects of a traumatic history on the present, and arguably the future, through alternative or futuristic settings. They share with phantasmic trauma narratives the goal to privilege subaltern subjects and communicate "the reality of traumatic events ... in a way that transcends conventional epistemologies, enabling the reader to experience a felt connection to the painful legacies of history" (Setka 95). Indeed, they suggest Afrodiasporic ways of knowing the past, which were suppressed by the rationality of a Western-dominated world. Moreover, they offer a new way of conceptualizing the connection between cultural trauma and historical memory, as they include trauma and its healing as a narrative device in the form of supernatural tropes not possible in realist fiction. Thus, not only *The Gilda Stories* and *Kindred*, which are (mainly) set in the past, but also *The Icarus Girl*, and the futurist *Who Fears Death* and *Brown Girl in The Ring,* can be read as Afrospeculative trauma narratives.

In this dissertation, I will further explore the above-mentioned connection between Afrodiasporic experience, both personal and collective trauma, and their relation to the politics of Afrofuturism. The central question I ask is thus how contemporary female authors of the African diaspora use speculative fiction's conventions to portray what Elli P. Schachter has termed 'identity configuration' and ways to healing during and after traumas distinct to the Afrodiasporic community. I will also work with several underlying currents of this question, including the significance of Afrofuturism for conveying important reparative messages; the origin, symptoms and effects of the specific trauma experienced by the protagonists, and its relation to life in diaspora; the protagonists' individual configuration of multiple identities (as a successive model to Du Bois' 'double consciousness'), and their journeys of what Richard G. Tedeschi et al. have conceptualized as 'posttraumatic growth', and its link to the speculative (i.e. supernatural, magical) elements of the narrative. In examining these questions, I will build on diasporic theory of identity formation and fragmentation, memory, and trauma.

On a broader scale, I will explore how the novels respond to and position themselves within the discussion on hybridity, diasporic identities, and trauma healing. Through examining speculative fiction works by female authors of the African diaspora, I aim at developing what Christine MacLeod has termed "an account of how 'otherness' is constructed and experienced" and a concept of hybridity which undermines cultural nationalism (58). Even though trauma causes reorientation and disruption, I argue that the meaning, if not value, attached to the traumatic experience is, as Balaev puts it, "influenced by a variety of individual and cultural factors that change over time" (4). Vickroy argues, like Balaev, that "[t]he fact that trauma, especially in colonial and post-colonial contexts, is often created out of cultural conflicts and attempts to efface certain cultures (and by extension the identities of individuals therein) makes it especially important to understand the nature of these conflicts and the mistakes of the past" (221). It will thus be my contention that the manifestation of that trauma in the individual must be read in terms of the social and political. In other words, I will highlight that the novels reveal how oppressive societal structures lead to collective trauma, which is carried and worked through by an individual character. I am thus recognizing that the healing of what Laura S. Brown has called "insidious trauma" (107) cannot be successfully done through individual means only. This works alongside my argument to expand, through critique, and via my specific selection of Afrodiasporic authored novels, Western psychological constructions of trauma as individual, when it is also, and crucially, collective.

Looking at female-centred Afrofuturist works by diasporic women who focus on trauma and diasporic identities is particularly significant for two reasons. First, discrimination based on race, ethnicity and gender is still a reality in our contemporary societies. Craps emphasizes this argument by insisting that for many marginalized communities all over the world who live in racist societies, everyday life is traumatic (28). In countries where racist and ethnocentric behaviour towards "foreigners" and women is practised or even institutionalized, diasporic women, as groups of larger diasporic communities, may therefore (but certainly not necessarily) experience an intersectional form of trauma. As Benjamin Robertson posits, "[b]eing a black woman in the [Western world] does not simply make an individual subject to racism and sexism. Instead, it makes that individual subject to something else that is a combination of racism and sexism in which neither one nor the other takes absolute precedence" (370). Therefore, insidious trauma, "the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit" (Brown 107), must be studied in scholarly research. Second, as historical traumas are considered to carry the possibility of being "inherited" over several generations after the actual event in the form of "transgenerational trauma" (Eyerman; Hirsch; Schwab), historically marginalized communities in modern society, such as a diaspora, may struggle to build and reintegrate their identities due to a looming and often suppressed cultural trauma inherited from former generations.[7] Hence, contemporary

---

[7] I certainly do not want to suggest a binary framework of healthy, integrated, whole white Selves contrasted to fragmented, pathological black Others. It is only partially true to say that historically marginalized communities have inherited trauma. Generations on both ends of horrendous events have been collectively traumatized, albeit differently, by historic violence. Contemporary examples for this so-called "perpetrator trauma" can be found among post-

diasporic individuals can (but obviously not necessarily) still carry the inherited collective historical trauma of their parents, grand- and great-grandparents, experienced, for example, during slavery and the European colonization of the African continent. Especially in the United States, a country which is often critiqued for being resistant towards its historical trauma, and which has not established a culture of remembrance similar to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in post-Apartheid South Africa and the *Erinnerungskultur* (translating to 'culture of remembrance') in post-Holocaust Germany, Afrofuturism offers a literary means to fill this gap, and is therefore especially worthy of scholarly attention. As Toni Morrison testifies, "[the American] culture doesn't encourage dwelling on, let alone coming to terms with, the truth about the past. That memory is much more in danger now than it was thirty years ago" (Morrison in Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* 222). It therefore does not come as a surprise that Afrofuturism, with its visionary and subversive politics, mostly emerged in the American context. Being deeply informed by multidimensional perspectives on trauma and healing, paired with subliminal and apparent tones of feminism, the five Afrofuturist novels I discuss in this thesis have the potential to alleviate pain and excavate repressed traumatic memory. As Vint declares, narratives serve as a way of making collective traumatic experiences accessible for cultural memory (243). Similarly, Toni Morrison writes that Afrofuturism can be seen as an extension of historical recovery projects, as they portray "how African slaves and their descendants experienced conditions of homelessness, alienation, and dislocation that anticipate what philosophers like Nietzsche describe as the founding conditions of modernity" (Morrison in Yaszek, "Afrofuturism" 47). As members of historically marginalized groups today and descendants of families that experienced trauma in the past,[8] Butler, Gomez, Hopkinson and Oyeyemi contribute to this endeavour through creative acts, utilizing the genre conventions of Afrofuturism to represent the "unrepresentable" and to break the silence which is inherent in trauma. I thus suggest Afrofuturism in this dissertation as a mode to "actively forget", in Friedrich Nietzsche's terms, a traumatic past by turning agonizing and suppressed traumatic memories into positive remembrance. Simultaneously, the narratives reimagine the future in a more just way to effect constructive changes in perception and action in the present. Having historically been denied both the space and the voice to tell their own stories, the black female authors are differently envisioning the future for Afrodiasporic communities, especially women. Their rich imaginative configurations, as narrated in their Afrofuturist texts, feed into the Afrodiasporic trauma theory I work towards in this dissertation.

It is by no means my intention to consider trauma in the realms of diaspora to pathologize the functioning of Afrodiasporic individuals. The experience of people belonging to this group cannot, and must not, be reduced to one of trauma. Accordingly, the five novels I will examine function as narratives of not merely survival, but

---

Holocaust Germans, post-Apartheid English and Afrikaner people in South Africa, or post-slavery Americans. For more detailed analyses in this regard, see the works of Dominick LaCapra (1998) and Saira Mohamed (2015).

[8] Whereas Butler's and Gomez's ancestors were kept in slavery, Oyeyemi is the daughter of Nigerian immigrants to Britain due to the Nigerian civil war. Hopkinson, on the other hand, is a descendant of Afro-Caribbean immigrants to Canada (Rutledge 589).

discourses of black and feminist knowledge production that undermine those of trauma as pathological and problematic. In this regard, it is also important to recall that trauma is not a psychosomatic illness – mental disorders are merely possible *symptoms* of unprocessed, unassimilated trauma. Neither do I want to suggest that Afrofuturist narratives are simply reactionary. Female Afrodiasporic writing is a product of agency and choice, instead of being reactive in the face of victimization. With regard to recent movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #Metoo, which blatantly show that our world is still wrestling with questions of racial and gender injustice and centuries of pain inflicted on and experienced by women of colour in particular, it is instead my aim to contribute to the transformation of old ways of thinking.

I chose the novels *Kindred, Who Fears Death, Brown Girl in the Ring, The Icarus Girl* and *The Gilda Stories* for my analysis because of the culturally diverse and multifaceted diasporic experiences of trauma they portray, and more specifically, because of the complex literary strategies they deploy to represent these experiences. Firstly, the Afrofuturist novels reveal various forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, and imagine ways of disrupting hegemonic and patriarchal structures. In using innovative representational strategies to underline the traumatic dimension of the past, they deal with the process of regaining control. In other words, these novels are "about the search for meaning after trauma and the rewriting of life's narrative to incorporate the catastrophe" (van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela viii), while simultaneously offering radical and transformative ways to healing. Secondly, the chosen novels distinguish themselves through black female protagonists who either bear, or are subject to, supernatural powers in a dystopian environment (meaning an environment where there is great suffering or injustice). In the course of the stories, their posttraumatic growth is triggered by the speculative elements the genre provides, more particularly the magical powers the protagonists possess, and which aid them during their journeys of posttraumatic growth. They are therefore especially suitable to carve out a distinct Afrospeculative trauma theory. Thirdly, the texts are concerned with re-imagining and re-constituting the black female body by replacing dominant discourse's obsession with stereotypical representations of black women as extreme examples of otherness. Thus, they contribute to the literary project that Griffin refers to as "textual healing" (519). Literary productions like these "serve to make the wounds of that legacy real for their non-black and male readers as well", as they "force all readers to occupy the critical subject category of the black woman" (521). Critical attention to those texts which perform textual healing thus bears transformative potential. While my reading builds upon Griffin's, it departs from it significantly in its attention to the inextricable intersection of body and mind in trauma and its healing, in contrast to conventional Western perceptions of the body and mind as separate entities. Despite research increasingly exploring and acknowledging the connection between body and mind, both in the realms of pain and its healing, Western conceptualizations of pain have long divided human suffering into two categories: mental and physical. As Nadine Flagel argues, though, and as I will demonstrate especially in my analysis of *Kindred,* "[p]hysical and emotional wounds are rhetorically indistinguishable" (232). Indeed, trauma can affect mental and physical health simultaneously. By including the body as a part of a multiply configured identity, the five novels suggest a distinctly Afrodiasporic approach to identity and trauma.

The conceptual and theoretical framework of the study, firmly situated within the field of literary and cultural studies, especially critical race theory, will be informed by interdisciplinary research. My main approach will be a contextual analysis of the novels, framed by concepts from Afrofuturist studies, postcolonial theory, women's studies (rendering the female protagonists a necessary focus of study), and (black intersectional) feminism, the latter whose fundamental tenets align with Afrofuturism's transgressive politics, and therefore is called "Afrofuturist feminism" by Susana M. Morris (155). These fields, by definition, argue "for the importance of all voices, all texts, especially those of the oppressed and marginalized" (Hentges 18) and work for social justice in a symbiotic way. Additionally, I will rely on concepts that have emerged within the realms of psychology and sociology, especially literary trauma theory, which is a subset of cultural analysis and psychoanalytic theory. I will contribute to this interdisciplinary dialogue by interweaving (cultural) trauma studies, which is regarded as "one of today's signal cultural paradigms" (Visser 270), as a theoretical framework with literary analyses, thereby aiming at advancing a distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory. This is in line with Chris N. van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela's position, who "advocate collaboration between the disciplines of psychology and literature, to examine jointly the nature of trauma and ways of dealing with it" (ix), as it could provide intellectually useful insights for both disciplines. Intertwining seemingly unrelated fields through innovative approaches might enable new insights into the different worlds we live in, thus opening up the opportunity for social change to occur. These "novel" interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches to Afrofuturism thus serve as a means to understand texts and their contexts in our world in a deeper and broader way. Interdisciplinarity is needed to "understand ideas and realities between and among, across and within", as "one lens is not enough to understand the world of the self" (Hentges 14). Even though trauma is indisputably a global experience, yet experienced very differently in individuals, my theoretical framework in this thesis questions the usefulness of conventional trauma theory and its assimilationist, Eurocentric roots beyond Western contexts. Still, engaging current concepts in the realms of Western trauma theory through Afrodiasporic literature is actually a productive exercise, because of what it is able to do to the former: "African social thought, expressed through its writers and critics, allows us to refine and address crucial problems in trauma theory, including questions about the representation of trauma and strategies for trauma healing" (Kurtz 421). In engaging trauma and the Afrodiaspora in speculative fiction, I will thus contribute to a broadened conceptualization of trauma and an extended, revised paradigm to talk about trauma in Afrodiasporic individuals.

I am aware that I, as all researchers, write from a particular history and culture. What I put to paper is therefore always contextual. Thus, I am conscious of my own limitations and the risk of contributing to "yet another of the First World academy's covert colonizing strategies of domination" (Hutcheon, "Colonialism" 9). In this regard, my situatedness as a white German woman makes this project on trauma and racism both problematic and fascinating, not only because I write this thesis in a language that is not my mother tongue. As Lisa A. Long writes, "if a reader/teacher/critic's racial identification corresponds to that of the author/protagonist, he or she will have access to particular cultural knowledge and racial experiences that offer a different and even privileged entree into the text" (475). This is not the case for me and the protagonists I am working with, and it is therefore a special challenge for me to do justice to the lives of black women. I do not, therefore, claim to

be speaking for black women. As a European engaging with Afrodiasporic literature, I do not possess the necessary qualifications to genuinely represent the original experience of black women. However, I agree with Christine MacLeod that criticism should not or could not ever be "divided up into racial no-go areas or any other kind of exclusive fiefdom" (53). Similarly, I reject the position that "'we' should only or mainly be concerned with what is 'ours'" (53). As Edward Said has proposed, critics have the intellectual responsibility to subvert such thinking in favour of "mixing, of crossing over, of stepping beyond boundaries", because these are "more creative human activities than staying inside rigidly policed borders" (43).

This thesis is divided into a theoretical chapter and five analytical chapters, sandwiched between this introduction and the conclusion. In Chapter Two, the theory chapter, I will approach both personal and collective identity and trauma from a diasporic perspective. Moreover, I will outline how trauma theorists have conventionally understood trauma as pathological, individual, and contagious, in the form of transgenerational trauma and postmemory. To offer a broader conceptualization of trauma, I am tracing a cultural understanding of trauma as employed in Afrospeculative trauma narratives, which is capable of initiating posttraumatic growth through what van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela have called 'bibliotherapy' and Griffin's concept of 'textual healing', thereby focusing on the roles of language, re-narrativization and memory in configuring a multiple identity. Here, I especially highlight Afrofuturism's potential for counterhegemonic discourse and its distinct capability of representing the "unspeakable" in trauma through cognitive dissonance. Chapter Three focuses on Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and considers the different ways the past informs the present. In tracing the speculative trope of time travel, I will highlight the novel's insistence on the necessity to excavate the traumatic past to be able to understand and change the present. Chapter Four analyses Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* and outlines how the speculative trope of vampirism is deployed to highlight the distinct position of black diasporic women throughout history, while simultaneously revealing how colonial and postcolonial traumas continue to affect the present. Chapter Five analyses how Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* characterizes the distinct space that diasporic individuals inhabit through the Yoruban *ibeji* and *abiku* myths. I consider the ways in which the narrative remains purposefully ambiguous in presenting the main character's precarious state, which could be read both from a medicalized or a spiritual perspective to highlight how diasporicity resists easy, dichotomous categorization. Chapter Six investigates how Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* similarly offers a 'third space' for diasporic cultural identity by imagining a diasporic framework of Voudoun spirituality, while simultaneously showcasing, by means of dystopia, how current forms of oppression might continue to prevail in the future if not adequately dealt with. Chapter Seven then traces how Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* unsettles simplistic binary worldviews by imagining a dystopian, post-apocalyptic future, in which various forms of oppression, such as racism and sexism, pertain, as a critique of ongoing neo-colonialism, imperialism and exploitation. In analysing the multiple ways in which Afrofuturism offers techniques of working through trauma and empowering individuals and societies in their posttraumatic growth, all analytical chapters highlight how the novels carve out representational space for Afrodiasporic women to offer multi-dimensional, complex characters, with whom readers from all cultural backgrounds might empathize and/or identify, while simultaneously broadening Western-centred trauma theory's predominantly pathological concepts. Finally, I conclude this dissertation with drawing parallels

between the five Afrofuturist narratives, thereby summarizing the distinctive ways in which contemporary Afrodiasporic female authors imagine, think about, and portray the personal and collective traumas emerging in the realms of intersectionally oppressive systems, combining them into what I call a distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory.

Chapter Two:
Theoretical Framework and Points of Departure

A Diasporic Approach to Identity Formation

An understanding of identity, which crosses the boundaries of psychological, sociological, and cultural studies, and which is linked to trauma, forms the theoretical basis for my dissertation. Due to the heterogeneity of the term 'identity' across disciplines, a fixed definition is impossible to give. Historically, liberal humanists have constructed a particular notion of a subject, who is an "autonomous, rational, disembodied, self-determining and self-defining individual, clearly distinct from the world around him and conceptualized as a white, heterosexual man with a coherent and stable identity" (Bast 153). This Western-centric conceptualisation of identity has been heavily criticized and widely dismissed by most postmodern researchers, as most individuals in our contemporary societies do not find themselves represented in this socially constructed, constraining conceptualization of identity. Women, members of the LGBTQIA+ community[9] and differently located diasporic societies, necessarily complicate the framework. Postmodern writers and scholars even describe identity consistency as "a coercive social demand on individuals, requiring them to choose among socially constructed binary opposites" (Gergen in Schachter 169). As many individuals cannot (and should not need to) place themselves in a fixed, binary category predetermined by society, they find themselves in a state of constant disconnection and fragmentation. As the concept of a stable, fixed identity rooted in conventional Western psychology is indeed a fantasy, Kenneth J. Gergen claims that "in place of the enduring and identifiable self, we find fragmentation and incoherence … the postmodern sensibility questions the concept of 'true' or 'basic' self and the concomitant need for personal coherence or consistency" (4). It is this argument that Bernard Murchland also follows when he proposes that, in the 21st century, we live in the "age of alienation" (1). Similarly, Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw argue that our age is the "age of trauma" (1), while Robert J. Lifton calls it the "age of fragmentation" (1). Increasingly facing "multiple" selves, the individual has to "manage different self-concepts flexibly" (Schachter 169) to achieve what might generally be considered a relatively coherent and integrated identity. If and how an individual can achieve this is a contested debate in research. Many postmodern researchers hold the view that individuals "should be encouraged to be flexible and to accept the multifaceted, changing, and contradictory aspects of their psychological existence" (Gergen in Schachter 169). Thus, cultural and literary scholars loosely define identity today as "the individual's psychological relationship to particular social category systems" (Frable 139). Thus, identity "designates the attempt to differentiate and integrate a sense of Self along different social and personal dimensions such as gender, age, race, occupation, socio-economic status, ethnicity, class, nation states, or regional territory" (Bamberg). In forming an identity, individuals hence rely on "values, goals and ideals that

---

[9] LGBTQIA + is an acronym and stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and all other people who feel they belong to the queer community.

are provided by tradition" within a culture or community (Aydin 129). This definition encompasses the notion that identity is neither a static dimension nor simple to understand, but rather the repeating process of an individual to construct and revise self-images at the intersection of societal interaction and individual biography (Nünning 307). In other words, people's identities are "fluid, multidimensional, personalized social constructions that reflect the individual's current context and sociohistorical cohort" (Frable 139). Identity should thus be understood as fluid and multiple. Multiplicity in identities, also in the face of fragmentation through trauma, is therefore celebrated and perceived as potentially enriching, instead of condemned. I will thus think of identity in this dissertation not as a fixed, stable entity, but as Stuart Hall has defined it: a "'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (222). It is a "matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" (225).

The process of self-construction or identity formation is often compared to a narrative, from where the notion of a 'life story' emerges (Bamberg; M. Crossley). As Paul Ricœur argues in his concept of 'narrative identity', it is only through the process of telling a story, that the Self can come into being (132). Thus, identity could be regarded as "synonymous with the individual's evolving, self-constructed life story" (McAdams in Schachter 171). Narration therefore serves as an organizing principle for human life. Accordingly, Susan Rubin Suleiman asserts that "how we view ourselves, and how we represent ourselves to others, is indissociable from the stories we tell about our past" (*Crises* 1). Historical memory, as I describe below, thus plays a critical role both in personal self-definition inside a group and the collective identity formation of a group. The term 'collective' or 'cultural identity' refers to group-specific forms of culture and functions analogous to personal identity. The collective identity of a group needs a constant consolidation by historical or 'cultural memory' in the form of rituals, symbols, and myths (Nünning 306). The term 'cultural memory' was coined by Aleida and Jan Assmann and is based on and expands 'collective memory', a concept developed by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in 1950, which implies that there is not only an individual but also a group memory, which influences an individual's understanding of events in the past. Cultural memory understands the socially constructed collective (historical) memory as the inventory of texts, pictures, and rites which are inherent to every society and era, and whose fostering stabilizes and conveys their self-image and collective identity (J. Assmann 15). It thus means the shared pool of knowledge and information of a social group, which is mostly transferred in the form of narratives as storytelling and which enables collective experience (Nünning 253). Narratives and the memory embedded within them are a means of reinforcing a collective identity, as humans constitute their social identities through narratives. Collective memory is not bound to a certain location, though. A diaspora, which can be loosely defined as a dispersal of members of a certain culture or from an original homeland, can share a collective memory regarding their origin, which reinforces their collective identity. In the diasporic context, according to S. Hall, there are two positions of thinking about collective or cultural identity. The first defines cultural identity "in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common" (223). The second position, however, realizes that one "cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely, … 'uniqueness'" (225). Again, we can

17

conclude that cultural identity undergoes constant transformation and is not eternally fixed. Diasporic identities then are "the names [diasporic individuals] give to the different ways [they] are positioned by, and position [themselves] within, the narratives of the past" (225). S. Hall's understanding of diaspora experience is thus not defined by purity, but by the recognition of diversity and heterogeneity, and by an understanding of identity as living "with and through, not despite, difference; by 'hybridity'. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (235). This approach celebrates and emphasizes fluidity and multiplicity.

Diaspora is a highly complex term which often falls prey to oversimplification and generalization. It is not to be confused with the concept of migration, as it exceeds the physical act of moving from one place to another. It involves "adaptation to changes, dislocations and transformations, and the construction of new forms of knowledge and ways of seeing the world" (McLeod 237). Diaspora entails the implications and complexities of migration, which have a ubiquitous effect on the identity of both immigrants and indigene persons. Diaspora is hence a theoretical concept, instead of the physical act of relocation. As Tanritanir writes, diasporic literature's mission has been "demystifying the actual realities of expatriates' life" and to "pen the agonies and trauma immigrants experienced through living in alien lands of diaspora" (105). Most authors committed to this mission share the theme of the "duality of an inevitable dilemma the immigrants undergo; that is, the feeling of homesickness and alienation in the host country mixed with the nostalgic memories and cultural, ethnic associations with the homeland" (105). The concept of 'home' is of utmost importance in the context of diaspora. The five Afrofuturist novels I work with in this dissertation also centralize these concerns. According to Avtar Brah, 'home' is often considered a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. Thus, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of locality" (192). 'Home' is thus not a location but entails the complex structures surrounding the concept of diaspora, and it is also a site of memory. The often romanticized, fairytale-like concept of home presented in public media, which conjures notions of inclusion, familiarity and belonging, can become contested in the diasporic context: "The question of home … is intrinsically linked with the way in which processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and are subjectively experienced under given circumstances. It is centrally about our political and personal struggles over the social regulation of 'belonging'" (Brah 192). In the case of a person calling a specific location 'home' but feeling out of place in this specific place, research speaks of 'displacement' or 'dislocation'. Put differently, a dislocated person feels conflicted about a place, for example, through feelings of not belonging. Feelings of dislocation can emerge both in individuals who have been forcefully or voluntarily dislocated. According to John McLeod, a person with a culturally hybrid or diasporic identity may have feelings of division between two seemingly irreconcilable worlds. This state indicates "the perilous intermediate position that both migrants and their children are deemed to occupy: living 'in-between' different nations, 'of, and not of' each place, feeling neither here nor there, unable to indulge in sentiments of belonging to either location, defined by others often in unflattering ways" (247). Achieving a state of security is impeded when being torn between the current residence and the previous domicile, subsequently leading to a state of disunity or fragmentation in the Self –

a state, as we will later see, which structurally recalls trauma, but also offers ways of transformation and growth.

Managing the conflict of two seemingly irreconcilable cultural identities in the diasporic context is an ongoing process – and it is here that it is useful to reconsider Du Bois's concept of the 'double consciousness', which he elaborated on in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois states that the identity of Afro-Americans is constantly caught between two cultural poles: "One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body…" (Du Bois 11). The concept convincingly demonstrates that the notion of a single, fixed and coherent identity "may actually be incompatible with social or historical reality" (Stocks 86). How then can the diasporic dilemma be approached? As Gunning argues, it is "recognizing this duality rather than its reparation, that constitutes the crucial step toward liberty" (120). Hopkinson argues similarly when she writes that

> for people from diasporic cultures there's more than a doubled consciousness, it's occupying multiple overlapping identities simultaneously …. We are the people who have more than one place or identity or culture that's home, and we're struggling to find modes of expression that convey how we'd had to become polyglot, not only in multiple lexicons but also in multiple identities. The classical forms of artistic expression give us a base from which to work, but from there we have to break the codified forms and create new voices for ourselves. (Hopkinson in Rutledge 599)

Thus, the employment and appropriation of innovative and creative literary forms and modes, such as Afrofuturism, are needed for making sense of the diasporic condition. Equally, for examining the Afrodiasporic speculative fiction Hopkinson describes, a broader concept for understanding diasporic identities is required. In highlighting that there are many ways to think about and experience being diasporic, Afrofuturism has the capacity to transform Du Bois's concept of the double consciousness into a triple, quadruple, quintuple or – simply put – multiple consciousness.

A contemporary perspective on personal ontogenesis suggests the term 'identity configuration' for "the different possible ways in which individuals configure the relationship among potentially conflicting identifications in the process of identity formation" (Schachter 167). According to Schachter, the term successfully bridges the gap between multiple identifications (a view especially put forward by modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf in *Orlando*) and the historical approach of a single, coherent and stable identity, enabling a person to configure a relationship among conflicting identifications: "A configuration implies a single set of relations among many components" (170). The resulting personal configuration is more than the "simple sum of all identifications" (171). This resonates with S. Hall's suggestion to think about identity as a "production", which is never fixed nor complete, and always in process. This production is focused on "*re-telling*" the past (224, emphasis in original). It is exactly this re-telling and "re-membering", a "putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha, *The Location* 63), as I will show, that the chosen Afrofuturist diasporic authors attend to.

Another rather recent model for Afrodiasporic identities, which shows parallels to Schachter's identity configuration, is the concept of 'assemblage', which was developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. While the intersectional model of multiple identities presupposes that the various components – gender, race, class, nation, sexuality, religion or age – are always complexly intertwined and interlocked, not stable nor

universal, but ultimately separate categories, which can be disassembled, an assemblage, as Deleuze and Guattari understand it, is "more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency" (212). Intersectionality[10]'s premise is that the separate identities are reflected differently in each person, depending on time and social context, thereby demanding the "knowing, naming, and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time" (Deleuze and Guattari 212). Thus, from an intersectional viewpoint, the individual *can* establish an identity, but a seamless identity is not achievable. Assemblage, in contrast, is not to be understood as a constellation of fixed categories but rather, as Joshua Yu Burnett phrases it, "an event in time that brings together multiple identity factors in ever-changing and potentially unstable and unquantifiable ways" (*My Left Arm* 13).

The concepts of 'identity configuration' and 'assemblage' are closely related to 'hybridity', a central concept in postcolonial studies. Jessica Langer summarizes that, "[i]n a sense, all postcolonial science fiction – indeed, all postcolonial cultural production – is about hybridity" (125). As (Afro)diasporic subjects inhabit two or more spaces at once, "[t]he hybrid is a usefully slippery category, purposefully contested and deployed to claim change" (Hutnyk 80). For a time, 'hybridity' has been seen as "a productive rejection of essentialist notions of identity and of binary logic in the context of colonizer-colonized relations" (McDonald 133). However, the term has also been critiqued. The scepticism particularly circles around the fact that the term's origins lie in racist discourses. As Jessica McDonald observes, "hybridity as a concept carries the anxiety that each individual component could be diluted in new hybrid forms" (140). This leans towards racism, as it implies that one of the components is inferior to the other, in one way or another. Additionally, the term is problematic as it suggests the requirement of "an anterior 'pure' which precedes mixture" (Hutnyk 81). This is reliant on the dualism of "pure/mixed", with 'pure' relying "upon the proposition of non-hybridity or some kind of normative insurance" (82). The culturally prominent dualism of pure/mixed surrounding miscegenation has long been dismantled as a myth but persists in the collective consciousness of many societies despite statistical evidence: Studies in gene mapping, for example, reveal that 70 to 80 percent of African Americans have white ancestors in their genealogy (Zack 75). Paul Gilroy also laments the impossibility of adequately describing mixture without suggesting the earlier existence of "uncontaminated" purity. He argues that "we must be prepared to give up the illusion that cultural and ethnic purity has ever existed, let alone provided a foundation for civil society" (*Between Camps* 250). The term 'hybridity' itself is therefore deficient. In its recent realist and descriptive usage, though, hybridity is used as "a convenient category at 'the edge' or contact point of diaspora, describing cultural mixture where the diasporized meets the host in the scene of migration" (Hutnyk 80). As language is always inadequate in describing reality, I will use the word 'hybridity' in lieu of a more suitable term for the experience of diasporic subjects. I focus on the usefulness of hybridity "as

---

[10] The theory of 'intersectionality' was, among others, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, who noted that the exclusion of black women from both feminist theory and mainstream anti-racist politics led to the need for a more intersectional approach which considers and addresses the particular ways in which black women experience oppression.

descriptive term, as political diagnostic and as strategy" (Hutnyk 93), emphasizing the creativity and vibrancy of ethnic pluralization, especially in writing.

Homi K. Bhabha has coined the term 'ambivalence' in the context of hybridity, which is characterized as a position or a subjectivity that does not believe in or practice any kind of hard binary structures of self or cultural identification, but which is open to accepting or adopting influences from either side of the colonial divide. Moreover, he elaborates on "border lives", thereby emphasizing a "third space" (*The Location* 39) where the migrant or diasporic individual belongs to neither of the two offered spaces, but in a space "in-between" (55). In this space, "new selfhoods are formed and articulated as alternatives to unitary conceptualizations of national identity" (Hout 333). Diasporic subjects, Bhabha claims, find themselves "*in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present" (*The Location* 219, emphasis in original), and thereby experience "unhomeliness", which describes "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" (9). As McLeod puts it, the so-called "border subjectivities" of diasporic individuals no longer rely "on fixed notions of home and identity to anchor them to a singular sense of Self. Rather, the loss of these fixed ideas has been transformed into a hopeful new paradigm where motion, multiplicity, errancy, unpredictability, hybridity and impurity are gleefully welcomed" (254). In other words, diasporic individuals reside in-between cultures and are marked by fluidity and plurality (in contrast to the fantasy of a stable and fixed identity), thereby disrupting binary oppositions. Bhabha also coined the concept of "restaging the past" for the ability of individuals who have access to this imaginative, but sometimes even literal, physical border, to intervene between two cultures. This space is appropriated by Afrofuturists – when they narrate the experience of diasporic individuals – whose multiple, at first seemingly irreconcilable, cultural identities are ultimately configured into a hybrid and fluid identity that is more than just the simple sum of all identifications.

Fragmented Identities: The Emergence of Trauma

After discussing different perspectives on diasporic identity formation as an extension of conventional identity theory, I now turn to the occurrence of trauma. As every individual, in every given moment, can be subject to traumatic experiences, the identity a person builds over time is often assumed to be of precarious construction. When trauma occurs, the narrated "life story" of an individual, and thus the identity configuration this life story is based on, is disrupted and fragmented, and the affected person may be left confused and uncertain: "the experience of traumatization serves to fundamentally disrupt the routine and orderly sense of existence, throwing into radical doubt our taken-for-granted assumptions about time, identity, meaning, and life itself" (M. Crossley 11). The fragmenting force of trauma is to be clearly distinguished from hybridity as I outlined it in the previous section. Fragmentation occurs in the face of trauma and is destructive, while hybridity, as I will exemplify especially in my reading of *The Icarus Girl* in Chapter Five, is to be understood as the meaningful surplus a diasporic individual might gain from multiple identities. Psychological trauma stands for an experience of extreme intensity – for example, an incomprehensible, humbling, painful and life-threatening event – that overburdens the individual's ability to cope with it and lastingly erodes or destabilizes the survivor's self-image (Nünning 728). The term 'trauma' already suggests its meaning: derived from the Greek

word *traúma*, it translates to 'wound' or 'injury'. The image of a wound, which continues to hurt after the infliction itself, already suggests that the term 'trauma' often "refers not so much to the traumatic event as to the traumatic aftermath, the post-traumatic stage" (Visser 272). Neurologically, a traumatic experience is sparked by an "excess of external stimuli and a corresponding excess of excitation in the brain. When attacked in this way, the brain is not able to fully assimilate or 'process' the event" (Suleiman, "Judith" 276). The unassimilated nature of the triggering event, according to Cathy Caruth, is central to traumatic memory: trauma is "not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4; emphasis in original).

Trauma studies engage scholars from diverse research fields – literature, history, sociology, medicine and philosophy. There is consensus on the fact that "[u]nlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats of life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death" (Herman 33). Typical causes of trauma are, for example, domestic violence, sexual abuse, but also experiences of exclusion and marginalization. The term 'trauma' is used both "generically to describe acute suffering", denoting a broad, universal cultural condition, and "clinically to describe the dynamics of individuals with overt psychopathology" (Good et al. 9; Kurtz 426). When I talk about trauma in this dissertation, I refer to the *generic*, or what Eugene L. Arva has called *cultural*, meaning. Moreover, I follow the ideas on trauma provided by van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, who state that "[t]he phenomenon of trauma, characterised generally by the falling apart of a life narrative, contains a continuum of experiences, ranging from an overwhelming trauma, which leaves the victim speechless with horror, to the smaller crises of everyday life where goals are missed and ambitions can be shattered" (59). Trauma is thus "not restricted to … extreme events. If trauma is seen as the shattering of a life narrative, it is an experience common to all. We all know of shattered dreams, of life treating us contrary to our desires; we know of illness and the death of loved ones" (x). It is this form of trauma as a cultural phenomenon that expands and revises our conventional, hegemonic, exclusive understanding of trauma as a sudden catastrophic event that I will examine more closely in my reading of Afrofuturist novels.

In the context of trauma, some scholars speak of a "dissociation" of the Self, as an act of self-preservation in the face of trauma (Boudreau; Koolish; van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela): the subject splits off part of itself, of its identity, "producing multiple personalities" in the process (Suleiman, "Judith" 276). The Self is split off from the damaged part and turns into a Self that is no actual Self anymore, a process named "unmaking the Self" by Kristen Boudreau (451-452). In other words, psychic disintegration causes a fragmentation of the person into a "core self" and "alters" (Koolish 173). The split or fragmentation caused by trauma has often been associated with its inherent "irrepresentability". Bessel A. van der Kolk writes that "[i]t is enormously difficult to organize one's traumatic experiences into a coherent account – a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end" (43). Trauma is incomprehensible and thus considered "unspeakable", as the horrors of the original event rob the survivor of the ability to put the experience into words. As Abigail Ward puts it, "language fails the survivor of trauma", which results in an "immense chasm between what needs to be

expressed and what can be comfortably accommodated within the existing limits of language" (177). It is in this inability to communicate the trauma with conventional language that creative, non-realist acts for representing the "unrepresentable" in trauma, such as Afrofuturism, become useful: literary works "discover new modes of expression, which attend to, and seek to move beyond, the pain and trauma of the past" (Ward 177).

The incapacity to assimilate or integrate the trauma of the original event into memory through a narrative in this theory of dissociation and fragmentation may cause the traumatic memory to echo continually in an excess of memory in the form of hallucinations, flashbacks, or nightmares (van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela vii). When the memory involuntarily returns, it appears as an "embodied memory" in the mind, which the affected person cannot control (Nünning 729). In other cases, instead of being continuously haunted by intruding memories, trauma survivors unconsciously avoid thoughts concerning the original trauma, experienced as a loss of memory or total absence of recall. This process of the brain suppressing the traumatic memory is called traumatic amnesia. This often results in depression, depersonalization, distinct changes in worldview or spirituality (Kaplan 40), hyper-vigilance (Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* 1) and other extremely diversified symptoms. In Western trauma models, this is generally referred to as 'posttraumatic stress disorder' (PTSD). The centrality of PTSD in Western trauma research is problematic, as its Eurocentrism does not incorporate non-Western ways of understanding trauma (Visser 272). Through engaging with non-Western knowledge systems in this dissertation, I seek to broaden the paradigm of trauma studies to render it more encompassing by integrating diasporic perspectives configured in Afrofuturist literature. Thus, I carve out the distinct trauma theory pioneered by Afrofuturists, which in turn is influenced by the conceptual frameworks of African theorists such as, for example, van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela.

Since the 1990s, trauma has not only been theorized as attributable to personal suffering but is also applied to the interpretation of group experiences. Over the course of history, such collective traumas have been triggered by events such as the Middle Passage of deported slaves to America, the genocides in Armenia or Ruanda, violent European colonization in Africa, and the Holocaust in Germany (Eyerman; Ward).[11] These collective traumas have been theorized to affect cultural identity in a significant way (Aydin 128). For Ron Eyerman, for instance, collective or cultural trauma is the "dramatic loss of identity and meaning … affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (2). If a trauma experienced by a collectivity – for example a religious or an ethnic group – is not adequately paid attention to or processed, it can "not only cause shifts, disruptions, and disturbances in the group's cultural identity and hinder its ability to flourish in the future, but it ultimately can also lead to its obliteration" (Aydin 128). Similarly, Jeffrey C. Alexander et al. argue that cultural trauma occurs when "members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (viii). So-called "colonial traumas" (Craps and Buelens

---

[11] For simplicity, I will use the terms 'collective trauma', 'cultural trauma' (e.g. Alexander et al.; Eyerman), 'mass trauma' (e.g. Chrisman and Dougherty), 'societal trauma' and 'structural trauma' interchangeably in this dissertation.

3), such as forced migration, slavery, segregation, diaspora, genocide and racism, are such "horrendous" events of structural violence. S. Hall even goes as far as saying that "[i]n the history of the modern world, there are few more traumatic ruptures to match these enforced separations from Africa" (227) caused by colonialism. As Kodwo Eshun theorizes, continuous debates over reparation indicate that these colonial traumas "continue to shape the contemporary era" (288). Similarly, Eyerman claims that, especially in the African American context, both violent European colonization of Africa and, subsequently, slavery in the Americas, still have a traumatic effect on the Black community (1). Colonialism's aftermath, palpable today for example in the form of institutionalized and systemic racism, marginalization and prejudice, has therefore been referred to as "postcolonial trauma" (Ward 176).[12]

As I have argued in the introduction, trauma can be viewed as being productive of identity, instead of eroding it. Eyerman argues, for example, that African American identity is rooted in the collective memory of a shared cultural trauma: the memory of slavery. Slavery "formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory" (Eyerman 1). Larson also confirms that "[m]emorialization of enslavement has proved a powerful means of identity formation for Africans in the Americas. Among others, [Paul] Gilroy characterizes how memories of slavery have recently served as a cultural resource for black identity formation" (359). Similarly, one might argue, the collective identity of the Afrodiasporic community spread all over the world is based on the collective memory of a shared trauma: colonialism and its aftermath, including enforced displacement, slavery, dispersal, or flight, and, consequently, war, exploitation, racism, and poverty, both on the African continent and in the Western countries, where Afrodiasporic individuals were and still are located.

Trauma has also often been theorized as having a contagious impact (Visser 275). Family secrets, early imprinting of fear and violence, physical and mental traumas, family stress or pressure, and cemented belief systems not only affect those suffering from it themselves, but have ripple effects on the subsequent generations. The following generations develop symptoms as if they had experienced the suffering of their parents and grandparents first-hand: for example, inexplicable fears, inner emptiness, feelings of guilt, commitment and relational difficulties, nightmares, or psychosomatic illnesses. The often unconscious process of passing on emotional scars intergenerationally was originally termed 'emotional heritage', from the German word *Gefühlserbschaften*, by Sigmund Freud. Research today refers to the reverberating effect of trauma as inherited trauma (Hirsch), secondary or vicarious trauma (Visser), ancestral trauma (Fromm),

---

[12] It must be mentioned here that, for a long time, critics have argued that 'postcolonialism' as a term is misleading. According to Burnett, "we exist in a neocolonial world, where the economic power of Western capitalism has replaced the military power of Western governments" ("The Great Change" 134). True postcolonialism in our world is, hence, still a utopia. Thus, I will use the term 'postcolonial' throughout this dissertation as defined by Ashcroft et al., who consider postcolonialism as encompassing all the cultures that have been, in multiple ways, affected by imperialism, from historical colonization to the present moment (2). In this sense, 'postcolonial' does not refer to a reality devoid of colonialist structures, but instead alludes to ongoing neo-colonial practices.

transgenerational trauma (Schwab), or intergenerational trauma (Aarons and Berger). Psychohistorian Howard Stein describes two possible directions for trauma transmission in nations, ethnic groups, religions, and families. Trauma can be transferred vertically, for example from parents to children, and horizontally, in a circular manner, for example among people who share a traumatic experience (192). Within the vertical transmission, Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger see two different ways for the prolonged trauma to be transferred: "through open and constant discourse about the past, specific stories of what the survivor experienced, or – and in many ways, more insidiously – through silence, a weighed silence that becomes solidified as felt anguish on the part of the survivor parent and dread on the part of his or her offspring" (57). As novelist David Grossman argues, the descendants of trauma survivors carry the responsibility to break these silences, as "lost" stories" have to "be told again and again because that is the only way to assemble the traces of identity and fuse the fragments of a crumbled world" (13). If suppressed, unprocessed traumatic memories are passed down to the subsequent generation. Thus, in the context of diasporicity, communities that have experienced colonialism and now, neo-colonial realities, need not only personal and psychological, but also collective and political tools to establish a culture of remembrance to work through collective traumatic experiences. Memorial spaces or commissions, such as the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in post-Apartheid South Africa and the *Erinnerungskultur* in post-Holocaust Germany, are assigned with the mission to excavate a traumatic past, break the silence, and tell the "lost stories" Grossman is referring to. In this dissertation, I will argue that Afrofuturism is one such political tool, functioning as a memorial space, for Afrodiasporic communities.

Another way to describe this phenomenon whereby someone is "strongly marked by distressing events that preceded that person's own birth and inhabits them as if they were private recollections" (Alloa et al. 2) is provided by Marianne Hirsch, who coined the notion of 'postmemory' in the 1990s. She describes the concept, which has emerged in the aftermath of the Holocaust, as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only through the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" ("Postmemory"). In other words, postmemory depicts what it means to own the memory of a violent history that one did not experience first-hand but is continuously haunted by – applying to both descendants of perpetrators and survivors. This means that members of the second generation "remember" through images, stories, and behaviours existent in the space in which they grew up. Families, in particular, can become the site of memorial transmission: "To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness," Hirsch notices, "is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue in the present" ("Postmemory"). To be transformed, "postmemory seeks connection. It creates where it cannot recover. It imagines where it cannot recall" ("Past Lives" 422). This requirement of creativity and imagination is echoed in what Stef Craps and Gert Buelens narrate as "traumatic experiences [that] can only be adequately represented through the use of experimental, (post)modernist textual strategies" (5). The

processing and remembrance of trauma thus calls for creative and imaginative representational techniques, enabled, for example, through Afrofuturism. Colonialism and its repercussions render contemporary authors of Afrofuturism, such as the ones examined in this dissertation, both descendants of members of collectively traumatized communities, and contemporary bearers of neo-colonial marginalization. Thus, their writing, among other things, can be read as a means of grappling with the effects of such trauma. They contribute to the establishment of a collective Afrodiasporic identity and a corresponding culture of remembrance, which I loosely define as the interaction of a society or an individual with their history and past to deliberately make it present.

Dominick LaCapra distinguishes between two different forms of trauma, which I will apply to this thesis as well. A 'historical trauma', according to him, refers to a singular, disastrous event, which can be precisely located biographically or historiographically. A 'structural trauma', in contrast, refers to a pattern of continual and continuing traumas (*Writing History* 82). In the context of both historical and structural trauma and its relation to Afrodiasporicity, the phenomenon of 'racial trauma' is important to consider. As Kenneth T. Ponds defines it, racial trauma is "the physiological, psychological, and emotional damage resulting from the stressors of racial harassment or discrimination" (23), which he compares to "an assault on our fundamental sense of safety and the right to exist in the world" (24). Ponds argues that especially in the United States, people of colour are continuously traumatized by both "interpersonal and systemic racism" (23). Racial trauma may either involve "a negative, sudden, and uncontrollable experience of crisis" (which resembles a historical trauma) or "an ongoing physical or psychological threat that produces feelings of fear, anxiety, depression, helplessness, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (23) (which resembles structural trauma). It is often evoked through structural microaggressions, the "everyday verbal or non-verbal slights, snubs, or insults (whether intentional or unintentional) which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to targeted persons" (Sue in Ponds 23). Microaggressions are subtle and covert forms of racist incidents, for example the denial of home mortgages, promotions, or loans, being stigmatized in the media or racial profiling (Craps 26). Diasporic individuals are often subjected to structural racism and discrimination in the form of microaggressions. Thus, as the Afrofuturist novels I examine tell stories about racism and questions of belonging, the concept of racial trauma forms an important point of departure for my analysis.

Ponds' approach to racial trauma strongly resembles Brown's notion of 'insidious trauma', which especially considers the traumatogenic effects of continuous oppression in our neo-colonial world, for example in the realms of racism and marginalization. As Craps writes, one racist incident alone may not be traumatizing, "but traumatization can result insidiously from cumulative micro-aggressions: each one is too small to be a traumatic stressor, but together they can build to create an intense traumatic impact" (26). This phenomenon of habitual forms of oppression was described by Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks,* where he compares the horror of racial prejudice to an experience of being "completely dislocated", to a state of being split and to physical amputation (112). In his discussions of traumatic fragmentation experienced by the Black community in the realms of colonialism and his analysis of Eurocentric race discrimination, which reduces the black person to ethnic affiliation by means of a fictitious stereotype, he emphasizes the survivor's psychological

deformation, destroyed self-esteem and sense of self-worth. Thus, Fanon analyses the psychological influence of dehumanization and suppression rooted in the racism inherent in colonial dominance. He concludes that in living in a white society, which proclaims its assumed superiority over the black population, the black person is put in a "neurotic situation" (xiv). Colonized people become so accustomed to identifying with the enforced white culture, that, when faced with reality, they find it alienating and traumatizing. In this way, Fanon might argue, structural racism keeps Afrodiasporic people from identifying as Africans, potentially resulting in complete alienation. The collective trauma of suppression, marginalization and racism theorised by Fanon is addressed in the works I will engage in this thesis. Drawing on notions of racial trauma, insidious and structural trauma, I engage a broadened model of trauma, which, in contrast to traditional, individual, and pathological conceptualizations of trauma, can respond to and account for collective, continuous forms of trauma experienced by diasporic individuals.

As we have seen, structural trauma permeates our world as "prolonged, repeated and cumulative stressor events" (Visser 286), for example in the form of racism and discrimination in the aftermath of colonialism and its systematic oppression. This aspect has been neglected in conventional definitions of trauma in Western trauma theory, which has been constructed from the experiences of "white, young, able-bodied, educated, middle-class, Christian men" (Brown 101), and it reveals the latter's inadequacy in dealing with Afrodiasporic experience and literature. As Craps and Buelens note, "the chronic psychic suffering produced by the structural violence of racial, gender, sexual, class, and other inequities has yet to be fully accounted for" (3-4).[13] A second aspect revealing Western trauma theory's deficiencies in dealing with colonial and diasporic trauma is that, as Craps states, "problems that are essentially political, social, or economic are medicalized, and the people affected by them are pathologized as victims without agency, sufferers from an illness that can be cured through psychological counselling," thereby denying cultural trauma theory's actual potential to represent and comprehend the experiences of such groups (28). In my analyses of literary Afrodiasporic representations of trauma, I work towards a more comprehensive trauma theory, which also considers the continuous, structural trauma experienced by marginalized communities excluded from the structures of Western hegemony. My research thus aims to respond to the links between trauma, healing and Afrodiasporic realities being "routinely ignored and dismissed" in conventional, Western-centric trauma research (Craps and Buelens 3). In aiming at a revised approach to cultural trauma studies, I explicitly interrogate non-realist modes of expressing suffering and oppression through the medium of specific Afrofuturist narratives. I try to carve out, in each novel, a

---

[13] See Giovanni de Girolamo and Alexander C. McFarlane (2001) for a write-up about their study which discovered that most of the world's most traumatogenic contexts (affected by natural disasters, war, famines, or genocides) have not been studied adequately. Only 6% of studies among traumatized populations had been done in developing countries, where most of the above-mentioned traumatic occurrences take place. This underlines the ethnocentricity of current Western-dominated trauma studies. As Craps and Buelens argue, "by ignoring or marginalizing non-Western traumatic events and histories and non-Western theoretical work, trauma studies may actually assist in the perpetuation of Eurocentric views and structures that maintain or widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world" (2).

"response to trauma that asserts the relevance of localized modes of belief, ritual, and understanding, thereby undermining the centrality of western knowledge and expertise" (Whitehead 27). In decentring the conventional Western perspective, I aim to highlight the radically different models of trauma necessary to comprehend the experience of oppression of Afrodiasporic individuals and communities, which Western constructs of trauma cannot, and should not, theorise. In my analyses, I will emphasize the narratives' distinct employment of magic and spirituality to understand trauma, and their insistence on subversion, revision, resistance, recovery and the need for social change and political activism for both individual and collective trauma healing. This, I will reveal, contrasts with Western trauma models' denial of "spirituality as a reference point" and of "the possibility of regeneration through ritual and belief systems" (Visser 279). Notions of trauma as solely dissociative and fragmenting, which are in line with Eurocentric, hegemonic conceptions of a "healthy" selfhood as an imagined, "whole" unity (Stocks 74), view the resulting multiplicity of the Self as damaging and pathological. In my reading of the five Afrofuturist novels in this dissertation, instead, I foster a reading of trauma that celebrates division, multiplicity, and fluidity. Indeed, I reject the assumption of a pre-existent state of unity or "wholeness" altogether. Hence, my understanding is that psychological division is the basis for the configuration of a productive, meaningful identity. "Healing" and reintegrating parts into one's identity thus directly counteract conventional Western perceptions of trauma, which are "inherently unable to reconcile multiplicity with mental health" and which insist "on a return to an original state of psychic unity [which is] at odds with the realisation and acceptance of duality that emerges as a result of liberation" (Stocks 86).[14] In the effort of broadening and "'decolonizing' cultural trauma theory" (Visser 279), I thus argue that empowerment, agency and both personal and social transformation must be incorporated as productive modes of theorizing both trauma and its aftermath.

Healing and Overcoming Trauma: Language, Narrative and Memory

Dissociation, suppression, or traumatic amnesia can, but do not necessarily have to be, enduring responses to trauma (Balaev 6). As J. Roger Kurtz puts it, it is significant that despite its fragmenting impact, those who work with trauma survivors tend to be "remarkably optimistic about the potential for recovery" (430). He continues that "[n]eural pathways in the brain may not be restored after trauma has disrupted them, but they can be retrained, and new pathways can be created. A community's memory of trauma may not be erased, but it can be transformed in positive ways, and new narratives can make sense of trauma" (430). In the following, I will use the word 'healing' not in the sense that it can ultimately provide, as van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela write, an end "to all pain and suffering, but rather facing and work[ing] through trauma, so that the tragic loss caused by trauma is balanced by a gain in meaning" (viii). Thus, I highlight the possibilities of growth and recuperation emerging in the realms of trauma. John P. Wilson similarly highlights the potentially

---

[14] It is important to note here that multiplicity in identity is not limited to diasporic individuals or individuals with dual or multiple nationality. Instead, "virtually all identities are subject to some form of fragmentation" (Stocks 89) which can be described in terms of identity markers, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, age, and so forth.

transformative effects of trauma and links them to the discovery of one's identity, character and purpose. This idea echoes what Tedeschi et al. have called 'posttraumatic growth' – a model that emphasizes the possibility of development and transformation after trauma and encourages both individuals and communities to reconstruct their worldview and question the beliefs and ideas they hold about their identities. In my understanding, healing does not presuppose a "whole" or coherent subject. On the contrary, complete "wholeness" or a stable identity are not, and will never be, achievable. In the narratives I investigate, healing and a configured identity are neither stable nor permanent, but their maintenance requires constant effort and life-long attention. Thus, when talking about healing, promises of complete redemption or closure are highly problematic. It is even dangerously naïve to believe that "coming to terms with" or "healing" is achievable purely through remedying the individual psychologically or through assuming that the present order is what could be considered "healthy". Instead, change must take place on a societal level and must be regarded as an ongoing process. Only then can dealing with collective, structural trauma lead to a social amelioration, where the injuries of the past stop operating in the present. But how can a person within a group, and thus a collectivity as a whole, emphasize new, beneficial aspects of an identity, while simultaneously gradually erasing the inhibiting pieces?

Research in several areas of current trauma studies generally agrees upon the fact that to rebuild the identity, restore the Self and regain agency over one's own life story after trauma, the affected person must assimilate and "embody" the memory in a language, which includes reorganizing and retelling the painful events (Boudreau 452). This means that trauma can be treated by "reintegrating the event, often through re-exposure and re-narrativization" (Pheasant-Kelly 15). The first step towards healing is thus assembling the traumatic memory and configuring the fragmented parts into a coherent story. Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela write that "the recovery from trauma begins with the finding of words and of a story about what happened; 'translating' trauma into the structure of a language and a narrative is a way of bringing order and coherence into the chaotic experience" (15). They call this the "transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory" (vii). Narrative can thus serve to restore "a sense of order and connection, and thus to re-establish a semblance of meaning in the life of the individual" (M. Crossley 11). As LaCapra notes, "conventional narrative is inherently redemptive" (*Writing History* 156). This applies to both personal and collective trauma. Communities carrying the burden of historical trauma need to work towards a cultural memory incorporating the traumatic experiences of the past and establishing a culture of remembrance to move beyond trauma and heal from historical and present-day forms of injustice.

This is where memory comes into play. As van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela state, "the struggle with trauma is a struggle with memory" (vii). Only by remembering the formerly repressed can collective cultural trauma be healed. In her novel *Beloved,* Toni Morrison takes up this idea in her notion of 'rememory', which means 'remembering memory'. The term indicates both a static repetition of traumatic pictures and the necessity to renew these pictures in the process of healing. Morrison sees something between remembering and forgetting: "disremembered and unaccounted for" (*Beloved* 275), which describes the status of trauma. LaCapra argues that, through "socially engaged memory-work", one can assimilate a collective traumatic

memory into the Self: "one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recognize something as having happened to one (or one's people) back then that is related to, but not identical with, here and now" ("Trauma" 713). Through public "re-memorying" and narrative, museums or literature do this kind of healing work. In the Afrofuturist novels investigated in this thesis, the traumatic memory described by Morrison and LaCapra is utilized in a supernatural way to contribute to the protagonists' healing processes. The protagonists "remember" their ancestors' and peoples' experiences through time-travel, vampirism, spiritual possession and visions. The memory-work enabled by re-experiencing the trauma as an embodied event releases the traumatic memory, which leads to an inevitable change in the protagonists after returning into their respective bodies or times.

One has to bear in mind, though, that memory is always a distortion, since it is "invariable and inevitably selective. A way of seeing is a way of not seeing, a way of remembering is a way of forgetting too" (Schudson 348). This forgetting is not always redemptive, especially in the context of diaspora. In contrast, it can be the result of conscious and voluntary determination to silence and suppress particular aspects of the past – especially as these pasts might include feelings of "pain, fear, shame, and embarrassment … It is not surprising, then, that perpetrators, as well as their families and communities, whether consciously or unconsciously, would suppress difficult pasts" (Whitlinger 650). I will highlight that it is an Afrofuturist endeavour to shed light on the silenced and denied pasts in the form of literary narratives to bring about catharsis and to include these pasts into the collective memory of a society. Establishing a public memory of collective traumatic experiences in the form of literature, such as Afrofuturism, is the premise for the social recognition and political legitimation of marginalized groups, as Ansgar Nünning writes (730). Hence, Afrofuturist texts contribute to the deconstruction of racial barriers, suppression, and prejudices, and have a share in working through collective trauma. The quest for memory in Afrofuturist narratives is also the quest for history and identity. We cannot understand ourselves when we do not understand the past and have a clear-eyed perspective on the present. As bell hooks declares, "moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side, a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of 'talking back,' that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice" (*Talking Back* 9). We need to look at the past and envision a prospect to understand the present and shape the gateway to a desirable future. Analysing Afrofuturist narratives, as I will do in this thesis, through the lenses of identity, trauma, and memory theory, is therefore important: these novels disrupt the traumatic silence and fatalism with which our contemporary societies are still yoked.

According to philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in *Untimely Meditations* (1997; original German title: *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen,* 1874), in the context of collective trauma and its destructive influence on cultural identity, to move on to recovery and being able to flourish, traumatized societies need to "actively forget" their transgenerational historical traumas, as they influence the present and arguably the future (Eshun 288), inhibiting the affected community from prospering and experiencing a catharsis. Nietzsche employed the notion of active forgetting not in the sense of "memories fading away" (Aydin 125). Instead, active

forgetting is outlined as an active, positive approach to trauma, which both individuals and collectivities need to cultivate. The notion of active forgetting thus offers a way of keeping the original trauma from paralyzing the traumatized group, as it "defuses and neutralizes past experiences that are not beneficial for present and future life" (125) by recognizing and allowing beneficial forms of knowledge about the past to persist, while recognizing and neutralizing harmful ones (132). The purpose of this practice is to dissolve the trauma by re-integrating it into the culture's collective identity by regulating "the chaos of impulses and enabl[ing] the selection of what should enter and what should not enter consciousness" (129-30). Nietzsche's notion of active forgetting is set apart from notions of dissociative amnesia or traumatic memory loss, which unconsciously occur as a form of self-preservation and which return to haunt the survivor through nightmares or flashbacks. Instead, active forgetting is a productive "defense mechanism" (130), which prevents a group from completely identifying with a traumatic past and thus destroying their future, instead giving it a "proper place in its history" (131). In other words, it is a fruitful notion of healing, residing between and balancing two common responses to trauma: repressing traumatic memories to a degree which resembles "forgetting" on the one hand, and constantly remembering by being continuously, uncontrollably, and destructively haunted by the past, on the other hand. It does not aim at negating the past and its significance but opens up a possibility for the future.

The liberating power of actively forgetting a trauma is made manifest in using mnemotechnologies, such as rituals, customs, habits, monuments, and retellings, which make sure the trauma is actively remembered by rendering it part of the affected group's identity: "through the very same practices of culturally incorporating it, the trauma is also forgotten … It is remembered and forgotten at the same time" (Aydin 134). This effort requires, as Ciano Aydin explains, recognition from perpetrator, survivor, and other stakeholders. The (symbolic) processing of trauma through mnemotechnologies "could be regarded as a kind of catharsis, as a kind of emotional cleansing or purgation" (135). Finally, the process needs to result in sublimation, which means the "transformation of negative and destructive emotions … into positive and constructive emotions, actions, and behavior" through a reinterpretation of the original traumatic event (133). Artists and writers are assigned a significant role here: "talking and writing about the traumatic event is already a form of sublimation" (135). As a particular field of African literature, Afrofuturism is "grounded in the types of imaginative 're-membering practice[s]' that promote recovery and healing from the destructive effects of trauma" (Kurtz 421). Thus, by consciously being concerned with trauma and its aftermath, the Afrofuturist authors I engage with contribute to the endeavour of actively forgetting by fostering a culture of positive remembrance. Throughout my dissertation, I will outline how Afrofuturism is able to contribute to a public cultural memory resembling a collective culture of remembrance. I will use the phrase 'reparative remembrance', in the context of *Kindred* and *The Gilda Stories*, to describe the process of remembering the past in a way that changes its power to feed into renewed conflict. For *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Who Fears Death,* I will use the phrase 'projective remembrance' to signify remembering the future through using "mock futures [that] serve the function of transforming our present into the determinate past of something yet to come" (F. Jameson 286). I will outline how Afrofuturism is able to contribute to a public cultural memory resembling a collective culture of remembrance.

In the context of diaspora, where two cultural worlds exceed the capacity of a person's memory (A. Assmann 229), the situation demands a new, configured identity, which can, among others, be manifested through the act of writing. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues, "[c]reative imagination is one of the greatest re-membering practices" after fragmentation (39). Similarly, van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela state that "[t]he void created by trauma needs words to be transformed into something meaningful" (15). Diasporic producers of cultural artefacts, such as artists or writers, thus bear out the hypothesis of posttraumatic growth, as they create aesthetic and meaningful pieces out of adversity, while not only recreating themselves, but simultaneously contributing to the recreation of the memory and cultural identity of a collectivity. In this way, they "find ways of being responsible to [their] history without remaining trapped by it" (MacLeod 65). Afrofuturists contribute to excavating and healing collective structural trauma by drawing from their respective cultural backgrounds to reconnect with it and to represent their experiences of trauma in a unique and personal way. Thus, they contribute to what should be our highest goal: the disclosure of trauma instead of the submission to "the temptations of closure" (Suleiman, *Crises* 232) or "artificial forgetting" (226). As Toni Morrison puts it, finding "the words to say it" is "the full agenda and unequivocal goal of a novelist" (*Playing in the Dark* v). Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela argue in a similar way when they theorize that writers follow the task to find "original ways of communicating the seemingly incommunicable" (58). Through "re-exposure and re-narrativization" (Pheasant-Kelly 15), the production (and consumption) of Afrofuturist literature thus can attain the "embodiment" of collective traumatic memory into language (Boudreau 452). The produced text then relieves the memory through written disembodiment, while simultaneously, in rising above the remnants of transgenerational trauma, helping future generations to heal. The challenge that Afrofuturist authors take on, therefore, is to reconcile traumatic memory with hope, thereby turning it into reparative and projective remembrance, as to forget is to remain wounded.

As a cultural artefact, Afrofuturism represents part of the cultural identity and collective memory of a social group (J. Assmann 15). Therefore, it has the ability to have a cathartic effect and set off the healing of collective trauma for both the protagonist and the reader. As van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela argue: "The healing potential of literary narratives can be seen from the point of the writer, who could find a catharsis through the (indirect) expression of suppressed pain, or from the viewpoint of the reader, who could find some kind of healing through discovering points of identification residing in the narratives" (ix). The premise for the cathartic effect to manifest is, of course, that the readers are actually exposed to such reading material. Afrofuturism thus not only enhances the possibility for reparation and healing for authors and societies, as it "re-narrates" traumatic experiences and fosters a culture of remembrance, but it may also disclose the reader's personal and collective historical traumas through memory. Thus, readers can benefit from what Alison Landsberg calls 'prosthetic memory', which emerges "at the interface between a persona and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theatre or museum" (2). Readers can gain access to memories of events they did not experience themselves, but which will subsequently be appropriated and inform the reader's personal identity, subjectivity, and politics in the present (2). In a sense, a reader is thus able to acquire "new memory" by excavating "old memory" through the consumption of cultural production. Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela express a related idea when they write that "literary writers invent

new narratives through which the traumatic memory of readers can be vicariously expressed, so that they can experience a catharsis. Literary narratives can help us to confront our traumas, to bring to light what has been suppressed: it also imagines new possibilities of living meaningfully in a changed world" (ix). They call this process "bibliotherapy":

> In dealing with trauma, writers can, vicariously, express what other trauma victims find impossible to tell. Readers, in the reading and interpretation of literary narratives, can in a way become creative writers as well by 're-creating' the narratives in their own minds – organising the elements of the story into a coherent whole, internalising it and applying it to their own situation. Literary narratives can help a traumatised person to confront suppressed feelings. When victims find it too hard to confront their trauma directly and to talk openly about it, literature can provide a way of facing it indirectly. (58)

E. Ann Kaplan similarly argues that "telling stories about trauma, even though the story can never actually repeat or represent what happened, may partly achieve a certain 'working through' for the survivor. It may also permit a kind of empathic 'sharing' that moves us forward" (37). Narrative, and Afrofuturism in particular, thus presents itself as a powerful and empowering cathartic tool in the realms of trauma healing, both as it facilitates the re-integration of the traumatic memory, and as it supports individuals or communities in their processes of posttraumatic growth.

As tools for articulating both collective historical and personal trauma, Afrofuturist novels enable readers to identify and empathize with protagonists. As Suleiman argues, "[w]e all project ourselves into what we read, especially into narrative. Just as it has been claimed that all writing – even the driest of critical studies – is in some way autobiographical, so it can be claimed that all reading is" ("War" 563-4). Fictional texts communicate an experience, which the reader can share only through reading: the novels thus "bridge … the distance between reader and protagonist, permitting the formation of a powerful emotional identification" (Setka 103). Recent research in neuroscience recalls what European 18th-century moral sentimentalism has long suggested: that reader identification "often invites empathy, even when the fictional character and reader differ from one another in all sorts of practical and obvious ways" (Keen 214). This aspect is especially compelling, as the term 'empathy' is derived from the German word *Einfühlung,* meaning the process of "feeling one's way into" another person or an art object. In the same vein, Suleiman notes that "[t]o recognize aspects of one's own life story in another's is no doubt easier for one who has undergone some of the same experiences …; but it would be far too restrictive, and wrongheaded, to suggest that *only* one who has undergone a certain experience can respond to another's story" ("War" 566). Thus, what Suleiman has termed 'autobiographical reading' is possible, and even desirable in the realms of resolving colonial trauma, not only for survivors or descendants of survivors of similar trauma, but also for individuals belonging to the "perpetrator group". As Suzanne Keen asserts, "[w]hen texts invite readers to feel, they also stimulate readers' thinking" (213). Studies conducted by Davida Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, for example, demonstrate that literary fiction is able to improve the reader's ability to comprehend what respective others might think and feel, and can, in turn, even stimulate prosocial behavioural responses. The Afrofuturist novels I have chosen to investigate open up this possibility for empathy and critical thinking as they all deal with suffering – an experience universal to humanity, albeit in unequal forms – and its impact on our society. The narratives thus "open … up a space for readers to feel mimetically connected to the experiences of the protagonist even

as they are cognizant of the difference between mimetic feeling and actual experience" (Setka 96). It is hence exactly this conditioning of how readers think about the past and therefore how they "potentially shape the way that [they] evaluate … [their] ethical obligations with regard to that history in the world of the present" (97) that Afrospeculative trauma narratives can help to achieve. Hence, I write this dissertation on the premise that the starting point for societal transformation is empathy and compassion, as it includes listening, which leads to improved understanding and establishes a common knowledge base and consent, from where intentional social or political measures can be taken. As LaCapra argues, thinking and writing about history in the realms of trauma is crucial (*Writing History* xi-xiii), as "in the encounter with trauma, history is reconfigured" (Caruth in Visser 275). Firmly rooted in Afrofuturism's politics of transformation and subversion, the five Afrofuturist novels I examine in this dissertation contribute to this endeavour of reconfiguring and rewriting the past to release traumatic memory. Thus, the empathy that Afrofuturism can stimulate, in addition to its work as counter-narrative that rewrites the past, could lead to more equal and just societies in the future.

Griffin's concept of 'textual healing' is also a vital point of reference for this dissertation, as it specifically addresses the position of black female authors within the literary canon and the effort to restore their work as a response to the legacies of colonialism and slavery – an endeavour this dissertation seeks to support. Griffin discusses how contemporary black women authors rewrite prevailing discourses of black bodies as inhuman, inferior, and ugly into sites of "healing, pleasure, and resistance" (521). She explains:

> I am using the term healing to suggest the way in which the body, literally and discursively scarred, ripped, and mutilated, has to learn to love itself, to function in the world with other bodies and often in opposition to those persons and things that seek to destroy it. Of course, the body never can return to a prescarred state. It is not a matter of getting back to a "truer" self, but instead of claiming the body, scars and all – in a narrative of love and care. (521)

In this context, Griffin recommends self-love as an effective tool for literally and discursively marginalized people to protect themselves against psychological harm due to politically violent structures, such as racism and sexism. Thus, textual healing, firmly rooted in a hope for reconciliation, rehabilitation and "a return to a restored black self through love and care in literature and in the world at large" (Barber 8), is a project of resistance and reclaiming agency. Thus, female-centred Afrofuturist works, which are fundamentally about resistance and reclaiming agency, contribute to the endeavour of textual healing.

I support the premise that, in the Afrodiasporic communities portrayed in the novels I examine, healing from colonial trauma is not a linear and straightforward process focused on the individual, but that it takes place in multiple forms both in the individual and, most significantly, in the collective. I also recognise that healing cannot occur effectively at the personal level when the cause of the trauma is political. The Afrospeculative trauma narratives suggest a distinctly African way of dealing with structural trauma: the journey of transformation and acknowledgement is guided by, for example, shared culture and tradition, a strong social network or community, forging new relationships, rewriting, rituals of mourning, language, spirituality, body awareness and acceptance, as well as social and political activism, which enables people to indicate that they will not accept structural violence and that they are very much aware of the trauma that it has caused them. Thus, as Kurtz rightly asserts, African tradition is "rich in resources for trauma healing, characterized … by a

holistic view of humanity grounded in a strong sense of spirituality" (430). These possibilities are African cultural resources to promote and express social healing, which are extensions, if not alternatives to, Western trauma healing methods – a distinctly Afrodiasporic perspective on trauma.

Afrofuturism as a Speculative Genre

Speculative fiction is one of the most popular genres of the 21st century. The umbrella term includes science fiction, fantasy, literary fiction, supernatural fiction, horror, dystopia, utopia, (post-)apocalyptic, and superhero stories, and their combinations (Jackson and Moody-Freeman, "The Genre" 127) – in short, any type of fiction that features supernatural and/or futuristic elements and presents an alternated or distorted reality can be defined as speculative. Jewelle Gomez explains that the rubric 'speculative fiction' is all literature that "postulates a time and circumstance as yet unknown" ("Speculative Fiction" 949; emphasis in original). She explains that "all such writers speculate a world that makes manifest more than is currently accepted – intergalactic travel, ghosts, telekinesis, or vampires" (948-9). In other words, it can feature alternative worlds not limited to our currently perceived reality. Even though the genre is inherently inclusive, most texts produced within its blurry boundaries have been surprisingly uniform regarding the inclusion and representation of minorities. Until recently, the genre has not paid much attention to issues of identity, race, ethnicity and gender, or the trauma related to them. As Marleen S. Barr puts it, Western notions of science fiction mostly "exclude … women, and people of color" (xv). The genre, as many other genres, has therefore been prone to promoting white supremacist identity or perpetuating the normalisation of white identity: "The creators and consumers of speculative fiction have, for the most part, been white males" (Gomez, "Speculative Fiction" 949). Similarly, Nalo Hopkinson recognizes that speculative fiction has a "long and deeply problematic histor[y] of depicting conquest and colonialism as glorious enterprises, and [it] also often engage[s] in the othering of indigenous people to the point where the latter become nonhuman: that is to say, they appear only as aliens" (Burnett paraphrasing Hopkinson in "The Great Change" 134). Black (and especially black female) speculative fiction, on the other hand, has commented on the political and social situation and reacted to cultural, social and technological developments. These newer forms of speculative fiction can thus be utilized to rethink the genre's tradition of normalising the presence of white, male authors and excluding people of colour and women – they can therefore be considered decolonial projects.

Moreover, speculative fiction has for a long time been considered a genre for leisure readers, rather than worthy of serious research. As Gomez points out, "[i]t is the idea that speculative fiction is somehow an indulgence or that it is trivial that seems the most probable reason for its dismissal by literary critics as well as its lack of appeal to most Black readers or authors" ("Speculative Fiction" 950). As I have established, Afrodiasporic literature emerged from a history of deep cultural, collective trauma and African writers feel a "responsibility or 'mission' to respond to that trauma" (Kurtz 426). That there has nonetheless, until recently, been "such little affinity between African literatures and trauma theory" (426) might be ascribed to Western trauma theory's deficiencies in accounting for diasporic experiences of trauma (Craps 2). Additionally, black people, generally, Gomez argues, have long viewed the production of literature as utilitarian rather than for the purpose of

entertainment. In her opinion, this "single-issued view (emphasizing racism) of the struggle for liberation in the Black community as well as the utilitarian approach to our literature seems to lead our writers away from the African traditions of spiritualism and magic that might naturally lead Black writers into speculative or even surrealist forms" ("Speculative Fiction" 951). Samuel Delany points out about Afrodiasporic people that "[t]he historical reason that we've been so impoverished in terms of future images is because, until fairly recently, as a people we were systematically forbidden any images of our past" (Delany in Dery 190-191). Thus, he blames the "massive cultural destruction" in the realms of slavery and colonialism for the secularly stagnating amount of black speculative production.

Beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, black writers such as Du Bois started to imagine futures in which previously marginalized characters were in charge of their own lives and "championed courses of social justice and challenged domination and conquest" (Jackson and Moody-Freeman, "The Genre" 129). In the 1970s and 1980s, female writers emerging from the feminist movement were interested "in speculative fiction and the creation of feminist utopias … their work postulated new ways for women to be in the world by using futuristic settings" (Gomez, "Speculative Fiction" 949). As Walter Mosley argues, especially for diasporic Africans, who were cut off from their ancestry by colonialism and slavery, speculative fiction offers "an alternative where that which deviates from the norm is the norm" (405). Thus, an increasing number of black female writers began writing speculative fiction. Nowadays, it is a growing genre that embraces issues of race and ethnicity, while also examining issues of gender, technology and politics.

Over the last few years, the genre's diversification has attracted a broader readership. It is theorized that speculative fiction's growing popularity is rooted in human fascination with the unknown and imaginative world, which is ultimately about our own world. Speculative fiction might appeal to modern Western readers, as Pringle and Nicholls argue, because "they represent everything we most fear and, at the same time, perhaps, secretly desire: a depopulated world, escape from the constraints of a highly organized industrial society, [and] the opportunity to prove one's ability as a survivor" (338). Simultaneously, the new diversified wave of speculative fiction might attract Afrodiasporic and female readers, as they find themselves and their intellectual and political concerns represented. Parallel to the rise of speculative fiction's popularity among readers, an increasing number of scholars have considered the field of speculative fiction as intellectually worthy of investigation, especially in the context of trauma – rightly so, as the genre, due to its core characteristics, has the ability to reach far beyond the traditional literary horizon and spark social change by encouraging their audience to think differently: "science fiction, so often misunderstood as the province of white men and their green aliens, is useful to the task of thematizing some of the more haunting aspects of black experience" (Parham 1317). In this dissertation, it is my aim to contribute to the project of foregrounding speculative fiction as "uniquely qualified to intervene as a politically transformative force" (Burnett, "The Great Change" 135), while simultaneously emphasising black female literary production, which has long been neglected despite its counterhegemonic potential.

The new trends in speculative fiction outlined above led to the emergence of so-called 'Afrofuturism', which emerged as a movement and a tool of aesthetic expression. Originating in the Black Arts movement of North

America in the 1960s and 1970s, it now includes not only American Africans but Africans dispersed all over the world. As Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones note: "Africa and its diaspora are connected via cyber-culture and have exchanged ideas, art, politics and more recently remittances since the nineteenth century; … the African diaspora has been institutionally designated the sixth zone of the African Union and similar to early developments of Pan Africanism starting in the African Diaspora, Afrofuturism is now a Pan African project" (ix). Among others, the Afrofuturist movement has given shape to a specific kind of speculative fiction that has assumed generic traits, as it combines "the tenets of realism with elements of allegory, folk tale, Gothic and romance" (Barr x), thus syndicating "elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magical realism with non-Western beliefs" (Womack 9). Thus, Afrofuturism as defined in this dissertation can, in simplistic terms, be understood as a subgenre of speculative fiction, written by Afrodiasporic writers.

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, Afrofuturism has gained increasing critical acclaim in both popular and academic discourse. Since then, Afrofuturism has developed into an umbrella term for considerations on how the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and technology are used to "imagine and reimagine lost pasts and new futures for alienated, black 'others'" (Barber 12), while simultaneously resignifying and reimagining black identities (11). Dery, to whom the portmanteau 'Afrofuturism' of 'Afro' and 'Futurism' – which tellingly showcases the connection between race and futurist fiction (Morris 154) – is generally attributed, describes it as speculative fiction that addresses Afrodiasporic themes and concerns "in the context of 20th-century technoculture" through appropriating a "prosthetically enhanced future" (736). Thus, Afrofuturism is critically concerned with themes of the African diaspora, mixing them with science fiction elements and imaginations of the future. Through cognitive dissonance, the fusion of fantastic and realist elements enables Afrofuturists to blend past and present in such a way that readers cannot treat the story as "happening in a reality ontologically distinct from our own" (Vint 243). It is important to emphasize here that Afrofuturism does not necessarily point to a text's setting in the future – rather, it refers to the author's shared politics of envisioning either the past, the present or the future *differently* to initiate transformation in our current, neo-colonial societies, with the aim of ensuring a better future for the marginalized. As Ytasha Womack writes, "it's a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques" (9). Thus, it is fitting that Reynaldo Anderson describes Afrofuturism as a global movement of black speculative thought responding to postmodernity (228).

Afrofuturism is an especially attractive mode to writers resonating with multiple cultural environments because the mode "articulates the 'crossing of thresholds' between worlds and is … at ease with the fluid and ambiguous. Already situated within a marginalized literary genre, the writers, readers and critics of SF are comfortable with notions of hybridity, transformation and non-linearity" (Carstens and Roberts 80). As Afrofuturism links blackness with experiences of alienation and dislocation, it is inherently subversive. Thus, Afrofuturism productively responds to conventional speculative fiction's shortcomings. It challenges expectations and stereotypes of gender, race, and ethnicity, and by extension, the genre of speculative fiction itself, with has often represented minorities in a stigmatizing way or omitted them altogether. Thus, in

undermining mainstream science fiction tropes, Afrofuturism emphasizes and problematizes issues regarding the representation of black characters in speculative fiction, such as the "structured absence and token presence of black characters and actors, themes of racial contamination and racial paranoia as constitutive of a post-apocalyptic future, and the traumatized black body as the ultimate signifier of difference, alien-ness, and otherness" (Barber 12).

Octavia Butler, Jewelle Gomez, Nalo Hopkinson and Helen Oyeyemi have all been referred to, or have referred to themselves, as Afrofuturist authors (Bould 183; Morris 164; Barber 7). For these writers, the reality of slavery, colonialism, and their traumatic consequences are conceptually and intellectually essential to engage through Afrofuturist narratives. For example, as Tiffany E. Barber observes, the realities of slavery and forced diaspora are compared to science fictional invasions of aliens and bodily transformation in their Afrofuturist narratives (11). Many Afrofuturist authors use speculative settings to imagine realities in which racialized characters productively disrupt the status quo. Afrofuturism thus investigates a history of racialization and subsequently subverts it (11). Afrofuturist authors acknowledge that present and future are inextricably linked to traumatic history, as the generic choice of speculative fiction allows a "purposefully antihistorical approach to the past" – they narrate the past as something more or other than conventional historiography (Dubey 780-81). Moreover, futurist writing, whether utopian or dystopian, "enacts and enables a structurally unique 'method' for apprehending the present as history" (F. Jameson 289). Omelsky supports this argument by stating that "imagining a present-as-past through the optic of the future opens us to the possibility of a restructured present and a shift in its normative modes of social thought" (48). Hence, Afrofuturist texts call for "a radically reimagined politics of the now" (33). In this regard, Afrofuturism bears the potential to create counter-narratives to dominant discourses which silence, deny or do not acknowledge difficult and traumatic pasts. George Lipsitz defines 'counter-memory' as "a way of remembering and forgetting that starts with the local, the immediate and the personal … [It] looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives [and] forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past" (213). These counter-narratives, again, bear the possibility to be subsequently transformed into collective counter-memory. Michele L. Crossley theorises that "through the interrelated processes of story-plotting and story-telling we partially determine the stories of our lives" (8). It is then by confronting a silenced past, by framing it into narrative, that Afrofuturists transform the different histories of Afrodiasporic subjects into collective memory and shape their trajectory for the future. The genre works at both the individual and collective level: one, Afrofuturism offers a new possibility for self-representation and individuality for Afrodiasporic women, rather than being represented one-dimensionally or stereotypically by others, and two, it acts as a space where racist and sexist stereotypes at the collective level can be addressed directly through imaginations of the future, thereby "defying existing norms and categories" (Barr xiv). In other words, Afrofuturists emphasize empowerment and self-representation, reclaim the past by creating alternative, more inclusive imaginations, envision different futures, and simultaneously critique the present.

The Relevance of Afrofuturism for Diasporic Identities, Trauma and Healing

As I have discussed, some traumas in the realms of colonialism, such as genocides, slavery, or contemporary, institutionalized racism, are so monstrous that the genre conventions of realist or mimetic fiction are simply inadequate to portray them in all their complexity. As Toni Morrison puts it, "certain kinds of trauma visited on peoples are so deep, so stupefyingly cruel, that – unlike money, unlike vengeance, even unlike justice, rights, or the good will of others – art alone can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning" ("Guest Column" 717). Creative modes such as Afrofuturism then operate as an especially valuable genre in respect of Afrodiasporic women's identity and experience with trauma, as they attempt to discover innovative modes of expression for communities of oppressed people. Speculative fiction is thus especially suited as a tool to portray the "unrepresentable" in trauma, as it speaks the "unspeakable". Eshun puts it this way: "The conventions of [Afrofuturism] … can function as allegories for the systematic experience of post-slavery black subjects in the twentieth century" (299). Therefore, Afrofuturism "stages a series of enigmatic returns to the constitutive trauma of slavery in the light of science fiction" (299). Nalo Hopkinson similarly asserts that

> [t]he experience of slavery is a huge cancer in the collective consciousness of African people all over the diaspora. The ripple effects of it … still continue, and they touch the past, the present, and the future … Speculative fiction allows me to experiment with the effects of that cancerous blot, to shrink it by setting my worlds far in the future (science fiction) or to metonymize it so that I can explore the paradigms it's created (fantasy). … I don't see science fiction and fantasy as being just wishful thinking … If black people can imagine our futures, imagine – among other things – cultures in which we aren't alienated, then we can begin to see our way clear to creating them. (Hopkinson in Rutledge 593)

Afrofuturism's specific narrative devices, which enable the reader to explore worlds that bear important resemblances to our own, render it an especially viable genre for reflecting traumatic experience and subsequent healing through memory because it plays with the imagination in ways that enable alternative, metaphorical representations of today's society and its history. In other words, Afrofuturism is not limited by what is known and therefore reaches further than realist literature. This also means, according to Burnett, that speculative fiction is, "in its unfettering from the limits of realistic representationalism … uniquely well-suited for grappling with current … reality" ("The Great Change" 136-137). The structuralist process of "zooming out" of familiar space and time has also been described as 'cognitive estrangement' or 'cognitive dissonance', a term borrowed by Darko Suvin from Bertold Brecht's notion of the estrangement effect. Providing a platform for cognitive estrangement, Afrofuturism has the ability to depict societal issues, such as diasporic identity formation and both individual and collective historical traumas in the aftermath of colonialism in an abstract and productive way. As Delany puts it, "what [fantasy fiction] presents us, even as it seems to lure us away to another age and clime, is our own home reviewed through the distorting (or, better, organizing) lens of a set of paraliterary conventions" (20). As speculative fiction has the "ability to transform and shift worldviews" (Okorafor, "Organic Fantasy" 285), we can discover truths about our world and ourselves and our identities in a way realist fiction cannot provide. By seeing familiar things from a new and unfamiliar perspective, speculative fiction is "a site for counterhegemonic discourse … a space for examining possibilities that are not available within mainstream realist literature" and exceptionally qualified to "intervene as a politically transformative force" (Burnett, "The Great Change" 134-135). By appropriating elements of fantasy and sci-fi and stimulating readers to ask questions about the nature of our reality and notions of identity and trauma in

a way realist fiction is not able to, Afrofuturist authors can tackle societal issues more effectively than realistic literary genres, challenging dominant discourses and preconceived notions and stereotypes. Through gaining insight into another "real" world, newly equipped readers might make changes to their own lives.

Afrofuturism is thus particularly useful in creating what Bhabha calls "counter-narratives", which allow writers to "disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (*The Location* 149). Thus, in producing counter-narratives, speculative storytelling bears the potential to both restore the omissions of the past and correct the lies told about it. Female Afrofuturists such as Butler, Gomez, Hopkinson and Oyeyemi re-imagine the past, present and future in their narratives and offer alternatives to oppressive structures through imagining differently. In the chapters that follow, I will attempt to show how they continuously stimulate the imagination, portray non-stereotypical representations of diasporic individuals, provide alternative realities and re-imagined futures, push the boundaries of thinking about gender and racial identities, and thus challenge multiple and inter-connected systems of oppression. In taking on tropes of Africa, I will argue that the Afrofuturist authors draw rewritings of historical accounts (as in the case of *Kindred* or *The Gilda Stories*) and of canonical futurist sci-fi texts (as in *Brown Girl* and *Who Fears Death*) to revise the Western canon, to correct and contest racist representations and to rewrite them with something transformative, and even revolutionary.

Literature Review

Despite a significant increase in recent years, Afrofuturism, especially authored by women, has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. The rare exceptions are the works of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany (who is male), the two most prominent representatives of Afrofuturism. Authors such as Nalo Hopkinson and Helen Oyeyemi have only recently been rendered the focus of a small number of researchers. That the novels I will engage are "part of science fiction's newest new wave" (Barr xvii) might be one reason that research is still lacking in depth. The first critical perspectives of research on Afrodiasporic writers of spec-fic were stimulated through the publication of Sheree Thomas's anthologies *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000) and *Dark Matter: Reading the Bones* (2004), where less well-known stories from Afrodiasporic authors are gathered. Another milestone was landed with the publication of Nalo Hopkinson's *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction* (2000), a collection of stories by both well-known and newcomer Caribbean authors, and *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Hopkinson and Mehan 2004), an anthology that includes science fiction short stories from authors in the African diaspora. Marleen S. Barr added the crucial anthology *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory* in 2008 to the body of literature, which includes short stories and critical essays by and about women of colour. Before that, she had also released *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism* (2000), the "first scholarly essay collection to emphasize the post-baby boom generation of feminist science-fiction scholars" ("Afro-Future Females" ix).

Sociologist Alondra Nelson started to think of Afrofuturism as a coherent mode of critical inquiry by launching www.Afrofuturism.net in 2000, by creating the Afrofuturist listserve together with multimedia artist Paul D. Miller (Yaszek, "Afrofuturism" 42) and by launching her book *Afrofuturism* (2002). Further significant publications on Afrofuturism include Eric Leif Davin's *Partners in Wonder: Women and the Birth of Science Fiction, 1926-1965* (2006), where he investigates numerous stories addressing racial discrimination, and Eshun's work, especially his essay "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" (2003), in which he sees the future as a tool for identity creation. Leading journals in the field of speculative fiction, such as *Extrapolation* and *Science Fiction Studies,* increasingly include research about speculative fiction authors of colour , but still, according to Jackson and Moody-Freeman, a "concentrated focus on the black imagination and sci-fi is absent" ("The Genre" 130). They state that a closer look at *Companion to Science Fiction* (2005) by David Seed, for example, reveals that it mentions Delany, Butler, as well as Hopkinson's and Mehan's *So long Been Dreaming*, but there is continued work necessary to fill the gap. In the special issue *The Genre of Science Fiction and the Black Imagination* (2009), published in *African Identities*, the scholars therefore aim at offering "fresh innovative critical strategies and approaches to the issues of race, gender, sexuality, power agency and resistance to domination and imperialism" ("The Genre" 130), featuring works by Octavia Butler and Nalo Hopkinson. With a similar goal in mind, the anthology *AfroSF,* edited by Ivor Hartmann (2013), contains contributions from countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa and has since been considered a foundational text of science fiction authored by Africans (Omelsky 34). In 2013, Ytasha Womack published *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture,* which introduces the reader to a variety of Afrofuturists, from visual artists to authors. Recently, in 2016, Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones released *Afrofuturism 2.0. The Rise of Astro-Blackness,* where they assemble the ideas developed between 2005 and 2015 that inspired the Black Speculative Art Movement (BSAM). Sofia Samatar's article "Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism" (2017), which was published in *Research in African Literatures*, as well as Achille Mbembe's "Afrofuturisme et devenir-nègre du monde" (2014), published in *Politique Africaine,* are rather recent, but nevertheless eminent additions to the existing canon of research on Afrofuturism.

So far, the existing research on black female speculative fiction and Afrofuturism has not explicitly focused on the role of trauma and diasporic identities in Afrofuturism, or the unique, transformative potential of the genre for representing and working towards the collective healing of colonial and postcolonial trauma. The specific conceptual concerns of diasporic identities, trauma, and posttraumatic growth, as well as their connection to speculative fiction, have so far been neglected. Academic research on the relationship between cultural and trauma studies has mainly been pushed forward by the *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies*, having published its latest volume in Spring 2016. Until now, the journal has issued five volumes, none of them dealing with the genre of black female speculative fiction or Afrofuturism. My dissertation will both contribute to, and extend the existing research, as it introduces the intersection of trauma theory and Afrofuturism. Therefore, this dissertation will make an original and valuable contribution to several fields of research.

Chapter Three:

Dismembering and Remembering – Trauma and Identity in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*

Introduction

Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred* (1979) is concerned with the traumatic aftermath of slavery and its effects on Afrodiasporic consciousness, including issues around racial and gendered oppression, and investigates journeys of self-definition and identity configuration in the context of the African diaspora. In dealing with history's grip on the present in an innovative way, which includes the science-fictional element of time travel, *Kindred,* as a form of "prosthetic memory" (Landsberg 2), encourages the reader to think about cultural memory, trauma, and its suppression from a new perspective. The novel tells the story of Dana Franklin, a 26-year-old African American writer who lives with her white husband Kevin in Altadena, California, in 1976. Under inexplicable circumstances, she unwillingly travels back through time and space to the plantation of her ancestors in Maryland in the early 1800s. She seems to be trapped in the ensuing cycle between past and present until she has ensured the birth of her several times great-grandmother, the slave Alice Greenwood's daughter Hagar. Her mission, thus, is to guarantee her own existence through continuously saving the life of the white plantation owner Rufus Weylin, who will eventually rape his forced mistress Alice so that Hagar can be conceived. Dana and Rufus' relationship, which circles around power and agency, constitutes the central struggle of the novel. Over the time span of Dana's six travels to the past, each stay lasting longer than the one before, the boy Rufus grows up and turns into a brutal slave owner, who frequently tortures Dana both psychologically and physically. Therefore, she quickly moves from merely witnessing slavery as a voyeur to experiencing it first-hand, which forces her to negotiate multiple subjectivities in the present. As the novel proceeds, her husband Kevin is also catapulted back in time, which compels the couple to face the traumatic horrors of slavery together, its remnants lingering over their life and marriage in the present. Ultimately, after Alice gets pregnant with Hagar, Dana stabs Rufus to death, as he attempts to rape her. She loses her arm in the process, which remains in the past, while the rest of her body returns to the present for good.

In her haunting experience of being kidnapped against her will, Dana, as a representative of the African American community, reiterates the direful voyage of her ancestors, and is forced to reconfigure her identity as a black woman, not only in the past but also in the present. The novel's main concern is hence the excavation of the past, which is enabled through the science fictional element of time travel. As representative for the whole American society, Dana confronts and reintegrates both her personal and the collectively transgenerationally transmitted historical trauma of African Americans. The importance of knowledge about and a connection to the past becomes a vital learning experience for her. Analogously, the reader is prompted to rethink gendered and racial identities in the present. Dana's journey is physically and psychologically painful and traumatic, but it facilitates her – and simultaneously Butler's audience – a direct encounter with the institution of slavery. This offers a provocative engagement with issues related to race, gender and its

intersections, and the importance of knowledge about the past for the construction of the future. Butler's reading of the past holds significant interpretative potential, as it links resistance against racism and misogyny, power, memory, and healing and is especially productive in relation to the double discrimination that the protagonist is facing as a black woman.

Due to its generic hybridity, *Kindred*'s genre has been the topic of an animated debate in research, despite Butler's own rejection of labels as "marketing tools" (Butler in Kenan 495). The novel collapses the boundaries of the (neo-)slave narrative, memoir, fantasy, and black speculative fiction or Afrofuturism, as it skilfully combines fantastical and historical-political elements. Consequently, similar to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, *Kindred* could be read as what A. Timothy Spaulding calls a "postmodern slave narrative" (2) which resists easy categorization, as it forces us to "question the ideologies embedded within 'realistic' representation of slavery in traditional history and historical fiction" (2). An alternative but similar way to place *Kindred* is provided by Lavender, who lists the novel as a prime example for his definition of the so-called "meta-slavery tale" (*Race* 63), which describes a combination of science fiction, slave narratives and neo-slave narratives. As Lavender defines it, meta-slavery fiction "demonstrates how slavery lives on in our cultural awareness and helps us ask how to deal with this history" (*Race* 88). These two aspects of *Kindred* – sociopolitical criticism and historical awareness – are synergized in what I have termed Afrospeculative trauma narratives.

Butler expresses trauma in *Kindred* through the postmodern literary trope of time travel, which renders trauma explicitly corporeal, in addition to its psychological dimension: as Dana physically travels to the past, she experiences the violent, degrading nature of slavery especially (but certainly not only) through bodily mutilation and abuse. I will thus argue in this chapter that trauma is made particularly tangible in the context of embodiment and that in *Kindred*, as in most (neo-)slave narratives, the body (and its mutilation) are included in the conceptualization of the Self, despite the common dualistic perception of Western subjectivity, which views body and mind as separate entities (Bast 152). Synecdochical for the African American community, Dana's struggle to come to terms with the transgenerational and personal trauma of slavery can only be prompted through embodied experience and the accompanying integration of memories from the past into the present through a process of acknowledgement and active reparative remembrance. As an Afrofuturist project of historical revision, the novel thus resists and actively counteracts historical amnesia by making the "unspeakable" inherent in trauma accessible, as a form of memory. Vint states that "[a]lthough slavery has ended, its traumatic and continued effects on Americans, both black and white, have not been dealt with" (242) and "American culture, particularly African-American culture, continues to be wounded by a past with which it has not come to terms" (245). Reading the novel as a powerful narrative contributing to the de-silencing of a suppressed, traumatic past, turning it into reparative remembrance, and thereby contributing to the endeavour of uncovering the collective trauma of descendants of both colonizers and slaves in the United States is important, as I contend, because the similarities between past and present are painfully real. As a kind of "memory machine" (Yaszek, "Grim" 1053), *Kindred* emphasizes the ways in which contemporary African Americans are continuously exposed to forms of what Adriano Elia has termed "contemporary slavery" (26), which express themselves both overtly and covertly in daily acts of racism, sexism, and classism. The time

travel device, in its ability to collapse time and address sociopolitical discourse, thus investigates the lingering effect of the trauma of slavery on the contemporary American society, "attesting that slavery remains an open wound" (Vint 242) for both black and white Americans today. I argue that in investigating and reconstructing the history of slavery through retelling the experience through present-day fiction, Butler's rewriting of the past has two main effects. As an "overtly didactic" (Prakash 20) work, *Kindred* has the potential, through eliciting reader empathy, to be both educating for descendants of former colonialists and slave-holders, to inform of "the potential emotional/psychological harm done to those who survived slavery" (Steinberg 474), and providing intragroup support for formerly underrepresented, subjugated groups of society who do not see themselves and their histories adequately portrayed, neither in historical accounts nor in works of speculative fiction. In this way, *Kindred's* Afrofuturist tropes, in their hyperbolic and allegoric function through cognitive dissonance, permit us to think about socio-political issues in new ways. Additionally, they highlight that for representing the experience of slavery, the genres of realism and existing historiography are not sufficient. Instead, *Kindred* offers an alternative to, and a critique of, the ways in which knowledge about a traumatic history is usually displayed in both fiction and non-fiction. In this chapter, I will propose a reading of *Kindred* which suggests that Dana is able to reintegrate her fragmented identity through the process of crossing the boundaries of space and time, thereby understanding herself in a continuum of past, present and future, which echoes the traditionally African belief that all living beings are inextricably linked by a consciousness that reaches across generations and is shared by ancestors, the living, and the yet unborn (Soyinka 3). This reading might contribute to working towards a new paradigm for talking about trauma in the experiences of diasporic individuals.

Abduction: Time Travel in Sociopolitical and Generic Criticism

That Dana's experience in slavery is deeply traumatizing is widely acknowledged in research on the novel (cf. Burnett, Donadey, Elia, Flagel, Long, Mitchell, O'Neill, Parham, Prakash, Setka). Marisa Parham even claims that *Kindred's* main concern revolves around the question of "how a traumatic experience potentially fragments an individual's sense of identity" (1318). As Florian Bast has argued, though, it is not only the degrading and brutal treatment she receives in slavery, but also the forced "abduction" (157) constituent of time travel itself, mirroring the Middle Passage of slaves from Africa to America, which is traumatic for Dana.

In her experience of travelling from California to 19th-century Maryland, Dana becomes an object to an unknown force, which violently compels her to leave her comfortable home in the 20th century. Her first experience of time travelling is comparably short, but the traumatic effects it has on her are already clearly recognizable in the narrative. She notes: "As real as the whole episode was, it's beginning to recede from me somehow. It's becoming like something I saw on television or read about – like something I got second hand" (*Kindred* 17). Moreover, Dana expresses feeling "like a victim of robbery or rape or something – a victim who survives, but who doesn't feel safe any more" (*Kindred* 17). As Setka observes, Dana might suffer from "a form of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (118), as she doubts the reality of her experience, which is typical for trauma survivors. Roberta Culbertson, herself a survivor of repeated group rape as a child, writes

that trauma survivors often describe this form of temporal and spatial splitting, which is later remembered as experiences of "faraway places inaccessible to anyone except them" (Culbertson in Parham 1324). This resonates with Dana's experience of being forcefully dragged through time and subsequently being unable to integrate the experience into her Self, as a form of detachment for the sake of self-preservation. Thus, in line with Bast, I read her involuntary, imposed travels as traumatic, which might have similar psychological effects as the crimes to which she compares her experience. The fantastic element of time travel infringes Dana's agency (Bast 152), which has a radical, disempowering effect on her life as an autonomous, self-reliant woman. Accordingly, she remarks: "I had no control at all over anything" (*Kindred* 113). Feeling out of control is, as van der Kolk writes, a common experience among trauma survivors. Having no power to stop the mechanism thus feeds into the argument that her experience of time travel in itself is traumatic. The time travel element thus serves as a reminder for both Dana and the reader that "[i]f repressed, … history will simply return to control one, as Dana is controlled when she is snatched back in time" (Vint 254). It affects Dana not only on a psychological level, but on a bodily level as well. She feels "dizzy, nauseated" and "collapse[s] to [her] knees" *(Kindred* 13). As Lavender states, travelling through time is characterized by "inherent disorientation" and "displacement" (*Race* 65). Indeed, as many scholars observe, the time jumps metaphorically portray the traumatic Middle Passage, where Africans were forcefully physically removed from their home countries and transported to America during the slave trade (Bast 157; R. Crossley 267; Setka 120). Flagel argues, for example, that Dana experiences typical symptoms of both the experience of the Middle Passage in slave narratives *and* time travel in speculative fiction, such as "nausea at terror of the void and a sense of chaos, emptiness, isolation, infinitude, separation, and absence" (219). Additionally, Dana lives under the constant fear of being "recaptured" out of the blue – similar to fugitive slaves facing "punishment, death, fear, separation from loved ones, recapture, ignominious return" (Flagel 219). These parallels of traumatic experiences in slavery and the experience of time travel directs further attention to the fact that Dana is indeed traumatized by her forced relocations and additionally highlight the effectiveness of employing time travel as a generic convention of speculative fiction to express trauma.

The inadvertent juggle between two separate times and spaces robs Dana and Kevin of their feeling of a secure "home" – a deeply problematic and over-determined concept in *Kindred*. As Thelma J. Shinn Richard observes, Butler seems to deliberately raise the question of "[w]hat home is available to the diasporic migrants of our world" ("Defining *Kindred*" 122). At first, Dana defines it as follows: "Home. It didn't have to do with where I had been. It was real. It was where I belonged" *(Kindred* 115). As the story unfolds, though, Dana and Kevin increasingly feel uncertain about whether Los Angeles in the 20th century or Maryland in the 19th century is "home" to them. Dana starts to perceive her original home as dangerous: "I don't feel secure here" *(Kindred* 17). When she arrives in Maryland for the fourth time, Dana is "startled to catch [herself] saying wearily, 'Home at last'" (127). In another instance, Dana "could recall feeling relief at seeing the house [the Weylin plantation], feeling that I had come home. And having to stop and correct myself, remind myself that I was in an alien, dangerous place. I could recall being surprised that I would come to think of such a place as home" (190). Homecoming becomes paradoxical, and the couple feels increasingly alienated from their present: "I had been home to 1976, to this house, and it hadn't felt that homelike. I didn't know" (191). Kevin similarly

observes: "If I'm not home yet, maybe I don't have a home" (190). Here, the time travel element echoes the diasporic experience of being caught between two cultural spheres. As Ashraf H. A. Rushdy claims, home in *Kindred* "is more than a place; it signifies the liminal site where one can lose or reclaim a historically-defined modern self" ("Families" 140). Thus, as Dana and Kevin lose their sense of home, they simultaneously lose their sense of Self – a process van der Kolk calls "depersonalization" in the context of trauma (100). When Dana is thrust back in time, her identities as an autonomous, black American writer and wife are obscured. Even her subject-status as a human being is questioned in slavery, which is, as I will argue later, deeply traumatizing. She discovers that she indeed has multiple identities that need to be configured into a multidimensional identity: the post-integrationist, independent 20th-century woman has to experience what it would have been like to live and work on a plantation in the Antebellum South as a slave, like her kindred, and the woman who is subjected and forcefully made to work on an actual plantation has to constantly remind herself of who she is and wants to be. Slavery, as Dana realizes, "has the power to reduce her modern, progressive notions of self to plain instinct and necessity" (M. Jameson 54). As a result of her identity crisis evoked by time travel, Dana experiences feelings of alienation and isolation, both in the 19th and the 20th century in three different ways: first, as an empowered but socially rather isolated black woman from the future in the patriarchal and racist hierarchy on the plantation in Maryland. Second, due to racism in hegemonic America, which still "excludes certain marginalized groups from its representations of itself" (Robertson 371). And third, as an outsider of society, due to her embodied historical knowledge, which would be dismissed as insanity by her circle of acquaintances in 20th-century Los Angeles, if ever found out. As Robert Crossley observes, *Kindred* thus has a lot in common with the "classic fable of alienation, Kafka's *Metamorphosis*" (267). These feelings of alienation, underlined by the speculative elements, allegorically portray the history of black people's marginalization, almost as if they were aliens coming from another planet. In typical sci-fi fashion, Dana feels like "a kind of castaway" (*Kindred* 87) travelling between two worlds, which mirrors posttraumatic stress and the survivor's constant involuntary flashbacks into the traumatic memory. Just as Dana's travels resemble "convulsive memories dislocating her in time" (R. Crossley 266), traumatic flashbacks transport trauma survivors back into the moment when the trauma originally occurred, if not processed adequately.

The time travel element enables moments of actual contact between the modern protagonist, Dana, and her ancestors kept in slavery. Being physically present in both time spheres, Dana represents the connection between past and present as well as the contrast (or similarities) between the former and current oppression of Afrodiasporic people. Hence, *Kindred* creates analogies to the oppressive realities of our modern world and showcases the past's grip on the present. By "foreshortening the distance between then and now" (R. Crossley 279), the novel focuses our attention on the continuity of slavery in the present, where the structure of chattel slavery seems to echo. Dana herself points out rather callously, for example, that she is "working out of a casual labor agency – we regulars called it a slave market" (*Kindred* 52). Her comparison connects the two worlds she is navigating throughout the narrated time span, thereby revealing parallels in the two systems, such as exploited labour and capitalist ownership (Flagel 234; Vint 243; Spaulding 52) – the one building on slave labour, and the other on more liberal forms of economic exploitation. Thus, I read the collapse in time

enabled by the trope of time travel as a reminder of the continually haunting echoes of slavery and patriarchy in the present, which continue to affect society and potentially perpetuate historical trauma. Oppression and discrimination continue to linger today in different forms through neocolonialism, "bleed[ing] itself into a supposedly enlightened present" (Steinberg 468). Despite efforts in emancipation and anti-racism policies, systemic othering and inequality persist all over the world. As Adriano Elia puts it,

> slavery has always existed, but … in our difficult age of migration, it is more present than ever.… [It] may take different shapes – forced and dehumanizing labour, forced and organized begging, the segregation of women and children, prostitution, forced and early marriages, the exploitation of migrants who are victims of organized crime. The allegedly reassuring assumption that slavery is a thing of the past is contradicted by innumerable examples of contemporary slavery. (25-26)

As Rushdy has pointed out in "Families of Orphans", Dana herself sees connections between slavery and present street violence (*Kindred* 33), rape (42), labour relations (52), sexual relations (97), wife beating (151), and apartheid (196). Systemic racism and its constituents – violence, sexism, and classism – thus persist in ways "akin to the continuation of slavery" (Vint 243). When reading *Kindred*'s conflation of time through the lens of Elia's concept of contemporary slavery, Dana's trauma not only originates in her own embodied experiences of the past, but in the oppressive forces in the present as well, which are remnants of the time her ancestors lived in, and which could loosely be alluding to forms of this "contemporary slavery" that Elia refers to. Robertson writes: "being a black woman in the United States does not simply make an individual subject to racism and sexism. Instead, it makes that individual subject to something else that is a combination of racism and sexism in which neither one nor the other takes absolute precedence" (Robertson 370). Dana's subject status is thus continuously threatened both in the past and the present, due to these looming oppressions. As a black woman in the present, Dana continues to experience a covert form of intersectional oppression, for example when her co-worker verbally abuses her by labelling her marriage to Kevin "Chocolate and Vanilla porn" (*Kindred* 50). These forms of discrimination even overtly resonate in her own family and marriage, for example when Kevin's bigoted sister and her husband threaten to not allow him into their home if he weds Dana ("her husband would have made a good Nazi", 110), and when Kevin repeatedly demands that she type his manuscript and letters for him, even though she despises typing, because he expects his wife to serve him as his secretary: "If I couldn't do him a little favor when he asked, I could leave", she tells the reader (109). Kevin's behaviour mirrors expectations of servitude prevalent in times of slavery while also being plainly sexist. As the taboo of miscegenation, overt racism, traditional gender expectations, and labour exploitation are a part of Dana's present, Butler insinuates how damaging thought patterns and racial, ethnic and gender discrimination have survived and continue to haunt the present. Indeed, as Steinberg puts it, it "takes Dana a lifetime as a black woman *and* a trip back into bondage to realize fully the intractable persistence of a white, male dominated hegemony" (471; emphasis in original). Thus, the time travel element illustrates how "Americans, inevitably, live the slave past in the ostensibly free present" (473). In suggesting subtle parallels between the two settings and eras Dana is inhabiting, Butler hints at the "ongoing effects of colonialism … from a postcolonial Black female perspective" (Richard, "Defining *Kindred*" 119). The novel's form mirrors this connection of past and present. The story line includes numerous flashbacks or analepses into the longer flashback, which is the novel itself, narrated retrospectively by Dana at an indistinct point in time. This circular

plot structure is additionally fragmented through Dana's narration of her time travelling to Kevin, while the chronological ending of the plot is split into a framing prologue and an epilogue. These interconnections, I argue, are Butler's way of emphasizing the significant role slavery's legacy continues to play in contemporary American identity.

As a socio-politically interested Afrofuturist, Butler utilizes speculative fiction tropes such as time travel not only to comment allegorically on contemporary realities, but also to criticize the way history is often presented in literature and the media. Time travel in the novel relates two historically different, yet in many ways continuous, forms of trauma and simultaneously constructs a memory to fill the void left behind by silenced and unheard slave voices. Woolfork asserts that Butler imagines the slave past "in an attempt to remember and reauthorize the enslaved" (3). By conflating past, present, and future through the Afrofuturist device of time travel, Butler skilfully constructs a counter-narrative. It establishes a counter-memory to both mainstream historical, often not exhaustive, accounts of the history of slavery and traditionally "white male"-dominated speculative and science fiction (Butler in Potts 9). Butler herself has voiced critique of the sci-fi genre, attesting it to have "always been nearly all white, just as until recently, it's been nearly all male" (Butler in Salvaggio, "Black" 78). Current historiography is, analogous to dominant Western trauma paradigms, insufficient for representing African American experience and the collective societal trauma of slavery. Hence, *Kindred* recognizes literature's ability to "make history". The novel serves as a "vehicle for cultural histories that not only function as a way of preserving cultural memory for a particular group but also as a means of documenting and packaging those memories in a way that can be accessible to other groups" (Setka 101). Butler's counter-history and counter-memory thus enlarges the historical canon on slavery by offering unusual but especially important perspectives and "more inclusive models of memory" (Yaszek, "Grim" 1054), while likewise revising science fiction's genre boundaries, as it includes the experience of Afrodiasporic individuals. Through her work, Butler hence elicits social criticism, while simultaneously challenging both generic and historiographic limitations.

Embodied Experience of Slavery: The Body's Role in Trauma

Next to involuntarily travelling through time, it is Dana's hands-on experience of life in slavery that causes trauma – physically and psychologically. Harriet Jacobs has asserted in the preface to her autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* that "[o]nly by experience can anyone realize how deep, and dark, and foul is [slavery,] that pit of abominations" (5). Similarly, Parham argues that there is "no possibility for an experience of the past outside of first-person experience" (1322). It seems that only through corporeal experience is it possible to comprehend history. In *Kindred,* the speculative device of time travel enables a form of first-person experience of slavery, as fictional experience, and therefore renders the past tangible for contemporary readers.

During her stays in the past, Dana suffers from "some form of physical trauma" (Bast 157), its intensity increasing over the course of the novel. She is attacked by Rufus' father with a rifle, she is beaten, severely whipped, and almost raped several times. Her own past, personified in Rufus, assaults and tortures her

physically and leaves permanent marks in the form of cuts, bruises and scars on her body. Long and Parham even use the word 'rape' to characterize Dana's trauma – it is "invasive, disorienting, and excruciatingly painful, both physically and psychologically" (Long 464; Parham 1327). The extreme physical abuses and the resulting pain rob her of her physical integrity and bodily control. Thus, as Bast rightly observes, Dana's main struggle over the course of the story is to regain agency and to re-establish power over her own body (152). The body in *Kindred* thus becomes a vital element both in the infliction of, but also in the process of overcoming trauma. Woolfork argues that literary trauma theory's predominant "antirepresentational ethos", as I have outlined in Chapter Two, has long neglected the physical dimensions of traumatic experience (2). She therefore proposes a representational strategy, 'bodily epistemology', which explicitly uses the body of a modern protagonist to register the traumatic history of slavery. Her "distinctly African American trauma theory" (8) is an alternative to conventional trauma theory and is equally interested in body and mind as sites of trauma, especially addressing the physical meanings of slavery. In Woolfork's reading of *Kindred*, Dana's involuntary travel to the 19th century and her bodily experience of slavery are a result of her amnesia about the past, which forces her to confront this living, traumatic history and prioritize it in her personal life in the present. *Kindred* seems to suggest that the body is essential and needs to be included in the conception of Self, contrary to the traditionally "cartesian self/body split" (Jesser 56). Indeed, to borrow from Vint, *Kindred* emphasizes the necessity to "embrace embodied experience as part of the self" (242). This reading echoes the body's historical role in justifying the exclusion of African Americans from full personhood and "as the means through which collective identity and resistance to such destructive stereotyping has been articulated" (244). In exposing Dana's contemporary body to the brutality of slavery, Butler seems to suggest that the control over her body as a site of conflict and the ability to protect it from further mutilation becomes instrumental in working through her trauma and reintegrating her fragmented memory into a newly configured, multiple identity as a modern African American woman. I will illustrate this point below by analysing Dana's physical reaction to trauma.

During her visits to the past, the violence Dana experiences "occurs in slow motion" (*Kindred* 237). When she is whipped, for example, she feels the pain "like a hot iron across my back, burning into me through my light shirt, searing my skin" (*Kindred* 107). Trauma research has found that in the brains of trauma survivors "[s]ights, sounds, smells, and touch are encoded as isolated, dissociated fragments, and normal memory processing disintegrates. Time freezes, so that the present danger feels like it will last forever" (van der Kolk 60). Thus, as is quite common among survivors of trauma, Dana's brain notes and stores seemingly tiny details of sensory experiences in fragments, as the experience overburdens her cognitive ability to memorize the experience coherently. Accordingly, the sentences become short and repetitive: "I screamed, convulsed … I vomited. And I vomited again" (*Kindred* 107). Here, Dana has a physical reaction to trauma by feeling sick. She is affected bodily by the traumatic situation, not only psychologically, which, as Flagel points out, "interprets violence as part of an unnatural order against which the body rebels" (236). When Dana feels "disoriented" and "confused" (*Kindred* 115) after her return to the present, she numbs her feelings and her body by taking aspirins and sleeping pills, which trauma research has often named as a typical posttraumatic coping mechanism to shut out the horror the individual has survived. Bodily suffering, and the attempt to

soothe it, thus play a vital role in *Kindred,* and it also carries metaphorical meaning. As Long writes, "suffering that ordinarily cannot be conveyed is invoked in [*Kindred*] as metonymic proof of a knowable past. The protagonists believe that history really happened because it hurts them. Without the bodily transubstantiation of distant suffering, there is no apprehension of the past" (461). Thus, it is only through meaningful interaction and engagement with a traumatic past, Butler seems to suggest, that America's history of slavery and racism can be apprehended and turned into reparative remembrance. In writing and imagining the act of remembering the past as a corporeal act with a lasting effect on the body *and* the psyche, Butler intriguingly links history to the psychological traumas the American national history has evoked, and to their implications, which are still lingering today.

Long claims that, as the "supernatural powers of 'kindred'… pull individuals into a historical past from which they are excluded", *Kindred* could be read as "verging on making claims to a sort of collective unconscious that passes through bloodlines" (Long 474). Here, the novel incorporates the idea of transgenerational trauma, which can occur within the family unit itself, or, on a broader level, in society, precipitated in current discrimination and oppression. Through time travel and embodiment, Dana literally relives the traumatic experiences of her ancestors, which reveals the transgenerational trauma she is carrying in the present. Dana's blood relationship to Rufus and Alice is thus metaphorically utilized to "imagine ways of knowing traumas that [her] bod[y] and mind … have never borne" (Long 462). Her history haunts her, maims her physically, and terrorizes her psychologically in the present. It will always be inside her and work its destruction from inside, if not adequately processed, just as much as the repressed collective historical trauma will remain an open wound in American society if not turned into a culture of remembrance. Through the speculative elements of time travel and subsequent embodiment, Butler employs the immediacy of Dana's experience to eliminate the alarmingly increasing distance to a traumatic past.

When Dana returns from one of her trips through time, she makes what Christine Levecq calls "frantic attempts at textual control over history" (528). She learns about slavery from books and movies in the present while waiting to be recaptured: "I read books about slavery, fiction and nonfiction. I read everything I had in the house that was even distantly related to the subject" (*Kindred* 116). Still, Dana understands that books do not prepare her for the embodied experience of slavery. She also realizes "that educated didn't mean smart … Nothing in my education or knowledge of the future had helped me to escape" (177). For adequately understanding the past, "films, Dana finds, are even less reliable guides to the past. Hollywood production values and the comfort of a theatre seat insulate viewers from material purported to be historically accurate" (R. Crossley 277). The novel makes clear that history books do not adequately portray the actual reality of slavery and do not include all versions of history in the national narrative. Despite being literate and privileged enough to access the cumulative "knowledge" about the past, Dana cannot escape unscathed and unimpaired. While she is able to gather general information on the situation she is facing, her research does not aid her in finding solutions for the particular situations of psychological and physical terror she is facing, for example, a certificate of freedom, which she and Kevin could use as a template for forging one for Dana. The books "do not contain freedom" (Bast 165) – neither from slavery in the past, nor from the past in the present. Dana is

only able to grasp the realities of Antebellum slavery through her journey through time, as it allows her to have direct contact – which media cannot replace. She discovers: "I had seen people beaten on television and in the movies. I had seen that too-red blood substitute streaked across their backs and heard their well-rehearsed screams. But I hadn't lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves" (*Kindred* 36). Dana's experience of an unexpected materialization of what had been known about slavery until then exclusively through media reveals three important points.

Firstly, as we have seen above, Dana's physical encounter with slavery, enabled through the speculative, enhances her understanding of the past and its aftermath in a way official historiography does not account for, as the perspectives of African Americans have not been adequately and multi-dimensionally recorded in conventional historiography. Thus, Butler's "defeatist view of the historiographic enterprise" (Levecq 532) critiques that history has become a "mere text" (528) in the present and thus privileges experiential knowledge over textual, historical knowledge. This is especially important as when history is reduced to text, people of colour could be written out of it. By going beyond the realist, mimetic aspect in its discourses, *Kindred* acts as a "historiographic metafiction" – a theoretical concept coined by Linda Hutcheon (*Poetics* 113-18) which problematizes the representation of marginalized and silenced groups and reveals a heightened consciousness of the dispossessed and oppressed through blurring the gap between history and fiction. In highlighting these neglected perspectives, the novel functions as a corrective to dominant discourse. Similarly, Rushdy argues that through "rewriting history by incorporating a familial and racial past into the received historiographical tradition, *Kindred* is a novel of memory.…[Butler's] achievement is to make memory transformative to the degree of literally translating the remembering subject into the past" ("Families" 136). Therefore, I propose, Butler is performing what Toni Morrison has called "a kind of literary archeology", where one may "yield up a kind of truth" through "the imaginative act", which is "bound up with memory" ("Site" 302; 305). *Kindred* becomes an excavation site of reparative remembrance, by counteracting traumatic amnesia and, in Nietzsche's terms, actively forgets a traumatic legacy by representing and rewriting a past that would otherwise be suppressed, misunderstood, or disregarded. As Woolfork argues, "[t]his insistence on a view of the traumatic past as 'accessible' by fantastic or paranormal means is a way to remember the slave past, to keep the event alive for the protagonist. The dangers of not referencing the past…include the risk that slavery will be forgotten or misinterpreted" (4). In Rushdy's words, *Kindred* thus rejects the "tendency of history to become abstract and of historical subjects to remain fragmented" ("Families" 139). Butler hence contributes to the obligation of remembering the past to apprehend the present and configure coherent, multiple identities, which are defined, in part, by history.

Secondly, and closely related, Dana's physical encounter with slavery through time travel hints at the irrepresentability of trauma in realist narrative forms. Realist narratives, as Dana's experience seems to suggest, are less suited to representing trauma adequately. Instead, the embodiment of the past as enabled through the speculative in *Kindred,* allows for a better understanding of historical social trauma and offers different strategies to approaching it. When Dana observes a slave being beaten by white patrollers, she physically experiences the trauma of her ancestors first hand in a sort of "sensory overload" (Flagel 236):

> I could literally smell his sweat, hear every ragged breath, every cry, every cut of the whip. I could see his body jerking, convulsing, straining against the rope as his screaming went on and on. My stomach heaved, and I had to force myself to stay where I was and keep quiet.… My face … was wet with tears. And my mind was darting from one thought to another, trying to tune out the whipping". (*Kindred* 36)

Far from being a representation Dana encounters, she *co-lives* the event, and through her physical co-presence, re-embodies the event with all her senses – she smells, hears, sees, and feels slavery in a vivid, almost pictorial way. Accordingly, as it is only one's body that determines what is experienced as present or past, the past changes from being mere memory for Dana in this scene. The tension between the experience itself and the act of remembering it is collapsed. This is especially relevant in light of what Culbertson notes with regard to memory: "What we normally call memory is not the remembered at all…, but a socially accepted fabrication, a weaving together of the thin, sometimes intertwined threads of true memory, the re-membered, so that these might be told. Memory is always in the end subjected to those conventions which define the believable" (178). *Kindred* thus questions conventional narrative forms and underlines the importance of recreating the experience of slavery through representations of embodiment and re-enactment, as it is not sufficient to project one's contemporary consciousness back in time from afar (Vint 249). The trope of time travel and the enabled embodiment of history enable a critique of the limitations of "objective", realist forms of history to convey (African-)American history and undermine the claims to truth of conventional American collective memory. A new dimension, in the form of speculation, has to enter the stage to express the unspeakable that is inherent in trauma. Yet, one must bear in mind that even speculative fiction has limits to representing trauma. Despite *Kindred*'s effort "to imagine ways of 'downloading' ancestral memory into contemporary psyches", pain remains "drastically particular and incommunicable" (Long 463+475). *Kindred* hence articulates the central paradox of trauma literature: "the impossibility of fully accounting for the horrors of the trauma with words and yet the necessity of trying to articulate the grueling experience as part of a process of healing and surviving" (Donadey 70). Butler thus contributes to the endeavour of Afrofuturism as well as trauma literature to represent the unrepresentable and speak the unspeakable (and unspoken).

Thirdly, Dana's journey to the past and her embodied experience of slavery invite readers of diverse backgrounds, on the one hand, to empathize and identify with African American experience and, on the other hand, to recognize the continuous existence of trauma in the present and thus be stimulated to change the status quo. In other words, by eliciting an emotional response, *Kindred* brings the reader's attention to the fact that the past of slavery is not different enough from the present. The author herself underlines this aim in an interview with John C. Snider: "I was trying to get people to feel slavery. I was trying to get across the kind of emotional and psychological stones that slavery threw at people". Thus, the time travel element enables a form of historical consciousness, as it gives readers the impression that they are travelling through time themselves, as "the vividness of its invented details gives the story a convincing 'you are there' documentary power" (R. Crossley 274). Hence, as a form of prosthetic memory, the speculative element of the novel helps the readers to empathize with former slaves and perceive the past "as a felt reality rather than as a learned abstraction" (274). Like Dana, the reader is initially "experientially unfamiliar" with the trauma of slavery and thus "shares the protagonist's lack of identification with the events being portrayed" (Setka 96). Gradually, though, the reader mirrors the protagonist's discoveries, which enables a "'mimetic encounter' with a trauma

that she did not experience, and one, moreover, to which she may not have a cultural connection" (96), while still being aware of the difference between actual, personal experience and mimetic feeling. White readers, in particular, might thus see "individual slaves as people rather than as encrusted literary and sociological types" (R. Crossley 270) and might discover that there is a closer kinship to the characters and their experiences on the Weylin plantation than they would like to admit. As Elia puts it, "[e]xperiencing the senselessness of old slavery from the apparently unreal perspective of a contemporary outsider may inspire the reader … to minimize the typical desensitization with which contemporary slavery … more often than not is met today" (20). African American or Afrodiasporic readers, on the other hand, might find themselves and their ancestors represented. As Long argues, "many [readers] tap into their own notions and memories of violence through this reading experience" (464) – a process which is reinforced through the use of a first-person narrator who mediates this direct experience, giving the reader a sense of immediacy.[15] As Donadey argues, this first-person perspective also echoes Du Bois's 'double consciousness', which Dana has to adopt as a survival tactic during her experiences in slavery (Donadey 70; *Kindred* 129, 161, 175). While not talking back openly to her oppressors to avoid further punishment, Dana still voices her opinions and thoughts towards her audience, enabling them to emphasize with her and additionally exposing and undermining problematic power relations. Butler thus attempts to find a way for her contemporary audience to get a glimpse of what their ancestors might have felt. Even though fictionalized history such as *Kindred* is not able to grasp and represent slavery to its full extent, the narrative might elicit "memories of readers' own traumas, confrontations with their personal histories, biases and prejudices" (Long 478). For individuals from all backgrounds, then, reading *Kindred* might enable the possibility for releasing traumatically fragmented, suppressed memory and initiate a gradual healing process of the collective social trauma of slavery. Thus, the reader is able to receive a deeper and enriched understanding of African American history in comparison to the one offered by popular media, and simultaneously respond empathetically to the protagonist's experiences in slavery in the past and to issues of gender and race in the present. Remembering Keen's claim that texts which trigger feelings in the reader "also stimulate readers' thinking" (213), Dana's embodied experience of the trauma of slavery and the oppressions she faces in the present might enable readers to expand and rethink their culturally constructed belief systems and inspire them to consider the diverse ways in which the past continues to inform race relations in the present. That Dana additionally is from the reader's contemporary world facilitates the process of identification. In this way, *Kindred* offers readers a proximity to cultural memory that inspires a heightened and more inclusive historical awareness.

We must bear in mind that Butler does not use time travel and the embodied experience of slavery enabled by it to change the past, but to change our understanding of it. Dana tellingly realizes she "couldn't do anything

---

[15] As Keen writes, "Narrative theorists, novel critics, and reading specialists have already singled out a small set of narrative techniques – such as the use of first person narration and the interior representation of characters' consciousness and emotional states – as devices supporting character identification, contributing to empathetic experiences, opening readers' minds to others, changing attitudes, and even predisposing readers to altruism" (213).

to change history" (*Kindred* 141) and "had no control at all over anything" (113). Instead, *Kindred* is about representing history more thoroughly, and making sense of a horrible past. The time travel experience is rather to be understood as the tool through which Dana can change her understanding of history, which, in turn, alters her and forces her to change her present, thus opening up new possibilities of transformation for the future. This force is crucial in my overall argument about the obligation of contemporary societies to deal with historical collective trauma. In typical Afrofuturist manner, *Kindred* seems to point to an alternative future where the American nation has transformed into a more equal society that does not deny or repress history, but rather acknowledges and remembers the past in collective memory. *Kindred* is thus about excavating a traumatic history to prevent suppressed traumatic memories from continuously harming the present, and to thereby enable a viable, more just future.

The Traumatic Dilemma of Forced Complicity in Crime

As research on the novel has observed, *Kindred* is greatly concerned with familial obligations and contracts. Therefore, another aspect which I argue has a traumatizing effect on Dana is her forced complicity in Rufus' rape of Alice. As the act will ensure her own existence, she has no other choice: "No matter what I did, [Rufus] would have to survive to father Hagar, or I could not exist" (29). Both Alice's rape and the ongoing brutal treatment of slaves on the plantation are thus a precondition for Dana's actual existence. Burnett even argues that her "genetic and historical existence is contingent upon the legacy of socially approved white-on-black rape" (*My Left Arm* 30). In other words, Dana discovers that her very identity relies upon white supremacy and a history of slavery. In the middle of her conflicting obligations, Dana thus can be read as both a survivor of trauma and a perpetrator. Thus, Dana could indeed be described as what Donna J. Haraway calls "cyborg heroines" (175) – she is neither innocently whole nor wholly innocent, both damaged and damaging, and she relentlessly negotiates with her humanity and power (Jesser 51). She is caught between two societies and eras, between the roles of saviour and victim, similarly to how the novel blurs and transcends the straightforward boundaries of traditional genres and the time spheres of past and present. This interconnectedness suggests that, just as Dana is co-perpetrator in Alice's agony, we as readers are also responsible for the perpetuation of slavery's traumatic legacy in the form of racism and that we need to take responsibility for a history which we did not construct.

When she finally kills Rufus, Dana conspires against a part of her own Self, since Rufus "indirectly constitutes and defines her" (Levecq 537). Missy Dehn Kubitschek puts it this way: "the dead past has claimed part of the living" (26). Biologically, Rufus is a part of her – they share the same blood. But the "trauma of her forced complicity" (Burnett, *My Left Arm* 44) not only affects her ancestor Alice and herself, but the whole slave community on the Weylin plantation: killing and freeing herself from the yoke of her perpetrator has far-reaching, devastating consequences not only on her own bodily integrity, but on the familial constellations on the plantation as well, as the slaves will be sold off and their families torn apart. Dana's subsequent feelings of guilt and remorse are especially rendered obvious, as the first thing she does after returning to 1976 for good is to travel to present-day Maryland to find out about the fate of her fellow slaves Sarah, Nigel, Joe, and Hagar.

As she is not able to find information about their whereabouts, she cannot find closure – and neither can the reader. Dana contemplates: "Why did I even want to come here. You'd think I would have had enough of the past", to which Kevin replies: "You probably needed to come for the same reason I did.… To try to understand. To touch solid evidence that those people existed" (*Kindred* 264). As Setka observes, Dana's urge to return highlights the essential role that historical memory has in the process of self-definition (115). The revisiting of the geographical site of her trauma could thus be read in two ways. On the one hand, Dana might intuitively expect that her return could be therapeutic and bring her a sort of relief and closure – similar to how memorial sites are believed to be important in the establishment a culture of remembrance. On the other hand, as Setka reads it, her need to return resembles a "repetitive compulsion" typical for trauma patients and is "symptomatic of the persistence of trauma" (114). Cathy Caruth argues that repetition is the attempt of the unconscious to process and claim the traumatic event (63-64). Which of the two options is more valid remains obscure: *Kindred*'s ending is "rough-edged and raw like Dana's wound" (R. Crossley 267). These gaps of knowledge the book leaves both on Dana and the reader seem to refer to the fact that a part of history is forever forgotten and cannot be retrieved – closure is thus never fully attainable. Analogously, as Burnett concludes, "Dana has been traumatized forever by her experience, and will always bear the psychological and physical marks of her experience" (*My Left Arm* 42). I will analyse this permanent physical wound – Dana's final disfigurement – in more depth in what follows.

Bodily Mutilation: Trauma's Grip on the Present

I have argued in line with Bast so far, that *Kindred*'s main motif is the body (151) and its important role in both traumatization and subsequent healing and identity formation. Not only has the body historically been, as Gregory Jerome Hampton and Wanda M. Brooks explain, "a boundless edifice for the articulation of 'otherness'" (72) through racial and gendered prejudice, but also the place where racial and gendered violence is executed in a traumatic way. It is therefore no surprise that the embodiment of trauma through experience, enabled by time travel, is Butler's chosen way of conducting her project of excavating suppressed history and traumatically fragmented memory. Accordingly, the genetic tie and relationship between Rufus and Dana, which climaxes in a physical altercation, are explicitly rendered corporeal in *Kindred.*

Dana's relationship with Rufus is characterized by an incessant struggle for power. Once almost a friendship, which initially spares Dana from physical harm despite her slave status, their relationship increasingly turns violent. At first, Rufus does not injure Dana himself, but he "arranges for other people to hit [her]" (*Kindred* 229). As the story proceeds, though, he breaks their "unspoken agreement" (238) by hitting her himself, which leads her to cut her wrists in an effort to elicit her return to the present (239), as she has discovered that a threat to her life will trigger the time travel mechanism. Yet Dana does not understand that she is bound to him by blood as kindred, as the novel's title suggests. Rufus and history itself will always live within her – she is inextricably bound to him by blood. As Robertson phrases it, "one cannot divide a person in half and get the father-half and the mother-half. Similarly, one cannot divide Dana to obtain her 'black', 'female' or 'American' parts" (373). In other words, "no matter how little blood we may inherit from any given ancestor,

that blood, and that history – whether modified, repressed, celebrated, etc. – remains there nonetheless" (373). Dana will therefore be forever unable to escape the past, which is part of her biological DNA. Over the course of the story, despite his cruel nature, Dana begins to care for, and even love, Rufus. In this regard, as Long observes, their symbiotic relationship seems to refer to the "inherently interracial and incestuous nature of the American national family, and…the intricate web of love, pride, need, self-loathing, and coercion that bind the fates of kindred folk" (469). Their conflict culminates in Dana finally killing Rufus, when he attempts to rape her in his grief over Alice, who has committed suicide, as he sees his beloved reflected in Dana in a kind of mirror image. In an effort to maintain her self-leadership, as well as her "self-esteem and psychic wholeness" (Mitchell, "Not Enough" 59), Dana stabs the depressed Rufus to death, as his physical assault "violat[es] their kinship, both literal and figurative" (M. Jameson 55). Rufus' attempted rape could be read as a case of domestic violence and abuse, which is, according to van der Kolk, one of the main forms of traumatization in our societies to this day (1), and which Butler seems to criticize. Long similarly argues that Butler explicitly points to the "kinship between slavery and domestic abuse" (466). As Dana loses her arm during this last episode in the past, the marks of having been sexually assaulted and tortured in what she had called "home at last" before (*Kindred* 127) will stay forever on her body as a stump. Her bodily mutilation is therefore worth dwelling on when reading *Kindred* with regard to trauma and the possibilities for processing it.

Kindred's prologue begins with the disturbing sentence "I lost an arm on my last trip home" (*Kindred* 9). Here, her traumatic maiming and the complex concept of "home" already set the tone for the rest of the novel, which is, as we have seen, deeply constituent of psychological wounds and physical injuries – both of them traumatic. I have analysed above how the omnipresence of these traumas transgresses temporal boundaries by invading Dana's "home" in Los Angeles, which reinforces Butler's emphasis on the loss of security and control that is characteristic of Dana's trauma. Flagel even calls Dana's state a "disoriented, post-traumatic state of disfigurement" (227). Thus, I agree with Steinberg, who claims that "Dana's psychological dispossession is mirrored by the actual loss of a body part" (469) – her lost arm, her scarred wrists and her two lost teeth are the embodied result of her trauma. Shortly before the epilogue begins, Dana picks up where she has abandoned the prologue's story thread: "Something harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm.… The wall of my living room … I was still caught somehow, joined to the wall as though my arm were growing out of it – or growing into it … I looked at the spot where flesh joined with plaster, stared at it uncomprehending. It was the exact spot Rufus's fingers had grasped" (*Kindred* 260-261). The subsequent necessary amputation of her arm, which finally dislodges Dana from the burden of involuntarily travelling to the past, is more than a wound that bears the opportunity to heal. The final disfigurement of Dana's body shows that she cannot be restored but will be left fragmented and unresolved forever – both physically and emotionally. Dana realizes this change for good when she "touch[es] the scar Tom Weylin's boot had left on [her] face, touch[es] the empty left sleeve" (*Kindred* 264). She has lost a part of herself and her bodily integrity to history. In killing her biological ancestor, Dana "literally kills her past" (Long 470), but a part of her own Self as well – she is forever "made unwhole" (Flagel 232). This has several implications.

First, Butler seems to deliberately complicate our need for reconciliation and closure. Instead, she demonstrates that complete "wholeness" of the Self is unattainable for all of us. As R. Crossley puts it, "genuine historical understanding of human crimes is never easy and always achieved at the price of suffering" (267). In an interview, Butler points out: "I couldn't really let [Dana] come all the way back. I couldn't let her return to what she was, I couldn't let her come back whole and [losing her arm], I think, really symbolizes her not coming back whole. Antebellum slavery didn't leave people quite whole" (Butler in Kenan 498). Again, bodily scars mirror preceding psychological wounds. Even cutting the cords to her past by literally killing it will not free Dana completely from her past and return her to her initial state of perceived bodily and psychic "wholeness". Dana observes: "[The ancestors] stayed with me, shadowy and threatening. They made their own limbo and held me in it" (*Kindred* 18). As Rushdy claims, Butler "literally represents history (or remembrance of the past) in the process of destroying a body. What Dana's physical losses signify is that to flesh out the past means to leave part of one's being there" ("Families" 139). Still, *Kindred* seems to suggest that we must engage with the past to mould and even re-orient our future. Here, Dana's experience points to the need to face the past and "then wrench ourselves from it, without being able to escape the mutilation of that past" (Donadey 71-72). Remembering the past, as *Kindred* does, takes a toll, but it is exactly this paradox that leads to actual healing and opens up possibilities for alternative, more inclusive futures. Accepting the incomprehensible is the only way to process trauma.

Second, and closely related, Dana's dismemberment challenges Western concepts of a stable and fixed identity and subjecthood, which is grounded in a "rhetoric of wholeness", by not only enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the past but also by forging "an enriched self, born out of fragmentation" (Barber 15). In accordance with research that has long dismissed and critiqued the conventional Western concept of a fixed identity, replacing it with the notion of a multiple and configured identity, Butler makes "selfhood as we understand it in Western culture ultimately uncertain" (Long 470).

Third, Dana's loss explicitly establishes the causal relationship between past and present. Similar to how I have read the time travel element, I read her permanent mark as a metaphor for the damaging influence of a traumatic history on the present and for how persistently it influences the present in myriad ways. The past's impact is forever inscribed on Dana's body, which conspicuously hints at the tangible reality of contemporary slavery in the 20$^{\text{th}}$ century: racism, racial violence, and hegemonic exploitation still cripple. This reading is bolstered by research. Robertson writes: "the physical imprint, the index, of nearly four hundred years of American race relations (not to mention gender relations) and two hundred years of the institutional denial of those relations, manifest in a visible wound" (372). Linh U. Hua (261), Long (474), Bast (152) and Flagel (232) argue similarly. Dana's dismemberment thus is a hurting reminder of slavery's traumatic legacy and symbolizes the damaging effect of a violent past on the present and arguably the future. The highly symbolic loss of her arm serves as a reminder of the impossibility of simply moving on without confronting history and suggests that leaving the past behind for good is not possible. To take this even further, Dana's body is presented as a living memory both for herself and for the reader, which serves as a daily reminder of the atrocities African Americans endured in the past and might continue to endure in subtler forms today: she is

the "contemporary attestation to the realities of slavery" (Long 460). Similar to how the physicalized trauma of slavery, manifested in the interruption of bodily integrity, is marked forever on Dana's body and mind, it constantly reminds America of its repressed past and the historicity of the present. This echoes the Afrofuturist endeavour to "reconstruct … the past to endow the present with new meaning" (Rushdy, "Families" 136) – a project labelled "long memory" by Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame, "meditation on remembrance" by Charles Johnson (74) and "literature of memory" by R. Crossley (xiv). *Kindred* thus enlarges the conventional concept of 'history' by including 'memory' into its definition (Kubitschek 149), pointing to the necessity for the American nation to forge a 'culture of remembrance' similar to post-Apartheid South Africa and post-Third Reich Germany.

When Kevin returns from his extended stay in the past, Dana's cousin barely recognizes him, comparing his physical appearance to that of a cancer patient (*Kindred* 243). Even though his physical markers in the form of scars are not as drastic as Dana's, Butler seems to suggest that revisiting the past to execute the necessary excavation of a traumatically repressed history is painful for both black people and white people, but more so for black people, while white people need to "metaphorically return to the past for a longer period of time" to understand the atrocities of the past and its lasting implications on the present (Donadey 68). *Kindred* as an Afrofuturist project and "inverse slave narrative" (Steinberg 467) thus contributes to this difficult project and dialogue to "find ways of being responsible to one's own history without remaining trapped by it", as MacLeod phrases it in the context of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (65). If a viable future for the United States is to be created, Donadey argues, "the process of accounting for a history of slavery must be done by all Americans" and "this process will not be painless" (68). As Dana can no longer blame Rufus for her history, which means she can no longer blame the past for the present, Butler shows that post-traumatic responsibility or blame cannot be assigned to a single person or group of people, but that it must be distributed over the collectivity: every individual has to personally take on history. The novel's juxtaposition of the "quintessential marker of U.S. national memory" (Hua 396), the Bicentennial celebrations on July 4, 1976, when Dana is travelling to the past for the last time, with the memory of its history of slavery, is especially noteworthy in this regard. Dana's birthday, the first time she travels to Maryland, and the American nation's birthday, when she returns for the last time, frame the narration. This special and highly symbolic setting implies that it is the nation itself that must re-examine its past to find ways to resolve contemporary conflicts grounded in racism (Kubitschek 28). This formal circle also implies that Butler "deftly connects individual consciousness with social history and invites readers to meditate on the relationship between personal and political identities" (R. Crossley 276). Moreover, by choosing Maryland and California as the backdrop of her story, Butler seems to suggest that all Americans, from East to West, need to revisit the past to be able to transform. All parties must continuously participate in this project of working through historically coined divisions and traumas in an active and often painful way to open a necessary conversation.

Several scholars, such as Caitlin O'Neill, assert that as Dana can never recover her arm, she will never recover "from the psychological trauma of her enslavement" (63) and remain traumatized forever. Similarly, Long posits that "the supernatural means of garnering any knowledge about one's origins do not stabilize the subject,

but rather unmoors his or her sense of self" (470). For several reasons, I do not agree with O'Neill's and Long's argument. As outlined in Chapter Two, there are ways to healing from trauma. Thus, I argue that *Kindred,* in its essence, is a story of recovery. I therefore read Dana's voyage to the past as a necessary journey into her interiority, through which she can access the traumatizing, formerly split off elements in her history and re-integrate them into a coherent life narrative through memory. Still, as *Kindred'*s unresolved ending allegorically suggests, this endeavour will never find complete closure. By collapsing the boundaries between present and past, Dana is able to come to terms with her own history and negotiate and newly configure her hybrid, diasporic identities, even though it comes at a considerable cost. Returning from the involuntary trips to the past, Dana and Kevin have gained a better understanding of American society and how and why systemic racism continues in the collectivity. Moreover, as Dana has gained knowledge about her ancestry and personal history, she is able to define her multiple Self in new and productive ways. I will analyse several factors involved in this process in more detail in what follows.

(Dis-)Remembering the Past: Agency and Making Decision

I have dwelled on the importance of bodily experience for comprehending the reality of slavery. In this section, I will emphasize the resulting process: the importance of action and decision-making for healing. As Bast argues, Dana is able to confront her trauma and regain power over her body and her life by performing agential acts. This is in line with current trauma research, which suggests that trauma survivors who "gain control over the residues of past trauma and return to being master … of their own ship" are able to reintegrate traumatic memories (van der Kolk 4). In what follows, I will narrow Bast's reading of agency down to its focus on decision-making. Despite the brutal treatment Dana receives in slavery, she maintains her self-authorization and a certain degree of control by claiming the right to make decisions on her own behalf. She showcases this sense of individuality already in the present, for example when she refuses to become a nurse, secretary, or teacher, as her uncle and aunt suggested, and pursues her dream of becoming a writer instead *(Kindred* 55). As Angelyn Mitchell poignantly expresses, Dana "eschews familial and societal gender expectations in selecting her career as a writer" and thereby "embraces her ability to define herself in both her past and her present" ("Not Enough" 64). Ironically, she later does become a secretary, teacher and nurse to Rufus and the slave community. While refusing Kevin's request to play his secretary in the present, Dana accepts the task when Rufus asks her to write something for him, despite "how hard [she] worked … to avoid jobs like this" (*Kindred* 226). She cannot reject these professions in the past, as the economic possibilities for black women were limited and fewer possibilities for individuality existed. Yet even in the past, she actively decides for herself, for example, when she chooses her possible death over further being held captive on the plantation by Rufus: "Now I would either goad him into shooting me or shame him into letting us go – or possibly, I would go home, I might go home wounded, or even dead, but one way or another, I would be away from this time, this place" (*Kindred* 187). In this episode, Dana affirms her active subject position by making choices, albeit within a limited framework. A certain freedom in comparison to other slaves on the plantation (for example voicing her honest opinions in conversation with Rufus), and her husband, are not negotiable to her: "Rufe, there are things we just can't bargain on.… I won't bargain away my husband or my freedom!" (142). She

later tells Kevin, referring to Rufus' potential plan to rape her: "I'm not property, Kevin. I'm not a horse or a sack of wheat. If I have to seem to be property, if I have to accept limits on my freedom for Rufus's sake, then he also has to accept limits – on his behavior towards me. He has to leave me enough control of my own life to make living look better to me than killing and dying" (246). If Rufus crosses this line, she decides, she will either kill herself or him – a risk she is willing to accept even though it is not given that she will exist in the present if Rufus is dead before he fathers Hagar. Rape is the "final assault against her sense of herself as a twentieth-century subject that Dana refuses to accept" (Vint 252). It would mean the ultimate erasure of her personhood in a society that, as Dana observes, already "considered blacks sub-human" and "women perennial children" (*Kindred* 68). Within her limited possibilities as a slave, Dana deliberately establishes boundaries by refusing to accept rape and imposing her own conditions on their relationship. The limits are verbally expressed, when Dana clearly says "No" (260) before she decides to finally kill Rufus. This single word forms an entire paragraph without being marked as direct speech. Her explanation follows: "I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover" (260). This decision is more than Dana's "refus[al] to relinquish her right to self-definition" (Mitchell, "Not Enough" 59): Bast defines her "calm creation of fact" as "her essential agential act, her central stand in defending her agency" (162). I broaden this reading by suggesting that the act of reclaiming control and agency empowers Dana to start her healing process through the widely acknowledged healing method of positive self-affirmation, which enables her to make rational, controlled decisions to ensure her safety – an ability which is often impaired in traumatized persons, as "the rational brain is basically impotent to talk the emotional brain out of its own reality" (van der Kolk 47). By voicing boundaries and repeating reaffirming mantras to themselves, trauma survivors are able to rewire connections in their brain to avoid "automatic emergency responses, like prolonged startle or aggressive outbursts" (van der Kolk 61). In taking self-defensive, rational action against her perpetrator, thereby "mirroring the penetration [Rufus] was about to commit" (Bast 162), Dana propels herself out of her externally imposed status as enslaved and victimized into the state of an empowered heroine. In a sense, "Dana has experienced victimization without becoming a victim" (Kubitschek 44). Moreover, her decision finally severs her ties to her damaging ancestor and her traumatizing familial past, even though it comes at a high price, a limb. She is consciously disrelating herself from her slave-holder ancestors by abdicating a part of her Self. I therefore read murdering Rufus, despite the deed of killing being traumatizing to Dana as well, as her active choice "in defense of her self-definition" (Bast 161), an act of self-preservation and a tremendous step on Dana's way to processing trauma. Still, the action is not victorious, but rather the acknowledgement of her Self, of what she is and always will be: her multidimensional identity. As Hampton and Brooks point out, *Kindred* "suggests a new way of thinking about the figure of a multiple-referenced identity…that being in a state of ambiguity is a positive attribute that should be sought after instead of avoided" (77). Thus, she "acknowledges that her body is her Self. She now better understands how African Americans were made into objects by slavery, and what they lost beyond the brute experience of physical torture. Dana is no longer controlled by the past when she takes action even at the risk of her own pain and suffering and admits that she is not separate or different from her ancestors and their bodily suffering" (Vint 254). Paradoxically, as I argue, *Kindred* seems to suggest that one can be "wholer" by losing or sacrificing part of one's older Self,

which might not serve its purpose anymore, to gain more important insights into and understanding about one's Self.[16] For Dana, her past will forever be a part of her present – with her lost arm being a visible reminder on her body – but not in the sense "that she is doomed to suffer its horrors, but that she will always bear the mark of her kindred" (Salvaggio, "Octavia" 33). When she kills Rufus, she cannot destroy him completely, or wipe out his memory, as he lives on in her biological body. Instead, Dana acknowledges the part in her that derives from him. As van der Kolk writes, "[p]eople cannot put traumatic events behind until they are able to acknowledge what has happened and start to recognize the invisible demons they're struggling with" (219). Dana's time travel, enabled by her ancestry, suggests that the lines of kinship are not separable and must be accepted for the mind to find peace. It is only by accepting history as part of her Self that Dana is able to oppose its destructive influence. The paradoxes her experience holds need to be acknowledged, and the socially constructed binaries Dana herself represents by being both white and black and therefore being "caught between" (*Kindred* 95), refused. As Yaszek notes, "Dana's rich and complex identity as a black woman 'don't come off' [as her fellow slave Carrie suggests] just because she has to make hard choices that are themselves neither wholly black nor white; instead that identity is informed by those choices" ("Grim" 1062). By extension, it is the recognition of her current position as a black woman in American society as the "alien other" (1063) that leads Dana to a newfound sense of Self. She is "[s]trengthened by her racial pride, personal responsibility, her free will, and her self-determination" and thus "embraces her ability to define herself in both her past and her present" (Mitchell, "Not Enough" 64). In other words, she ultimately regains a sense of Self when she learns that she can never again exist without a lasting connection to her history in the 19th century. Neither can she lead a life in the past while abandoning her 20th-century Self.

As I have established, Dana must physically travel to and embrace the past and thus reintegrate her trauma to configure her Self in the present to come to terms with her nation's and her own painful past. In a sense, as Bast (163), Rushdy ("Families" 138), Luckhurst ("Horror and Beauty" 32-33) and Parham (1325) have pointed out, *Kindred* prefigures the concepts Toni Morrison calls 'disremembering' and 'rememory' in her novel *Beloved* (1987). 'Disremembering' is used in the context of traumatic forgetting, meaning suppressed memory. 'Rememory', in contrast, usable as both noun and verb, is the notion of deliberately returning to the past to reconstruct it. Thus, rememories are pieces of memory that return later not as traumatic flashbacks, but as a healing form of reiterated remembrance. As Lavender puts it, "[r]ememory brings the past into the present, forcing us to account for the experience of slavery and the problems slavery has caused for people living today. Rememory is a way of sharing the past experiences of others; it establishes a relationship between then and now" (*Race* 64). The concept of 'rememorying' in *Beloved* resembles a culture of remembrance and therefore could be a healing force. 'Rememory' and 'disremembering' are used instead of the conventional words

---

[16] Of course, a missing limb robs a body of its functionality, which could indeed emphasize, as Bast further argues, "a present threat to agency, as it forcefully testifies that racial and gendered prejudices perform immensely powerful attacks on the agency of people in the twentieth century" (164). In other words, slavery's pervasive horrors continue to affect today's society in subtler forms of oppression.

'remembering' and 'forgetting' to indicate that the past is very much alive in the present and that "forgetting" requires a conscious effort on the part of the subject, namely, forcing the past to the subconsciousness. 'Disremembering' is a common behavioural response in trauma survivors, which does not necessarily serve the individual in the long run, as the memory will reappear in torturing, involuntary flashbacks. 'Rememory', as I read it, though, is desirable as it could have therapeutic effects through reintegrating traumatically fragmented pieces of memory into the life narrative. Dana's recurring trips to her past can in fact be read as a healing way of 'rememorying', even though it leaves a permanently visible mark on her body. Here, the speculative element in *Kindred* establishes an emotional and embodied 'rememory' of the past for her readers. Dana learns, in substitution for the reader, that the past cannot be altered and that it will forever impact and inform the present and the future. In fact, it is a prerequisite to come to terms with the past to live fully in the present or to build a desirable future. Dana will probably embark on a lifelong journey of discovery about the "meaning of her raced ancestry", which will be an "inborn part of her daily existence" (Steinberg 475), just as negotiating and re-configuring one's identity is an ongoing and lifelong process for everyone. In an interview, Butler says: "I don't think that black people have made peace with ourselves, and I don't think white America has made any kind of peace with us. I don't think we really know *how* to make peace at this point" (Fry 65; emphasis in original). *Kindred,* in its process of excavating and recovering the past, offers a way for both white and black Americans to find peace. Dana shows the readers that one must acknowledge and make peace with the past and the paradoxes it encompasses to stay sane and to be able to configure a multiple identity. *Kindred* thus becomes a metaphorical imperative for its contemporary audience to learn about and from the past.

Deconstructing the Body/Mind Dichotomy

Thus far, I have established that slavery's heritage is both physical and emotional fragmentation, for both the individual and the collective. I have especially dwelled on the (dis-)relation between physical fragmentation and a fragmented gendered and racialized Self. Accordingly, I now argue, in line with Vint, that in addition to accepting and acknowledging the past as part of her Self, Dana has to accept her body, being the result of the traumatic act of sexual abuse, as part of her identity. Parham claims that Dana "must survive the tension between understanding of [her] bod[y] as [her] 'own' and also recognizing [her] bod[y] in relation to pasts that exceed, leak into, the present moment" (1318). This is in line with van der Kolk's trauma theory, which suggests that "[i]n order to overcome trauma, you need help to get back in touch with your body, with your Self" (246). Thus, Butler seems to reject the traditionally liberal humanist body/mind split, and rather embraces what Vint calls "identity founded on connection rather than isolation [which] incorporates the body as part of self" (245). It is imperative for Dana to abandon her modern, dualistic conception of subjectivity as separate from the body to tackle both her traumatic ancestry, the experiences of her time in the past and the traces this traumatic legacy leaves on her contemporary life. As long as she remains faithful to herself as a "disembodied subject, she deludes herself that the experience of slavery is safely contained in the past" (249). She has to embrace the embodied experience as part of her Self and acknowledge that "a past that can affect her body affects [her] self" (Vint 249), so she can begin to recover. I am aware in my reading that one must remain wary of a simplified recourse to the body as the location of the essential Self. Therefore, I emphasize the

interconnectedness of body and mind in identity configuration, without giving either of the two absolute precedence.

When Dana overcomes the binary of body and mind by embracing her embodied experience and understands that both mind and body were affected by and in need of recovery after slavery, she can reintegrate her fragmented identity and begin to heal. As I have established, Dana lives in a patriarchal and racist society in her present. Vint argues that "healing the fractures in American culture arising from slavery might best be accomplished through a personal healing of the rift between mind and body" (242). The deconstruction of the body/mind binary thus also opens up *Kindred*'s potential to resist: as long as Dana refuses to integrate both mind and body into her multiple Self, she "remains constrained by patriarchal and racist relations" (Vint 249) in the present. Accepting herself and her body by configuring a multiple identity is vital if she is not to allow the wound of slavery to continue. Thus, *Kindred* rejects the notion of "see[ing] ourselves as separate, autonomous, and isolated individuals, disconnected from others…a subjectivity 'based on the dualism of mind and body, subject and object, self and other' and embrac[es] a vision of 'their necessary intertwining'" (Sanchez-Eppler in Vint 244). I suggest therefore that the prerequisite of rejecting the body/mind dichotomy to overcome trauma echoes a cosmological view that all living beings are firmly rooted in a "cosmic totality", inextricably linking everything into a "consciousness" (Soyinka 3) that reaches across generations and is shared by the living, who are regularly visited by spirits and reincarnations of ancestors and the yet unborn. This sense of connectedness, which permeates many African cultures (Soyinka 4), is mirrored in *Kindred*'s blurring of time and space, and its insistence on the need to not only attain historical awareness, but also to acknowledge and even empathically "feel" the psychological as well as physical experiences former slaves endured. In line with Woolfork, I thus argue that the body in *Kindred* is used to "mediate multiple forms of knowing the past" and "share[s] a degree of corporeal resonance with (and a bit of spiritual obligation to) those enslaved in the past" (4). This spiritual reading of trauma is also in line with what Katie Cannon observes: "Our bodies are the texts that carry the memories and therefore remembering is no less than reincarnation" (Cannon in van der Kolk 184). *Kindred* hence becomes 'anamnesis', as Donadey calls it: a "collective re-membering of the past across generations to suggest a possible collective healing and national reconciliation that must pass through the repressed of culture and history in its violence" (76; cf. Rushdy, *Remembering* 6; Mitchell, *The Freedom* 21). That present and past in *Kindred* are mutually constitutive and can be travelled, and the idea of an embodied experience of the past as reincarnation and anamnesis can therefore be read as an distinctly Afrodiasporic way of addressing trauma.

Community Spirit and the Role of Family

After my considerations on Dana's dilemma of forced complicity, one could argue that *Kindred* emphasizes the importance of blood relationships and the responsibilities that accompany them. I argue, though, that over the course of the story, Dana identifies and aligns herself with the slave community on the Weylin plantation, while simultaneously "disrelating" from her white ancestry, as Rushdy phrases it (*Remembering* 113-15), despite her investment "in white patriarchy as the bearer of history and family" (Hua 399). This process of

integration and investment into the slave community is essential for her survival, for fuelling her personal growth and even for emerging strengthened from the traumatic horrors of slavery.

The community of slaves on the Weylin plantation consists, among others, of Dana's ancestor Alice and her husband Isaac, the housemaid Carrie, the cook Sarah, the sewing woman Liza, young Nigel, whom Dana teaches, and the field worker Sam James and his family. Dana realizes that "[t]hese people were my relatives, my ancestors. And this place could be my refuge" (*Kindred* 37), yet she initially (and understandably) responds to the community as if she is looking at it from the outside. She is "pretending" to fit in, not personally relating to her new surroundings: she "played the slave, minded [her] manners probably more than [she] had to" (*Kindred* 91). She perceives herself (and is perceived) as an outsider – a state which Robertson labels "being-within-but-not-belonging-to" (371), when she realizes: "[Kevin and me] weren't really in. We were observers, watching a show. We were watching history happen around us. And we were actors. While we waited to go home, we humored the people around us by pretending to be like them. But we were poor actors. We never really got into our roles. We never forgot that we were acting" (98). Dana identifies herself as a spectator, and not as an actual participant in the society of the 19th century. This does not remain unobserved: Alice and Sarah both call Dana a "white nigger" (160, 165), for example, because of her distinct education and speech – according to them, Dana tries to talk "like white folks" (74).[17] In another instance, she is accused of being the slave who helps "white folks keep niggers down" (167). By Rufus' family, she is perceived as "impudent" and "insolent" (219; 66). At once "too…white" and "too black" (255), echoing Du Bois's concept of the African American 'double consciousness', Dana finds herself in a situation that resonates with the experience of many diasporic individuals around the world today: a state of in-betweenness, to belong to neither and both cultures simultaneously. Dana is "free in the present-day but is also enslaved there by hegemonic cultural practices, just as she is enslaved in the antebellum South but free by comparison to her black ancestors" (Setka 108). Existing in two times and spaces robs her of her feeling of belonging in either world and renders her an alien outsider.

Within this close network of solidarity, the relationship of Dana and Alice is often conflicted. As Dana observes, "elsewhere, under other circumstances, I would probably have disliked her".[18] In their extraordinary situation, though, they "had a common enemy to unite [them]" (*Kindred* 236): the white slaveowner. R. Crossley observes: "despite the severe stresses under which they live, the slaves constitute a rich human society

---

[17] As bell hooks argues, "[f]rom slavery to the present, education has been revered in black communities, yet it has also been suspect. Education represented a means of radical resistance but it also led to caste/class divisions between the educated and the uneducated, as it meant the learned black person could more easily adopt the values and attitudes of the oppressor" (*Talking Back* 98).

[18] As Butler reveals, her own life taught her the importance of community despite difference: "I've always lived in clutters of people who found ways of getting along together even if they didn't much like each other, which was often the case" (Butler in Mehaffy and Keating 54).

[that] always patches itself back together, drawing from its common suffering and common anger a common strength" (275). In an act of subversion, *Kindred* portrays the white characters as "odd, isolated, pathetic, alien, problematic" (275). Similarly, Flagel states that the slave-holding society is the one being described as "monstrous" (228). As the story progresses, Dana realizes two things. First, that the common suffering and anger bind her to this community. She "recognizes herself as a genuine participant literally unable to distance herself or to discount her investment in the antebellum events" (Steinberg 473). She finds an "emotional escape … from the ubiquitous sense of physical and psychological marking. One conceivable option for her is to turn … to other women and/or slaves in her community" (470). Second, Dana realizes that she is no longer able to observe slavery from a detached point of view, as she is gradually sucked in. Her tolerance for the 19th century grows proportionally to the time she spends there. Soon, she is appalled by how easily she adapts to the brutal world around her: "not that I wanted us to have trouble, but it seemed as though we should have had a harder time adjusting to this particular segment of history – adjusting to our places in the household of a slaveholder" (*Kindred* 97). Dana wonders: "once – God knows how long ago – I had worried that I was keeping too much distance between myself and this alien time. Now, there was no distance at all. When had I stopped acting?" (221). The longer she is exposed to slavery, the more her mind becomes a literal slave to her environment. In illustrating slavery's violation of Dana's sense of self, I argue, Butler points to the danger that history can be repeated anytime if we do not constantly remind ourselves of it.

Surrounded by her black relatives, Dana begins to see herself in a new light, blends into the community and gets strongly involved in the family of slaves – a way of bonding that initially is, as I argue, even slightly utilitarian, as it is necessary for her survival. She realizes: "I need all the friends I can make here" (*Kindred* 79). She "liked to listen to [the enslaved] talk sometimes and fight my way through their accents to find out more about how they survived lives of slavery. Without knowing it, they prepared me to survive" (94). These fragments of orally transmitted information in the 19th century serve Dana better than the history books she devours in her present – traditional African orality seems to prevail over textuality in *Kindred.* In a form of symbiosis, Dana helps the slave community in their struggle for survival, for example with medical knowledge about malaria, while they offer her a "more complex historical perspective" in return (Steinberg 474). As the story progresses, Dana develops true affection and a sense of belonging among her fellow slaves, as she plays an active role in the daily life on the plantation. She participates in a corn husking party, for example, and genuinely joins into the community's "companionable laughter" (229). For the first time in her life, she experiences collaboration and mutual nurturing in her "extended family" (Mitchell, "Not Enough" 67). She increasingly takes on the role of a mother to several of the slaves on the plantation: she nurtures and protects her ancestors, as a mother would. For example, when Alice finds herself in a posttraumatic state, she nurses Alice, who calls her "Mama" (*Kindred* 153), back to health, and she becomes the children's teacher. Dana discovers an entirely new aspect of her identity. For the first time in her life, as she is an orphan in the 20th century, she forms strong familial bonds and blossoms in her new role as a nurturer. Most importantly, though, Dana learns the importance of the Afrodiasporic community and "earnestly invests herself in its continuance" (Mitchell, "Not Enough" 67).

It is significant that the only person Dana seems to be emotionally close to in the present is her husband Kevin. They seem to have an emancipated, modern marriage without children, both working and providing for the household (109). Their relationship is loving and caring, based on respect and communication, which has changed their former single lives for the better: "I think Kevin was as lonely and out of place as I was when I met him" (52). Other than her aunt and uncle, who reared her, and her "favorite" cousin (116), whom Dana calls for help after one of her returns, she does not mention further family, neither does she have a large community of friends. Her father "had died before [she] was old enough to know him" (252) and she also "remember[s] the pain of [her] own mother's death" (258). Barber even calls Dana "twice orphaned, as a child and by her aunt and uncle's disavowal of her interracial marriage" (15). As both Kevin and Dana are orphans, Kevin's racist sister and her husband are their only family on his side. When Dana and Kevin drive to Las Vegas to get married despite dominant social conventions and family objections, they do it secretly and "pretend [they] haven't got relatives" (*Kindred* 112). Overall, they seem to be estranged from their families and lead an individualistic and rather isolated lifestyle. Travelling to the past opens up the possibility for them to finally claim a family that is based on social instead of biological ties (Rushdy, "Families" 154). Indeed, as Rushdy remarks, they have to remember the past to construct a "new sense of kindred" (155). Their trip provides them with a new family, both by relation and disrelation. This newly-found aspect of her personality guides Dana to remaking herself and process her trauma, as Richard posits: "turning inward to discover powers inherent in the self has sound psychological validity; so too does the unity Butler establishes between people through empathy and interdependence" ("Science Fiction" 5). Van der Kolk also underlines the importance of our "capacity to heal one another. Restoring relationships and community is central to restoring well-being" after trauma (38). Thus, *Kindred* insinuates that helping others is therapeutic, and giving is healing.

Dana establishes a completely new self-image in the network of her ancestors by gradually relinquishing her Western individualistic worldview and making room for her Black or slave heritage, which values community support and collaboration. Van der Kolk underlines the importance of this kind of relation regarding trauma: "Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives. Numerous studies of disaster response around the globe have shown that social support is the most powerful protection against becoming overwhelmed by stress and trauma" (79). Still, the slave community also teaches Dana "to see the necessity of identity within a community, [she] must experience individual helplessness; to define and maintain the self, Dana must relearn to insist on absolute individual needs even when they do not serve the community" (Kubitschek 32). Thus, Dana has to modify her actions so that she can achieve two goals simultaneously: ensure her own and her ancestor's survival, similar to a mother's difficulty in not only ensuring her own, but also her children's survival. It is this balance that aids Dana in growing as a person and being a valuable, transformative, and enriching contribution to society in the past, but also in the present. Her understanding of family and its importance is probed and will presumably affect her life in her present. As Richard phrases it, "[t]he past, [Butler] has suggested in *Kindred,* traps us into being who we are. The present provides us a chance to make conscious choices to shape the future despite that heritage, but our narrow biological definitions for 'kindred' may not support such changes. Like Dana, we need to identify 'kindred spirit[s]' and embrace them as family"

("Defining *Kindred*" 126). Butler herself recounts in an interview with Stephen Potts that, "I can't help dwelling on the importance of family…it seems to me our most important set of relationships. It is so much of what we are. Family does not have to mean purely biological relationships either" (3). I therefore suggest that, similar to Gomez in *The Gilda Stories,* which I discuss in Chapter Four, Butler innovatively rethinks the concept of family. Despite the obvious fact that family ties are a source of complications and trouble, as she must kill her ancestor, Dana "turns to family origin to supply not only ontological meaning but also a political and historical 'refuge'" (Long 469). As Nancy Jesser notes, Butler reworks the traditional, biological family "into an extended network of kinship" (53). Dana's sympathies lie with the "family" she has found in the slave community. Thus, her "sense of family is wrought from a common experience, and is not simply a matter of blood" (Rushdy, "Families" 147). A physical place, it seems, loses its significance of being "home" in the absence of loved ones, kindred spirits, and a close community. Indeed, as Mary Helen Washington argues, "much of what we call family is constructed through memory" (7). "Home" is thus a *choice* which goes beyond blood relation and biological kinship, but is rather found in relationships, while family becomes a construct established from collective memory and shared history, instead of from blood alone.

Re-Narrativization and Bibliotherapy: Writing as Textual Healing

As Steinberg posits, many slave narrators "argue for literacy as *the* vital means of escape from physical and mental bondage" (474; emphasis in original). Similarly, trauma research claims that "[t]elling the story is important; without stories, memory becomes frozen; and without memory you cannot imagine how things can be different" (van der Kolk 219). It therefore does not come as a surprise that in *Kindred,* writing and reading are highly significant. In this section, I especially highlight literacy's power in freeing individuals from "mental bondage" in its parallel to literary production as a means to overcome trauma.

As a writer, Dana literally lives off her literacy. She reveals that she already had used writing as a form of therapy earlier: "Sometimes I wrote things because I couldn't say them, couldn't sort out my feelings about them, couldn't keep them bottled up inside me" (*Kindred* 252). After one of the returns from the past, she again turns to writing to process her traumatic experiences: "Once I sat down at my typewriter and tried to write about what had happened, I made about six attempts before I gave up and threw them all away…Someday when this was over, if it was ever over, maybe I would be able to write about it" (116). As van der Kolk puts it, it is necessary to revisit the trauma, to regain control over the Self: "Sooner or later you need to confront what has happened to you, but only after you feel safe and will not be retraumatized by it" (204). In this regard, Dana's struggle to write stems from her struggle with the traumatic past, as her brain is not yet able to process the horrors of slavery. As long as Dana is consumed by the past, she is not able to write about it. As van der Kolk posits, "[t]rauma by nature drives us to the edge of comprehension, cutting us off from language based on common experience or an imaginable past" (43). Dana cannot put the "unspeakable" inherent in her traumatic experiences into words, as language fails her. In having Dana confront language's inadequacy to represent and put into words the horrors of trauma, Butler seems to suggest that historiography is not suitable for representing trauma and that an affective account of the horrors of slavery is needed instead: an

autobiographic text, which works against the traumatic amnesia around slavery and its aftermath, institutionalized racism, while giving a platform to formerly marginalized voices. Accordingly, Dana's struggle to verbalize what cannot be expressed mirrors Afrofuturism's motivation to represent the unrepresentable and imagine the unimaginable through estrangement as best as possible, to allegorically comment on and raise awareness of our contemporary realities.

Before Kevin lives in the Antebellum South himself, he gives Dana the platitudinous advice of the socially privileged to "pull away from it…that sounds like the best thing you can do, whether it was real or not. Let go of it" (*Kindred* 17). Kevin's suggestion displays, as Marc Steinberg observes, that "[h]istory and recollection may…greatly differ for people, individually and collectively, according to our respective cultural experiences and social locations" (475). Dana realizes that, for her, "simply letting go" is not a feasible option – instead, she must confront the past first through embodied experience and then through active remembering and therapeutically re-telling the events to reintegrate and turn the haunting and painful memories into productive remembrance: she must "actively forget" her trauma. Especially as a writer, Dana seems to have the intuition that writing will aid her in reconstructing a coherent life story, locating her personal identity within the collective, cultural identity, and re-establishing a sense of self and home after her traumatic experiences. Her impulse thus echoes Rushdy's argument that "[f]or some writers…writing is the only way to construct a home" ("Families" 141). To access the medium of writing to recover her Self, though, Dana has to access her fragmented memory first. Fittingly, Hua calls Dana's account of slavery a "series of remembrances" (400). Many scholars who have dwelled on the role of memory for contemporary African Americans argue that "the act of remembering is curative and leads to a sense of wholeness which would not be possible for the cultural amnesiac" (Rushdy, "Families" 139). Bell hooks, for example, postulates that to "bear the burden of memory" means searching the "debris of history for traces of the unforgettable" ("Representing Whiteness" 342): "It is the telling of that history that makes possible political self-recovery" (345). *Kindred* thus could be read as a contribution both to what van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela have outlined as 'bibliotherapy' and what Griffin has called 'textual healing'.

Because of *Kindred*'s form as a rewriting, told by a first-person narrator and framed by a prologue and an epilogue, it seems that Dana has ultimately achieved writing her story down and found a way of coping with her trauma. The process seems to have been enabled through remembering, as the first chapter's first sentence suggests: "The trouble began long before June 9, 1976, when I became aware of it, but June 9 is the day I remember" (*Kindred* 12). But next to pouring out her experience on paper in solitude, it is also in conversation with Kevin that she re-narrates and therefore processes her trauma. When she engages in a dialogue with her husband after her first trip to the past, she "remembered it all for him" (15). Again, after her second visit to Maryland, she "remembered it for him in detail" (46). It seems that Dana has to employ what Rushdy calls "something like a collective memory. Remembering, as Dana realizes, takes on a different valency when it is a collaborative effort" ("Families" 148). This form of rewriting of shared suffering "gives their life that sense of connection to the past which writing had not provided" (148). In effectively using her memory to retell her story, Dana re-engages with her past to process her traumatic experiences and turn the raw encounter with

slavery into a coherent, productive memory: "I closed my eyes again remembering the way I had been hurt – remembering the pain" (*Kindred* 10). In this manner, she re-integrates the traumatically split off parts into a coherent life narrative, thereby supplying herself with a biography. As Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic argue, "storytelling/counterstorytelling and 'naming one's own reality' using narrative to illuminate and explore experiences of racial oppression" (161) is an objective which is regularly pursued by critical race theorists, among whom I locate Butler as well. On that note, Dana could be read as a proxy for Butler's own tribulations and experiences as a black woman: "the book was written to negotiate [Butler's] own experiences of reading and consequently being haunted by slave narratives. That what began as a pedagogical project has for its author become a therapeutic one" (Parham 1321). Butler claims in an interview that "[a]ll writers are influenced by who they are" (Butler in Potts 9). She also reveals: "So the nice thing about writing is that you do keep discovering not only things about the world but things about yourself" (Butler in Mehaffy and Keating 60). From her grandmother, for example, she often heard stories about raising seven children while working hard on a plantation in Louisiana (R. Crossley 269). Her mother, again, made a modest income from working as a housemaid for all her life, from the age of ten, and Butler often observed her being treated "like a non-person" (270). These experiences in her family naturally influenced her later writing and even inspired her to be a writer in the first place, as she explains: "Their lives seemed so terrible to me at times – so devoid of joy or reward. I needed my fantasies to shield me from their world" (Butler in Mixon 12). In putting her ancestor's privations and trials to paper, Butler works through both individual and collective histories.

Moreover, Butler reconstructs, re-narrates and subverts dominant Western modes of historical representations of black women in slavery. In typical Afrofuturist manner, through writing a counter-narrative to Western conceptualizations, Butler claims space for minorities who often were silenced or side-lined, thereby unsettling and rewriting the past. Butler's work acts to represent those in danger of being forgotten or ignored. By putting a more encompassing version of Afrodiasporic history to the forefront of societal consciousness through re-narrativization, thus enlarging a seemingly personal experience, Butler contributes to reparative work towards undoing the trauma of American slavery. Thus, I argue, as a "fictional memoir" (R. Crossley 271), *Kindred* contributes to the process of "actively forgetting" a traumatizing collective memory by excavating suppressed or forgotten historical realities. In its effort to excavate forgotten, trivialized and erased traumatic histories, the novel not only has a therapeutic function for the author, but for both reader and the African American society. In addition to her project of illuminating the inadequacy of historiography and the haunting effect of the past's traumas on the present, Butler uses her writing, infused with social critique, as a therapeutic medium for those minorities who until now have not seen themselves adequately represented in sci-fi. She explains that the genre "has long treated people who might or might not exist as extraterrestrials. Unfortunately, however, many of the same science-fiction writers who started us thinking about the possibility of extraterrestrial life did nothing to make us think about here-at-home human variation" (Butler in Govan 87). Especially black people had been portrayed as stereotyped or bizarre characters. Thus, Butler's "redrawn science fiction[al] cultural boundaries" (R. Crossley 274) contribute to a richer plurality of human images in her work, which counteracts dominant representations offered by popular Western science fiction.

Conclusion

The saying that "time heals wounds" is not applicable to trauma – paradoxically, in the context of trauma forgetting means to remain wounded. Only "actively forgetting" and turning the fragmented traumatic memory into reparative remembrance can bring relief from being continuously harmed. Time in *Kindred* exemplifies this characteristic – it is not proportional but disjointed. Dana may spend stretches ranging first from minutes to days, and later from weeks to months in the past, while in her Los Angeles home only seconds, minutes or hours are passing. In other words, the present takes up more time in the past. This "cyclical, non-linear view of history", resembling a "zigzag" (Steinberg 472), is decisively non-Western – conventional Western ideological delineations of time as linear are thus denied in *Kindred*. Time as a fixed entity is subverted to portray that a certain time span is not enough to hold the tremendous amount of pain, as traumatization often happens within seconds, but haunts the individual for months, if not years. It might come back in the form of nightmares or flashbacks, which only take a few seconds, but might feel like an eternity in their torturing force. Terms such as "past", "present" or "future" and our conventional understanding thereof are thus ultimately inadequate to describe the experience of trauma. This observation, in combination with the novel's stress on the importance of a communal spirit, renders its occupation with trauma particularly Afrofuturist and thus feeds into the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory I try to work towards in this dissertation.

In this chapter, I have argued that *Kindred* is a strong reminder that traumatic history in the form of slavery must never be forgotten, as forgetfulness about trauma is often concealed by a deliberate and harmful amnesia about the past. *Kindred* challenges our understanding of slavery and reveals that remembering, which is presented as a literally physical experience, is painful but necessary for redemption –to keep history in the collective consciousness and memory alive and to avoid the danger of history being repeated. Forgetting the subliminal and repressed past should never be an option when processing trauma. On the contrary: the burden of history becomes heavier the more we distance ourselves from its actual reality, even though history is ultimately unknowable. If deliberately denied and repressed, trauma will return to haunt the present perpetually, similar to how Dana is uncontrollably forced to travel through time. This applies to both white and black Americans, albeit differently, as Dana's and Kevin's shared experience exemplifies: to alleviate the pain of history, both must confront and acknowledge it, ultimately living together as kindred. Thus, *Kindred* contributes to a culture of remembrance, which means the interaction of a society or an individual with their history to deliberately make it present. I have also argued that the utilization of speculative fiction tropes allows Butler to capture the horrors of the "unrepresentable" and "unspeakable" inherent in trauma. Dana's traumatic removal from her comfortable sphere in the 20th century leads her to an even more traumatizing experience of the horrors of slavery through embodiment. By collapsing temporal and spatial boundaries and foregrounding the intertwined relationship between past, present, and future, Dana's travels not only permit her to be a witness to the traumatic history of slavery but also enable her to experience, reclaim and even critique it. When she explores her own traumatic family history, Dana allegorically excavates the traumatic past of her nation's history. Hence, trauma in *Kindred* is presented explicitly not only as a personal, but as a collective, experience. The need to revisit and relive the past alludes to the problematic fact that history has been repressed instead of

acknowledged and therefore continues to linger and affect the present. History must be worked through before both personal and collective bodies and minds can free themselves from the past. As Dana's past becomes a significant aspect of her present, the time travel element points to raceclass inequalities persisting in the present as intricately connected forms of the aftermath of slavery. Thus, *Kindred* reminds us that the present is not sufficiently different from the past, as American society has not overcome the racial hierarchies that were characteristic of slavery – and that it is remembrance and acknowledgment through which recovery and healing is made possible. The novel's particularly skilful mediation of the past, foregrounding representations of embodied experience, nurtures a distinct historical consciousness. Consequently, we as readers more easily empathize and identify with Dana and her confrontation of historical reality, while being inspired to ponder our own relationship to historical trauma and its survivors. In promoting gender equality, anti-racism and interracial love, *Kindred* creates opportunities for the reader for ethical thinking about cultural trauma. Thus, the pedagogical imperative of the novel seems to be to invite readers to unravel history and question its impact on the present. The time travel element foregrounds the transgenerational national trauma American society is facing by rekindling the past and, through a heightened sense of identification made possible through the frame of reference of a 20th-century protagonist, stimulates both cross-cultural empathy and critical thought in the contemporary reader.

I have concluded that Dana's self-definition as a subject with a multiple configured identity after trauma can emerge on several conditions: the past needs to be embodied, and therefore experienced, and then to be accepted. Dana has learned this through three major means. First, by identifying with and acknowledging the heinous, traumatic sufferings of her ancestors in slavery and investing herself in the community. Second, by incorporating her body into her conception of her Self. And third, by re-narrating her story to reintegrate traumatically fragmented pieces of memory into a coherent life story, which is coined by remembrance. Only when Dana is no longer cut off from herself through engaging with her past can she experience healing, as the cycle of trauma returns to cause further agony unless addressed and processed. The time travel element thus enables the project of resisting the traumatic amnesia around history with which contemporary American society is still yoked, making palpable the collective traumatic past through embodiment. In insisting that the atrocities of slavery need to be embodied to be grasped in all their dimensions, to develop strategies of resistance and to authenticate the experience of former slaves, *Kindred* serves as a form of bibliotherapy or textual healing, for author, reader and society alike. To this effect, *Kindred* offers innovative ways of thinking about individual identity after trauma, collective memory, and the inclusive representation of history. In its investment in representation of the formerly marginalized and forgotten, *Kindred* pursues historical veracity. It is a site of memory, where contemporary readers are invited – or even required – to question their perspective and encouraged to recognize slavery's trauma in an effort to address and resolve its lingering aftermath today. Thus, *Kindred* offers "psychological insight into the experience of slavery" (Elia 23) and simultaneously voices socio-political criticism regarding contemporary race and gender concerns, as they work alongside unresolved historical traumas. In essence, *Kindred* is as much about dismembering as it is about remembering. Dana's dismembered body, metaphorically portraying the historical trauma and continuing transgenerational trauma of racism, serves as a catalyst for the necessary work of remembering as a means to redeem trauma.

Chapter Four:

Vampirism and the Gothic – Trauma and Identity in Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*

Introduction

Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories* (1991) is not a traditional vampire novel: it interrogates the meanings of being black, lesbian, woman, vampire, and artist and encourages readers to reconsider the role of Afrodiasporic women in Western societies in the past and present, thereby imagining alternatives for the future. *The Gilda Stories* is a blur of speculative genres, and has been labelled Afrofuturism, neo-slave narrative (Lewis 447), vampire fiction, ancient folklore (Ibrahim 318) and a representative work of lesbian and African American gothic (Bryant 541). Gomez herself, though, calls her work "speculative historical fiction" (Gomez, "Of Afrofuturism"). The narrative is set in Louisiana in 1850, when the "Girl" – how the protagonist, Gilda, is called at first as she is not named yet – is still a mortal slave who has just escaped life on a cotton plantation. The story starts with her flight, when she desperately kills a white bounty hunter who attempts to rape and return her to slavery. Hiding in a lonely barn, she is saved and adopted by a 300-year-old, white, lesbian vampire called Gilda, who runs a brothel in New Orleans with her equally immortal Native American partner, Bird. The establishment called *Woodard's* serves as a safe haven for women, where they can live an independent life both socially and economically, and where the Girl is educated and protected from a "world where being black and young condemns you to a bleak future of marginality" (Fusco 246). When the original Gilda decides to end her long life, the protagonist is, with her own permission, transitioned into immortality and inherits both Gilda's name and the brothel. Bird subsequently takes on the role of her caregiver and sexual partner.

As Gilda travels through time, searching for lasting affection and intimacy, she leads multiple lives as a black lesbian vampire. She "becomes a kind of American Everywoman engaged in a pilgrimage through our history, our society, and our changing ideas about life, love, responsibility, and the proper place of Woman" (J. Johnson 73). In Yerba Buena in California (1890), she resists her sexual attraction to Eleanor, who is an experienced but predatory and dangerous vampire. In Rosebud, Missouri (1921), she falls in love with the pious (and mortal) Aurelia, whom Gilda desires to change into a vampire for her company, but whom she finally leaves out of respect for her purpose and ambition as emotional support for the village population. During her time in the South End of Boston (1955) and New York City (1971 and 1981), Gilda experiences work and life in beauty parlours, theatres, bars, and night clubs, where she refines her art skills and engages in Civil Rights movements. As the novel moves into the future in Hampton Falls in New Hampshire (2020), she becomes a celebrated romance novelist. The last part of the novel describes her travel from the Midwest to Peru in 2050, where she is again fleeing persecutors who crave the vampires' immortality.

Conventional vampire stories have generally been patriarchal, so that women are often the victims of predatory male vampires. *The Gilda Stories* is the first story about a black female vampire ever published in the United States (Thomas 388), and it transcends this idea of female victimhood. In contrast to historically sadistic white male vampires preoccupied with "sexuality and perversion", such as Dracula (Fusco 250)[19], Gilda is a woman of African descent who puts special emphasis on her relationships and on fine art, specifically in the form of literature and music. The traditionally bloodthirsty monster is replaced by a psychologically complex and much more humane subject. Her peer vampires are equally exceptional: with "utopian ideas, compassion, tenderness, and a profound sense of responsibility" (J. Johnson 73), they all drink human blood without killing, leaving the person with a sense of well-being and "energy, dreams, ideas" instead (*The Gilda Stories* 45; from here on, I will refer to the novel as GS). Taking blood for them is an act of "fair exchange in a world full of cheaters" (GS 45). Additionally, the vampire family places strict regulations on vampiric reproduction and grants the right to end one's immortal life on one's own terms. A speciality of Gomez's vampire community is their ability to mind-read, even from a distance, enabling a constant telepathic network between the members of the group. Gomez's distinct vampire mythology thus reveals an important difference from traditional vampirism: her vampires are heroic, but not predators – in her world, the traditionally monstrous "Other" becomes identifiable and accessible for the reader. At the time of its publication, the novel was considered revolutionary for this progressive and disruptive content. Now, though, Jewelle Gomez is well-known as one of the pioneers of black speculative fiction or the Afrofuturist movement.

Gilda's journey resembles a quest. Over the course of two hundred years, she is on a search: for herself, for a family, for a better world and for freedom, even though racism and sexism are widespread in every age of her extended life. Gomez charts this search for a connection to other (human and immortal) beings, as Maria Holmgren Troy observes, "parallel to and intersecting with African American and women's history in the USA, as well as the lives of people from other and overlapping marginalized groups that have often been cast as monstrous or 'other'" (61). In other words, Gomez employs Gilda's longevity to cover the history of, and critically point to the difficulties faced by, Afrodiasporic women over the centuries. The narrative trope of immortality, which, as an Afrofuturist trope, enables the relationship between the readers' worlds and the world of fiction, thus grants the reader insights into the experience of Afrodiasporic women over time, while simultaneously fostering identification and empathy. The novel is therefore especially fascinating to examine in a project that aims at carving out how the political in Afrofuturism enables discussions about the identities and healing processes of Afrodiasporic women after colonial and race-related trauma.

The idea for *The Gilda Stories* was prompted by a specific incident in the mid-1980s, when Gomez, talking to a friend over the phone in a telephone booth, was harassed by two men who walked by and made sexually inappropriate comments to her. As she vividly described during a panel discussion hosted by the San Francisco Public Library, she consequently "freaked out", went home and wrote her first Gilda story (00:04:14). She

---

[19] Of course, there are exceptions here: earlier sympathetic representations include, for example, J. M. Rymer's *Varney the Vampire* (1845-7) and, more pertinently, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976).

reveals: "What started as my own angry outburst at a personal affront on the street evolved into a set of responses to injustice that suggest that girls are not as powerless as they're taught they are and that individuals and society have the ability to change" (Gomez in Doerer). Those two men in the street sparked her interest in "any figures who prey upon people who are less powerful" (00:13:19). Thus, the novel is rooted in "highly personal events", which, as Gomez believes, reinforces the essence of the feminist precept that the personal is political (GS 257). Why, of all things, did Gomez choose to frame her concerns about society with a vampire story? What attracts socially conscious – particularly feminist – writers to the speculative, especially the gothic? And where does trauma and its healing come into play? The following analysis will attempt to discuss these questions.

I will argue that Gilda's traumatic experiences as a slave on a plantation and the tragic loss of loved ones have produced long-lasting emotional and psychic wounds that fragment her identity and rob her of a sense of meaning. Her feelings of isolation and alienation, symptomatic of the systemic marginalization she experiences due to her race, gender, and sexuality after her transition into a vampire, reinforce the disintegration of her identity. Along with the novel's chronological structure, I will subsequently read the different life stations after the occurrence of her main trauma in slavery as representative of different stages of healing. Several factors, such as bibliotherapy, memory-work, community and family, a framework of morals, art, and moving through different historical periods and cultural settings contribute to the gradual but successful establishment of her multiply configured and constantly developing identity. My main focus in this chapter will be the connection between the politics of Afrofuturism, literary processing of trauma and the process of rewriting and re-appropriation of the past by Afrodiasporic authors. Moreover, I argue that Gomez utilizes the genre conventions of Afrofuturism, especially in the form of vampirism, to convey her critical perspective on racism, sexism, and homophobia. In doing so, she troubles traditional models of identity and genre, as she highlights the intersectional nature of black queer women's marginalization in the societies Gilda, as a synecdoche for her community, inhabits at different points in her life, but also the one black diasporic women face in our current world. By utilizing vampirism and immortality as speculative tropes in her narrative, Gomez contributes to a distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory, which fosters an approach towards identity formation that celebrates fluidity, multiplicity, and hybridity, and which denies and subverts conventional Western approaches for understanding diasporic experiences of trauma.

Colonial Trauma: Slavery and the Loss of Loved Ones

Throughout the novel, Gomez strongly emphasizes the topic of trauma. As a (former) slave, Gilda has suffered from many incomprehensible, humiliating, painful and life-threatening events, which almost necessarily evoke what has been termed 'colonial trauma', as they overburden her ability to cope with the experience and erode her identity. Secondly, she emerges traumatized from a life full of war and various forms of discrimination, such as sexism, racism, and homophobia, which results in strong feelings of alienation and isolation. In the repercussions of colonialism, her identity is constantly threatened, as over the course of the story, she is discriminated against, harassed, and hunted down because she is black, female, lesbian and a vampire. These

experiences result in what is termed 'postcolonial trauma'. Additionally, due to her vampirism, which must be kept secret, she is necessarily socially excluded from human society to a certain extent. This frequently renders her miserable and lonely. As I will outline, Gilda's trauma manifests in regular flashbacks, depressive episodes, and post-traumatic amnesia – tropes which Gomez utilizes to display Gilda's desperate search for healing and closure through the ages.

Over her extended life span, the protagonist Gilda is traumatized in several ways: both through her experiences in slavery – especially bodily and psychological violence – and through the loss of her family when she is still human. As a result, she is continuously haunted by and incessantly suffers from her memories of the plantation throughout her later life. Especially the occurrences shortly before and during her escape, inevitably resulting in the loss of her remaining living family, continue to trouble her in the form of nightmares, flashbacks, and depressive episodes. To underline the importance of the connection between trauma and memory in Gilda's life, Gomez has her dream about her former life on the novel's very first page, and continues to draw the reader back into Gilda's traumatic past throughout the story. While she is sleeping in a barn, on the run from the plantation in Louisiana where she and her family were held captive, she dreams of her mother and recalls the stories she was told about the Middle Passage:

> The Girl slept restlessly, feeling the prickly straw as if it were teasing pinches from her mother. The stiff moldy odor transformed itself into her mother's starchy dough smell. The rustling of the Girl's body in the barn hay was sometimes like the sound of fatback frying in the cooking shed behind the plantation's main house. At other moments in her dream it was the crackling of the brush as her mother raked the bristles through the Girl's thicket of dark hair before beginning the intricate pattern of braided rows. (GS 9)

What at first seems to be an idyllic childhood memory from rural life has to be put into context: when the story sets in and her dream is described, Gilda's mother has died shortly before and she has walked for fifteen hours without stopping, has retreated into an abandoned farmhouse and has fallen into an uneasy sleep "hemmed by fear" (GS 9). Gilda grieves the loss of her mother deeply. Therefore, I read Gilda's romanticized dream as a case of post-traumatic amnesia or dissociation, since she remembers a rare, mystical and blissful domestic moment of her former life, while simultaneously shutting out the horrors of slavery, under whose torturous circumstances her mother lost her life. Amnesia functions as a measure of self-preservation and as a form of subconscious censorship, as the mind is not able to assimilate or process the traumatic event (Suleiman, "Judith" 276). On other, later occasions, when Gilda finds herself in a safe environment, her traumatic memories slowly return. She starts to remember the brutality and hopelessness of her former situation in vivid pictures. She now recalls "her master's lash as well as her mother's face, legends of the Middle Passage, lynchings she had not been able to prevent, images of black women bent over scouring brushes" (GS 180). In another instance, she remembers:

> [t]he hot rows, their leafy stalks licking at her legs, the heavy sun overhead. Her sisters moved quickly down the rows, making it into a game. She tried to keep up but never could. And the first time she fell into the dirt, face down, almost smothering, she waited for the lash she was accustomed to hearing around her. But her sister's hand had lifted her effortlessly and dragged her along as if she were just another burden like the sack of white cotton. (GS 170-71)

In this world of ubiquitous exploitation, even her sister's helping hand evokes ambivalent memories as powerful rescue, yet it inevitably reiterates the pervasive context of objectification, as Gilda compares herself

to a "sack of white cotton". These memories of her experiences as a slave, and the stabbing of the bounty hunter – which I will examine later – and the loss of her mother, return in the form of torturing flashbacks and nightmares: "The horror of slavery appeared to reap endless returns" (GS 180), she contemplates after a nightmare which she has "only rarely now, but whenever she did she awoke crying in terror" (GS 30). In another example, Gilda concludes that "[the past] waits for you to find it again and again" (GS 126). Here, Gilda describes her incapacity to assimilate the fragmented, traumatic memories into her life story and her identity, which causes the traumatic memory to echo continually in the form of uncontrollable flashbacks – her ability to integrate the original event into memory is lost. Random associations with everyday occurrences evoke horrible memories in her and force her to relive her torture. Blood trickling from a sleeping woman's neck, for example, remind her in a vivid way of "the wounds she and her sisters suffered on their tiny hands as they'd wrenched the cotton from its stiff branches. Lines of blood covered them until the flesh was hardened by experience" (GS 123). In constant psychological pain, Gilda "struggle[s] to keep herself from slipping backward into the past" (GS 170). As Habiba Ibrahim identifies, "at various moments in the present, Gilda recalls the dead and almost forgotten. Her enslaved mother's face and hands…return to her decades and centuries later …. Gilda doesn't float through homogenous empty time as someone who will remain young forever. Rather, the fragmented past…continually reemerges, shapes the present" (324). Her slightly excessive fear of water, which kills vampires in *Gilda*, and her resulting neglect of overseas travel, works in a similar way to showcase her suffering. Her anxiety around water distinguishes her from her fellow vampires, who explore all parts of the world frequently, but for Gilda, water stands for more than the fear of death, triggering traumatic memory. It reminds her of a trauma passed down to her transgenerationally: "It was as if she were being asked to make the Middle Passage as her ancestors had done" (GS 198). Her inherited personal and collective transgenerational traumas have not been actively dealt with, and she is haunted by these kinds of flashback throughout the centuries.

One of the most dreadful and traumatizing memories is added to her disturbingly long list right after the dream about her mother on the novel's first page. While she sleeps, a bounty hunter, whom she describes as a "beast from this other land" (GS 11), discovers her in the barn and attempts to rape her. In self-defence, she stabs him fatally with a knife, as she "was not ready to give in to those whom her mother had sworn were not fully human" (GS 10). Facing another traumatic situation, she has a flashback, remembering her mother telling her in classical vampire-vocabulary, that "[white people] just barely human. Maybe not even. They suck up the world, don't taste it" (GS 11). Later, Gilda similarly describes some people she meets during her travels as "beasts on two legs" (GS 67). By labelling the bounty hunter "just barely human", Gomez retrospectively reverses the stereotypical dehumanization of black slaves in the United States in the 19th century. The idea of colonialism is connected to sucking up and violently taking, and the colonizer is compared to a predator. As both predators and the sucking of liquids are traditionally associated with sadistic vampires instead of with white humans as vampire prey, Gomez's choice of words offers a resistant language to racism and supremacy. The introductory chapter "haunt[s] back" – a process which Teresa A. Goddu describes as Afrodiasporic writers' "reworking [of] the gothic's conventions to intervene in discourses that would demonize them" (138). By uprooting and rethinking traditional roles of power assigned to black and white, Gomez "assert[s] the

subjectivity, agency and family bonds of African American slaves" (69). Thus, I agree with Miriam Jones, who concludes that the "real" monsters in *Gilda* are racists, rapists, and greedy and power-hungry people, who "literally feed off others" (166-167). Instead of the black woman, it is the white male subject who is demonized in Gomez's novel (Holmgren Troy 69). In another example, Gomez uses the word 'enter' to describe the way in which Gilda pushes the knife into the rapist. By utilizing vocabulary associated with intercourse, Gomez again subverts the traditional power balance between herself and the male predator, releasing Gilda from victimhood and turning her into an active agent instead. As Lynda Hall reasons, while the "female body is often represented in culture as a territory to be vanquished and forced into surrender ... the Girl reverses the physical and symbolic transaction" (417) by killing the bounty hunter, emerging, at least physically, untouched. On these first pages, Gomez already sets the scene for the novel's overall atmosphere and tone. Throughout the narrative, she continuously uproots and reverses historical roles of black and white characters, as well as men and women, by giving the reader insights into the slave's memory and how the black community viewed their oppressors. As the storytelling subverts deeply engrained racist beliefs and prejudices and represents formerly marginalized voices, *Gilda* becomes a counter-narrative and counter-memory to mainstream Western white- and male-centred texts.

Postcolonial Trauma: War, Alienation and Being the "Monstrous Other"

Next to the colonial trauma induced by slavery and the loss of family members, Gilda's life is affected by war in all its atrocities, which drains her energy and leaves her resigned and traumatized. When abolition of slavery develops from being a mere thought to actual events, Gilda thinks to herself: "the talk of war, the anger and brutality that was revealed daily in the townspeople, was a bitter taste in her mouth. She had seen enough war and hatred in her lifetime. And although her abolitionist sentiments had never been hidden, she didn't know if she had the heart to withstand the rending effects of another war" (GS 32). Even though she continues to be an advocate for black human rights and is willing to sacrifice for it, the looming catastrophe awakens suicidal thoughts: she feels that "she had lived much too long" (GS 32). Depression and contemplating suicide are rather common symptoms among survivors of historical and structural trauma, as a South African study on soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder in the form of depression and anxiety after the "Border Wars" in the 70s and 80s shows (van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 58). One has to mention, though, that even though Gilda lives through depressive episodes, she concludes that "… the war is important. People have got to be free to live" (GS 45). She realizes the importance of the freedom she is dreaming of, but she also acknowledges that it is extremely hard to obtain, even after slavery has officially been abolished: "It soon became clear that although the institution of enslavement was no longer sanctioned, our world had not become a more hospitable place for me or my people. Often it was only the gifts that I acquired in this new life [of vampirism] that saved me from those we call civilized" (GS 82). By referring to her supernatural strength as a physical weapon against structural violence, she points to her observation that neither liquidating the bounty hunter nor the abolishment of slavery can truly render her free of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Holmgren Troy concludes that in *Gilda,* "the Civil War is figured first and foremost in terms of a means to end slavery, the classed and raced system of which the Girl has been a victim, and whose effects

in the shape of residual racism will have an impact on her life in the US long after slavery has been abolished" (63). Real freedom, as Jerry Rafki Jenkins explains, is only obtainable when Gilda dissociates "race and family from skin color and blood" (316). The societies she lives in over the years, though, make this endeavour a hard task. Her vampiric family takes almost two centuries to form, and the racism she experiences does not seem to cease. On a personal level, long after abolition, she continues to face experiences that evoke race-related trauma, or what Gunning describes as the "everyday trauma brought about by the struggles of living through the unsettling experience of diaspora and mixed-race identity" (125).

Gilda not only receives hostility and discrimination from white men, but also from lighter-coloured people in comparison to herself – the "creamy-colored quadroons, who, with mighty effort, pretended they did not see [Gilda and her black friends]. It was some time before the Girl understood that these graceful, cold women shared her African blood" (GS 28). Through these regular microaggressions and covert hostility, Gilda discovers a new form of discrimination by those of her own kin. As a result of these various forms of discrimination, which cause race-related trauma, she experiences strong feelings of isolation and alienation that render her frequently depressed. Her emotions are thus reinforced by her traumatic state, which evokes, like a downward spiral, further feelings of loneliness and segregation. As L. Hall observes, "[v]isibility, identity, and feelings of self-worth become major issues in a new way for [Gilda] that layers onto the oppression of slavery" (405). This echoes Ponds' ideas, who claims that diasporic individuals are "confronted with hostility, neglect, and racism", which "may heighten the effects of other traumatic life events" (23). In including speculative tropes such as the portrayal of empathic and compassionate vampires as allegories for marginalized individuals in our modern societies, *Gilda* highlights the traumatic results of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination against diasporic individuals and offers a crucial platform for Afrodiasporic female writers to represent, deconstruct and rewrite deeply engrained stereotypes and prejudices.

These experiences of physical and, more importantly, psychological violence pertaining to her race are often paired with her experience of being structurally marginalized, harassed and discriminated against because of her gender and her sexuality. In this way, Gomez encourages her readers to radically re-evaluate the many ways black women's identities intersect and what connections these intersections have to forms of discrimination and violence. As a black queer woman, Gilda belongs to a group of people who historically have had, and continue to face, a triple burden from suppressive hetero-patriarchal and racial power structures. She is "triply targeted as Black, female, and lesbian (each of which also is affected by class)", as Gomez explains ("Speculative Fiction" 951). This situation alienates and isolates her from the dominant part of society. While she lives at *Woodard's*, for example, she is sexually molested by a customer and only barely saved from rape by the old Gilda (GS 30). As a woman, she explains, Gilda "had been attacked more than once by men determined that she die, but of course she had not. She felt their hatred as personally as any mortal" (GS 180). That Gilda is forced to cross-dress and wear "men's breeches and a heavy jacket" (GS 13) while she travels, illustrates the constraints Gilda is facing in society as a woman: "even in a small town just east of here … four times I met others just like me. I mean women dressed like boys. Just going around from place to place trying to live free" (GS 60). When perceived as a man, Gilda can live freely, but as a woman, she would be

confined to domesticity and passivity. In two other instances, Gilda remembers the "innocent spirit and toughness of women dressed in men's breeches [she] had met on the road" (GS 194), and "the guise of boyhood that had cloaked her during her travels west, releasing her from the pretences and constrictions of womanhood" (GS 66). This constraint strongly limits her self-expression and leaves her in a state of constant pretension and conflict. Here, Gomez alludes to the feeling of many women who "find the socially appropriate dress for 'femininity' does not suit them, is *constricting"* (L. Hall 399; emphasis in original) and thus critiques normative gender expectations. As L. Hall states, clothes "are an indicator of gender crossing performative 'acts' that allow women more freedom" (399). Hence, it is no surprise that Gilda "longed to be free of the dress and stockings, to wear her dark, men's trousers and woollen shirt" (GS 109) to free herself from oppressive limitations. The novel thus carries important lessons about deeply engrained beliefs around womanhood, essentially resisting gender stereotypes. In another instance, Gilda teaches Houston, her guard in 2050: "'We don't faint, Houston.', 'All women faint,' he said, chuckling. 'No, Houston, all women do not faint. They haven't in a long time'" (GS 240). Also, the prostitutes at *Woodard's* subvert normative expectations around gender: they are "self-assured, outspoken, and politically aware" (Holmgren Troy 62). As Bird taught them, "they all had the manners of ladies, could read, write and shoot" (GS 25). One might argue that even though Gilda is a black, lesbian, self-determined, politically active vampire, and therefore disrupts the traditional stereotypes around Western female behaviour, she seems to be equipped with conventional – and learned – feminine attributes as well, such as self-sacrificial love and care for the subjects she is responsible for. In conceptualizing Gilda in this way, though, Gomez "embraces the most traditional, conservative and impairing aspects of femininity as it has been defined by the patriarchal dichotomical tradition.… Instead of collapsing this dichotomy, Gomez just embraces what she considers the positive side of it. Killing the demonic, abject aspect of the Mother understood as foundational to female identity, she stands with the nurturing, candid version of the angelical" (Fusco 256). Womanhood is hence presented as powerful and full of liberty. In portraying her female characters as strong, independent, and able to define and defend themselves and their lives, Gomez productively subverts gender stereotypes, which effectively contrast traditional, oppressive notions of womanhood and femininity.

The novel also offers a counter-narrative in terms of race and sexuality. As a politically educated and active person, Gilda herself holds the view that "the inattention of her contemporaries to some mortal questions, like race, didn't suit her. She didn't believe a past could, or should, be so easily discarded" (GS 180). Here, Gomez alludes to the lingering aftermath of slavery, which is still palpable in contemporary America in the form of racism and what Elia has termed 'contemporary slavery' (20), and underlines the importance of reparative remembrance of suppressed trauma through "active forgetting" for American society to process this postcolonial trauma and to unlearn deeply engrained belief systems. To undermine common assumptions about race and reject the social construction and the biological explanation thereof, Gomez has Gilda's fellow vampire Sorel – himself a European from the 18th century with "immense deep, blue eyes" (GS 59) and "pale skin" (79) – suggest the unity of all races on earth. When Gilda tells him that the women at *Woodard's* attributed her enduring youth to her blackness ("To them the African has a magical power over the appearance of youth", 79), Sorel answers: "That must explain my enduring good looks then!" When Gilda replies, "Then

there are strains of Africa in your blood as well?", Sorel reveals his hidden message: "In what great, civilized nation are there not?" (79). The scene contributes to the above-described discourse by raising questions about the purity of race and the normativity of whiteness.

To critique heteronormativity in *Gilda*, Gomez frequently presents inter-racial and homosexual couples. Anthony and Sorel are a white gay couple, whereas Native American Bird and the "original" Gilda, who is of European descent, are lesbians. In addition, the vampires are polygamous. Gilda's vampiric family, originally consisting of "two black lesbians, a straight black man, two gay white men, and a Native American lesbian" (M. Jones 165), displays a complete inversion of traditional nuclear family constellations. The only straight white man in the story is an obsessive and aggressive stalker who should never have become a member of the family in the first place. This open and diverse sexuality goes against popular imagination in the 19th century, according to which women should be passive, weak, dependent, and domestic,[20] love relationships should be lived within certain ethnic boundaries and within heterosexual wedlock, and black people were stereotypically viewed as generally less human, hypersexual, lazy, naïve, sexually violent, and intellectually impaired (Fusco 249; L. Hall 398).

Despite, or maybe exactly because of, the characteristics of her vampire family, and due to being pushed to the margins of society, Gilda experiences consistent alienation and isolation while amongst humans. She craves a connection she does not seem to be able – or allowed – to have: "It was a link she searched for in each new place she lived, one she regretted breaking when she moved on" (GS 196). Only when she introduces Julius into her life, her first own "change" into vampirism, does it "ma[k]e Gilda understand what had been missing in her life – the demands of intimacy" (GS 197). As vampires are supposed to live in secret and not reveal their existence to humans, she cannot expose herself freely to the human beings she surrounds herself with, even though she craves those relations and deep connections desperately. When in vampiric company, she is able to grow used to the "reality of their isolation" (GS 110), but as soon as she is only among humans, loneliness overburdens her. She is never fully part of her group of friends, nor can she invite people to her house, because her secret has to be kept strictly – she "accepted the separation that stood between herself and the others" (GS 195). Moreover, as a black lesbian woman living through centuries when oppression due to race and gender was even more prevalent than today, she experiences the loneliness accompanying her marginalization full front. Consequently, Gilda constantly struggles with traumatizing feelings of isolation and alienation. The first kind of loneliness is cast in generic terms; this arises from the character's vampiric status, recognizable from genre fiction; the second kind of loneliness is rooted in her oppressed social position, here recognizable as that of a black lesbian woman. The Afrofuturist text blurs these two kinds of loneliness, thus enlarging the range of modes of reception. These different modes of reception are not mutually exclusive, but they allow for

---

[20] For a detailed account on the so-called 'Cult of True Womanhood', which emerged as a cultural convention for white women of the upper class in 19th-century America, refer to Barbara Welter's essay "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860", where the four ideological Victorian virtues – purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness – are displayed.

different emphases, a license in how to fashion one's reading and identification with the protagonist. Along with widening the potential readership, the text thus also enables those with similar experiences to navigate to what extent they expose themselves to the socially inflicted pain – rather than the generic convention – that is referenced in the fictional text.

In Afrofuturism, black scholars and authors critique and counteract negative stereotypes around blackness, notions of black Otherness and the ideological perception of people of colour as non- or sub-human in literature. Similarly, intersectional feminist academics work to deconstruct and demask images of black female archetypes. Gomez achieves both through her revolutionary protagonist, who counteracts stereotypical characters both in our world and in Gothic literary production, especially vampire fiction. By introducing a politically active, queer, black, female vampire into her work, Gomez exemplifies the importance of redefining a territory formerly "dominated by whiteness and stereotypical visions of blackness" (Fusco 252). Hence, she forwards her ambition of bolstering a new approach to issues and traumas faced specifically by black women, and to bring black stories to a national audience, thus feeding into the Afrospeculative trauma theory I seek to broaden in this dissertation. Gomez's narrative subsequently is one of the increasing number of texts which engage "with the difficult task of giving voice to the otherwise repressed or marginalized black subaltern" (Fusco 252), while also constituting an assault on the traditional canon of vampire fiction through a female black lesbian protagonist and a community of vampires distinctly different from "classic" Eurocentric vampires. Gomez explains that she wants to "show how women of color and lesbians of color showed up throughout history", as "that's what futurist writing can do – imagine how things can change for the better" ("Of Afrofuturism"). As Holmgren Troy summarizes poignantly, "Gomez writes and re-envisions the history of slave families, black women, lesbians, and feminists, among others, cloaking it as a vampire novel with the powerful but ethically responsible African American vampire Gilda as its hero" (70). The novel hence becomes a counter-memory to traditional historical vampire stories, thereby "giv[ing] marginalized groups such as lesbians and slave families a viable history" (72). Especially as the typical vampire in Western literature used to have a "powerful social position", as Judith Johnson puts it (75), it is a potent social critique to hand these positions over to previously marginalized groups of society. Thus, as Virginia Fusco puts it, Gomez "creates a place for *countercultural narrative* in the American and international literary scene" (253; emphasis in original). Additionally, she contributes to Griffin's concept of 'textual healing', as the novel addresses the position of black female authors within the literary canon and the effort to restore their work as a response to the legacies of colonialism and discrimination. Thus, Gomez not merely provides a history and a platform for historically discriminated individuals, but also a future: the vampire serves as a vehicle for imagining what the future might look like. Gomez explains, for instance: "[Afrofuturists] are dreaming of a better world, a different world, and that's what I wanted to spend my life doing" (00:07:16). With *Gilda,* Gomez has created a powerful vision of black freedom, as Jenkins puts it, which "expands, instead of narrows, black people's understanding of what it means to be black and, therefore, who can represent black freedom in fiction and in everyday life" (326). In answering back to a dystopian present, Gomez thus imagines a fair future coined by multi-ethnic communalism and respect.

Educated women dressing in clothes and adopting mindsets traditionally attributed to men at the time Gilda transitions into a vampire were considered scandalous and a monstrous threat to the dominant social order. In the Oxford English Dictionary, "monstrous" is defined as "repulsively unnatural" and "abnormally developed or grossly malformed" (OED 1351). In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison argues that the West, but America especially, has designed an "imagined safe territory where the Other as black coincides at times with the 'monster' or with the 'freak'. In other words, blackness is either a synonym of danger and corruption or of savage naivety of those in need of protection and guidance" (Fusco 248). Gilda is othered due to a combination of her race, her gender, and her sexuality, which renders her the other of the other – the other of white people, the other of men, and the other of heterosexual people. Gilda's radical otherness is emphasized even more by her willingness to become a vampire – a monster in the literal sense – which, in traditional vampire narratives, is a state portrayed as absolutely undesirable.[21] On her journey, Gilda often and deliberately mingles with subjects historically constructed as monstrous or Other by dominant discourse, such as African Americans, Native Americans, prostitutes, homosexuals, and transgender people, for example her transsexual neighbour Marcie (GS 173). Through Gilda and her tribe, Gomez acknowledges how the marginalized in society are often those labelled monstrous. Yet, she also revises this potentially racially traumatic discourse. In comparison to the ideological beliefs most of Gilda's human surroundings hold, Gomez portrays the selection of people her protagonist surrounds herself with as diverse, open-minded and compassionate. By displaying affection and empathy, for example by insinuating positive dreams and hopes in their prey and by comforting each other in times of despair through telepathic communication, Gilda and her family represent the opposite of conventional ideas around Otherness: they "turn … the structures of racism, sexism [and] homophobia ... in classical vampire narratives against themselves" (Winnubst 9). Moreover, Gilda's family bears transformative potential: in choosing her tribe among the people pushed to the margins of society, Gilda "refuse[s] marginality and exclusion by creating and celebrating connections across many borders", as L. Hall puts it (395). Instead of an innate character trait, Gomez seems to consider "monstrousness the social condition of vampires as well as the social condition of black people positioned as queer *vis-à-vis* white gender and sexual normality" (Lewis 454). Thus, the speculative trope of vampirism, and the trauma and feelings of alienation and otherness it carries, might allegorically stand for the experience of Afrodiasporic women.

In speculative fiction, "othered" characters have mostly been featured in the form of aliens or robots, for example. Vampires, though, especially in *Gilda,* take a special place in the – inherently questionable – dichotomy of Self/Other. As M. Jones highlights, "the category of 'vampire' ceases to be a fluid marker of 'otherness' and becomes a fixed subject position on a political and historical grid" (154). This is especially exemplified when examining vampires and their mirror reflection. In conventional vampire narratives, bloodsucking immortals do not have a mirror reflection. In Lacanian psychoanalytical terms, this is decisive,

---

[21] A recent exception, in a typical counter-narrative manner, is Bella Swan in Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, who desires to be turned so that she can be with her vampire partner Edward Cullen forever, but also because she will become more able-bodied and physically remarkable, which stands in sharp contrast to her clumsy human-ness.

as a mirror reflection is constitutive for subject formation: for psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, individuals "achieve an identity, a recognized place in the social order, by passing into the Law (the culture's signifying order) – at the cost of creating the unconscious and establishing a permanent split, an alienation of self from desire, within the subject" (Leitch 2485). The subject hence experiences a moment of both alienation and identification when looking into the mirror for the first time. This moment is "crucial to ego formation and thus self-realization" (Mafe 28). In this theory, traditional vampires can, as Shannon Winnubst states, "never become a subject in the ways that Lacan has read subject formation, for the vampire does not have the one necessary condition to become an upstanding, rational, straight, white, male body-in-control" (8). The conventional vampire thus is neither Other nor Subject. As Winnubst explains, "[t]he [traditionally male] vampire, that crosser of boundaries extraordinaire, is forever haunting because he is forever beyond the grasp of straight white male subjectivity" (8). This is not the case for Gomez's Gilda, though, who can well see herself when she looks into a mirror. Examining her braids after her change into vampirism, she thinks: "The kinkiness of it reassured her – not at all the look of a ha'nt or spook as many thought her and her kind to be. Her face was there in the mirror, not banished to some soulless place" (GS 56). On the one hand, the mirror reflection helps Gilda and her family retain their humanity and human identity, but on the other hand, as Holmgren Troy remarks, it "fix[es] them as raced and gendered subjects with distinctive sexual orientations" (60). Gomez herself explains that her concept of a vampire "functions … as a floating category of all things 'alien' to the normative forces of official cultural discourses" ("Recasting" 154). She explains why her characters cross boundaries in this way: "Our misogynistic culture has divided and compartmentalized our lives … sharply … [S]pilling over into the categories women were not meant to occupy is the transgressive behaviour that can break down the barriers to personal and political liberation" ("Femme Erotic Independence" 106). Thus, her writing becomes a political act of crossing borders and imagining a more equal future for marginalized groups in society. This is in line with Cedric Gael Bryant's argument that "monstrosity *is* the unspeakable – race, sexuality, gender, class, oppression – but it is also, in African American literature, the *response* that is spoken, that 'claims' a retaliatory monstrous difference" (544; emphasis in original). In forging a new type of vampire that deviates from the archetypical, sadistic monster, the novel speaks this "unspeakable", which echoes the idea of trauma, and thus transforms traumatically fragmented memory into narrative memory and a life story for formerly marginalized individuals. In doing so, *Gilda* contributes to posttraumatic growth in historically traumatized societies as well as textual healing.

This achievement of *The Gilda Stories* crucially depends on the narrative mode. Traditional vampire fiction is told either from the victim's or the vampire hunter's perspective, for example in John William Polidori's "The Vampyre" or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, where the vampire is the "horrific other" (J. Johnson 78). As J. Johnson notes, "[t]he traditional formula of horror fiction has always been that We are attacked by It, even if, in the vampire and werewolf mythos, part of that terror is that we fear and partly desire to become It" (78-79). *The Gilda Stories,* though, employs a third-person narrator strongly focusing on Gilda's interior life. Hence, Gomez facilitates the identification process of the reader with the vampire, the supposed monster. Thus, as Gilda is narrating from within the subjectivity of racialized and marginalized others, the formerly "abnormal" are taken from the margins and put right into the centre, and thereby rendered as the norm in the context of the narrative.

In this way, as Fusco remarks, Gilda embodies the readers' recognition of his or her own Otherness. Thus, she invites us "to look at our own monstrosity, our culturally manufactured Selves with their ambiguities and hybridity, to engage with the notion of social transformation" (252). In the same vein, through this "shift in status of the vampire as 'other' in the text", we are forced "to reconceptualize the threat of violence and the source of evil in the text" (Spaulding 105). The conventional Western formula for horror fiction follows a dichotomous pattern, reinforcing the good/bad binary: a white subject is attacked by the "Monstrous Other". In *Gilda,* though, the formerly "monstrous" are now compassionate vampires, whereas the historical victims of vampire attacks (white mortals) become the monstrous aggressors against, and oppressors of, women, people of colour, and other marginalized groups in society. The horror in *Gilda* is thus a result of institutional slavery, paired with racism and sexism. As J. Johnson notes, "the more obvious terror [than the vampire] is that we recognize in the vampire story a metaphor for how things actually are, more often than not, or for how society constructs them" (77). The implementation of an innovative narrative mode is thus one of the most powerful revisions Gomez makes. By positioning her characters in a way that counteracts and transgresses the dominant normative and binary thinking of "Us versus Them", Gomez opens up new ways of thinking about power relations and equality, while simultaneously representing and empowering readers belonging to historically marginalized groups.

Reversing Post-Traumatic Memory into Active Forgetting and Remembrance

The moment Gilda transitions from the nameless "Girl" into the vampire named Gilda indicates the beginning of her search for personhood. Thus, her journey to healing and towards a configured identity only starts when she obtains supernatural powers and when she is given a name. The act of naming opens to her a world of new possibilities and ways of processing her traumatic memory into a coherent life story. However, after traumatic experiences in slavery and ongoing discrimination based on her race, gender, and sexuality, Gilda has to work hard to actively configure an identity throughout her life. In contrast to the posttraumatic flashbacks she initially experiences, the newly named Gilda starts to do memory-work by deliberately remembering her past to work through her trauma – she reverses her post-traumatic amnesia into active, reparative remembrance. A certain amount of soil she carries with her wherever she goes functions as a conscious material reminder of her life as a slave on the plantation: "Although she had not been back to Mississippi since the day she'd made her escape from the plantation, she carried the soil with her, and its scent made it real to her still" (GS 130). The ritual of carrying a token representing the horrors of the past feeds into the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory I work towards in this dissertation. Traditionally, vampires also took soil from their homelands with them to stay alive, but in the case of *Gilda,* Gomez reimagines this genre convention in a productive way and utilizes it as a symbol of reparative remembrance which stands for Gilda's continuous healing.

Her friend Anthony explains another coping mechanism for traumatic memories to Gilda which will be useful to her throughout her whole life, and which also helps her to work through her haunting memories of the overseer she has killed as he tried to rape her:

> There will be a time when death comes at your hand. When this happens, when you must protect
> yourself or those in your care, the real sin would be in taking life easy. The only way to maintain any

humanity is to remember the faces of those who've died. To carry them within ourselves so that whatever good might have remained in their spirits has someplace to dwell. You cannot kill, then forget their faces without forgetting some part of yourself. (GS 82-83)

"Forgetting some part of yourself" refers to Gilda's post-traumatic amnesia, a state resulting from repressed memory after a traumatic event (Suleiman, "Judith" 276). Remembrance, in contrast, refers to the active decision to remember traumatic experiences in a processed way – very much akin to Nietzsche's notion of 'active forgetting'. Nietzsche does not refer to "memories fading away; it is rather a positive and active force, a capacity which an individual, a society, or a culture needs to prosper. This notion provides guidance on how to banish the trauma to the extent that it ceases to paralyze the traumatized group" (Aydin 125). Actively forgetting her dominating traumatic experiences and reversing them into productive, reparative remembrance for Gilda then means making sure the trauma is actively remembered by rendering it part of her identity, and simultaneously, "through the very same practices of culturally incorporating it, the trauma is also forgotten … It is remembered and forgotten at the same time" (Aydin 134). This process enables her to live her present, but simultaneously be anchored in the past and focusing on the future..

Holmgren Troy argues that *Gilda* also "remember[s] through [its] use of genre conventions" (71). By framing her concerns in a vampire story, Gomez grants the reader "access to the … vampires' personal memories of the past" (71). Thus, similar to time travel in *Kindred,* the speculative trope of vampirism functions as what Landsberg has called 'prosthetic memory'. Covering slavery, reconstruction, civil rights, and the last two centuries, the novel illuminates the lingering presence of slavery in the present, thereby illustrating "the ways the past history of slavery intrudes upon the present with disturbing and dangerous consequences" (Spaulding 7). By taking over the older Gilda's name, Gilda links women through an even longer time span. Hence, she serves as a figure "between memory and history: as remembering subject … as well as embodiment … and transmitter … of the past" (Holmgren Troy 71). Viewing the past from an extended angle through the perspective of vampirism, readers are able to get a more immediate and encompassing access to history. The vampire hence "can be imagined as an eyewitness to and a participant in the past as well as an embodiment of the past in the present and somebody who is able to convey history" (Holmgren Troy 58). As Ibrahim similarly states, the vampire has the innate ability to reanimate history by living a life over several centuries: "his or her consciousness comes to stand in for a redemptive relation to the past from the standpoint of the present" (317).

As we have seen, memory is always distorted, as it is inevitably selective. Bearing this in mind, Pierre Nora describes the dichotomy between history – an authentic collective memory – and historiography as a "problematic and incomplete" representation of the past (8). The vampire, though, similar to time travel in *Kindred,* has the ability to disrupt this dichotomy and is, essentially, a living memory. Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela write that,

> [a]lthough it is impossible to reach full knowledge of the past, and although final closure will always be out of our reach, [unfinished business crying for closure] urge[s] us towards the ideals of knowing and working through the past. [It] pose[s] a challenge for oral and literary historians, for narrative therapists and creative writers – ultimately for all of us – to hear and to tell the stories of those unheard, to give a voice to those who have been silenced. (47)

The immortal figure of the vampire in *Gilda* follows this lead. In excavating and de-silencing a traumatic past and highlighting a continuously oppressive present from the perspective of the marginalized, Gomez contributes to what has been defined as posttraumatic growth and a culture of remembrance through "actively forgetting" the traumatic past. As the Afrofuturist endeavour "take[s] up the past to imagine what might be in the future, while the vampire genre represents a past in relation to the present" (Ibrahim 317), *Gilda* emphasizes the connection between past, present, and future. In Missouri in 1921, Gilda realizes this connection when she tells a friend that "[t]he past does not lie down and decay like a dead animal … It waits for you to find it again and again" (GS 126). Indeed, in the future in 2050, a form of slavery reappears in *Gilda*, as vampires are methodically chased:

> Thoughts of the Hunters, armed with drugs and other weapons to ensnare her and her family, caused Gilda to shiver with the memory of her escape from the plantation. In unsuspecting moments she felt the bounty hunter's hand on her childishly thin ankle as he dragged her from beneath the hay. Those who came now were more silent, more expert, but essentially the same. Their approach filled her with a familiar terror …. This horror was slavery come again. (GS 234-35)

The scene emphasizes the point I made earlier, that vampires in literature, like African slaves, have historically been regarded as "social monsters" that needed to be hunted down. In connecting past, present and future, though, Gomez additionally displays that "social conceptions of monstrosity defined through racialized discourses of queer gender and sexuality operate continuously" (Lewis 454). Gomez points to the fact that the past will return, and the only way to avoid a continuously haunting past is through memory-work: by remembering the past, actively forgetting it, working through it in the present and imagining a better future to be able to take the necessary actions to actually construct it.

In moving past and present closer together through the speculative concept of vampirism and immortality, Gomez also reimagines the conditions of slavery in the context of freedom, thereby hinting at the neo-colonial nature of our modern societies and what Elia has termed 'contemporary slavery' (20). As Goddu writes, "slavery haunts the American gothic" (3). Similarly, Bryant highlights that "[c]hattel slavery is a monstrous gothic economy precisely because, *de jure,* it made the slave owner a machine, a producer of property, profits, and pleasure bound by no other structures than supply and demand and lust" (549). It comes as no surprise, then, that the South of the United States is a rather common scenery for vampire stories, as the gothic potential of the institution of slavery still lurks there (Holmgren Troy 59-60). *Gilda,* however, only starts there, before it moves to different places and times. By shifting both time and space, Gomez demonstrates how slavery and the resulting racism spread from the South but continues to haunt the entire nation. Having been turned into a vampire before the Civil War, Gilda's "history and memories as well as [herself] are strongly reflected by race, gender, class, and sexuality" (Holmgren Troy 60). By having Gilda carry the traumatic legacy of the past through space and time, Gomez renders the consequences of slavery a viable issue of the present.

After its horrific past including slavery and the atrocities surrounding Native Americans, the United States of America, among other nations, such as Germany after the Holocaust and South Africa after Apartheid, can be described as collectively traumatized (A. Assmann; Eyerman). It can therefore be no coincidence that *Gilda* is set in a society where Gomez herself experiences discrimination due to her race, sexuality and gender, and whose members, both perpetrators and survivors, continuously suffer from the aftermath of collective trauma.

In historically traumatized societies like the United States, "scarred by division, collective anger and animosity, writers have a vital role to play", according to van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (61). They propose that "the first step to the healing of a society is to take literary writers seriously when they reveal misery and evil" and "call our attention to 'shadow figures'" (61). In their view, "[l]iterature frequently destroys … stereotypes and challenges readers' imagination and empathy, stimulating them to discover a shared humanity in characters who are 'different'" (61). This feature of Afrofuturism could especially apply to readers belonging to a dominating group in society. But literature, and Afrofuturist works such as *The Gilda Stories* in particular, equally serve readers who can find themselves in the "outcast" group Gomez's vampires represent, finding relief in characters they can identify with. Additionally, Gilda and her vampire family are prototypes of subjects with whom traumatized readers could identify: they are harassed, hunted, marginalized, discriminated against, and excluded on several levels and due to several reasons. As van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela explain, when subjects suffering from trauma find it unbearable to confront their own traumas, it is possible that they "discover a literary character or characters with whom they can identify and thus indirectly confront their own trauma" (60). In other words, "reading can bring a catharsis of suppressed emotions" (60). The critics emphasize that "[l]iterary narratives can help a traumatised person to confront suppressed feelings.… [They] can provide a way of facing [their trauma] indirectly – and of talking indirectly about [the survivor's] trauma by discussing the literary narrative" (58). In potentially having a cathartic effect on author, reader, and society as a whole through its allegoric function, *Gilda,* and other Afrofuturist novels, could therefore play a vital role in trauma healing for an entire nation.

Actively Chosen Family Bonds and a Framework of Morality and Values

Given that a story about vampires would traditionally be regarded as horror or gothic fiction, it is striking that the atmosphere of *Gilda* is rather idyllic – some critics even say "romanticized" (Lewis 455). It is a vampire story devoid of vampiric horror, as the vampire society acts responsibly and in a just way instead of devouring and killing their prey. The framework of morals and values Gilda and her family adhere to keep her in balance and represent something she can rely on. Thus, they play a significant role in her journey towards healing and a multiply configured identity or assemblage. Gomez's vampires condemn the killing of the mortals they feed off, and, in the very rare occasions that they have to take a life, for example when being threatened, they are obligated to memorize the deceased's face. When they suck blood, they leave a gift in exchange, calming down the mortal's fears and instilling nurturing and restoring hopes and dreams instead. They never torture the humans they feed on, but rather comfort them, as a parent would do with a child. In one telling instance, Bird explains the vampire's special philosophy of exchange when feeding themselves with human blood: "as you take from them you must reach inside. Feel what they are needing, not what you are hungering for. You leave them with something new and fresh, something wanted. Let their joy fill you. This is the only way to share and not to rob. It will also keep you on your guard so you don't drain life away…. It's that strength you must learn to control" (GS 50). In this example, the reader might detect the values of fairness, compassion, respect, justice, humanism, self-composure, self-control, and contribution as driving forces in the vampiric community. Gomez's vampires are profoundly humanist and have hardly anything in common with the stereotypical figure

of the monstrous predator in mainstream vampire fiction. As Jenkins puts it, in Gomez's vampire universe, "it is possible to satisfy one's 'hunger' without being a monster, without producing terror, exploitation, or bodies in pain" (321). Similar to this symbiotic ritual, transformation into vampirism and thus introduction into the vampire family in *Gilda* "requires equal participation and commitment: not rape and desertion, but marriage and a stable family life" (J. Johnson 78). Instead of having a male vampire crashing his fangs into his female victim in an act of exploitation and violent invasion, the "birth" of new vampires in *Gilda* resembles the nurturing of a baby. The still-human first gives consent to the transformation before an exchange of blood takes place, which resembles the suckling of a child at her mother's breast. The new vampire is then taken care of as one would do with an infant. When the old Gilda transforms the Girl/Gilda, for example, she carries her to her bed, bathes her and gets her dressed (GS 46). These norms and values, based on equality, love and respect, I argue, serve as a vehicle for healing and re-configuring Gilda's posttraumatic Self in that they give her a reliable benchmark for her process of identity configuration. Thus, by creating a vampire community which places immense importance on living a lifestyle based on these morals, Gomez continuously weaves in her social criticism and the hope for a better, more inclusive future for marginalized groups in society.

The traditional vampiric patterns of domination and submission, which bear strong resemblance to the supremacist rule of men over women and colonizer over colonized through the centuries, are subverted in *Gilda,* and replaced with an act of exchange, driven by moral viewpoints. Thus, the hierarchical order of the dichotomies male/female and colonizer/colonized are contested and uprooted, pointing to and envisioning the possibility of equality in the future. Here, the unusual vampiric transformation and feeding processes serve as another example for how Gomez disrupts and transforms the traditional vampire story into an intersectional feminist one, especially as the subversion of power relations also parallels the revision of heterosexual relational patterns: by introducing queer characters into her narrative, Gomez opens up a new vision about the definition of relationships, which goes further than the traditional relationship between man and woman. When Gilda decides to introduce Julius into their community of vampires, she mentally tells Bird: "We've finally delivered a brother for me" (GS 194), thereby hinting at their status as lovers as well as mother and daughter. In this instance, for example, or when the new Gilda becomes Bird's new sexual partner after the old Gilda takes her own life, Gomez breaks the taboos around the traditional family by mixing up the roles of mothers, partners and children. By rethinking traditional family roles, Gomez sharply critiques widespread ideas about heteronormativity and traditional understandings of love relations.

It has become quite clear by now that, next to the guiding framework of values and the memory-work Gilda engages in, another important factor in her lifelong healing process is her family – both her biological family on the plantation in the Antebellum South and her new and chosen vampiric community. As Gilda starts out her life as a vampire, she is initiated into her new family, which consists of her first sexual partner Bird, the couple Anthony and Sorel, and later Julius, Effie and Ermis. The novel exemplifies, as Jenkins rightly points out, that "families, like friends, are a matter of choice" (316-317). Similarly, L. Hall underlines that family in *Gilda* often hints at "the individual's ability to choose and 'create' the 'family'" (401). Anthony points out the elements that constitute its foundation: "to choose someone for your family is a great responsibility. It must

be done not simply out of your own need or desire but rather because of a mutual need. We must search ourselves and the other to know if it is really essential" (GS 69). These wisely chosen families, he concludes, "bring solace" and "last in harmony" (GS 69). The bond remains a choice, though, and can be loosened, as Gilda emphasizes in a conversation with Ermis: "You are not bound to me. Don't feel obligated to take this journey if that's not what you want" (GS 246). I read this explicit emphasis on freedom as a reminder for the reader of the lingering dangers of renewed enslavement. Gilda finds "real freedom" when she dissociates the traditional concepts of race and family from widespread beliefs about the necessity of blood relation and the requirement to share a skin colour for family (Jenkins 316), and embraces a hybrid, diverse and diasporic concept of community instead.

Gilda flourishes in human communities of queers and feminists, forms close relationships with her vampiric brothers and sisters, and remains tied to Bird both mentally and emotionally throughout her journey, even though they are apart for most of the novel. This group of people serves Gilda well and supports her, and its members form a close-knit support net during the process of her healing. The vampires interact on a conscious and empathetic level, enabled through their telepathic abilities. When Gilda struggles with depressive episodes, she perceives that "seeing her mother's eyes staring back out at her was comforting. Bird's presence in her walk, the sound of Bernice's laughter in her own, all made the connection to life less tenuous. Finding those she loved within herself eased the passage of time" (GS 180). Within her chosen vampire family, she finally finds the connection and love she so long wished for. When she feels lonely, she simply "call[s] out in her mind to Sorel, saying only, *I feel alone.* In return, she felt Sorel reach out to her, the warmth of his affection washing over her as if he stood at her side" (GS 70; emphasis in original). When the old Gilda is about to end her life, she assures Bird: "[The Girl] will always be with us, just as I'll always be with you" (GS 24). The mythical spiritual presence of a distinctly African cosmic consciousness and connectedness, which reaches across temporal and geographic spaces, "replaces death's finality" (L. Hall 409). In other words, Gomez explores a form of spirituality which is traditionally "discredited by the Western European concepts of the rational mind" (409-410) and thus challenges Eurocentric scientific approaches to trauma healing, which are rooted in rationality. In this way, Gomez employs a distinctly African way of addressing trauma and its healing.

By introducing this revolutionary concept of choosing and creating family on one's own, Gomez breaks up the traditionally powerful institution of the conventional nuclear family, which promotes gender inequality in the form of female submission and male domination. Hortense J. Spillers defines the practice and understanding of family in Western cultures as "the vertical transfer of bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogatives of 'cold cash,' from *fathers* to *sons* and in the supposedly free exchange, of affectional ties between a male and a female of his choice" (270; emphasis in original). By having Gilda choose her family, Gomez disrupts the hetero-patriarchal structures of the traditional family, offering an alternative approach. Gomez's "matriarchal mode", which Fusco compares to a "*countercultural commune*" *(*255; emphasis in original), subverts the traditional understanding of family dramatically, and makes room for new, non-hierarchical relationships which negate the assumed necessity of a powerful man as the head of a family and which "bypass … heterosexuality" (L. Hall 401). The family is thus based on cooperation instead

of hierarchy. As Gomez explains, to her, family "is more than a unit designed to uphold the idea of capitalism" (Gomez in Keehnen). Instead, it is the foundation on which Gilda can build her vampiric life and which guides her through her life. In Rosebud in 1921, she is part of a female community – her friend Aurelia as a driving force behind it – which aims at addressing racial issues. In the South End in 1955, Gilda is caught up in the female community of a beauty parlour (GS 129), while in New York in 1971, she is concerned about the extensive patriarchy within the African American community. In this context, she exemplifies the case of a black female friend of hers, who had done a tremendous amount of work for a black theatre company, but ultimately had not received the grant money, which "went to every brother in the place but not her" (GS 170). I therefore argue that it is her female community which becomes a source of strength and resilience for Gilda. Her feminine – and feminist – relations offer the possibility of reflecting on society and its conflicts.

Moreover, the emphasis on the individual's ability to create or choose a family showcases that "naming and claiming identity as a family", where procreation is not a necessary component (L. Hall 401), is an agential act of identity formation. Even more, it illuminates, as Winnubst states, that we can "no longer … draw neat boundaries between what is organic and not organic, what is natural and unnatural, what resembles us and what does not resemble us" (14). This should be read as liberatory, as we leave behind "the natural/unnatural dichotomy, and all of the (sexual, racial, religious, national) violences it has brought upon us.… Virtually all boundaries are crossed here – human/non-human, … alive/undead, male/female, white/black, straight/queer" (Winnubst 14). Thus, family becomes associated with ideology instead of biology or nature: it resists assimilation and flourishes in diversity. It is defined by a mutual need of one another instead of by "gender-determining obligations or race-determining blood-lines" (Lewis 455) – race and gender as indicators of relation are no longer valid. Instead, "kinship becomes a particular mode of reading the many flowing affections, affinities, connections, and intensities that circulate amidst bodies in the world" (Winnubst 13). Indeed, Gomez explains, family is rather to be viewed as an interconnected community, because "as human beings we are always searching for that … From that circle we extrapolate our value and ability to effect change in the world. So, in effect, family is taking care of everyone, not just you and the person you live with" (Gomez in Keehnen). This again underlines the importance of a strong social network or community, connection and a shared culture and tradition as a distinctly Afrodiasporic approach to trauma and its healing.

Not only are her relationships to living female vampires and humans important for Gilda and her healing process – her relationship with her deceased mother continues to affect and influence her in a reassuring and therapeutic way. As Gilda never knew her father, her familial ties are limited to the female side of her genetic family on the plantation – her mother and sisters. Her mother's early death and Gilda's subsequent escape made the development of life-long affectionate bonds nearly impossible – a stolen intimacy, which in the novel is attributed to the dehumanizing effects of slavery. Still, arguably due to the sense of cosmic connectedness to her ancestors, Gilda's mental bond to her mother is strong and enduring. Gilda keeps fond memories of her biological mother and her stories of their earlier African life in freedom, as well as of her nine sisters throughout her whole life, for example, how her mother combs her hair (GS 131). In another instance, she recalls her mother bathing her as a child: "The intimacy of her mother's hands and the warmth of the water

lulled the Girl into a trance of sensuality she never forgot" (GS 12). The rituals of care, in the form of braiding and washing, stand for the safety and security Gilda felt in her biological family. She finds "those she loved within herself [to] ease … the passage of time" (GS 180). Gomez points to the need to "deliberately maintain ... a connection to the familial groupings of one's past", which is "as important as consciously choosing family in the present" (Lewis 455). In this sense,, family in *Gilda* is not only intricately connected to race, gender, and sexuality, as outlined above, but also to memory. Moreover, Gilda's fond memories of her deceased family, as Holmgren Troy assesses, "assert the subjectivity, agency, and family bonds of African American slaves and, thus, serve as a contemporary commentary on allegations that these were lacking under slavery" (67). *Gilda* thus becomes a literary counter-narrative and counter-memory to dominant discourse and historiography, as it opposes the historical perception of African American slaves as subhuman.

Literacy, Rewriting and Art to Shape and Express One's Identity

In contemporary trauma research, scholars commonly agree upon the fact that to assimilate an isolated, traumatic memory into the Self, the traumatized person needs to "embody" the memory in language (Boudreau 452), which often occurs through re-narrativization. As in *Kindred*, the act of writing as a means of working through a haunting past is portrayed as especially important for Gilda in the novel. When she is still called the Girl and lives with the older Gilda and her future lover Bird, the latter teaches her to read and write from the newspaper and the Bible: "Neither of them could see themselves reflected here. Then [Bird] told the Girl stories of her own childhood, using them to teach her to write. She spoke each letter aloud, then the word, her own hand drawing the Girl's across the worn paper. And soon there'd be a sentence and a legend or memory of who she was. And the African girl then read it back to her" (GS 21). The healing act of writing and story-telling that Gilda and Bird perform, and which echoes van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela's "transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory" (vii), is also referred to as 'bibliotherapy' (58). The two vampire women intuitively follow this path: they work with their memories to express their multiple identities and reintegrate their traumatic experiences into their newly configured Selves. Additionally, as Gilda and Bird do not see themselves represented in conventional literature, they create stories for both themselves and other subjects similarly marginalized by society and dominant discourse. In doing so, they visibilize and mark themselves, claiming space as queer black women in the future. In true Afrofuturist manner, Gomez here especially aims at empowering those marginalized groups who have not been represented appropriately in literature in the past. She emphasizes: "A lot of young women, and women of color didn't have the opportunity to read about heroic figures. They didn't have the opportunity to read about women of color who stood out as powerful and kind and yet were still growing up and finding their way. I get to see Gilda grow up for 200 years, and I had those young women of color in my mind as I was writing" (Gomez, "Of Afrofuturism"). In this context, she clarifies that it is not the analysis and deconstruction of black lesbian lives which has the "most immediate, broad-based and long-lasting cultural and historical impact", but "the *representation"* ("But Some of Us" 290; emphasis in original). She continues that it is "[o]nly by telling our stories in the most specific, imagistic, and imaginative narratives … the lives of black lesbians take on long-term literary and political significance". It is hence through the process of writing, story-telling and representing herself that

Gilda can work through her trauma. The visibilization of her Self supports Gilda in embodying her traumatic memory during the process of dealing with trauma and identity configuration. L. Hall writes that, for Gilda, the "embodied nature of writing and story-telling" is a "major source of identity and connection with the past and with others in the past. Reader and writer, teller and listener as witness, complete the dialogue and facilitate the understanding that creates community" (395). As van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela argue, "in dealing with trauma, writers can, vicariously, express what other trauma victims find impossible to tell" (58). This means that Afrofuturist authors who have set themselves the goal of rethinking and re-narrating past, present and future take on the possibility to evoke healing in both themselves and their audience, and thus society as a whole.

Gilda's transition from illiteracy to literacy, and the resulting opportunity of authorship, is especially important when considering the historical understanding of illiterate slaves in opposition to white supremacy:

> the creation of formal literature could be no mean matter in the life of the slave, since the sheer literacy of writing was the very commodity that separated animal from human being, slave from citizen, object from subject. Reading, and especially writing, in the life of the slave represented a process larger than even 'mere' physical manumission, since mastery of the arts and letters was Enlightenment Europe's sign of that solid line of division between human being and thing. (Gates 24-25)

When neither Bird nor Gilda find figures to identify with in the prominent literary canon, they turn to the performative act of producing their own narratives, utilizing their literacy which, figuratively, transitions them "from object to subject", as Henry Louis Gates Jr. puts it. It is with this context in mind that I propose that Gomez deliberately highlights Gilda's educational journey in her novel to demonstrate the parallels between Gilda's journey from illiteracy to literacy and her transition from human to vampire. By juxtaposing the two processes, she further revises and subverts the above-discussed ideological discourse around monstrosity, which is transferred into "normality", the norm, in the novel. Gomez herself states that gothic texts often "remake mythology" ("Recasting" 86) – in other words, they revise monstrosity, which allows them to "dominate, take over the page" (Bryant 550). It is exactly in this sense that the character Gilda resists, revises, and revolutionizes traumatic Gothic conventions. This argument is further supported by the fact that *Gilda* is narrated solely from Gilda's point of view, which gives the reader the impression that Gilda writes down her memoirs to work through her past.

It is not only literacy, literature, and the act of re-narrativization though, which help Gilda to configure an identity and reintegrate her traumatic memory into a coherent life story. Art in general, in combination with time and space, serve as a source of continuous healing in Gilda's life. The experience of healing from trauma through art is recognized by van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, among others. They state that not only literary narratives can serve as a vehicle for trauma and lead to healing, but also "the narratives of film and drama; the 'stories' told by paintings and sculpture; or in music; or in artistic expressions where these art forms are combined" (59). The speculative element of the novel, immortality, provides Gilda with the possibility of adapting to and growing into different roles in different time spheres and locations, thereby adding to the multiple layers of her configured identity. She thinks to herself: "Singing, writing words, and making them melody were central to the life she had made for herself" (GS 199-200). It is important to note here that Gomez chooses the expression "to make a life for oneself" – which could also be read as "to make a self for oneself".

Gomez, as a diasporic subject herself, seems to be a supporter of the theory that a self can be established and configured at will and that the establishment of an identity is a continuous and fluid process. As Gilda switches roles and occupations in her respective lives throughout time and space, she convincingly demonstrates, as stated in the proposition of this chapter, that a subject cannot be pinned down to a single coherent and stable identity over the course of a lifetime. As her peer vampire Effie states, "movement is life for us" (GS 214). "Us" in this case, stands for the vampires in the narrative, but it could also apply to the reader and every human in general. An identity can therefore never be stable. Instead, it must be fluid and changing to be what is generally considered "healthy".

By taking on a different occupation in every era that she inhabits, Gilda establishes a configured identity for herself by incorporating the respective newly achieved Selves into an overall fluid and enhanced identity. The magical vampiric elements of the novel – especially immortality, as it allows Gilda to move through time and space – enable this multiple identity formation process. Her journey through the fine arts thus can be read as a form of posttraumatic growth. Gilda reaches high proficiency in every art she decides to practice, and she expresses her emotions and embraces healing through her performances as a pianist (GS 195), song-composer (199), author (219), artist (167) and in the creative acts of being a hairdresser and beautician in a beauty parlour (129). In one instance, Gilda has a strong memory of her life passing by while performing: "The present no longer existed: her life was a line stretched through time – humming with the wind, taut and delicate, strong and wiry. The faces that sang on the line were clear and immediate, no longer fuzzy images from her childhood. Her mother sang the same song she used to sing when she rocked the Girl to sleep on their hard pallet beside the stove" (GS 139). It is a song which helps Gilda to excavate a formerly "fuzzy" and distant traumatic memory, and simultaneously provides the possibility for reconnecting with her past by reintegrating the memory into her Self. As L. Hall rightly observes, songs connect time and "provide rhythm that aids memory and brings pieces of the past together" (397). In a sense, the "music-making process becomes part of the self-in-process" (397). Bringing pieces of a shattered past together represents healing from trauma, which is inherently disintegrating and fragmenting. By reconnecting with her Self, Gilda can also better connect to her surroundings. When she works as a professional singer, Effie tells her: "When you sing, I listen to your thoughts" (GS 215). In expressing her feelings and remembering her past through art, Gilda experiences healing and, therefore, a closer connection to her female audience: "It was in these moments that she felt most at peace with the mortal world at whose edge she lived" (GS 201). She witnesses that "[w]hen she sat down at the piano it was only she and the women" (GS 201). The act of self-expression thus works as an affirmation of Gilda's identity formation and her continuously healing Self. It has a soothing effect on her and becomes one aspect of her path to liberation and healing.

As there is not one perfectly stable configured identity, complete closure and healing will never be possible – neither for the vampire Gilda nor for any human being. This thought is exemplified by the novel's circular structure: it starts and ends with Gilda being hunted down. As a fugitive slave, she is feverishly chased by her master and harassed by the bounty hunter; as a grown-up and experienced vampire, she is pursued by a part of the human population – the Hunters – trying to take her blood to claim her supernatural powers for themselves.

She remarks that "[t]his horror was slavery come again" (GS 235). The novel's structure thus alludes to the fact that complete "healing" and complete resolution are not possible – neither for Gilda nor for any living being. Gilda's search for closure and psychic integration has thus not yet been accomplished at the end of the novel, and probably never will be. Complete "healing" and a whole stable identity for every human is an illusion, but still worth striving for, as everyone is able to reach at least a state of balance or momentary contentment – when actively putting in the work. This is exemplified in the novel's closing sentence, where Gilda seems to reach some kind of personal goal: "Gilda was no longer fleeing for her life" (GS 252). Keeping in mind that, throughout her life, Gilda has not only literally fled from bounty hunters and other aggressors, but also figuratively from her invasive, haunting traumatic memories, I read this sentence as Gilda's final acknowledgement of her past and the reintegration of her traumatic memories into her life story. The novel thus fosters hope in the face of catastrophe and stimulates the imagination of the individual for a better, yet not perfect future, thereby exemplifying different tools the reader can use for his or her own journey of posttraumatic growth. Thus, by producing Afrofuturistic literature, Gomez contributes to the continuous and necessarily ongoing healing process in her readers, and, by extension, in society as a whole.

Revising Gothic Narratives and Confronting Cultural Invisibilities

One reason why Gomez frames her social concerns within a vampire story might be the fact that typical gothic motifs such as the ghost, the vampire or the uncanny metaphorically can stand for (sexual) desires and drives that are, in the Freudian manner, historically repressed and tabooed. Most repressed desires remain culturally invisible – similar to how trauma is often silenced. Afrofuturism, due to its inherent imaginative aspects, though, makes visible what is culturally suppressed or invisible. In 2016, when *The Gilda Stories* was re-published on the occasion of its 25th birthday, vampirism enjoyed more publicity and attention than ever after its initial rise in the 20th century. The "vampire hype" emerged especially around bestsellers such as Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* and TV series such as *True Blood* and *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. One might ask, what constitutes the raised interest in vampirism? If we assume that the Jungian assumption that "myth is society's dream" is true, what is so appealing and worth dreaming about in the figure of the vampire? What does Jewelle Gomez, as an openly lesbian feminist, dream of when she writes about vampires? As J. Johnson points out, "part of the inherent metaphorical material in society's dreams of vampire narratives is social, and involves questions of social justice, power, exploitation, race, and class, as well as the more obvious gender conflict" (75) – all burning issues of societies throughout the world in the 21st century. Moreover, as J. Johnson hypothesizes, in Freud's terms, the vampire represents our repressed and forbidden desires:

> The sensation of horror, far from being the desired goal of our reading, is simply the price we pay in the economy of the unconscious, for thinking the unthinkable. But in [*The Gilda Stories* and other contemporary vampire narratives], what was socially or sexually unthinkable, what was therefore repressed, *becomes* desirable, becomes the norm, not only acceptable but utopian. The vampires … are not narrative Others but narrative selves, role models. (79; emphasis in original)

Veronica Hollinger rationalises that, in the postmodern days of deconstruction, vampires have come to represent "the monster-of-choice … since it is itself a deconstructive figure …. It is the monster that used to be human; it is the undead that used to be alive; it is the monster that *looks like us*" (201; emphasis in original).

By making her "monsters" even more human-like than traditional vampire figures, as they obey certain moral and ethical standards and do not kill senselessly, Gomez achieves something remarkable: through the genre conventions of Afrofuturism, she brings to the fore historically marginalized characters, cloaks them in power, but makes them accessible and desirable through their relatable life struggles and their moral convictions. Hence, through identification, the reader might start imagining a changed future, which might lead to the implementation of changes in the present. Additionally, as Kristen Doerer paraphrases Gomez, "genre writing is a great way to introduce controversial topics to her readers … in a way that is not controversial or didactic", as fiction has always been a powerful tool for cultural activism (Kovattana and Gomez 79). In *Gilda,* vampirism functions as the threat around which the novel's other provocative themes are set. Gomez writes that she "felt that speculative fiction had so much to show us about possibilities for social change and equality" (Gomez, "Of Afrofuturism"). She continues that "literature is an important political tool. It gets people thinking. They see vampires, but they are thinking about feminism" (Kovattana and Gomez 83). Thus, through the vampire trope, she has the ability to voice socio-political criticism and "comment on, revise, or reinscribe generic and socio-historical assumptions about race, gender, class, and sexuality" (Holmgren Troy 57). It comes as no surprise, then, that Gomez's protagonist is politically highly active as well – Gilda explains to Julius, for example, why a black theatre company gave up on its dreams:

> Most of the men we marched with ran out of liberation ideas. They had a big dream about black men being free, but that's as far as it went. They really didn't have a full vision – you know, women being free, Puerto Ricans being free, homosexuals being free. So things kind of folded in on top of themselves …. Gilda was surprised at the depth of her own feelings, about the disappointment she had seen on the faces of black women over the years. (GS 170)

In this scene, autobiographical similarities between Gilda and her inventor become rather obvious. Gomez herself admits: "I work extra hard to make sure that my work doesn't come across as exploitative, and to create characters that live up to the values that are core to me" (Gomez in Bond). Also, Holmgren Troy notices that "Gilda's and her author's projects appear to be very similar, especially when Gilda begins writing historical novels" (70). Gomez claims to be a lesbian feminist, living by the slogan "you have to first change your dreams to change the world" (San Francisco Public Library, 00:06:58). In her opinion, Afrofuturists imagine and dream of a better world, which is an endeavour she wants to spend her life with. She believes that issues of social justice and identity can best be addressed through black speculative arts, which offer diverse ways of creating meaning through the black imagination (00:16:28). She explains her political consciousness through her upbringing during the Civil Rights Movement: "Everything people were doing was an expression of liberation and opening up new worlds for blackness. Writing in a conscious way about being black and, as a feminist, about women and how women are placed in the world, made me more conscious about why I am doing it …. How we fight racism and sexism needs to be in our hands" (00:21:34). Gomez highlights that speculative fiction makes it possible for a large part of the population to find themselves and their politics. Genre fiction, being highly popular reading material in the 21st century, "can get away with telling a political story" (00:41:21), and as more people read it, they become increasingly conscious of their political surroundings and might make changes to their learned behaviour.

Gomez is of mixed heritage herself (GS 257) – her ancestors include Native Americans and African Americans (Bond). Her heritage as a diasporic subject can thus be characterized as hybrid. The hybrid figure of the vampire, who is half human and half supernatural, might thus have attracted Gomez due to its power, strength, and possibilities. But she also gives another personal reason for her fascination: in the afterword to the 2004 edition of *The Gilda Stories,* she recalls her early captivation by vampires such as Dracula and draws the link between her loneliness due to her parents' divorce and Dracula's hunt for a companion: she felt that "[she] was the only one who could understand Dracula's suffering", even though she was never "quite comfortable with the dead bodies that littered Dracula's path to fulfilment" (*The Gilda Stories* 2004, 256). Consequently, she explains, she felt the need to "excavate and reshape" traditional vampire conventions "before [she] could claim vampyres [sic] as [her] own" (257). In another instance, she confesses that "the challenge for me was to create a *new* mythology, to strip away the dogma that has shaped the vampire figure within the rather narrow Western, Caucasian expectation, and to create a heroic figure within a broader, more ancient cultural frame of reference" ("Recasting" 87-88; emphasis in original). One example of how Gomez promotes this endeavour is the fact that her vampires receive immortality by the intentional act of mixing blood: her characters become improved beings by being "mixed" or hybrid. Again, Gomez's vampires can metaphorically be read as standing for diasporic individuals and their distinct experiences of being caught "in-between", of hybridity and marginalization.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Gilda is considerably traumatized by her experiences in slavery, by the loss of her biological family, by war, and by ongoing discrimination and marginalization due to her race, gender, and sexuality, which evoke feelings of alienation and isolation. It is through active memory-work, in the form of counter-memory and actively forgetting, that Gilda, placed in the Afrodiasporic novel as an allegory for her community, is able to transform her traumatic memory, flashbacks, and haunting visions into active and continually healing remembrance. Moreover, through her chosen family and the loving memory of her deceased biological family, Gilda's feelings of isolation and alienation decrease tremendously. A framework of morals and values, symbolic tokens of reparative remembrance, and her literacy in the form of storytelling and writing, aid her in working through her traumatic past. Additionally, the cathartic effect of art, especially of music, theatre, and literature, through which she processes her experiences, paired with the healing factors of moving through different historical periods and cultural settings and the accompanying possibility for the adaption to certain roles in life, play a huge part in Gilda's healing process and contribute to the formation of her configured, multiple identity. For Gilda, as for every human being, final closure, a stable, fixed identity, and complete "wholeness" are not accessible. Thus, the novel outlines a diasporic approach to identity, which celebrates fluidity, multiplicity, and hybridity. Yet, in a hopeful manner, Gilda continually works on herself and through her traumas and, in doing this, is supported by like-minded people who form a close network of mutual support. In other words, it is through community and shared beliefs, rather than individualism, that Gilda can liberate herself from traumatic memory and depression. In deploying a distinctly Afrodiasporic

approach to trauma healing, which relies on rewriting, community, and a social network, spirituality and social activism, Gomez contributes to the broadened Afrodiasporic trauma theory I try to carve out in this dissertation.

I have shown that Gomez utilizes genre writing, more precisely the figure of the vampire, as a metaphor and platform for societal issues and traumatic conflicts concerning power relations in the form of race, gender, and sexuality. To give marginalized groups of people a voice and rewrite conventional history, thus feeding into a revised, Afrospeculative trauma theory, she reassesses and revises the gothic vampire figure in several crucial ways. Thus, she draws a counter-narrative, which deconstructs and revises traditional patriarchal, racist, and sexist conditions. The novel thereby reconceptualizes the ordinary horrors which are often not acknowledged to be horrific. It brings to the fore the everyday trauma experienced by marginalized groups of people in the form of contemporary slavery, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. Thus, *Gilda* confronts a silenced traumatic past by framing it into narrative, transforming the different histories of Afrodiasporic subjects into collective memory and shaping their trajectory for the future. It is hence a powerful document of resistance, survival, and textual healing for both Afrodiasporic people around the world, and for women, lesbians, transgender, and other historically and structurally marginalized human subjects in our contemporary societies. I have highlighted that in revising the traditional representations of black women in speculative fiction, especially in vampire fiction, Gomez points to invisible cultural conditions which need to be brought to light to ensure a better future. By displaying the vampire as a living memory of the past, she urges the reader to acknowledge the lingering effects of the past on the present, and to reassess the way society deals with this haunting past. The novel hence emphasizes the ongoing relation between past, present, and future. As I hope to have shown, vampirism in *The Gilda Stories* serves as a possible means for working through traumatic memory, not only for Gomez, but also for the reader and society as a whole. Thus, as Gomez's non-predatory, ethical vampires move once marginalized groups of society to the centre, I will give *Twilight*-author and literary godmother of nonviolent vampires, Stephenie Meyer, the final words here: "I'm with the vampires of course" (487).

Chapter Five:

Half or Double? – Trauma and Identity in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*

Introduction

The Icarus Girl (2005) is Helen Oyeyemi's first novel, which she completed during high school at the young age of 19. Haunted by loneliness and disruption, the story reflects on the role of identity and trauma in the realms of diaspora, immigration, and hybridity. Its main conflict revolves around seemingly unbridgeable binaries and the tension between the two cultural worlds the protagonist navigates. Deliberately remaining ambiguous about the interpretation of key concepts in the story, the novel intriguingly highlights the experience of immigrant and mixed-ethnic descent and its complex consequences within rigid social structures. With the help of speculative tropes, the novel reflects Afrodiasporic experience and allegorically alludes to and critiques the overriding binary worldview of Western society and modern perceptions of multiculturalism.

The Icarus Girl focuses on the eight-year-old, precocious Jessamy Harrison, called Jess,[22] who is the only daughter of a British father, Daniel, and a Nigerian mother, Sarah, living in London, and covers one year of her life, until she turns nine. In the narrative, the consequences of the familial constellation, her dual heritage, which the prepubescent Jess finds highly unsettling, and her uncertain belonging are mapped out. The protagonist is portrayed as having a troubled identity which manifests in hermetic, fearful, and often choleric behaviour. She also suffers from loneliness and desperately wishes for a friend to confide in. Her classmates bully her, and, in response to her frequent tantrums, assume that Jess "has all these 'attacks' because she can't make up her mind whether she's black or white" (*The Icarus Girl* 86; hereafter, I will refer to the novel as TIG). They label her as "*so weird*" (148; emphasis in original), tell her she is "one of those people who'll never be normal" (107) and that she will finally "end up in a mental hospital" (107). During Jess's first visit to her mother's family and her hometown Ibadan in Nigeria, the story veers into magical realism, richly drawing from Yoruban mythology. Under inexplicable circumstances, a girl named Titiola appears in Jess's grandfather's compound. Nobody except the imaginative Jess seems to be able to see her, and she soon becomes Jess's confidante and playmate. TillyTilly, the name Jess starts to call Titiola, exhibits supernatural powers, disappearing and reappearing out of nowhere not only in Nigeria, but also after the family has returned to England. TillyTilly reveals her knowledge about and introduces Jess to Fern, Jess's twin sister, who died during childbirth – a fact that had been kept from Jess by her family. Over the course of the story, what starts out as a friendship, seemingly uplifting the highly strung and fearful Jess, turns into a demonic, fraught fight over Jess's body, which TillyTilly tries to occupy. The entry of the destructive TillyTilly as a mythical

---

[22] Throughout the novel, Jessamy Harrison is called either "Jess", "Jessy" or "Wuraola", her Yoruban name. I mostly use "Jess" in this dissertation as the reader gets introduced to the character with this name on the first pages.

component into Jess's daily life, which becomes increasingly powerful and frightening, raises conflicts and tensions which often result in near-death experiences. As the story progresses, the omniscient narrator leaves the reader wondering whether TillyTilly is Fern's ghost, the result of the child's imagination in the form of an alter ego or doppelgänger, or the symptom of a mental disorder evoked by trauma. The novel ends ambiguously, having the reader imagine the most probable outcome.

In this chapter, I will outline two different ways of reading *The Icarus Girl*: A medical 'scientific' explanation for TillyTilly's appearance and Jess's unusual behaviour, and a Yoruban spiritual one. Negotiating the two perspectives by linking the narrative to Afrofuturist criticism, I will additionally suggest a third reading, which attends to Jess's hybrid status, and which dissolves the tension between an African spiritual and a Western 'scientific' explanatory framework for both Jess's precarious state and the nature of the character of TillyTilly. This reading especially emphasizes how Oyeyemi employs speculative tropes, especially supernatural, gothic elements, to portray the effects of the protagonist's life as a "half-and-half child" (TIG 13) – a hybrid figure. In bringing these two readings together, I will argue that by deliberately leaving the reader wondering about TillyTilly's nature, Oyeyemi highlights the necessity to rethink culturally determined assumptions about diasporic identities and trauma, thereby foregrounding the question about the nature of reality. In other words, I argue that by showcasing and critically engaging with racialized cultural hybridity in her work, Oyeyemi critiques binary thinking and racial and psychic normativity, instead pointing to the possibility of a configured identity which embraces multiplicity and fluidity. In critiquing simplistic binary and normative thinking, Oyeyemi writes a counter-narrative to historically male-centred Nigerian novels and unsettles Western trauma theory. Secondly, I will explore the meaning and intention of the novel's unresolved and ambiguous ending, which I read as a metaphor for the continuous process of configuring a human identity and healing of trauma. I further claim that Oyeyemi employs Afrofuturist elements in her narrative, such as the appearance of a supernatural, ghost-like character, to convey traumatic experience and, by denying the reader closure with an ambiguous ending, highlighting the haunting nature of trauma when it is not adequately dealt with. In doing so, Oyeyemi feeds into the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory being worked towards in this dissertation. Lastly, I will investigate Oyeyemi's reasons for including the trope of childhood twins to represent the experience of alienation of Afrodiasporic and diasporic individuals in Western societies.

The Protagonist's Precarious State: Sense of Self and Sense of Home

Jess's precarious state, which is at the core of the critical strategies *The Icarus Girl* has attracted, is associated in different ways with her culturally hybrid positioning. As outlined in Chapter Two, hybridity is a useful "slippery category" (Hutnyk 80) when engaging with Afrodiasporicity and individuals inhabiting two cultural spaces at once. Therefore, I will begin this chapter by outlining how this hybrid precarious state is conveyed through the novel's central motifs and forms, both in Jess's sense of Self and her sense of home. Early in the novel, Jess understands that her main struggle is being Nigerian and British simultaneously – in other words, being culturally mixed or hybrid. She tells her psychologist, Dr McKenzie, to whom her mother drags her due to her behavioural problems: "[Mum] wants me to be Nigerian or something. And I don't want to be changed

that way; I can't be. It might hurt" (TIG 257). The expressed fears of being painfully "stretched" (257) physically hint at her fear of her dual inheritance "expanding" her into something bigger than she can cope with. Thus, Jess is afraid that having multiple identities or Selves – being English and Nigerian simultaneously – and the respective consequences of this, might be painful, so she decides to identify with neither of them. Referring to herself as a "half-black person" (TIG 254), one could read her, as Sarah Ilott and Chloe Buckley do, as "uprooted and dislocated, identifying as British yet identified by some as Other due to her skin and Nigerian heritage" (TIG 403). As Ilott and Buckley further claim:

> This contested sense of identity centres upon the negotiation, transgression, and reinforcement of physical borders, from the national borders of Nigeria and the UK that have been rendered permeable through multiple waves of colonization and migration to the fleshy borders of her own body, which is allegorically figured as the battleground on which the fight for her national identity will be won. (407)

Indeed, as a consequence of Jess's dilemma, the bodily boundaries between Jess and TillyTilly, and the dead twin sister Fern become increasingly blurry throughout the plot. The more the characters painfully merge into one another, the more Jess finds negotiating her mixed heritage problematic and the more she disintegrates within "the stress of [her] split time and place" (Cooper 62). She contemplates: "Two of me. No, *us*. TillyTilly, JessJess, FernFern, but that's three. TillyTilly and JessFern? Or FernJess?" (TIG 251). These repetitive names account for the double, hybrid nature of the protagonists, Jessamy and Titiola. The fluid boundaries between the two girls result in Jess gradually disappearing, as she is taken over both physically and mentally by TillyTilly. She experiences this as a loss of being – exemplified when Dr McKenzie asks her, in Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical manner of probing her unconscious through language, to utter the first word that comes to her mind in response to a word he gives her. Jess's reaction to her own name is "gone" (TIG 130). Jess finds it especially hard to cope with her surplus names, which are a direct result of her dual heritage: her English name Jessamy, shortened by her family to "Jess", and her Yoruban name, Wuraola. Additionally, she is given a third, hybrid name by TillyTilly: Jessy. This dilemma sets the scene for later developments, as the very first word of the novel is "Jess?", the question mark effectively scrutinizing her identity. She perceives "the sound of her name [as] strange, wobbly, misformed, as if she were inside a bottle, or a glass cube, maybe, and Mum was outside it, tapping" (TIG 3). This image of isolation, of being confined in a space apart from the other human beings, further portrays her inner state of loneliness, alienation and not belonging. When her grandfather calls her Wuraola, she freezes, "not knowing what to say or do …. Wuraola sounded like another person. Not her at all. Should she answer to this name, and by doing so steal the identity of someone who belonged here? Should she … become Wuraola? But how?" (TIG 20). She starts to identify as at least two persons, thereby "misidentif[ying] her Yoruba heritage as Other" (Ilott and Buckley 407) and developing the fear of appropriating a space not meant for her. Surely by now, as Gunning rightly observes, "the first glimmers of a fragmented self begin to become manifest to the reader" (125). During a later conversation with her grandfather, Jess concludes that "he thought her name was Wuraola, but he was wrong" (28). She is not able to identify with the name Wuraola, finding no way of how to "become" her – she constructs half of her identity as Other, further fragmenting her Self. She emphasizes her concerns when she wonders "why her mum allowed some people to call her Sarah, and others to call her Adebisi" (TIG 21). In addition, when TillyTilly calls her Jessy, she suffers from a panic attack: "Jessy? The second time. This was the second time that someone had

called her something that she had never been called by anyone before. First Wuraola, now Jessy. She'd always been *Jess* or *Jessamy*, never a halfway thing like Jessy" (TIG 41). The third name further disturbs her sense of Self, reinforcing her feelings of being 'half' of a single coherent person. At first, it seems like Jess might be able to establish a hybrid identity which negotiates her nationally divided and contested subjectivity – TillyTilly and Jess "shed their given names in favour of hybrid adaptations, 'halfway things' of their own making" (Mafe 24). But Jess continues to feel constantly torn between two seemingly opposing identities, unable to reconcile her multiple selves into a coherent set of configured identities – which she seems to feel obligated and pressured to: "She just didn't know; if she could decide which one to be, maybe she would be able to get rid of TillyTilly, who was angry with her for worrying about it. Ashes and witnesses, homelands chopped into little pieces – she'd be English. No – she couldn't though. She'd be Nigerian. No –" (TIG 257). As Burnett puts it, "[o]ften modern day immigrants find they can never be fully accepted into their new home culture, yet that new culture changes them enough to at least partially alienate them from their birth culture" (Burnett, "Realist Fiction"). Paralleling immigrant or diasporic experience, Oyeyemi strongly marks her protagonist's cultural identity as ambiguous.

Jess's inner conflict and her struggle for an identity are metaphorically portrayed in the battle around her body. After TillyTilly violently infiltrates Jess for the first time, she feels stained and rejects her physical body. She prays: "Please take my skin, take my feet and my hips, because she's been in them and spoilt them and made them not work" (TIG 205). The wording Oyeyemi chooses strongly resembles how survivors of rape often express their feelings toward their bodies. *Arise Sexual Assault Services*, for example, state on their homepage that survivors of rape frequently "experience a sense of shame and some may feel that being sexually assaulted marks them or makes them dirty/soiled in some way".When Jess is taken over by TillyTilly once more, she "shed[s] her body as if it was merely some shell that the sea roars through" (TIG 304). This is, however, not to be read as a moment of self-recognition, but rather as the completion of her physical alienation, as Ilott and Buckley argue (413). TillyTilly invades Jess's body violently and contests these physical borders which Jess cannot overcome, thereby literally 'consuming' her from inside out and causing her tremendous pain.

These motifs of consumption and food are numerous in *The Icarus Girl*. Oyeyemi uses hunger metaphorically "for the transgression of borders and therefore the potential threat to personal identity" (Ilott and Buckley 408). Jess's grandfather indicates this when he warns her about TillyTilly consuming her: "Two hungry people should never make friends. If they do, they eat each other up. It is the same with one person who is hungry and another who is full: they cannot be real, real friends because the hungry one will eat the full one" (TIG 240). When Jess talks to TillyTilly later, she tells her: "I'm not full, but you're the hungry one" (243), which hints at both her fear of TillyTilly's gradual consumption, and a certain sense of incompleteness. Jess seems to be lacking something that TillyTilly at first promises. In another instance, when TillyTilly pulls her through the staircase and into the earth in Jess's home in England, she is forced to consume soil: "Jess felt earth push into her face and her mouth, and she *drank* it, as a vast amount of air whistled past her ears, and TillyTilly's hand fell away from hers, and she was standing, spitting out the dank taste of the soil" (148; emphasis in original). Jess physically rejects the land as part of herself, protecting her bodily boundaries against intrusion, thereby

"signalling her aversion to national(ist) claims to her body" (Ilott and Buckley 409). In line with the pervasive motive of consumption, Jess also shows several signs of having developed an eating disorder. Firstly, she declares that she cannot eat in front of strangers (TIG 88) – she covers her mouth while eating to hide it from others (140). As the story unfolds, her habits become more extreme, as she develops a fear of her food. The rice she is supposed to eat looks "too sharp somehow, like lots of little white knives pointing out in every direction. It smelt so nice, but she was scared that it would hurt to swallow" (196). Some scholars, such as Tamar Heller and Patricia Moran, have claimed that disordered eating hints at the relation of "female authority and female appetite" (3), as the mouth is associated with both eating and talking. Jess's fear of food can then, as Ilott and Buckley put it, "be read analogously as a fear of having her identity changed through the incorporation of outside influences" (408).

These outside influences become especially manifest on the plane to Nigeria, which would be Jess's first visit to her mother's family. She has a screaming fit and describes the precarious state of her sense of home: "It was Nigeria. That was the problem. Nigeria felt ugly. Nye. Jeer. Reee. Ah. It was looming out from across all the water and land that they had to cross in the aeroplane, reaching out for her with spindly arms made of dry, crackling grass like straw, wanting to pull her down against its beating heart, to the centre of the heat, so she would pop and crackle like marshmallow" (TIG 9). Being immediately confronted with her dual heritage, she personifies the country, which lovingly seems to reach out to embrace her. Feeling fearful, uprooted, and dislocated, though, she experiences this gesture as threatening. In her imagination, the country appears as "leering" (10), trying to burn and hurt her. It seems to mostly be Jess's fear of the unknown which stimulates these fears: despite being unusually bright and educated for her age – she recites *Hamlet* and writes her own poems – Jess "knows nothing about anything" in Nigeria (23): she cannot pronounce basic Yoruba words, and "couldn't say Titiola right" (282). This stands in sharp contrast to "her mother's fluency in both cultures" (Hron 36) and to her father, who eagerly tries to learn to speak Yoruba and cook traditional dishes. Jess, instead, rejects Nigerian culture and finds it disconcerting that both she – who is called *oyinbo*, 'stranger', at the airport by a man (TIG 17) – and her white father, are treated as outsiders: "the people milling around him all glanced pointedly at him as they passed …. The acknowledgement of an oddity" (12-13). She wonders whether the official checking their passports had been thinking "who is this woman, who has a Nigerian maiden name in a British passport, who stands here wearing denim shorts and a strappy yellow top, with a white man and a half-and-half child?" (13). In relation to this observation, Jess recollects another moment of estrangement: she thinks about England as a place where "people who stared at you would shift their eyes away with an embarrassed, smiling gesture if you stared back. England, where people didn't see you, where it was almost rude to, wrong to" (16). Even though the narrator does not explicitly link this staring to Jess's black skin, like the stares her father receives in Nigeria due to his white appearance, it is nevertheless highly plausible that its root might be racist. These two experiences reveal that being half-black and half-white simultaneously renders Jess Other in both Britain and Nigeria, separating her from both her father and her mother, thereby intriguingly echoing the struggle of diasporic individuals to find a place of belonging between cultures. This "placelessness" is further emphasized in her fascination with fairy-tales. She longs to know more about "the 'normal' fairy-tales that her mother omitted to tell her, the ones that always made her seem stupid when the

other kids talked about them and she didn't know them" (176). Her mother tells her the Yoruban stories, but Jess feels like she does not know enough about either Western and African stories to be able to decide where to place herself culturally: "What she needed was for the long-armed woman to tell her some simple story that could show her how to know the difference between leaving and being taken away, spellcaster or spellbound" (176).[23] As Jess blurs "the boundaries between colonizing self and colonized Other," *The Icarus Girl* thus "offers a … complex negotiation of identity in which self/Other and here/there oppositions are collapsed" (Ilott and Buckley 403). The novel is hence "profoundly diasporic" (Cuder-Domínguez 278), as it engages with recurring departures and arrivals, as well as feelings of dislocation, uprooted-ness, and "unhomeliness", Bhabha's word for the "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" (*The Location* 9).

'Home' is indeed an important concept in the novel, through which Jess's dislocation and alienation are additionally emphasized. As Rosemary Marangoly George defines it, 'home' is an "imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography" (11). The "little pieces" of the homeland Jess mentions (TIG 257) could symbolize her feelings towards having multiple countries of origin, none of them being completely "hers", and Jess oscillating between bits and pieces she can identify with for an instant. In the beginning of the novel, Jess frequently refers to England, the place where she was born and grows up, as 'home' (TIG 16; 41). Even TillyTilly seems to refer to England as Jess's home during her visit to Nigeria: "'Go home now,' she said, and Jess could tell by the way she said it that she didn't just mean 'go back to your grandfather's house' but also 'go back to England'" (76). Still, over the course of the novel, she does not feel 'at home' there, always under the impression that something is missing. When Jess realizes that she "wasn't *there* any more" (190; emphasis in original), she actually means that she is not at home in her home anymore, referring to what Rebecca Jones describes as her "increasing psychological discomfort, her increasing fear of TillyTilly, and her trouble reconciling her dual identities" (49). The strict boundaries of home that Jess has established for herself, values deeply, and tries to adhere to, crumble over the course of the story, highlighted especially through the fact that TillyTilly constantly intrudes into Jess's "home". She appears uninvited in the grandfather's compound and in London, and breaks into the grandfather's library, an amusement park and a classmate's house. No space seems to be safe from her invasion:

> Jess imagined feet walking upstairs, someone looking in the rooms. She was wondering if this was a situation like her dad had been talking about, an intruder situation … now Jess realized that she didn't like uninvited people …. The house had become a shadowy, empty space where people could come in and out if they wanted to, touch things, take things, lurk. (135)

Not even Jess's room is comforting anymore: "it was now a frightening place" (190). Jess's desire for the home to be a familiar space encompassing safety and family, while excluding the dangerous and the unknown, is shaken to the core. Thus, TillyTilly's intrusion into Jess's private space works as a metaphor for Jess's instability, the increasing estrangement and looming changes in her life. At the end of the novel, Jess concludes that she would never be able to decide which place, for her, resembled home: "It was a wilderness here and

---

[23] The long-armed woman is portrayed on a charcoal picture which Jess finds in the empty boy's quarters in her grandfather's compound in Nigeria. The figure starts to haunt Jess in her dreams when she is back in England.

Jess had been getting lost and beginning to despair that she'd ever find her way out until someone came and bore her away on their back, away, but still not home. Not home, never home, no" (TIG 319). TillyTilly had previously triggered that conviction in Jess, when she told her several times that she would never find 'home', as "[t]here is no homeland" (TIG 249; 250). The wilderness, into which Jess dissolves, thus represents the final state of homelessness.

By displaying the concept of 'home' as ambiguous, R. Jones argues, Oyeyemi "write[s] home as a place [her] character … can re-imagine to suit [her] sense of being different …. This sense of not being 'at home' is also productive and valuable, since it enables … Jess to interrogate [and re-imagine] the idea of home" (53). Taking this argument a step further, I read Oyeyemi's emphasis on the word 'home' as her critique of traditional boundaries and borders, which confines the concept of 'home' as a space that is in need of borders: in our world, England is England, and Nigeria is Nigeria. In this sense, Oyeyemi also investigates how not feeling at home in one's actual home subverts the hegemonies and ideologies surrounding the concept of 'home', thus re-imagining and re-writing it. Here, notions of transnationalism or Bhabha's 'third space – recalled in "the bush" or the "wilderness of the mind" in *The Icarus Girl* – enter the discourse: globally-located migrant identities "transcend national borders and … conceive of home as a mobile identity located in the spaces between places …. Through migrancy, home can be constituted as much in travel and the 'third space' as in fixed locations" (R. Jones 51). Similarly, Jess re-imagines home as transnational, when she pictures herself "'stretched' across her dual Nigerian and British identities and coming to rest somewhere between the two" (54). We do not have a language (yet) to express non-binary thinking. Instead, divisions between spaces define who we believe we 'are'. In this regard, one could read the figure of TillyTilly as a constant, even positive, reminder for Jess: "You always want to know where you belong, but you don't need to belong" (TIG 248). Similarly, in another scene TillyTilly tells Jess: "Stop looking to belong, half-and-half child" (250). Later, Jess recalls that TillyTilly "said it didn't matter about belonging, but it did" (249). Her fear of not belonging creates strong resistance to disidentification. In other words, she would rather remain in pain than risk losing her familiar, unhappy self by taking a leap into the unknown. TillyTilly asking Jess, "Do you suffer through making your own suffer?" supports this reading.

Stylistically, Oyeyemi highlights Jess's precarious state of hybridity through several features. On the level of language, she frequently uses the word 'half', which indicates Jess's incompleteness and disjointedness. In addition to being half-Nigerian and half-English, she is "half a twin" (TIG 293), having been divided at birth. Oyeyemi's motif of halving and doubling, which runs through the whole novel, is further convoluted by the motifs of migration, dislocation, and hybridity (Bryce 63). Jordan Stouck argues that Jess is both "excessive and lacking as a subject (excessive in that she is overly defined and lacking as she does not conform completely to any one definition)" (101). Indeed, she often perceives herself pessimistically as 'half' and incomplete, instead of viewing her twin Fern, TillyTilly, and her Nigerian heritage as a surplus or double. This sense of lack rather than excess is especially stimulated by her circumstances: she lacks stable peer relationships in the form of friends, and a sense of belonging and ease with herself. Additionally, society's tendency to categorize into binaries complicates Jess's life. In this sense, Oyeyemi's playing with halving and doubling recalls the

possibility of 'dual' or even multiple configured identities for diasporic Africans – an approach which Jess is not able to appropriate (yet).

Jess's increasing disintegration of mind is additionally represented in the form and style of the narrative as the novel progresses. An omniscient third-person narrator uses stream of consciousness to capture and express Jess's internal struggle, which manifests in episodes where she is incapable of forming coherent thoughts and act according to them. Oyeyemi uses bracketing for certain sentences that serve as parentheses, and italics for things that Jess thinks but does not verbally utter, as she cannot say them out loud. The further the narrative advances, the less coherent become Jess's streams of thought. Especially in episodes of infiltration by TillyTilly, and when Jess enters the wilderness, the narrative resembles a poem rather than prose:

> (she didn't hear the silent sister-girl telling her that it wasn't the right way, not the right way at all)
> And
> *hop,*
> *skip,*
> *jumped*
> Into Tilly's unyielding flesh as she clawed at Jess's presence,
> *(it hurt them both burningly)*
> Back into herself. (TIG 322)

Oyeyemi also plays with visual effects, for example when TillyTilly pulls Jess

> d
> o
> w
> n
> and *through* the staircase (146).

The letters' arrangement indicates the same direction as the word's meaning, metaphorically evoking Jess's downward spiral in both mental and physical terms, as the novel proceeds. Additionally, the split of the book into part I (Nigeria), II (England) and III (Nigeria) represents Jess's feeling of being divided, of separation and fragmentation. Like the chapter count restarting with '1' in all three parts of the novel instead of being numbered consecutively, Jess feels insurmountable incompatibility between her Yoruban and English identities and cannot integrate them into a continuous flow of configured identities. Finally, Oyeyemi further highlights the relevance of hybridity in Jess's case through intertextuality. When the daughter of Dr McKenzie, Shivs, visits Jess, she finds a volume of Lewis Carroll's works in Jess's room, which is bookmarked at *The Hunting of the Snark* (TIG 270). The snark, in Carroll's imagination, is a hybrid creature that is constantly switching roles – sometimes appearing as ferocious and scary, sometimes as completely harmless. It can therefore be read to metaphorically represent Jess's precarious state as a "half-and-half child" (TIG 13) and her ambiguity towards her sense of Self and sense of home, which is reinforced by TillyTilly's invasive presence.

The Trauma of Being 'Half'

The central features of this novelistic construction of a precarious Self correspond to broad definitions of trauma in medical discourse, as outlined in Chapter Two, where I also spell out that some trauma theorists have linked experiences of cultural hybridity to trauma, without making the former necessarily result in the

latter. Dave Gunning, for example, argues that immigrants or diasporic individuals can be, but not necessarily are, subjected to "the everyday trauma brought about by the struggles of living through the unsettling experience of diaspora and mixed-race identity" (125).[24] When building on this argument, it is important to note that not every immigrant or diasporic person *is* necessarily traumatized. Yet, considering Jess's behaviour analysed above, reading her suffering as a result of what could, in broad terms, be defined as trauma, is justified. Her existential dilemma then is rooted in two different kinds of traumas, both involving being 'half': being 'half-black' (or 'half-white') and being a 'half-twin'.

Firstly, she seems to unconsciously grieve the unprocessed loss of her twin sister, who died in childbirth – an event that she cannot remember. She feels a hole whose origin she cannot define: "I don't want to be weird and always thinking weird things and being scared, and I don't want to have something missing from me, and –" (TIG 122). In *The Lone Twin,* Joan Woodward shows that the loss of a twin either before, during, or shortly after birth can strongly affect the surviving twin and produce long-lasting emotional and psychic wounds. According to her studies, the surviving twin frequently 'knows' without having been told, that he or she had been a twin at birth. In her time as a psychiatrist, Woodward experienced that "these early losses are extremely deep, because the small child does not possess the faculty of talking about his or her experiences. Thus, we cannot with any certainty say what it is that has created the memory of the deceased twin" ("Losing"). In Jess's case, the memory of the deceased twin surfaces in the form of TillyTilly, who "tells" her about her sister. After Jess finds out about her lost twin, she strongly resents her family for not having told her about it and her feelings of incompleteness and of fragmentation are reinforced.

Secondly, and importantly, I suggest that Jess suffers from a trauma resulting from being a "half-and-half" (TIG 13), a hybrid child. Bhabha's definition of hybridity, which opens up a 'third space for immigrant and diasporic individuals, resonates with Oyeyemi's "wilderness of the mind" (TIG 191), the third world the Yoruban mythology proposes alongside the spirit and the human world. As a diasporic subject, Jess's state resembles the situation Bhabha's border subjectivities face: they are "*in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present" (*The Location* 219; emphasis in original), and thereby experience "unhomeliness", which describes "the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" (9). Thus, as a consequence of her dual heritage and hybridity, Jess suffers from what Bharati Mukherjee names the "trauma of self-transformation" (274). The complete adaptation to either or both her English and her Nigerian heritage is painful, as she has to grow personally to achieve it – and change and growth is almost always painful. It is in this sense, though, that I read Oyeyemi's overall employment of hybridity in *The Icarus Girl* as a catalyst for change.

---

[24] Regarding the term 'mixed-race', Phoenix and Owen point out: "The specific terms commonly used to describe people of mixed parentage, and sexual unions between black and white people, tend to pathologize those who cannot easily be fitted into the taken-for-granted racialized binary opposition. Thus 'halfcaste', 'mixed-race', 'bi-racial', 'maroon', 'mulatto' (from mule), and 'metis' (French for mongrel dog) all demonstrate essentialism and bipolar thinking" (74).

Tensions between Yoruban Spiritualism and Scientific Medical Explanations

The Icarus Girl does not provide easy answers to the following questions: how do we read Jess's troubled and precarious state? Is her invisible friend TillyTilly an alter ego, a figment of her vivid imagination, or the sad ghost of her dead twin sister Fern, residing in the mythical "wilderness of the mind" (TIG 191), the place where the narrator imagines dead twins go after their death? Is Jess mentally disturbed and in need of psychological help or is she haunted by a sinister spirit that can be exorcised by traditional Yoruban practices and rituals? Does Jess suffer from PTSD, dissociative disorder, bipolar disorder, or a mixture of the three due to her "identity crisis", or is a dangerous ghost troubling her because the traditional Nigerian Yoruban rituals relating to twins being born – and especially in the case of death of one of the two twins – were neglected? In other words, is the Afrofuturist novel to be read from a Western psychoanalytical and medical viewpoint or from an African angle, both of which are facilitated in the Afrofuturist novel? Or is there a third way of reading it, fitting into Oyeyemi's depiction of Jess as a diasporic subject who juggles a seemingly paradoxical tension? And on another level: is TillyTilly a symbolic manifestation of Yoruban myths about twins or a memento of an unresolved colonial history? These questions have been addressed by researchers extensively, especially as the possible answers imply entirely different readings of *The Icarus Girl*. In the following, I will outline the two most prominent readings of Jess's state, and of the character TillyTilly, along with my own reading and sharing my main observations, outlining the options and then attempting to move beyond this dichotomy. The following argument will focus on trauma in relation to the twin, which has become a focal point of the two critical strategies.

A Pathologizing 'Scientific' Reading

I will first turn to the more scientific and potentially pathologizing critical strategies of reading the protagonist's precarious Self. From this psycho-symbolic point of view, TillyTilly would not be actually physically 'real' but would stem from Jess's imagination. In parts, this reading is supported by several characters. The (predominantly Western) people surrounding Jess in England find numerous, quite diverse physical and psychological explanations for her condition: the malaria prophylactics and vaccinations before the family's trip to Nigeria (TIG 9) are one justification, her feeble health resulting in fever deliriums, another (55). Her teacher finds two more when she tells her: "I really don't know how much of your behaviour is precocity and how much of it is plain attention-seeking" (181). In classical psychoanalytical terms, one could argue that Jess lacks consistent role-models in her life, as her mother and grandfather, for example, are constantly torn between two cultures as well, and embody contradiction (TIG 26; 228; 307; 313). Gunning reasons in this way when he concludes that Jess's trauma "arises because of her unwillingness to [embrace this contradiction characteristic of the adult world] .... There is a persistent sense that her trauma, her symptoms and her 'cure' are all generated by the adult world into which she must be interpellated" (126). One could also interpret Jess's behaviour as bearing slightly autistic traits, as she has difficulties with eye contact and expressing emotions (TIG 4; 21), feels overwhelmed in social situations, seeks a high amount of personal space (such as the hours she spends alone in her room reading and annotating books, 59; 181), narrow or

extreme interests in specific topics (such as in her haiku writing phase, 7; 134), and the need for unvarying routine. Lastly, as Jess's psychologist Dr McKenzie points out, TillyTilly could also stem from her very vivid imagination as a child. This explanation is backed by studies by Marjorie Taylor et al., for example, who discovered that imaginary companions can help children cope with traumatic experiences. The possibility of Jess suffering from depression is also made plausible in the novel's very beginning, where Jess claims to be "tired" when asked why she is "sad", "though how she could be so tired in the middle of the day with the sun shining and everything, she didn't know" (4). Her dad, Daniel, who is diagnosed with depression, is constantly similarly tired (261). These justifications all seem plausible, but, as TillyTilly puts Jess and her surroundings in dangerous and even life-threatening situations, they are not sufficient.

Since TillyTilly's impact on Jess's life is extremely severe, the most plausible explanation from a Western perspective would be the reasoning that TillyTilly originates from one or several interacting psychological illnesses, which have their basis in Jess's trauma of dislocation and loss, such as Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD), dissociative disorder, and bipolar disorder. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America describes three main categories of how PTSD is most often experienced. Firstly, by "re-experiencing the trauma through intrusive distressing recollections of the event, flashbacks, and nightmares"; secondly, by "emotional numbness and avoidance of places, people, and activities that are reminders of the trauma"; and thirdly, by "increased arousal such as difficulty sleeping and concentrating, feeling jumpy, and being easily irritated and angered" (ADAA). As van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela state, "[t]rauma has been described as the 'undoing of the self', and as loss: loss of control, loss of one's identity, loss of the ability to remember, and loss of language to describe the horrific events" (vii). When applied to Jess's behaviour, one could argue that PTSD symptomizes in her as panic attacks and screaming fits, traumatic and dissociative amnesia or the regular struggle with and loss of memory, feelings of being overwhelmed and overstimulated, the inability to express her experience into language, and finally, the construction of an alter ego or doppelgänger as a substitute, who copes with the trauma instead of herself – the latter being a plausible explanation for TillyTilly's ghost-like existence.

Firstly, Jess frequently suffers from panic attacks and screaming fits: she "had calculated one weekend that on average she had at least one serious tantrum in school per week" (TIG 86). There is a pattern to her temper tantrums: she starts screaming when she feels like she cannot control the situation. Eurocentric trauma theory would read this as typical for trauma patients, as difficult situations remind the survivor of their original trauma. When Jess faces the uncomfortable situation of getting to know her Nigerian grandfather, for example, she "sensed herself on the edge of a screaming fit, already beginning to hear her breath coming faster than usual, feel the flat tightening at the bottom of her stomach" (21). Whenever she feels helpless and afraid, these psychotic outbreaks render her even more incapable of controlling her body and thoughts and leave her in what could be called a delirium – her mental state manifests physically.

Secondly, Jess's trauma manifests in regular memory loss. This traumatic amnesia already sets the scene for the novel on the first page, where Jess hides in her usual place of refuge, the cupboard, and where she has to confirm and affirm her own identity to herself constantly to be able to remember who she is:

> *I am in the cupboard.* She felt that she needed to be saying this so that it would be real. It was similar to her waking up and saying to herself, *My name is Jessamy. I am eight years old.* If she reminded herself that she was in the cupboard, she would know exactly where she was, something that was increasingly difficult each day. Jess found it easier not to remember, for example, that the cupboard she had hidden in was inside a detached house on Langtree Avenue (3, emphasis in original).

The cupboard becomes a metaphor for her consciousness, since she is defining herself while finding shelter there. As she perceives national spaces such as Nigeria and the UK as discomforting, she retreats to small, manageable, uncontested areas, which provide security: she "didn't like life outside the cupboard", a "place where everything moved past too fast, all colours, all people talking and wanting her to say things" (3). Here, one could argue that Jess shows posttraumatic symptoms of being overwhelmed and overstimulated by sensory input. As R. Jones claims, Jess's "struggle comes from an understanding of identity as similarly enclosed and exclusive [as the cupboard]" (53). It is consequently logical that Ilott and Buckley draw a parallel to the "closet" (407) here, hinting at Jess's inability or fear to express her emotions.

As analysed, Jess's trauma originally appeared when her twin sister died in childbirth, which she cannot remember, and only developed into a more severe form over time, as traumatic experiences piled up: "It couldn't be, it couldn't be. How could you forget being ripped away from your twin?" (292). The experience of losing her sister results in a state resembling Western conceptualizations of traumatic amnesia, for which Fern seems to be responsible, without Jess's conscious knowledge:

> It was a blessing, even if she didn't know it – the remembering of so many things that were her fault being drained away from her by her sister, who had promised to take care of her. Memories were burdens that took Jessamy through three worlds of hurt, the three worlds that only twins inhabit, and she was only half a twin. Yet even as she fell asleep, Jess was aware on some level that her memories were being moulded so that they were all different (293).

Fern "draining away" memories from her sister, which is characteristic of trauma, renders her the personification of trauma. Another observation feeds into the same argument: when Jess is, mostly involuntarily, "swapping" bodies with TillyTilly or being taken over, she cannot remember anything her own body says or does. The most extreme case of this selective memory occurs during the family's second visit to Nigeria, where the time span over which her memory loss stretches becomes the longest: "Later Jess could never remember the actual day of her ninth birthday" (302). Through the lens of PTSD, these episodes of amnesia could be read as periods in Jess's life where her traumatic memory overburdens her, and when her mind, in self-defence, switches off to protect her from further damage in an act of dissociation.

Thirdly, Jess's inability to choose her identity is strongly linked to language, and the loss thereof. She often struggles to answer questions or only replies in her head (284). Frequently, she feels obligated to "say things" (4) even though she does not want to, so she just resorts to silence. Consequently, her mother describes her as a girl who "ha[s] nothing to say for herself" (5). During one of her visions involving the loss of speech, "the searingly, impossibly hot coal that she pressed to her mouth was burning not only her lips and fingers, but, it seemed, every inch of her by association" (186). In another, TillyTilly's lips "moved over a small, mauve stump; the remains of a *tongue"* (250; emphasis in original). From a Freudian interpretation of dreams, her nightmare, confronting her with mutilated organs of speech, could metaphorically portray her inability to express her feelings, her fears, and her distressing memories. Her behaviour resembles what trauma survivors

often describe as the incapability of articulating their experience, as the experience of trauma is "unspeakable" (Stocks 78; van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela xi; Herman 179). From this perspective, "Jess's screaming and silence thus signify the inarticulability of her experience, the fact that her world, her multiplicity is not always describable" (Stouck 104). But Jess's difficulties concerning oral expression are not only mental. Physically, she seems to be in fragile health and regularly succumbs to "that peculiar febrile illness of hers", which includes inexplicable fever attacks: "Then … came the inevitable fever, the whites of her eyes tinged pink, her head lolling dejectedly on her pillow, her fingers limp as if the bones in them had evaporated. She mumbled, made small sounds, like singing noises, broken songs, because when she was ill she could never speak properly" (TIG 80). During her fever episodes, Jess feels that "something was the matter with her tongue; it felt far too big for her mouth and made flaccid, flapping movements against her bottom row of teeth and her lips" (165). Her humming and singing are referred to as "her illness-singing sounds" (165). In Western trauma theory, these symptoms, resulting from trauma, could be read as being of a psychosomatic nature. When she is afraid of the snake in the zoo in Nigeria, Jess invents a third, personal language: she speaks "in some loose gabbling language that was born from her fear" (30). In another instance, she seems to be unable to control her words, "spitting [them out] like blades to hurt …. She didn't know how to stop" (246). Her anxiety in the face of the unknown could thus be at the root of Jess imagining TillyTilly as a form of hallucination which takes over not only her physical body, but also her thoughts and language. In this sense, TillyTilly would then be a symptom of the physically paralyzing dread Jess experiences in the aftermath of traumatic loss and hybridity.

Madelaine Hron suggests that Jess might also suffer from bipolar disorder, thereby reading TillyTilly as a "signifier of Jess's precarious postcolonial condition" (38). According to Western trauma theory, a patient suffering from bipolar disorder undergoes drastic and disruptive changes in mood, "characterized by alternating manic and depressive periods" (37-38). This bears resemblance to TillyTilly, who, if read as Jess's own alter ego, switches opinions and ideas as fast as Jess's emotional state: "Jess sighed, too tired to keep up with Tilly's change of mood" (TIG 189). Brenda Cooper underlines the theory of Jess having a bipolar disorder when she states that "the performance of multiple identities is hazardous and may result in the loss of sanity altogether or in suicide" (55). An alternative or even supplementary explanation is provided by Dr McKenzie, who diagnoses Jess with a light form of dissociative identity disorder (DID), the "creation of multiple selves in response to a traumatic event" (TIG 129), as he expresses it. It is important to note that Dr McKenzie believes that Jess indeed has been traumatized, and that her state is symptomatic of this traumatic experience. He explains the possibility that TillyTilly is either an alter ego or an internalised imaginary companion: he theorizes that, in need of an outlet for emotions which she cannot show, Jess has created "a personality that is very markedly different from her own" (276-77), which emerges when she is scared or angry. In other words, he essentially reads TillyTilly as a mirror double. Gunning notes that "the manifestation of this alter ego might be related to Jess's difficulty in accepting her mother's characterization of her dual self" (125). He is referring to Sarah telling Jess: "It's not a matter of my wanting you to be Nigerian – you are, you just are!'… You're English too, duh. And it's OK" (TIG 242). But this, for Jess, is contradictory and irreconcilable. Jess represses her memory, her anger, and her fear, which results in the appearance of an alternative personality who lives out the repressed emotions. Jess silences these aspects to an extent that she cannot even remember whole

episodes of her life. In the moments when she is conscious, though, feelings of guilt befall her, and she tries to make amends for her earlier, trance-like behaviour. Until the novel's ending, it seems like Jess cannot assume responsibility for her actions and accept her emotions. Dr McKenzie seems to hint in a similar direction when he points out that "sometimes we do things that we don't like and that we can't understand, Jess. It's possible that all TillyTilly means is that part of your mind, say, the part of you that can show you're angry in a reasonable way, hasn't developed as quickly as other parts, like the part of you that likes reading lots of books" (TIG 277). Sarah is torn between wanting to believe Dr McKenzie and giving way to the beliefs she inherited through her Yoruban upbringing: "So you mean … when Jess screams, and when she breaks things, that's a side of her that she calls TillyTilly? … My father would die laughing" (277). DID is defined, according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, as the "disruption of identity characterized by two or more distinct personality states, which may be described in some cultures as an experience of possession" (American Psychiatric Association 155). For Sarah, in contrast to Dr McKenzie, the second part of the definition – an alternative illustrative framework – seems to be more plausible. Accordingly, Jess's grandfather ascribes the horrifying circumstances that scare both Jess and her parents to spirit possession.

I have shown that *The Icarus Girl* both includes and affords a scientific, yet pathologizing reading of Jess's precarious state. From this Western psychological and medical perspective, she has been severely traumatized by a dual identity and might, either additionally or evoked by the trauma, suffer from one or more of the mental illnesses described above . Yet, it also allows for alternative constructions of Jess's Self. A purely 'scientific' reading cannot effectively and ethically be used to understand hybridity and the complexity and nuances of living as a diasporic subject. The Western psychological perspective alone is not sufficient in explaining a diasporic or hybrid subject. Simply ascribing Jess's behaviour and TillyTilly's appearance to individual trauma is simplistic and flawed, especially in light of the socio-political realities of a world rooted in binaries and dualisms, inclusions and exclusions, which have a major impact on Jess's experiences of trauma and dislocation. Oyeyemi especially critiques this overriding binary worldview of Western society through Jess's family. In contrast to dominant parts of society, Jess's family embraces the seeming contradiction and overcomes binaries on several levels. Sarah, for example, refuses the Christian belief system as Jesus is always portrayed as a white male with whom she cannot identify (TIG 228), but she loves her British husband and continues studying Western culture at university: she changes her subject from medicine to English literature, the latter which her father rejects as "words describing white people, white things, every single story spun out in some place where *we* don't exist" (26; emphasis in original). The grandfather insists on Christian obedience and urges his daughter to pray to Jesus (307), but turns to Yoruban spiritual beliefs and a traditional "witch doctor" when problems arise (313). Her family demands of Jess to "internalize contradiction" (Gunning 126). I thus suggest that Jess's subjectivity, her "psychological condition", might be understood as a reaction to the normative politics of difference; the dualisms that prominent discourse creates to sustain certain ideas, for example of home, our place of comfort. Thus, in the same vein, Oyeyemi voices critical concerns on Eurocentric trauma theory's problematic focus on the individual, on psychic normativity and, "the simultaneous search for a particular traumatic event to explain subsequent symptoms" (Gunning 121) instead of considering "problems that are essentially political, social, or economic" (Craps 28). As Craps observes,

problems rooted in society are often "medicalized, and the people affected by them are pathologized as victims without agency, sufferers from an illness that can be cured through psychological counselling" (28). Effectively decolonizing Western trauma theory, Oyeyemi thus challenges Westernized language, notions and attempts to make meaning of trauma in offering an alternative explanatory framework emphasizing localized modes of belief and thus feeding into the Afrodiasporic trauma theory being carved out in this dissertation. As I will show in the next section, she refuses to accept a "traumatic reality 'behind' the text" by utilizing spirit possession as a "counter-trope" to a "Western" view to show the deficiency of both (Gunning 130). Stocks sees the source of the problem "in the typical psychoanalytical conception of the unified autonomous self as the model of healthy mental functioning. This valorisation of the individual ensures … that current conceptions of trauma are unable to deal usefully with cultures that operate with a more communally based notion of selfhood, as well as those for whom division is a lived reality" (Stocks in Gunning 120). Thus, in the same vein, Oyeyemi's novel functions as a critique on modern perceptions of multiculturalism and hybridity. As Tariq Modood states, the problem with multicultural diversity, and therefore with Jess's Self, is that "it constitute[s] not just some form of distinctiveness but a form of alienness or inferiority that diminishes or makes difficult equal membership in the wider society" (37). Thus, Jess's feelings of alienation and disruption stem from the common assumption that hybrid and multicultural subjects are not capable of having a fixed or given identity – which is, of course, not only true for multicultural and hybrid subjects, but for everybody. As spelt out several times in this dissertation, the concept of a fixed identity has long been dismissed in research on identity formation and replaced by the notion of a configured identity or assemblage. Thus, hybridization and multiplicity in *The Icarus Girl* serve as a tool for counteracting the common perception of the necessity and even possibility of a fixed and lifelong identity, rather suggesting that having a multiple and configured identity does not mean that the subject cannot be what is generally considered as "whole" or "healthy". *The Icarus Girl* serves as a reminder that the world is full of unresolvable contradictions and the necessity of accepting this fact: life is messy, and consequently, identity formation is messy, too. Instead of perpetuating the ideological belief in a single, stable, and coherent identity, it is the "recognition of this duality, rather than its reparation, that constitutes the crucial step toward liberty" (Gunning 121). Oyeyemi critiques Western trauma theory by implying the possibility of a "healthy multiplicity": "While the divided self may not be entirely unproblematic, the trauma theorists are inherently unable to reconcile multiplicity with mental health and their insistence on a return to an original state of psychic unity is at odds with the realisation and acceptance of duality that emerges as a result of liberation" (Stocks 86). There is no final closure to the world. Sometimes, though, certain conditions are not contradictory but a matter of perspective. I therefore would like to emphasize Malcolm Bull's view, who explains that

> [t]here is … a potential tension between treating the self holistically, in all its historical, social and interpretative complexity, and treating the self as a single, coherent unit. Not only does the former not necessarily imply the latter, it may make it more, not less difficult to keep the self intact. If, for any historical or social reason, personal identities are interpreted or constructed in terms that imply duality or multiplicity, then even if there is continuity of self-consciousness the self must be understood in correspondingly multiple terms. (261).

Bull further argues that the problem of recognition of these multiple identities is the necessary and fundamental step towards freedom and liberation. In this sense, Oyeyemi productively subverts and expands Du Bois's

inherently dualistic notion of the African American and Afrodiasporic 'double consciousness'. As Christopher Ouma clarifies, "as a diasporic subject, Jess's consciousness is not just double …; rather, it is a *multiple consciousness*" (200; emphasis in original), as she is constantly journeying between Nigeria, England, the spiritual world, the "wilderness of the mind "and the 'real' world her parents live in, thereby "blurring [the] boundaries between real and imagined images and bodies" (200). This multiple consciousness is portrayed as destructive, though. According to Du Bois, the inner conflict of being torn between cultures results in "either an enriched, amplified sense of self or else in a schizophrenic, thwarted identity" (Cuder-Domínguez 280). One could read the novel as implying that in Jess's case, the second option surfaces. Jess's multiplicity drives her to self-destruction, as she is not capable of reconciling her inner differences in a productive way. This state should not be read as an isolated, individual medical case, though, as it is rooted in limiting societal and political belief systems.

The Yoruban Spiritual Perspective: *ibeji* and *abiku* Myths

Reading Jess's precarious state from a Western medical perspective renders Jess a patient of depression and various psychological illnesses and TillyTilly a product of her vivid imagination. Thus, several critics discussing the novel have followed suit. As outlined as well, this reading is limiting, especially because it pathologizes and victimizes the protagonist. It is not sufficient in explaining a subject who is hybrid. Moreover, a purely psychological reading cannot account for several aspects of TillyTilly's nature. In the following, I will therefore outline an alternative reading of *The Icarus Girl.*

In many parts of the narrative, TillyTilly is portrayed as more than just an illusion. Throughout the plot, the reader is left to wonder if the bad things happening are committed by Jess or by TillyTilly – which depends on whether one reads the character of TillyTilly as an imaginative alter ego or as an actual existent spirit, manifest due to neglected twin traditions: among them are a smashed mirror, a broken computer, Jess's only friend Siobhan being pushed down the stairs, and the inexplicable illnesses of Daniel and the teacher Miss Patel, whom Jess claims to hate. All these events occur when Jess is extremely angry or disappointed by someone. Yet, even if one reads her as the culprit, she seems to have acted unconsciously, as she wonders whether she really would have been capable of committing these deeds, scrutinizing both her physical and her psychological abilities, as well as TillyTilly's existence. She reaches the conclusion that "the trouble was that, with TillyTilly, it was possible. Possible, but not true" (278). Oyeyemi reveals that Jess is responsible for Siobhan's fall, which Jess seems to remember after a while: "Siobhan had not been dancing, but rolling, bump bump bump, from upstairs to down, terrible, she shouldn't have pushed her, why had she pushed her?" (293). Similarly, Jess seems to be culpable for Daniel's and Miss Patel's state – people whom TillyTilly "gets" for Jess: "Tilly didn't need to remind Jess that she only got people on Jess's instruction, and Jess knew that the fact she could never remember being angry enough for that meant only that she didn't want to remember" (267). But Jess does not – no mortal being on earth does – have the actual physical power to render another person depressed or insane. Siobhan realizes this quicker than Jess: "Listen, how silly is it that you think you did it? Think about it... duh!" (267). She wonders herself: "But if it wasn't her fault, was it Tilly's? And if it

wasn't Tilly's fault, was it hers?" (183). Reading the story in this sense requires asking how much responsibility can be ascribed to an eight-year-old girl at all.

By instilling the vision of a baby, TillyTilly reveals the story of Jess's dead twin sister: "There were two of you born, just like there were two of me. The other one of you died… You have had no one to walk your three worlds with you" (169-70). When Jess learns about her dead twin sister Fern, this knowledge is provided by TillyTilly. In realist terms, there is no scientifically explicable way (yet) that Jess could have come up with that knowledge herself (cf. Taylor et al.). Instead, Yoruban mythology provides an explanation, as Cooper articulates: "At the core of the novel's magic is its genuine belief that th[e] neglect [of an *ibeji* statue] may account for much of Jessamy's dislocation [and maladjustment]" (54). An *ibeji* carving, operating as an idealized representation of the late person, is extremely important for twins in Yoruban mythology, as Sarah explains to Jess (TIG 191-192). The deceased twin is honoured by the statue, which contains its soul, and subsequently does not return for revenge. Instead, it preserves the surviving twin's link to our human world (Stouck 102). It is believed that if the *ibeji* statue is not carved, "the wrath of the slighted twin will trouble the survivor with nightmares and even cause death" (Thompson 11). Taiwo Oruene explains that this practice evolved from "the belief that twins possess one soul between the two of them, and with the death of one, the twin could not be expected to live with half a soul" (209-10). Fernand Leroy et al. clarify that in traditional African societies, twins were believed to originate from another world, and aroused "emotional reactions oscillating from fear and repugnance to hope and joy" (134). These ambiguous feelings are represented in Jess's changing emotions towards TillyTilly and her vacillating relationship with her mother, which becomes increasingly unsettled throughout the plot. Dr McKenzie asks Jess whether she is scared of her mum and he seems to hit a sensitive nerve, as she confusedly answers that she does not know (TIG 256). After Jess finds out about her dead sister Fern, the mother-daughter-relationship becomes almost hostile. When her mother enters her room, Jess flinches "in a flurry of bedding, nearly falling from her mattress in her gesture of avoidance" (172), afraid that Sarah might kill her, as she supposes her mother killed Fern. "*It's Mummy, it's Mummy. She's not going to – she won't*" (172; emphasis in original), she reassures herself. Sarah is similarly afraid of her daughter, sobbing uncontrollably, calling her a "witch" (174).

Closely related to the *ibeji* belief in Yoruban mythology is the *abiku* – a spirit child with supernatural powers who is trapped between different dimensions (Hron 28). *Abiku* actually belong to the spirit world and try to return there constantly. Hron explains that this "evil spirit reincarnates in children and causes them to gradually waste away and die without apparent cause" (38). Either TillyTilly or Jess, or both, might be *abiku,* in this regard. Sarah explains the concept to Daniel in her own words after Jess reveals her knowledge about her dead sister Fern, which she could not have acquired anywhere except from a spirit:

> [Jess] knows about her. I don't know how she knows. She's like a witch; she doesn't even look right… Her eyes –… They know! THEY ALWAYS KNOW! Twins … they always … Oh my God … she's like a witch … Three worlds! Jess lives in three worlds. She lives in this world, and she lives in the spirit world, and she lives in the Bush. She's *abiku*, she always would have known! The spirits tell her things. Fern tells her things. We should've … we should've d-d-done *ibeji* carving for her! (TIG 174)

As Jess lost her twin, she has "no one to walk [her] three worlds with [her]" (170). The concepts of *ibeji* and *abiku* both suggest, Ouma argues, that Jess "is vicariously living the life of her dead twin, Fern – which is to

114

say, that she lives within multiple cosmologies and is constructed in an intra-mythological framework" (197). This mythological framework is drawn from the cosmological view that all living beings are firmly rooted in a "cosmic totality", inextricably linking everything into a "cosmic consciousness" (Soyinka 3), which reaches across generations and which is shared by the living, who are regularly visited by spirits and reincarnations of ancestors and the yet unborn. Through the Yoruban mythological framework, which is interwoven in the narrative of *The Icarus Girl* and which revolves around twins and *abiku*, Jess's feelings of lack and incompleteness can then be explained by the missing twin and the spiritual beliefs surrounding it. In this sense, Oyeyemi contributes to the distinctly Afrodiasporic approach to trauma and its healing which is fleshed out in this dissertation.

Afrofuturist genre conventions would allow for this spiritual reading. Oyeyemi's work follows certain conventions of speculative fiction – especially of gothic fiction – which hint at the existence of supernaturalism in the text. The reading of TillyTilly as a haunting African spirit seeking revenge is firstly supported by the epigraphic poem by Emily Dickinson, which sets the ghostly and gothic frame of the novel, and underlines TillyTilly's appearance as a spirit, instead of as an imaginary friend. The quote already points to the story's supernatural and paranormal elements, and the theme of loneliness:

> Alone I cannot be –
> For Hosts do visit me –
> Recordless company...

Additionally, gothic tropes and descriptions of ghosts are frequent in the novel. TillyTilly is often portrayed as having a "cold body" (TIG 170) and emanating a "wet, rotting vegetation smell" (248). She also hints at her own immortality, when she says, "I'm older than you a lot" (118). The most compelling evidence for TillyTilly's "actual" existence as a ghost, though, is the fact that Shivs, an independent outsider, can indeed feel her when she is in the room. She experiences her as "a constantly moving coldness", radiating "badness" (272), and causing a physical reaction: "it was like being sick and hearing rattling in your ears that wasn't really there, it was slow, bottomless, soundless, creeping … and it wasn't just inside her stomach, but inside her head as well, slowly building in pressure" (272). Shivs concludes that "this was not the kind of imaginary friend that you'd mistakenly sit on. She was a cycle of glacial ice" (272). Additionally, TillyTilly slams the door while Jess sits next to Shivs, placing her hand on her head for evidence that she is not shutting the door herself (271). Jess's Yoruban grandfather can sense TillyTilly's ghostly presence as well. When TillyTilly takes possession of Jess's body on her ninth birthday, she can suddenly speak Yoruba fluently. The grandfather seems to instantly recognize that it cannot be Jess who operates her body. He tells the ghost: "O ya, stop that, now" (305), and subsequently tries to convince Jess's parents of the necessity of a witch doctor. Even Sarah realizes that Jess is not quite herself and that her voice sounds different (306), but she rather escapes the situation by taking Jess to Lagos, instead of facing her options.

However, the African spiritual explanatory framework is also not able to account for all ambiguities. Even when reading TillyTilly as the result of neglected twin rituals, it remains unclear whether she is Fern's spirit, her impersonator, another personification of the long-armed woman, the *ibeji* goddess, or an independent ghost who either lost her own twin sister or is the dead twin sister of another living girl. She seems to embody

different consciousnesses depending on the situation. In the story, it is suggested that she is neither Fern nor Fern's spirit, but rather lost a twin herself: "TillyTilly is not Fern, but a separate malevolent spirit, and no real justification is given for why she torments Jess" (Gunning 125). She confesses: "I have been just like you for such a long time! But now I am Fern, I am your sister, and you are my twin …. I'll look after you, Jessy" (TIG 170). As Stouck reads this passage, TillyTilly "takes advantage of Jess's loss to substitute herself for Fern" (102) – a reading which also points at TillyTilly's independence from Jess's imagination. The most probable explanation is that TillyTilly's "true form" is the long-armed woman Jess encounters as a drawing on a wall in the deserted building in her grandfather's compound in Nigeria (TIG 74) – the representation of an *ibeji* carving, as Jess discovers, when she first sees one in a book her mother shows her (193). Jess "knew, now, that TillyTilly and the long-armed woman were somehow the same person, like the two sides of a thin coin" (167). The woman tells Jess in one of her dreams: "'*We are the same,' said the long-armed woman, as she flew away. She wasn't speaking in English, and it wasn't Yoruba either. 'Yes,' said Jessamy. 'Yes.'*" (103; emphasis in original). By "the same", she refers to what TillyTilly will explain to Jess later: "You have been so empty, Jessy, without your twin; you have had no one to walk your three worlds with you. I know – I am the same" (170). Jess herself is confused when it comes to TillyTilly's nature: One time she states that "[t]he worst thing was that it was all really happening" (250); another time she hopes that "surely her mother had figured out that TillyTilly wasn't properly real?" (184) and exclaims that "she's not real, but it's a secret" (160). She oscillates between the two different explanatory frameworks outlined above. Sometimes, she questions her own sanity, for example during a session with her psychologist: "'You know you're wrong, don't you?' Jess informed Dr McKenzie, as grandly as she could. But her knees were jiggling up and down with fear. Oh God, what if he was right and she was just this mad, mad girl who did things that she couldn't control?" (277). She fears that "*something is really wrong with me*. Other kids didn't do this sort of stuff, she was sure, even if they were twins" (180; emphasis in original). In other instances, though, Jess seems to be inclined to believe that TillyTilly is indeed a ghost. Yet, when she confronts her directly, TillyTilly clearly states that she is not a ghost in the traditional sense (291-92). TillyTilly admits that she is neither the product of Jess's imagination nor a part of the human world, when Jess desperately begs her to tell her what she actually is: "Jessy, you guessed without me explaining that I'm … that I'm not really here. I mean, of course I'm really here, just not really really here, if you see what I mean … Most of the time I'm somewhere else, but I can appear, and you haven't imagined me! Remember Colleen's house? And the amusement park? You know you couldn't have imagined those!" (166). Thus, the girls seem to agree on TillyTilly's status as something which is, on the one hand, "real", but, on the other hand, not "really really" or "properly" here. Jess seems to be able to accept that paradox, as she lives in a world where things *become* real when she perceives them to be 'real' (R. Jones 45; emphasis in original). This reading is underlined when considering that Jess is sceptical of explanations in general: "With her mother, it always seemed to be about reasons. Why, why, why? Didn't she know that knowing why didn't make things any less scary?" (169). Oyeyemi here seems to advocate against the constant necessity for reasonable or scientific explanations that pervades Western societies. Finally, Jess concludes that "Dr. McKenzie thought that he knew what TillyTilly meant, but he was wrong. Nobody knew what Tilly meant, and nobody knew what Jess meant either, though with Jess, they could if they really wanted

to" (278). Not regarding the multiple explanatory possibilities for TillyTilly's (non-)existence as a mental product or a haunting spirit, I agree with Ouma, who claims that TillyTilly "represents a silenced, hidden, and traumatic past – a heritage that haunts Jess from a life before birth at the continuum between the birth and death of her fellow twin, Fern" (199). That TillyTilly represents an unresolved past does in fact allow for both the medical and the spiritual explanation of Jess's precarious state.

As outlined above, the novel's main conflict lies between Jess's diagnosis with DID, PTSD or bipolar disorder by her psychiatrist, and her identity as an *abiku,* a Yoruban spirit child, both rooted in the presupposition that Jess has been traumatized. Juxtaposing Eurocentric and African views, the possibility of either a Western psychological disorder or a Yoruban spirit possession in *The Icarus Girl* then means that the reader's cultural norms can lead to different assumptions about Jess's precarious state. Ouma elaborates that "the *abiku* clearly comes from a distinct collective history, a phenomenon that applies to a specific Yoruban collectivity. DID and its diagnostic history also come from a distinct and racialized collectivity but have since been projected onto a universalized individuality" (189). Depending on the cultural background of the reader, different assumptions might be drawn. Thus, a definite conclusion favouring one of the two dichotomous positions is not reachable. Instead of committing to the authenticity of either of the two options, Oyeyemi skilfully weaves together the Western discourse around personality disorders with the twinning mythology of Yoruban cosmology in *The Icarus Girl* – a discrepancy which parallels Jess's location of experience, and Oyeyemi's own cultural background as an immigrant to Britain. Physically, both Jess and Oyeyemi grew up in England, but psychically and mythically, they are influenced by Africa. I therefore suggest that a hybrid author and a hybrid protagonist require a hybrid reading of the novel. The possibility for both viewpoints, the Western and the African, to be at least partially true is emphasized by Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong: "The double is symptomatic of a crisis in self-acceptance and self-knowledge: part of the self, denied recognition by the conscious ego, emerges as an external figure exerting a hold over the protagonist that seems disproportionate to provocation or inexplicable by everyday logic" (82). Similarly, Jane Bryce argues that "[w]here there is no homeland, inhabitation becomes the painful alternative: denied the right of 'belonging,' ghostly presences and haunting are intrinsic to the diasporic condition" (64). By mixing a variety of supposedly conflicting cultural references and reading possibilities, which include Yoruban animism and Western psychoanalysis as well as realism and gothic fantasy, Oyeyemi expresses Jess's multiplicity as an outcome of her own hybrid subjectivity. The novel represents hybridity – as Jess does. Accepting the paradox of two seemingly conflicting interpretive regimes, I agree with Pilar Cuder-Domínguez, who concludes that TillyTilly is a "'racial shadow', that is … a truly Nigerian child that compensates for a diasporan subject's feelings of inadequacy and lack of ethnicity" (283).[25]

---

[25] The novel's main concerns are mirrored in its genre, which has been heatedly debated. One has to position the novel's genre within an ambiguous space, caught between realism and the fantastic, and between socially induced illness and mythology. This is consistent with my argument above, which states that both Jess's state, TillyTilly's nature and *The Icarus Girl* itself cannot be readily pigeonholed and classified into normative categories but are as hybrid as Oyeyemi, the daughter of a Nigerian immigrant to the UK, herself.

Ultimately, *The Icarus Girl* critically engages with hybridity, which manifests not only in the novel's genre but also in the mixed heritage of her protagonist and in the manifold ways of reading her doppelgänger, to critique the popular postulation that hybridity requires "an anterior 'pure' which precedes mixture" (Hutnyk 81). This includes the dualism of "pure/mixed", with 'pure' relying "upon the proposition of non-hybridity or some kind of normative insurance" (82). I read Jess's grappling with her identity formation and denial of her mixed heritage as Oyeyemi's critique of the concept of hybridity or multiculturalism. I hence argue that *The Icarus Girl* works towards the disillusionment and disruption of the concept of ethnic purity, replacing it with the possibility of shaking off the yoke of culturally constructed dualisms. Therefore, I read Jess's major concern with being "mixed" as social critique, as the problem is socially constructed. Whole nations, such as Britain, could be transformed through literary works such as *The Icarus Girl* as it offers a wider range of possibilities for identification.

Final Take-Over: Reading the Unresolved Ending in a Negative Light

Over the last few pages of the novel, Oyeyemi describes what seems like Jess's final battle against TillyTilly, who has taken over her physical body. Lying in a hospital bed after a car accident which leaves her in a coma, she tries to regain control over both her body and mind through battling against TillyTilly in the "wilderness of the mind" (TIG 191) – which resembles a dreamlike journey. *The Icarus Girl's* ending is open and ambiguous – as Ilott and Buckley put it, it "resists a redemptive or cathartic ending" (402). Can Jess finally accept her multiple identities and configure a coherent Self? Can she exorcise TillyTilly once and for all? Does she experience posttraumatic growth and find a way to healing and recovery? Or is she dying, taken over both by her injured body and TillyTilly's invading spirit, losing the final battle? These questions are left unanswered and leave room for guessing. While research has addressed this extensively, there seems to be no consent. The ending can be read as a final, lasting merger of Jess and TillyTilly, which results in Jess's death. This idea is supported by Brenda Cooper (2008), as well as Sarah Ilott and Chloe Buckley (2016), who argue that the novel is "unable to find comforting resolutions, disrupt oppositional structures, and create a utopian hybrid space or to bring about a unified sense of self" (Ilott and Buckley 402). Instead, it "resist[s] closure and defer[s] the construction of a stable identity" (407) by celebrating multiplicity and hybridity. Several aspects of the novel support this theory.

Firstly, Fern unsuccessfully begs Jess not to merge with the vicious TillyTilly anymore, as it might lead to her destruction: "[Jess] didn't hear the silent sister-girl telling her that it wasn't the right way, not the right way at all" (TIG 322). Jess behaves notably much more like TillyTilly than like her usual self during this fight over her body, "smiling ferociously, smiling transfigured" (322). Whether Jess will be transformed when and if she wakes up or whether this signifies her transformation into the spirit world, mutating into a malevolent demon like TillyTilly, remains unclear. Secondly, though, the Yoruba poem "Praise of the Leopard" at the very end of the novel suggests a "beautiful death" and a "crushed skull" (323). Like a leopard, TillyTilly "clawed at Jess's presence (*it hurt them both burningly)*" (322; emphasis in original), seemingly ripping them both lethally apart. Cooper supports this argument, suggesting that "Jess has destroyed herself, become prey to the leopard"

(63). Thirdly, Jess still has not found "home" when the story abruptly ends: "It was a wilderness here … but still not home. Not home, never home, no" (319). Ultimately not finding home clearly hints at a negative outcome. Fourthly, in the wilderness, it is declared that "Jessamy Harrison was a little girl who was going to die" (318). Even though she finally identifies with being called by her Nigerian name – "She heard her name. 'Wuraola!'" (320) – she is still being called Jessamy Harrison by the wilderness. It seems like she does not fully incorporate the Nigerian part of her identity. In claiming that "there was a sister-girl now, one who could now call herself Wuraola where true names were asked for" (322), she "gives" her Yoruban name to her dead twin sister. The fifth and most apparent hint supporting the theory of an unresolved ending, though, is given in the title, a reference to the Greek myth of Icarus. In the story, Icarus and his father Daedalus are imprisoned by King Minos. Since Minos controls both sea and land, Daedalus invents wings for himself and his son. Before the start, he warns Icarus not to fly too high or too low, otherwise the heat of the sun or the humidity of the sea would lead to a crash. After a while, Icarus becomes arrogant and climbs so high that the sun melts the wax of his wings, causing the feathers to break and him to plunge into the sea. The desperate Daedalus named the island on which he buried his son in memory of his child, Ikaria (Bonfante and Swaddling 43). The Icarus myth is generally interpreted in such a way that Icarus' crash and death is the punishment of the gods for his outrageous reach for the sun. Like the imprisoned Icarus, Jess finds herself in a "state of confinement from which she must eventually escape" (Mafe 23). During one of TillyTilly's infiltrations, which the girls call "swapping" (TIG 205), Jess is the Icarus Girl, as she "dip[s] and plummet[s]" (147), falling "through the staircase, the carpet and the actual stair", and finally "smash[ing] against the ground" (146). Like Icarus, she longs to feel better, experience a feeling of "wholeness" and "fly, like when we were falling yesterday, but only, like, upwards" (156). When TillyTilly asks her what she wants to be when she is an adult, she answers: "I'd like to fly" (156). In the same vein, the last line of the book, where Jess wakes "up and up and up and up" (322), can be read as the rising of the disaster-prone Icarus: "She had stopped flying and had fallen a long time ago, and didn't know the way" (319).

Redemptive Hybridity: Reading the Ending in a Positive Light

Reading the ending in a positive light, however, could mean that Jess emerges as a liberated new figure. This theory of a "happy ending", of transformative potential, is supported, among others, by Hron (2008), Diana Adesola Mafe (2012), Cuder-Domínguez (2009), R. Jones (2011) and Ouma (2014). Hron argues that Jess is reconciled with the Yoruban spirit world on these last pages – that she is carried through the wilderness with Fern's help and retrieves her body and her mind from TillyTilly, instead of being taken over. In offering this possibility, Oyeyemi navigates "imposed binaries by creating a hybrid space in-between in [her] fiction" (30). This argument is convincing, and it correlates to Bhabha's 'third space', where hybrid and diasporic individuals can find a place of belonging. Similar to Hron, Mafe as well as Ilott and Buckley read the novel as redemptive, through "the lens of positive hybridity" (Ilott and Buckley 405). Mafe supports this "new hybrid form" (33) by comparing *The Icarus Girl* to earlier Bildungsromane, such as *Jane Eyre,* arguing that Oyeyemi rather merges the Self and the Other, instead of expelling it (33), thereby emerging stronger. She sees the final struggle "between self and Other as one of cultural reconciliation. After all, Jess herself functions as the

racialized Other, never quite fitting into either of her respective cultures" (31). Mafe underlines this argument in her observation of the American poem by Dickinson and the Yoruban poem about the tiger, which "sandwich" the storyline, thereby "placing the narrative literally between cultures and traditions" (33). In the same vein, Mafe reads TillyTilly as a "powerful manifestation of Jess's Yorubaness and a source of cultural knowledge" (31), thus claiming that "Jess's final battle with TillyTilly is less about colonial exorcism than it is about postcolonial hybridity and amalgamation" (31). In Mafe's words, hybridity can then be newly defined as "both a process of negotiation and a condition of being between multiple, often opposing, cultural identities and influences" (22). This is in line with the current stream of opinion in scholarly research, which views hybridity as a "subversive and positive alternative to binaries of self and other" (Stouck 92).

This theory of redemption is firstly supported by the fact that Jess's grandfather finally puts up an *ibeji* statue in the hospital room where Jess fights for her life. This carving "guarded the corner for the little twin who needed its help, needed the forgiveness it brought, needed to win more than ever" (TIG 318). Cuder-Domínguez sees the carving as Jess's "key to actively deconstruct and reconcile in herself the tensions between British and Nigerian identities" (285). Secondly, an invisible power, probably Fern or the *ibeji* goddess – which again are actually interchangeable – arrives to help Jess and makes her "see a way to return" (TIG 319). Mafe reasons that this could indicate that Fern and TillyTilly are actually two independent characters. This argument is supported by the fact that TillyTilly calls Jess by her Yoruban name to trick her into answering to only one of her several names. But Jess is finally accepting her hybridity and offers to share her name with Fern (321). She thus "claim[s] her Yoruba name but also giv[es] it away. No longer a threat but a gift, Jess's name is big enough to share, perhaps because she has more than one identity", as Mafe points out (32). Similarly, R. Jones argues that, as Jess starts to respond to her Yoruban name, she is "tentatively reconciled to her Nigerian family and identity" (53). Thirdly, one could read Jess's gradual response to her grandfather calling her by her Yoruba name as at least a partial reconciliation with her Yoruban heritage (TIG 301). Finally, Jess jumps "back into herself" (322) on the very last page of the novel, which could signify a lasting return to her living body.

I agree with neither the positive nor the negative reading suggested by academics so far. Instead, I read the open, ambiguous ending as the only possible way for the novel to end, as Jess's conflict will never be resolved completely – she is born as she is and there is no way to ever change her heritage. Hence, Jess can only learn to live with her inner multiplicity, embracing it as an asset – total closure is unattainable. As identity is dynamic, Jess needs to constantly renegotiate her configured identity throughout her life as she matures, keeping it on a trajectory she chooses for herself as an active, empowered female on the verge of becoming a teenager. I therefore agree with Stouck, who claims that "while desire for a conclusive subject is present in any narrative …, the desire is always deferred and unrealistic …" (106). The ambiguous ending instead denies a self-sufficient and unchanging identity: "The uncertainty of the ending and whether Jess ever definitely returns or remains [in the wilderness of the mind] confirms the negotiation with otherness which is ongoing for all human beings" (106-7). Similarly, Gunning argues that "this ambiguity is important for allowing the dissociative reading still to haunt the text" (125), and the narrative's refusal to be reduced "to a single model of being" (127). An unresolved ending of *The Icarus Girl* is in line with the politics of Afrofuturism for several

reasons. Firstly, as Afrofuturist narratives play with the imagination, they inspire the reader to envision his or her own version of a story (Jackson and Moody-Freeman, "The Genre" 131). This could have beneficial effects on the discovery of truths about the reader's own world, self and identity, and on taking measures to bring a more just future into being. Secondly, Afrofuturism points to society's pitfalls, and voices socio-political critique of dominant but harmful discourses without proposing an unrealistically soothing and reassuring world view (Eshun, "Considerations" 288). As van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela point out, "sophisticated novels mostly have 'open ends', suggestions that various future possibilities exist, and that readers may never attach one final meaning to a story; similarly, it is impossible to interpret a human life finally when it has come to an end. Final closure evades us in the 'reading' of human lives as well as in literary narratives" (22). Afrofuturists acknowledge that present and future are inextricably linked to traumatic history. Trauma can never be eradicated completely from an individual's or a collective memory, which means it can never come to an "end" in the literal sense. Instead, it has to be transformed into active, reparative remembrance through "actively forgetting" it. Hence, a resolved ending in *The Icarus Girl* would undermine Afrofuturism's basic message: that the past is not adequately resolved and needs to be continuously acknowledged and worked through from all (especially from the formerly neglected) viewpoints, as it affects the present and the future. Read through this lens, the character of TillyTilly stands out as a metaphor for an unresolved past. It seems like TillyTilly, subject to traumatic amnesia herself, as she cannot remember what happened to her own twin (TIG 292), (ab)uses Jess's body "to be remembered. Tilly didn't need to be remembered, but she wanted to be. Why? It was the same with Fern. But people forgot, they forgot, and it wasn't her fault" (301). Thus, *The Icarus Girl* is a haunting reminder of the problematic belief systems and inequalities pertaining to our societies and surface in the form of racism, sexism, prejudice, contemporary slavery, and other forms of oppression, which stem from a traumatic past that has not been adequately uncovered and acknowledged. Thus, the novel contributes to Afrofuturist recovery projects: a way of making traumatic experiences accessible for cultural memory. The haunting "ghosts", TillyTilly and Fern, both serve as a reminder to society that memory is crucial in negotiating cultural identity, as otherwise, the past will continuously haunt the present. Thus, the recognition and acceptance of the past is vital in the narrative, as TillyTilly mainly functions as a nagging reminder to remember the losses of the past.

Childhood Twins

Oyeyemi's parents moved from Ibadan to London when Oyeyemi was four years old (Oyeyemi, "Once upon"), leaving her culturally hybrid, yet without having experienced Africa first-hand. Thus, the cultural practices of contemporary Nigeria remain alien to her, as Cuder-Domínguez notes (311). Even though her own knowledge of Africa may be partial, Oyeyemi plays with Yoruban myths surrounding twins, such as *ibeji* carvings and the *abiku* belief. Inspired by these African legends, Oyeyemi reworks the doppelgänger archetype for a mainly Western audience by interweaving Western and African elements in the narrative. Why does Oyeyemi choose the figure of the twin, the double, or doppelgänger as a trope of speculative fiction for expressing the torn experience of diasporic living? Nigerian demographics show an interestingly high number of twin births, especially among the Yoruba people. The four-fold difference between Yoruba and European twin birth rates

have been researched extensively, but studies could not come up with a plausible explanation (Renne 63). The "highest dizygotic twinning rate in the world", combined with an unusually high prenatal mortality rate of twins in Yoruban society (Leroy et al. 132), might have led to their mythical status. It is hence not surprising that, first, mythology about twins in Nigeria is widespread, and second, Nigerian and Nigerian-diasporic authors frequently use twinning in their work, and particularly employ the trope in speculative fiction. Next to *The Icarus Girl,* Diana Evans' *26a* (2006) and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) can be named as popular examples. Bryce has noted that these authors use the motif of twinning as an embodiment of "the *haunting* of the diasporic Nigerian, whether exile or half-and-half child … [d]enied the right of 'belonging'" (64; emphasis in original). This echoes the dilemma of alienation from both home and host culture that modern-day immigrants often experience (Burnett, "Realist Fiction"). In appropriating the speculative, mythically infused trope of twinning, Oyeyemi characterizes the distinct diasporic space immigrants inhabit and enables her predominantly Western readers gain access to their experiences through reader identification and empathy.

In literary theory, especially in images of doubling, splitting, dissociating and metamorphizing the Self, the symbol of the twin or doppelgänger traditionally stands for an identity crisis, and the loss of self-transparency and self-control (Butzer and Jacob 421-22). As Günther Butzer and Joachim Jacob claim, character doubles also auto-reflexively hint at the relationship between author and character. In the same vein, Cooper claims, for example, that by using twins in her literary production, Oyeyemi encodes her own "splitting, doubling and questing for [her]| identities" in Britain and her striving for a connection with Africa (51). Jess living "in her imagination, and, indeed, her hermitic and precocious but surreal world of childhood is informed, arguably, by the author's own struggles to live in an imaginative bubble – having faced, as Oyeyemi did, the challenge of acculturation" (Ouma 193). Indeed, Oyeyemi was clinically depressed and suicidal, which she confirms in an interview with *NPR Books*: "I was suicidal for a long time in my teens and I was so unhappy … It was the kind of unhappiness that you know everyone else is feeling, but you don't care because you've dehumanized them, because they're all monsters and demons and beasts who are out to kill you, so you become a beast and a monster yourself. I regret so much" (Quinn). A certain degree of autobiographical and personal involvement in the novel can thus be hypothesized. In this sense, one could argue that Oyeyemi re-negotiates her own identity and reflects on and processes her traumatic experiences of marginalization and alienation as a diasporic individual throughout the writing process (Mafe 39). In this sense, by utilizing the trope of twinning or of a doppelgänger in the realm of identity configuration and processing postcolonial trauma, Oyeyemi joins Sukhdev Sandhu's model of "self-fashioning", which he developed for second generation writers who "can wear as many masks, create as many personae, explore as many new avenues" as they want (42). Moreover, for Bryce, the twin or doppelgänger "embodies the use of the feminine double both as shadow or negative to the paradigmatic male protagonist of [traditional] Nigerian fiction" (60). In this sense, *The Icarus Girl* becomes a counter-narrative to historically male-centred Nigerian texts, thereby contributing to Griffin's understanding of textual healing by producing new stories for Black British people. Cultural scholars see writing as a transformative, therapeutic act for both subjects in, and outside, the literary text: "Writing is posited not only as representative of (or supplementary to) real identities, but also as an aid to self-expression and identity formation" (Ilott and Buckley 407). Thus, Oyeyemi's writing can be positioned as an act for working through

the "sociocultural and psychological alienation of the immigrant individual", which is "inextricably linked to issues arising from postcolonialism and globalization" (Hron 39). In this sense, Oyeyemi's writing not only contributes to the relief of collective traumas on a societal level and of her own personal traumas, but she also provides a platform and intragroup support for formerly underrepresented female immigrant, diasporic or hybrid individuals facing similar concerns, who might, seeing themselves and their histories adequately portrayed, through the process of bibliotherapy outlined by van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, experience a catharsis.

It is especially noteworthy that Oyeyemi chose to include not only twins, but child twins in the novel. The figure of the child as a protagonist is common in contemporary Nigerian fiction, where authors draw from a rich tradition of the child figure, especially the *abiku,* in Nigerian literature, as Hron argues (27-28). The fact that children occupy a central role in Nigeria is not surprising, as more than 50% of the population is under eighteen (UNICEF). Hron claims that the hybrid space of childhood, caught between childhood and adulthood, enables authors to introduce topics that are "too large for adult fiction, while also engaging culturally uninformed Western readers" (27). Therefore, the child figure is an especially suitable means for Nigerian writers to communicate their perception of Nigerian culture to a Western audience – especially "in the context of multiculturalism, globalization, and even international human rights" (28). Hron hypothesizes that children inhabit a space of hybridity, opportunity, and resistance: children continuously negotiate, question, and resist cultural constructions (29). Looking at societal issues through the eyes of a child is thus especially fruitful, as children frequently "infringe the taboos of society, cross the adult shame frontier, and penetrate emotional danger zones which the adult can only control with difficulty" (Elias 167). Hence, derived from a space "in-between", the space of immigration, the employment of a child figure in *The Icarus Girl* deftly exemplifies the cultural and emotional alienation of diasporic individuals in contemporary postcolonial society, thereby "transcend[ing] generic expectations or social conventions, while also pointing to the perilous precariousness of acculturation" (Hron 39). It is important to notice here the similarity between the outlined politics of child or young adult fiction and the politics of Afrofuturism, whose authors set themselves the goal to produce literature that elicits moments of estrangement through the use of supernatural elements and thereby stimulate the reader's imagination to rethink common assumptions or patterns. By addressing societal and political issues through an Afrofuturistic lens and through a child's perspective, the reader may identify with the protagonist on a more profound level, as they improve their imaginative empathies with Nigerian characters and circumstances, and thus rethink their culturally constructed belief systems, inspiring them to consider the ways in which normative thinking and categorization are harmful and problematic. In this sense, Jess and TillyTilly become symbols or metaphors for processes that take place in society. *The Icarus Girl* as a whole, and Jess's struggle for the illusionary concept of a coherent stable identity, in particular, can then be read as a national metaphor. Ilott and Buckley, for example, claim that "Jessy's process of self-identification effectively repeats the act of colonial violence in repressing and Othering her Nigerian heritage" (404). Hence, her traumatic dislocation and alienation emphasize the lingering power of the political, physical, and psychological traumas that emerged during the colonial period (403) and persist in modern society as racism, contemporary slavery, marginalization and inequality.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Oyeyemi deliberately places her protagonist Jess in a diasporic context, where both mental disorder as a result of post-traumatic stress disorder, and spirit possession become possible readings of the protagonist's precarious state, to convey the traumatic effects of dislocation and hybridity in the context of immigration. The two readings – of Yoruban spiritual mythology and a Western, scientific explanation – both of which suggest trauma as the central theme of the novel, co-occur symbolically for the protagonist's dual heritage. Using this strategy of cultural multiplicity, Oyeyemi recognizes and subverts Du Bois's idea of the African American or Afrodiasporic 'double consciousness', who considered doubleness an inherent feature of the African experience in the Western world, and opens up the possibility, and even necessity, for a multiply configured, fluid identity instead. By additionally being located at the intersection between African folk tale, gothic ghost story, and Western *Bildungsroman*, the narrative points to the requirement to rethink normative and ideological assumptions about genre, trauma and identity. Contributing to the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory I try to work towards in this dissertation, the narrative subverts Eurocentric trauma theory by envisioning new ways of conceptualizing trauma in the context of diasporicity, calling attention to the distinct situation faced by black diasporic immigrant individuals, who continue to face marginalization and various systems of oppression. By denying the reader a cathartic ending, Oyeyemi displays the inevitability of a haunting, unresolved past, if not adequately dealt with through actively forgetting and establishing a culture of remembrance. In the same vein, the novel points to the requirement of historical recovery projects to work through transgenerational cultural trauma and post-memory, through rendering the trauma a part of the newly configured identity or the collective cultural memory, and the need to constantly rethink and renegotiate present and future, thereby contributing to the creation of an improved present. In drawing a counter-narrative to traditionally male-centred Nigerian literature, Oyeyemi represents and provides a space of intragroup support for Nigerian-diasporic women.

Chapter Six:

Dissolving Binaries – Trauma and Identity in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Introduction

Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998) is a futurist coming-of-age story concerned with seemingly unbridgeable binaries. Its main conflict revolves around the tension between the mystically infused, syncretic Caribbean culture and the post-industrial Canadian society that the protagonists juggle. While intriguingly reflecting the unique conglomerate of identities of the Caribbean diaspora, the novel especially highlights the complex interdependence of collective and personal trauma in the realms of diaspora: with the help of sci-fi tropes, it displays the dynamics and daily struggles of identity formation of "those who are located at the nexus of competing cultural forces" (Wood 317), while allegorically alluding to overt and covert systemic oppression and marginalization of minorities in Canada today. In reflecting Afrodiasporic experience, the novel explores race, gender, and class issues, such as the effects of diasporic displacement, managing two different cultures, and the challenges specifically faced by black women. In doing so, it creates a powerful vision about female and immigrant identities and the future of Afrodiasporic communities in contemporary society.

Brown Girl is set in postapocalyptic Toronto.[26] An economic collapse has caused the materialistic, privileged and powerful population to flee to the affluent suburbs. After violent riots, the devastated inner city has even been abandoned by the negligent Canadian government, leaving behind a deteriorated, anarchical city core titled "the Burn", which is still inhabited by an ostracised, self-sustaining community mainly consisting of immigrant minorities. This is where three generations of African Caribbean women struggle for both physical and emotional survival. The protagonist Ti-Jeanne, a single mother of a baby boy, is living there with her strict grandmother Gros-Jeanne, aka Mami, who is running a balm yard, after her mother Mi-Jeanne has disappeared. The centre, devoid of government structures and exploited as a farm for surplus organs, has fallen prey to a criminal organization called "the posse", which is controlled by the protagonist's ruthless grandfather Rudy. The villain abuses Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices to sustain his power with the human spirit of his daughter Mi-Jeanne, Ti-Jeanne's lost mother, whom he has turned into a vampiric duppy-soucouyant, a zombie-like figure captured in a calabash: "Rudy does work the dead to control the living" (*Brown Girl in the Ring* 121; referred to as BGR from here on). The gangster boss is asked by government officials to secretly find a viable heart for a life-saving transplantation to Ontario's incumbent Premier Catherine Uttley, whose election campaign depends on her disapproval of pig-to-human transplants. Rudy subsequently forces Tony, Ti-

---

[26] Interestingly, Toronto has been identified by the United Nations as the most ethnically and racially diverse city on the planet. That Hopkinson chose this setting for a novel about diasporic living and alienation is therefore especially significant.

Jeanne's drug-addicted ex-boyfriend and father to her child, to provide the suitable heart, which happens to be Gros-Jeanne's, as she has the unusual blood type AB and a history of healthy living. To acquire the organ, Tony is driven to kill Gros-Jeanne under threats of torture, while Rudy sets out to use Ti-Jeanne's soul in his oppression – an endeavour she ultimately escapes from by summoning her ancestors' gods and releasing her mother's soul from the calabash.

In this chapter, I will argue that *Brown Girl,* which fuses traditional sci-fi elements with Caribbean folklore, centralises the struggle of a third-generation diasporic immigrant from Jamaica, born in Canada, to reconcile her beliefs and characteristics as a North American woman with her Afro-Caribbean heritage. This heritage is mainly based on community and Voudoun spirituality, a distinct Afrodiasporic religious system. Alienated both from her native Caribbean culture and marginalized by the white Canadian society due to racism and classism, she experiences a sort of traumatic "placelessness", which manifests, among others, in strong feelings of shame and symptoms resembling schizophrenia, which has often served as a metaphor for postmodern life and postcolonial environments (Bhabha, *The Location* 214). Additionally, having been exposed throughout her life to childhood abuse, abandonment, domestic violence, addictive and destructive relationships and the loss of several family members, Ti-Jeanne struggles with traumatic fragmentation on a personal level, which I read as a direct consequence of the structural trauma she is facing. I will highlight in this chapter the myriad ways that personal and collective trauma interconnect in the diasporic experience. To resolve her trauma, I propose that Ti-Jeanne must confront and reintegrate her traumatic memory by turning it into reparative remembrance, supported by her Afro-Caribbean community, and acknowledge and embrace her Self as it is, for as Bhabha puts it, "cultural awareness exhibits itself mostly in the form of self love, and love toward others" ("Culture's" 167). I will also argue that Hopkinson seems to strongly reject the notion of a fixed, stable identity, as Ti-Jeanne's transformation involves configuring both cultural aspects of her identity into hybrid, Afrodiasporic identities, which are marked by her Creole language and a new, individual access to spirituality, sustained by a close-knit community. In extrapolating from present conflicts, I argue that *Brown Girl* suggests an innovative way of thinking about Canadian cultural identity while simultaneously encouraging the reader to think about sociopolitical issues from a new perspective, by stimulating empathy and identification. In highlighting the distinct situation of black female immigrants in Canada, voicing sociopolitical criticism and drafting a powerful vision of transformation, *Brown Girl* is an example of what I have called Afrospeculative trauma narratives and feeds into the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory I try to work towards in this dissertation.

Structural Trauma: Marginalization due to Class and Race

The Canadian society in *Brown Girl* is deeply fragmented. The novel is set in the wracked, downtrodden "Burn", a neglected dump, abandoned by all institutions, controlled by a mafia-like gang and decimated by what Rhonda Frederick calls "rich flight" (9), the process of the more affluent part of the population fleeing to the suburbs. The poor remaining population mostly consists of ethnic minorities, who find themselves "outside the laws that protect the whiter, richer humans in the suburbs" (McCormack 254). Bridges and gates keep the

impoverished part of the population in a state of imprisonment and geographically contained, while the wealthy suburbians have one-way access to the area via helicopter, to indulge in the nightlife and prostitution: "This unidirectional access with no genuine contact with the people of the Burn creates a people-as-commodity culture in which the practices of sex tourism, cultural voyeurism, and organ harvesting reduce the most vulnerable members of society to their use-value and treat them as economic surplus", analyses Esther Jones ("Africana Women" 201). In *Medicine and Ethics,* she continues that "[f]rom the sex market of the Strip to the procurement of human organs, the trade in human flesh positions the impoverished urban underclass as a cheap and plentiful resource for the benefit of the wealthy and privileged" (101). In comparison to the "suburbians", the disenfranchised community of the Burn receives neither health care and social security nor formal education, which only accelerates the degeneration. The idea of inclusion and exclusion that is evoked is supported by the novel's title: the residents of the Burn are associated with being "in the ring": they are literally cut off and marginalized from the rest.[27] As Roxanne Rimstead explains, "[w]hen a society [like Canada] and its national dream admire the rich because they acquire wealth and power that allows them to stand outside of the community … the same community must denounce the other polarity, those who do not succeed in the national dream" (5). Subsequently, the poor are located "outside imagined community on the fringes as fragments of nation" (7). The societal segregation thus shows that ideas of classism and racism are conflated. Similar to how the system of slavery denied subject status to black people, "the stigma of poverty is a special type of stigma which attributes to the poor a status of being 'less than human'" (Waxman 69). The Burn-community's neo-colonial situation of being viewed as "less than human" by the more affluent population in the suburbs is also comparable to how Achille Mbembe describes racial segregation in times of Western colonization of Africa: the marginalized parts of society were ostracized into a state between subjecthood and objecthood (26) – an experience any individual necessarily experiences as traumatic. Critically alluding to the traumatic history of slavery, the immigrants living in the Burn are exploited by the oppressive, racist system as involuntary organ donors, instead of as plantation workers, to fulfil the capitalistic needs of the greedy rich. As "racism can traumatize, hurt, humiliate, enrage, confuse, and ultimately prevent optimal growth and functioning of individuals and communities" (Harrell 42), I argue that Ti-Jeanne's living conditions in this dangerous, financially impoverished, even ghettoized slum, emphasized by being marginalized due to her race and social class, are deeply traumatic and, as we will see, affect her personal life and her ability to form profound relationships in myriad ways.

Growing up surrounded by poverty and violence, Ti-Jeanne sees no sustainable opportunity in life for herself and her child and feels doomed to live in this war-like environment for the rest of her life. Her situation, marked by her skin colour and her social class as an immigrant, exhibits the traumatic falling apart of a life narrative that van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela have described. Her ambitions seem unreachable and life is full of both small and big crises: her dream of a family with Tony seems to be an illusion, her own mother, father

---

[27] "Being in the ring" is also an expression often associated with fighting each other in boxing – in that respect, the residents' fight for survival and against their oppression is highlighted.

and grandfather have disappeared, and in her current environment, filled with fear and criminality, she sees no future or career for herself and her baby. As a third-generation diasporic individual, she feels alienated from her Caribbean heritage and the community life of the Burn; on the other hand, she is isolated from the Western lifestyle in Toronto's affluent suburbs. Being marginalized by the wealthy and white Canadian society due to racism and classism and forced to live in a violent environment without prospect, she has lost all sense of belonging to both the Western society, which she initially desires to be part of, and the Afro-Caribbean community of the Burn – the place of current residence and the place from where her ancestors migrated. This idea of division and traumatic fragmentation is an important overall theme in Hopkinson's narrative. Ti-Jeanne is "unable to assimilate into the dominant culture through economic mobility, and thus [is] left with a fragmented identity of being from neither here nor from 'back home'" (Skallerup Bessette 179), as the conceptualization of home has become contradictory and slippery. This in-betweenness echoes the postmodern black individual's liminality, which is rooted in slavery – "the collective memory of which has shaped contemporary [Afrodiasporic] identity" (Setka 104). Her traumatic "placelessness" is reinforced by her economic situation and social class as a black immigrant, as Ti-Jeanne does not have the opportunity to escape from her situation. Ti-Jeanne's trauma is thus the result of being oppressed because of societal structures, and thus structurally induced. As the novel deals with feelings of dislocation, uprooted-ness, and what Bhabha has termed "unhomeliness" ("The World" 9), *Brown Girl* is centrally focused on diasporic experience. As a diasporic subject, as described by Bhabha, Ti-Jeanne finds herself "*in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present" (*The Location* 219; emphasis in original). I argue that, as a consequence of the cultural clash she experiences, Ti-Jeanne is subjected to what Mukherjee names the "trauma of self-transformation" (274). Hyperbolically extrapolated from present conflicts in Canada, Ti-Jeanne's living conditions seem to be a strong statement concerning the effect of colonialism, imperialism, and racism. As Ruby S. Ramraj emphasizes, "[v]ery much a postcolonialist, Hopkinson reveals in her texts her abhorrence of the ideology of imperial oppression towards both men and women, towards the disenfranchised and towards the subaltern" (136). Thus, in typical Afrofuturist fashion, Hopkinson links past, present and future, as well as reality and fiction, to comment on an unjust present, which is marked by a distinct imbalance of power dynamics.

Shelly P. Harrell claims that experiences of racism are always necessarily "embedded within interpersonal, collective, cultural-symbolic, and socio-political contexts" (44). In the following section, I will therefore highlight the connection between the social, collective trauma of marginalized immigrant individuals in Canada, which I have described above, and personal trauma within the diasporic space. As I will argue further on, Ti-Jeanne experiences several severely traumatic events throughout her life, ranging from abandonment and physical abuse to witnessing the murder of family members. As Harrell writes, "[t]he experience of life stress includes situations that can occur across all sociodemographic groups (e.g., death of a loved one, loss of a job). For people of color, however, life stress must also include consideration of experiences that are related to the unique person-environment transactions involving race" (44). She calls these distinct experiences "racism-related stress" (44), which might affect an individual physically, psychologically, socially, functionally, and spiritually. She distinguishes between six types of racism-related stress: "racism-related life events", which are relatively time-limited; "vicarious racism experiences" through observation or report;

"daily racism microstressors"; "chronic-contextual stress" reflecting social structure and political dynamics; "collective experiences of racism", for example the economic conditions of members of racial groups or stereotypical representations in the media; and the "transgenerational transmission of group traumas" through stories that are passed down along generational lines (45). As Ti-Jeanne permanently lives in a violent and lawless environment segregated from the affluent suburbs, where racism and classism are still a daily occurrence, I argue that she is subjected to all six forms of racism-related stress. Harrell further writes that "[t]he frequency, intensity, meaning, and consequences of common life stressors can vary based on race/ethnicity", as the experience might be "qualitatively different, and perhaps more intense, for members of historically oppressed groups" (47). Harrell here intriguingly displays the interconnection of racism-related stress and general life stress, while arguing that the former might increase the psychological impact of the latter. Of course, though, the ways in which racism influences the intensity of experience of other traumatic life events are complex, vary greatly and should not be used to pathologize historically oppressed groups (53). She comments that "[r]acism has also been connected to psychological well-being as manifested in trauma-related symptoms" (48). I am aware of the fact that traumatic experiences are always an experience of stress, but stressors are not always necessarily traumatic. In Ti-Jeanne's case, though, the severity of her experiences justifies the interchangeable use of Harrell's "racism-related stress" with what I call "racism-related trauma". These traumas are in reciprocal relation with the personal traumas she experiences.

Schizophrenia: A Metaphor for Postmodernity, the Split Subject, and Diaspora

In cultural and literary studies, schizophrenia often serves as a metaphor for postmodern life and postcolonial environments, because, as Bhabha argues, "it is the schizoid or 'split' subject that articulates, with the greatest intensity, the disjunction of time and being that characterizes the social syntax of the postmodern condition" (*The Location* 214). This condition is particularly noticeable in postcolonial diasporic groups, who face the challenge of combining local traditions with a Western imperialistic history (Bustamante 16). Accordingly, having been inspired by an astounding piece of research, which reveals that an especially high percentage of male Caribbean immigrants to the UK seem to suffer from mental illness, Hopkinson declares that her protagonist deliberately shows "schizophrenic traits" (Hopkinson, "Nalo" 76). I therefore argue that Hopkinson includes schizophrenia as a metaphor for a traumatically lingering colonial past, which is especially drastic in the case of modern Afro-Caribbeans in Western countries, as they are doubly uprooted and transplanted in a postmodern sense – from Africa and from the Caribbean. The Caribbean does not have a language of its own, which renders the inhabitants "subject to a tragic alienation from both language and landscape" (Ashcroft et al. 145).[28] The region hence is neither African nor American or European, as Western economy took pains to eliminate traditions and languages of the native Tainos and the enslaved Africans

---

[28] Of course, this interesting and creative creolisation of language, which often takes place in marginal spaces, is unique, which is why I would not call it "tragic" at all.

(Bustamante 16). Hopkinson's incorporation of schizophrenia thus materializes as a pertinent portrayal of a continuously traumatizing situation due to its unresolved nature.

In the very first chapter, Ti-Jeanne reveals that she has horrible visions of people's deaths and frightening spirits, featuring for example La Diablesse[29] – a mix of a soucouyant, a "frightening old hag, skin-shedder, bloodsucker, fly-by-night" (Anatol 35), an "old woman, … the figure of abjection, hovering in that liminal space, that border between 'us' and 'them' and also between life and death" (17), and La Diablesse in the case of *Brown Girl* – and the pervasive Jab-Jab, "a devilish creature of Jamaican and Trinidadian carnival that can also be understood as the Prince of Cemetery manifestation of [Eshu]" (Coleman 10). Ti-Jeanne can "see with more than sight" (BGR 9), which seems to dissolve her identity and draws her to the brink of madness: "Sometimes she saw how people were going to die. When she closed her eyes, the childhood songs her grandmother had sung to her replayed in her mind, and dancing to their music were images: this one's body jerking in a spray of gunfire and blood, that one writhing as cramps turned her bowels to liquid. Never the peaceful deaths. Ti-Jeanne hated the visions" (BGR 9). Ti-Jeanne's seer gift allows her to communicate with the Orisha spirits of the Afro-Caribbean pantheon but also exposes her to horrific imagery of people dying to the point that she is sometimes unable to properly distinguish between reality and vision. As a Caribbean immigrant herself, Hopkinson explains why she was inspired to utilize schizophrenia in her own writing:

> [the researchers] had no real theories as to why, but part of their idea was that the imbalance that caused the schizophrenia was probably impelled in part by the culture shock of coming to such a different land and, being male, having fewer social resources. The image caught me. And because I usually start with a female protagonist, I started with a woman who had some of those symptoms, but had no idea how to explain them. I put them in terms of her culture, and … I started to do research into what in her own culture would make sense of what she was feeling. (Hopkinson, "Nalo" 76)

Ti-Jeanne's "own culture" which Hopkinson refers to, the Afro-Caribbean culture, suggests that visions signify a special access to spirits. Mami Gros-Jeanne tells Ti-Jeanne: "If you don't learn how to use the gift, things going to go hard with you. You want to come like the crazy people …? Not knowing if you have clothes on your back or what day it is, just walking, walking, and seeing all kinda thing that ain't there, not knowing what real and what is vision?" (BGR 59). Gros-Jeanne points to her daughter Mi-Jeanne, who refused to acknowledge the "seer gift" Ti-Jeanne seems to have inherited and who is now roaming the streets of the Burn as a homeless woman referred to as "Crazy Betty" because of her denial. Despite her grandmother's warnings, Ti-Jeanne fails to understand, develop, and learn about the way spirits communicate with humans. It is important to note that the Afro-Caribbean culture regards her visions as a "gift", which implies explicit agency and empowerment, rather than the victimization a Western reading of schizophrenia might imply. E. Jones argues that, having been socialized in a Western context, Ti-Jeanne has "internalized the denigration of Afro-

---

[29] La Diablesse, linked to the vampiric sucking of blood from her victims, is a female devil, who is portrayed on Gros-Jeanne's tarot cards as an "arrogant-looking mulatto woman in traditional plantation dress and head-tie. Her smile was sinister, revealing sharpening fangs. Behind her ran a river, red like blood" (BGR 51-52). As Anatol critiques, the "myth of La Diablesse casts the woman of mixed race and blended features as extremely dangerous", who "occupies a condemned space in both white and black communities" (39).

Caribbean spirituality and resists developing these gifts because she perceives them as evil and backward" ("Africana Women" 201). This is the reason she would rather believe in suffering from a mental illness than acknowledging her spiritual gifts. In Gros-Jeanne's view, though, this denial is the reason why mental illnesses can occur at all. In other words, Gros-Jeanne does not dismiss the existence of mental disease and trauma, but simply identifies different roots for their appearance. As E. Jones similarly argues, "[l]inking spiritual visions to psychosis is not a new trend. Historically, different religious traditions have taken various approaches to the epidemiology of madness and its cure … Only recently have mental health practitioners begun to study the relationship between spirituality and psychosis" (*Medicine* 107).

As I have established, Ti-Jeanne's original and continuously perpetuated trauma is inherently tied to the racist marginalization and alienation she experiences due to her immigrant status, which is intertwined with and even reinforces the intensity of the symptoms of her personal traumas. In this regard, medical research might imply a connection between the schizophrenic traits Ti-Jeanne exhibits and her posttraumatic condition. The University of Liverpool, for example, conducted studies on the relationship between trauma and schizophrenia (Bentall et al. 661), finding that children who survived trauma before their 16th birthday were three times more likely to suffer from psychotic illnesses as grown-ups. The stronger the traumatic experience, the more severe the illness. In their study, they examined children who experienced trauma in the form of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, neglect, parental death, and bullying. As Ti-Jeanne suffered the loss of her mother at a very early age and grew up in an environment lacking verbal and physical expressions of love, instead relying on physical punishment, her schizophrenic symptoms, and the "usual nightmare[s]" (BGR 42) she recurrently suffers from, could be linked to her childhood trauma.

Childhood and Transgenerational Trauma: Abandonment, Abuse, Addiction

Ti-Jeanne's mother Mi-Jeanne, aka Crazy Betty, disappears when Ti-Jeanne is only nine years old (BGR 47), leaving her with her emotionally distant and strict (yet silently caring) grandmother. Ti-Jeanne only knows that her mother and grandmother had an argument, which led Mi-Jeanne to run away without her child. We later learn that her deserting mother did not feel capable of raising a child, which she did not want in the first place, and felt overburdened with the responsibility (242). Neither father nor grandfather seem to have been present either. Early abandonment can have traumatic effects on children, sometimes leading to an impaired ability to trust, allow true intimacy, and thus form lasting relationships later in life (cf. Beck). Furthermore, feelings of love are rarely expressed in Ti-Jeanne's home: her grandmother Gros-Jeanne "was a hard woman" (219) and sometimes even physically violent: her mother and grandmother "raised her with the strap; it was what she knew of discipline" (33). The memories of being beaten haunt her later in her life: "Ti-Jeanne remembered how the back of Mami's hand used to feel when it connected with her face" (55). The memories of this physical abuse and her mother's disappearance complicate her relationships and even affect her behaviour towards her own child, as I will assess later in this section.

Hopkinson declares that she deliberately equipped Ti-Jeanne with "many of the concerns of contemporary society faced by black women" in the African diaspora, such as "unwed motherhood, poverty, conflicts

between self and tradition" (Hopkinson in Rutledge 594). She explains: "I know what it's like to be a green girl, to feel somewhat aimless in life. I know what it's like to be overrun by events. I've also had boyfriends who were really bad for me. I know what it's like to be scared and unsure of myself" (592). For example, Ti-Jeanne has an obsessive, unstable on-off-relationship with the irresponsible, drug-addicted father of her child, who is affiliated with the mafia-like posse, and struggles to make ends meet financially as a single mother. This emotionally abusive, even toxic relationship with Tony is, on the one hand, an example of how her childhood trauma manifests in her later life: her ability to form lasting relationships with a reliable, trustworthy partner seems to be impaired. Tony and Ti-Jeanne's conflict mainly revolves around Tony's inability to accept responsibility for their child and to desist from criminal activities: "Why you can't ever just settle down and live good, eh, Tony?" (BGR 21), Ti-Jeanne asks him desperately. He is "too flighty to make a good father" (43) and not able to provide for the family through "honest work" (43). Even after several fights, he is still not "done with that stupidness" (22) as Ti-Jeanne had hoped. The problematic relationship to the baby's father, as I argue, is closely connected to the precarious situation the two find themselves in as black immigrants: for Tony, paternal responsibility is especially challenging, because the lack of other opportunities and constant discrimination have driven him into criminal activities. On the other hand, her relationships both with Tony and her baby, as I will argue next, not only mirror her childhood trauma of abandonment, but also reiterate the destructive relationship of her grandparents, who are fierce enemies at the time the story is set. The trauma of destructive and addictive relationships seems to be passed on transgenerationally in the family. Her mother Mi-Jeanne's love history appears to have been problematic as well: Ti-Jeanne "had never known her real father" (100). It is therefore my proposition that both the traumatic exposure to domestic violence and abandonment during her childhood and the toxic role-models in her close family make it difficult for Ti-Jeanne to "establish stable, trusting relationships as an adult", both with her partner and her baby, as traumas "leave traces on our minds and emotions [and] on our capacity for joy and intimacy" (van der Kolk 1). I understand these collective yet personally exhibited traumas in relation to what marginalized and oppressed groups of people have experienced over generations. As Ti-Jeanne lives in a society where racism is "at all times a distinct possibility", her life experiences might have a psychological impact "above and beyond the generic stresses of life" (Harrell 47).

The posttraumatic symptoms of fear of further abandonment and her loss of trust in other humans manifest drastically when she discovers her pregnancy: she deliberately does not inform Tony about his child, because "[s]omething had made her want to keep the little person she was growing all to herself. It would be the one human being who was totally dependent on her and would never leave her" (BGR 24-5). After their break-up, Ti-Jeanne moves back in with Gros-Jeanne and struggles with the burden of raising her child alone in a precarious financial situation to which Tony cannot contribute. As a result, she experiences both her baby and the shameful situation of being forced to move back in with her grandmother as a burden. Consequently, her affection towards her child is, as Anatol describes it, "wavering and largely learned" (41), a situation which Hopkinson displays as troubling Ti-Jeanne deeply. This surfaces when Ti-Jeanne, unwaveringly (and irrationally) in love with Tony, blames her baby for the break-up: "It hadn't been Ti-Jeanne's decision to leave Tony; it was Baby's … Resentment battled with the urge to care for the baby" (42-43). When her grandmother

tells her: "Ti-Jeanne, I want you to leave that boy alone. I don't want you to mix up with he and the posse" (52), she justifies her ongoing infatuation by again making the child responsible for her life decisions: "I know Tony is nothing but trouble, Mami, but he is my baby-father. He have a right to get to know the baby, ain't?" (BGR 52). When Gros-Jeanne lectures Ti-Jeanne on being gentler with her child, she reluctantly admits her nagging feelings – mostly to herself: she did not want the baby in the first place and feels overwhelmed with it. In one example, when the baby screams, her torn emotions become especially apparent: "Ti-Jeanne hated the noise. She shook [the baby] a little, hoping to startle him into silence. Instead his screaming took on a desperate edge. Guilt burned at her" (BGR 33). Similarly, when her mother confesses to Ti-Jeanne about abandoning her, "shame made Ti-Jeanne's face hot. It was too close to the bone. She knew what her mother had been feeling" (BGR 242). I argue that these feelings of guilt, shame, and powerlessness about the fact that motherly affection does not come naturally to her are rooted in feeling inadequate because she cannot fulfil society's unrealistic expectations of mothers as self-sacrificing and constantly loving – especially as she lives under such oppressive social and racialized circumstances, which drastically limit her opportunities, in comparison to the privileged "suburbians". Therefore I argue, as does Anatol in her analysis of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, that Ti-Jeanne's "lack of maternal bond is carefully attributed", not to Ti-Jeanne as a woman herself, but "to the profoundly traumatic circumstance" (43) she finds herself in: structural trauma in the form of racism, classism and alienation, as well as the strongly connected personal childhood trauma which is evoked by her own mother's tendencies of feeling overwhelmed by the child (in this case by Ti-Jeanne herself), as she probably faced similarly hopeless and limited prospects for her offspring. In other words, I propose that Ti-Jeanne re-enacts, whether consciously or unconsciously, her mother's behaviour of perceiving her child as a frustrating and tiresome feature of her life, inhibiting her autonomy, which is rooted in her own trauma – structural, inherited and suffered from as a child.

Shame as a Marker of the Posttraumatic and Postcolonial Condition

Up to this point, I have covered the traumatic events that occurred in Ti-Jeanne's past, ranging from racism-related structural trauma to childhood and transgenerational trauma. In this section, I will outline how her traumatization climaxes over the course of the narrative. First, Ti-Jeanne discovers with horror that the wicked, oppressive murderer and gang lord who manipulates spiritual practices to control the Burn is her own grandfather. He holds captive and tortures his daughter, Ti-Jeanne's lost mother, as a soucouyant in a bowl and is after Ti-Jeanne's soul as well, to restore his power. To top these horrible experiences, her own boyfriend, instructed by her grandfather, the posse don, violently kills her grandmother (BGR 153), to whom she had finally found emotional access. The events overburden her brain's ability to cope with them, as, by definition, trauma is "unbearable and intolerable" (van der Kolk 1). When she learns of the sudden death of her grandmother, for example, she reacts to this traumatic experience by not being able to make sense of the events: "'Dead? Mami really dead?' Ti-Jeanne felt as though her own heart were being turned inside out. The words came out without thought: 'How she get like this?'… She ran after the ambulance, screaming, begging, crying … She stood in the road, howling, wailing, until her breath was gone and her desolate eyes were swollen nearly shut" (BGR 153). To make matters worse, Tony points a gun at her, threatening to kill her (162), and shoots

her newly found mother, Mi-Jeanne, straight in the chest (163). Luckily, this shot is not lethal, as Mi-Jeanne has been turned into an externally controlled duppy-soucouyant-La Diablesse, which means she is immortal. The incomprehensible horror of the events thus almost culminates in a familial massacre. Not surprisingly, the disasters in Ti-Jeanne's closest circle of family leave her wounded and grieving. No conventional societal safety net – not family, but especially no government institution – is able to secure her safety. Thus, I read the family's precarious situation and the violent outbreak as a direct result of a long history of exclusion from important economic and social opportunities, which is a problem Hopkinson extrapolates from the situation we are currently facing. In other words, it is the distinct postcolonial, diasporic condition, paired with a white supremacist society, that leads to trauma.

As analysed above, Ti-Jeanne's life often circles around the emotion of shame or guilt. Firstly, she is ashamed of her inability to bond with her child. Secondly, she feels ashamed because the relationship with Tony was unsuccessful, she is forced to return to her grandmother for financial support and because, selfishly, she does not want Tony to know that the baby is his child, to have the boy for herself. According to van der Kolk, shame is a common companion in the life of traumatized people: "deep down, many traumatized people are … haunted by the shame they feel about what they themselves did or did not do under the circumstances. They despise themselves for how terrified, dependent, excited, or enraged they felt" (13). "Shame and self-contempt" are also often considered a result of humiliating racism, as Frantz Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* (88). I therefore read Ti-Jeanne's shame as a symptom of both the personal and the structural racism-related trauma she experiences as an Afro-Caribbean immigrant in Canada. Ti-Jeanne is also ashamed of her grandmother's spiritual practices, which she considers nonsense, and of her visions, whose spiritual nature she cannot accept as part of herself. To underline this point, I will provide some context on Ti-Jeanne's postcolonial, diasporic condition by returning to Ti-Jeanne's fundamental concern: her postmodern Caribbean-Canadian identity. As Sarah Wood puts it, Ti-Jeanne is caught in the "battle between a mythical and mystical Caribbean culture and the demands of a postindustrial, postcolonial, and here posturban society" (317). Initially, she rejects the spiritual aspect of her Self, as she is afraid of her visions, which she deems as the first signs of insanity. As Anatol puts it, Ti-Jeanne "fails to see the complex whole of life" (37). Despite her "second sight" – her seer gift – she is unable to recognize her mother Mi-Jeanne, Crazy Betty, in the homeless woman wandering the streets of the Burn and, similarly, she cannot identify the spirit in her dreams as her "spirit father". She struggles to integrate her Afro-Caribbean heritage, including her spiritual gifts, into her Canadian Self, unwilling and unable to accept who she really is. In other words, she has difficulties connecting her Western beliefs with an ethnic heritage passed on to her by her grandmother and, instead, completely denies them. As Rebecca Romdhani claims, "the emotional cost for the African-Caribbean diaspora of denying one's African heritage in favour of assimilating into the colonizer's culture is shame" (73). Shame, in Romdhani's understanding, is a negative estimation of the Self as a whole: it is "a debilitating condition that controls and inhibits the functioning of clear thought, positive emotions, self-esteem and self-respect, and the ability to maintain good relationships with others" (74). Indeed, as long as Ti-Jeanne clings to her individualistic lifestyle informed by the West, she is unable to form close bonds to her baby, her grandmother and Tony – the people closest to her. Another symptom of trauma-induced shame is its ability to deaden emotions. As James Gilligan

explains, "when self-love is sufficiently diminished, one feels shame. But it may be somewhat paradoxical to refer to shame as a 'feeling,' for while shame is initially painful, constant shaming leads to a deadening feeling, an absence of feeling" (47). This is consistent with current trauma research. According to van der Kolk, who has been doing research on PTSD for several decades, survivors of trauma regularly experience feelings of numbness. As a result, shame becomes the dominating feeling again – and a downward spiral is entered (67). This is, as Romdhani argues, exactly what happens to Ti-Jeanne: "she feels shame, experiences trauma, and is detached from her community and ancestors. Ti-Jeanne's initial shame derives from her childhood. She feels hurt and rejected by her mother who abandoned her" (75). When Mi-Jeanne asks Ti-Jeanne to smash the calabash to save her, Ti-Jeanne's suppressed emotions boil over: "Mami want me to turn bush doctor; Tony want me to dead; you want me to save your wicked soul. What I go help you for? After you abandon me from small?" (BGR 162). Her feelings of rejection, not being loved, and being under the control of others, overburden her. She lacks autonomy and balance between support from outside and self-reliance. I argue that these feelings are triggered both by her posttraumatic condition, which robs her of the ability to empathize and put herself into the position of others, and by her postcolonial, diasporic position as a racialized immigrant individual. Being traumatized and discriminated against, she cannot fulfil her responsibilities in the community and in her family.

Resolving Dichotomizing Categorizations

In *Brown Girl,* Ti-Jeanne's root-working grandmother Gros-Jeanne is both a trained nurse and the community's herbalist healer and spiritual leader in Afro-Caribbean traditions, who works from a so-called balm yard and has access to the orishas from Yoruba tradition through ancestor veneration and spirit work. Hence, she possesses resourceful knowledge and experience in Western allopathic medicine as well as ancient naturopathic remedies and spiritual traditions of Orisha worship. She uses a mixture of both in her benevolent healing practice: when Caribbean plants are not readily available, for example, she substitutes them with native Canadian herbs. By successfully combining physical treatments with spiritual medicine, she aids the Burn in surviving amidst the drug dealing, human trafficking, epidemics, and poverty. In contrast to Ti-Jeanne, she understands that scientific and traditional knowledge systems can coexist, even though black healers' knowledge has historically been discredited (E. Jones, "African Women" 194). As Monika A. Coleman puts it, "Mami Gros-Jeanne understands that life as a member of an immigrant community necessitates being conversant – in language and in medicine – in both Caribbean and Canadian culture" (3). Traditional African and Western medical practices are hence not mutually exclusive, but can be complementary. In this sense, Gros-Jeanne is an example of cultural adaptation and translation. Mami owns what Bhabha has called the 'third space' of diasporic individuals, who reside in-between cultures and are characterized by fluidity and hybridity, in contrast to a stable and fixed identity. Gros-Jeanne's double background and her adaptability are also echoed in the novel's form, which is a skilful blend of Caribbean and Western beliefs, settings, and genres. I therefore suggest that, as an Afrofuturist visionary, Hopkinson deliberately begins each chapter with a traditionally Caribbean folkloric quote to link her novel, written in English, to the Caribbean literary tradition: references to the play *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* by Caribbean-British author Derek Walcott, (from which she borrows

the protagonists' names), allusions to the children's game "Brown Girl in the Ring" (such as in the title), and epigraphs of Caribbean tradition. Additionally, Hopkinson utilizes Caribbean vernaculars. She blends these elements with conventional sci-fi elements such as a dystopian setting and biotechnology (Nelson, "Making" 98) to showcase that Afro-Caribbean healing practices and spiritual beliefs are complementary to Western scientific medicine.

As third-generation immigrants, Ti-Jeanne and Tony represent the younger, scientifically influenced, sceptical generation, who believe that spirit worship is outdated and should not have a place in the lives of modern, "sane" people. Having been born and socialized in Canada, they seem to absorb their worlds through Western modes of perception and express ambivalence and unease towards Gros-Jeanne's indigenous spirituality. Tony, for example, responds with "disgust and fear" (BGR 92) to Mami summoning her spirits. As Wood argues, he is "clearly aligned with the consumerist impulses of [the] potentially destructive Canadian culture" (318) by dealing drugs and being associated with the posse. In the same vein, Tony derogatorily calls Mami's skills "mumbo-jumbo" (BGR 98) and "obeah" (104), as he perceives it as "exotic and frightening, forbidden and dangerous" (Wood 320).[30] Ti-Jeanne, being more ambiguous, publicly defends her grandmother's practices against the sceptical Tony when he links Gros-Jeanne's practices to madness: "What's that crazy old woman doing over there in Riverdale Farm, eh, Ti-Jeanne? Obeah? Nobody believes in that duppy business any more!" Ti-Jeanne defensively replies: "Is not obeah, Tony! Mami is a healer, a seer woman! She does do good, not wickedness!" (BGR 36). Secretly, though, she is not so sure herself, despite her own visions: "There was the drumming that went on in the crematorium chapel, late into the night. The wails and screams that came from the worshippers. The clotted blood on the crematorium floor in the mornings, mixed with cornmeal. Obviously, other people than Mami still believed in 'that duppy business'" (BGR 36). Ultimately, I argue, Ti-Jeanne does not believe in Mami's "bush doctor remedies" and would rather rely on "commercial drugs" instead of learning "all that old-time nonsense" (36). She replaces her grandmother's Caribbean herb remedies with "stockpiles" (13) of Western medicine, which, as Wood argues, indicates the "primacy of Canadian knowledge … over that which emerges from the Caribbean" (319) in Ti-Jeanne's belief. The past, as she supposes, has "lost [its] potency" (BGR 13), and therefore she is not able to dedicate herself to increasing her knowledge in this field. Instead, she is profoundly incredulous about, and even ashamed of, the "old world": out of ignorance and fear, she rejects her skills in clairvoyance and her grandmother's teachings, even though Gros-Jeanne attempts to persuade her to see the relevance of her ancestry and history: "Is a gift from God Father. Is a good thing, not a evil thing. But child, if you don't learn how to use it, it will use you, just like it take your mother" (BGR 47). On the other hand, Ti-Jeanne is also afraid of "the 'burbs,' [the] Mercy Hospital ambulances and Rudy's elegant grey Bentley" (111) – all being Eurocentric symbols of capitalism and modernity. As E. Jones explains, Ti-Jeanne is neither able to understand nor to acknowledge the "syncretic practices of dual culture integration" Gros-Jeanne is practising effectively "to enable a highly resilient livelihood for her and her progeny" ("Africana Women" 198). Instead, Ti-Jeanne is caught in a potentially

---

[30] Mami herself rejects the label '*obeah*' for what she does, as the term could be read as black magic in the text (BG 59).

unstable, plural, evolving, contradictory, intersectional set of identities and cannot embrace her multiplicity and hybridity just yet. Thus, I argue, this state of not being able to define and place herself, which echoes Burnett's claim that "modern day immigrants find they can never be fully accepted into their new home culture, yet that new culture changes them enough to at least partially alienate them from their birth culture" ("Realist Fiction"), is traumatic for Ti-Jeanne.

I suggest that the root of Ti-Jeanne's ongoing trauma around her multiplicity is mainly her (learned and conditioned) struggle to categorize herself within the paradigm of "either/or" – in terms of dichotomies. Ti-Jeanne believes that she can only be either Canadian or Caribbean and is unable to embrace and celebrate what she perceives as "paradoxes". In other words, she has difficulties tolerating and allowing the existence of hybridity or a multi-faceted cultural identity in her life, denying the complexity of human beings and her lived reality because she longs for assimilation into simplistic categories, such as "Canadian" or "Caribbean". This makes sense in the way that it is an appropriate response to a space where one is an immigrant, where dichotomies help people feel "safe" and secure in their identities and place. In longing to live a supposedly "normal life" in the suburbs, away from the influence of her troubled family situation, she further "disconnect[s] herself from her family, community, ancestors, and culture" (Romdhani 75). Thus, by dismissing anything "strange" and disapproving of her grandmother's belief system, Ti-Jeanne is unreceptive toward the reality of her own life and Self. To be able to survive and not drown in her trauma, Ti-Jeanne must resolve her "dichotomous philosophy" and accept the spiritual source of her visions (E. Jones, *Medicine* 108). Thus, I propose that in some ways Ti-Jeanne has to acquire more skills and strategies to deal with being an outsider in a Western country, which includes developing a certain kind of intelligence to manage her Self in her living space, but also to dismantle the dualisms surrounding race and ethnicity. I do not define this condition as a disorder, but as a logical consequence of living in the corrupted and traumatizing reality she has been socialized into. In the next section, I will outline several aspects that lead to the undermining of her restricted beliefs about her own identity, which enable her to start a process of resolving her traumas and expanding her identity.

Embracing Cultural Multiplicity: Community, Creole and Voudoun Spirituality

Positive notions of multiplicity are dominating over traumatic experience in *Brown Girl* – especially towards the end of the story. And it is exactly the acceptance and incorporation of this hybridity of identities that aid Ti-Jeanne in working through her wounds and traumas caused by oppression and marginalization, as well as her personal circumstances. As Lee Skallerup Bessette rightly observes, Ti-Jeanne has to "overcome [her] perceived or real physical imperfections to achieve some sort of internal balance and happiness" ("They Can Fly" 167). Thus, as I will argue, the active appropriation and use of the African religious heritage of Voudoun spirituality as an addition to her postmodern Canadian identity, along with the safety net of a close community and the identity marker of a hybridized language all aid in working through her traumas and turning the wounds of her past into scars. This displays, as I argue in line with Donna McCormack, that embodied selfhood is

always intertwined with others and that each individual has responsibilities towards more than just her or himself (254).

The turning point towards improvement occurs soon after the most drastic event in Ti-Jeanne's life so far: her grandmother's violent death at the hands of her boyfriend, who also points the gun at her and her mother in the presence of his baby boy. It is her mother who shows her the way out of the ongoing misery of trauma: Ti-Jeanne has to reclaim authorship of her own life narrative by saving Mi-Jeanne's duppy-spirit from her grandfather's dominion. She can terminate Rudy's power, which is indirectly systemically supported by the Canadian government, through breaking the bowl her mother is captured in. This key moment, when Ti-Jeanne realizes that she actually plays an important role and is needed in the community, triggers a chain reaction: she realizes that she is free from the toxic love she has had for Tony. She "looked into the eyes of this man she had loved beyond sense or reason. She thought of her grandmother's body lying there with its head broken in, looked at Mi-Jeanne's cooling body lying beside them on the ground" (BGR 165). She tells Tony: "Yes, I mad" (165), and goes off to save the community she suddenly identifies with. This is also the moment that her relationship with her baby begins to prosper. She tells her mother: "let me just go get the baby. He hungry. I could feed he while we walk" (166). She successfully combines motherhood with her quest of saving the community from its evil oppressor and breaking the bad obeah he uses to establish his power.

Radical Inclusion: Community Spirit

Despite their daunting prospects, the multicultural, underprivileged society living in the "doughnut hole" of the Burn, as "they call it when an inner city collapses and people run to the suburbs" (BGR 10-11), has developed a flourishing community of exchange, barter and farming as well as their own, unique sense of ethics and justice. Their community spirit and mutual support inspires their will to survive against the odds of "pedicab runners", who refuse to enter the Burn, and the fact that its (female) inhabitants have to look around constantly to ensure that they are not harassed or sexually molested (BGR 31). In other words, they reply productively and creatively to the challenges they face as the state apparatus does not take effect anymore. Because there are no stable structures, the members of the community have established their own running society with several profitable enterprises to support each other: there is a "self-appointed town librarian" (BGR 10), a self-published newspaper (11), a man who repairs and sells bicycles (12), and a couple who runs a business of farming and hunting products in the city's park (11-13). And there is Gros-Jeanne, of course – a trained nurse, who fulfils the role of spiritual leader, healer, priestess, pharmacist, *mamba,* herbalist, and doctor. She serves the spirits on behalf of the community, as Joseph M. Murphy explains: "service to the spirit is service to the community; and service to the community is service to the spirit. Service is revealed to be the central value of communal life. Service shows the spirit, in ceremony, but also whenever one member serves another. It is 'service' in all its elegant, multiple meanings, that shows the active quality of the spirituality of the African diaspora" (6-7). Again, Hopkinson explicitly foregrounds the community's strength, courage, adaptability, and resilience by letting the resourceful community combine skills that they learned in their Western technological environment with traditional ways of self-sufficiency, thereby effectively disrupting

the notion of an abandoned city centre as dystopian and hopeless and envisioning a new, hybridized cultural identity for diasporic individuals. As Skallerup Bessette theorizes, by embracing both cultures, the interdependent community of the Burn "can transcend the stigmas, nourishing themselves culturally within a society that refuses to nourish them materially" (179). The Burn-community postulates the power of creativity and resilience through service and spirituality as a group. Hopkinson underlines the importance of community with an intriguing stylistic element: the novel is a conglomerate of different points of view. The reader catches glimpses of the inner life of Ti-Jeanne, her boyfriend Tony, Gros-Jeanne, and the villain, Rudy. Still, Ti-Jeanne is without doubt the protagonist, and the bulk of the novel is told from her perspective through a third-person narrator. It is my proposition that this narrative format follows a certain agenda: Hopkinson deliberately uses several third-person voices in her novel to convey the importance of a deeply interlocked and supportive community. Hopkinson's use of slang and creole, which I will focus on more deeply later in the chapter, serves the same purpose.

Having provided this background, I argue that the traditional, and simultaneously postmodern, community of the Burn functions as a social and psychological safety net for Ti-Jeanne, who is able to rely on help in her traumatic situation from both her core family and the greater community. Ti-Jeanne's core family has strong bonds to the neighbours and the overall community of the Burn, which, despite the constant threats due to an extremely high crime rate, resembles a tightly interwoven village population. The circle of friends around Ti-Jeanne's Afro-Caribbean family is diverse both in race and in language: next to other people from the Caribbean, it includes some who speak "Spanish and others the African-rhythmed French of the French Caribbean islands. One or two were White, and there was Mami's friend Jenny who was Romany" (BGR 87). This diverse community is, as Michelle Reid assesses, "based on a Caribbean model of hybridity" (306). As Hopkinson herself asserts: "Caribbean cultures are hybrid cultures. Hybridity was a strategy for survival and resistance among the enslaved and indentured people. They all came from different cultures with different languages and then had an alien culture and speech imposed on them. They had to find ways to use elements of all the cultures to continue to exist" ("Code Sliding"). Like the current Caribbean community in Toronto, the Burn population "negotiates among several cultural identities" (Coleman 1). The conglomerate of Burn residents finds a fruitful combination of their diverse cultural backgrounds to survive, thrive and support each other. This serves as the backdrop for Ti-Jeanne's beginning the process of embracing and appropriating her multiplicity as well as her role as the community healer. In this sense, Ti-Jeanne is a prime example of what Langer states: racial hybridity in *Brown Girl* can enable radical inclusion (126). It is this strong net of community and collaboration that challenges her to learn how to use her cultural and spiritual resources for contributing in a meaningful way to this society, for example by carrying on her grandmother's legacy as a healer in her own unique and hybrid form of spirituality and by using her seer gift to free her peers from Rudy's oppressive rule. I therefore argue that it is through the act of giving and contributing that Ti-Jeanne is able to heal her wounds and establish a configured identity for herself.

Ti-Jeanne is only able to overcome her traumas and reintegrate her traumatic memories when she accepts her affiliation with a strong social network like the one presented as an asset instead of as a restriction. Initially,

as Romdhani explains, Ti-Jeanne "mistakenly believes that rejecting her African heritage and assimilating into white Canadian culture is the means through which she can assert her autonomy and selfhood" (73). Consequently, she feels locked in and tells herself: "She had to leave this place as soon as she could, get away from the balm-yard and Mami and Rudy and all these beings she couldn't see who were trying to control her life" (BGR 123). As the novel progresses, though, Ti-Jeanne relinquishes her idealism around Western individualism and starts to additionally incorporate the Afro-Caribbean community spirit into her sense of Self. She seems to realize that putting on a "white mask", in Fanon's words, is not an appropriate way to forge a diasporic cultural identity. Traditionally, Western understandings of identity and selfhood are, as McCormack assesses, "founded on distance and violence, and others are a potential threat to the integrity of the self. Here, the self must protect its borders to keep its (largely disembodied) self intact" (253). This philosophy has been, as she continues, a central belief in the violent course of enslavement and dehumanisation of whole populations and individuals (254). In Hopkinson's novel, though, selfhood is rooted, instead, in a "co-constitutive relationality, where the other is not separate or distant from the self, but rather the very means through which the self comes into being" (252). In other words, Hopkinson designs a model of selfhood where Self and Other, either alive, dead, or spirit, are shaping each other to bring to light the ongoing violence against oppressed minorities. Hopkinson's notion of a syncretic Afro-Caribbean cultural identity that is based on a sense of belonging thus has its root in a "relational and co-constitutive responsibility for each other" (252). As Hopkinson explains, this relationality is especially potent for women:

> There is this notion in black women's fiction that people don't tend to operate singly. Our families are important. My work does not reinforce that whole notion of the science fiction hero who goes off by himself and saves the world. My work is woman-centered because that's what I know, and that's what I grew up with. My protagonists tend to have to build community around them before they can do anything. (Hopkinson in Watson-Aifah 168)

It thus is not surprising that the novel's main protagonists – those who actively take the reins and turn the world upside down for the better – are all female, both black and white. The transformative power of the novel thus lies with women: Ti-Jeanne, Mi-Jeanne, Gros-Jeanne and premier Uttley, who shifts her course of politics after her transplantation, are portrayed as agents who have a positive impact on society. The villain Rudy, however, as well as the irresponsible, easily controllable drug-addict Tony, who is dependent on the aid of women to fulfil his duties, are male. In this context, Hyacinth M. Simpson claims that "as a woman living in a still-sexist society, [Hopkinson is] interested in using [her] writing to intervene into some of that sexism" (110), for example by addressing issues concerning young female adulthood and adolescence. Simultaneously, *Brown Girl* contests male entitlement and successfully undermines patriarchal, imperialist, and racist assumptions through the usage of active female heroes who are tightly interwoven into a strong community. Harrell writes:

> Individuals and organizations from within one's racial/ethnic group can assist one in dealing with racism-related experiences by providing understanding, modelling, and mentoring. At another level, community support involves the more global sense of a psychological community; it does not require an identifiable individual, but reflects an awareness that support is available from the larger community, a feeling of connectedness and not being alone, as well as the knowledge that others in one's group have had – and survived – common experiences. (52)

In this sense, I argue that not only does the community of the Burn provide this intragroup support for Ti-Jeanne, but that Afrofuturism as a genre bears the possibility of providing it for historically marginalized and oppressed groups, especially black women, through the process of identification. In *Brown Girl,* as an example of sci-fi, a genre which has long neglected the inclusion of female and black characters, Afrodiasporic readers might find themselves and their ancestors represented. Additionally, the novel might enable white (and male) readers to identify and develop empathy towards historically othered people, thereby rethinking their own privilege and deeply ingrained, conscious and subconscious racist beliefs. In an interview with Nelson, Hopkinson argues that writing allows her to intervene in her readers' assumptions through the creation of different standards in her fictional worlds, and through exaggerating the values her characters live by into the fantastical, "so that the consequences conversely become so real that they are tangible" (Hopkinson in Nelson, "Making" 101). By productively intersecting fiction and history, Hopkinson makes tangible the neo-colonial restrictions on black women today, and thereby, in true Afrofuturist fashion, provides the change in perception which is required to discuss matters that may otherwise be hard to deal with (Bustamante 26). She achieves this by foregrounding black female heroes, by emphasizing the importance of community, by channelling West African and Caribbean histories and spirituality, and by subverting conventional readings and discourses of the imperialist past. Thus, Hopkinson uses characters from marginalized groups of society as a strategy of resistance towards both mainstream science fiction and neo-colonialism. In an interview, Hopkinson explains that she has been pondering both on the fact that black people are often not considered as "plausible future bodies" in literature (McDonald 138), and on the theory that "the aliens and fairies and what-have-you in science fiction and fantasy could be seen as stand-ins for people of color" ("Maybe" 101). As she does not see herself and her people reflected in mainstream literature (102), her writing foregrounds formerly marginalized characters, giving underprivileged minorities a voice. Hopkinson thus rewrites canonical texts representing Afrodiasporic people and women, to reclaim, correct and replace them with a more encompassing version of reality. She elaborates: "I think there are many types of black lives that don't really get talked about. We are as complex as any culture on this earth. We're trying so hard to get the rest of the world … to recognize that we are respectable, deserving human beings" (Hopkinson in Watson-Aifah 169). Hopkinson's endeavour of representing historically marginalized groups of society is especially important, as Langer suggests, because mainstream Canadian science fiction, in particular, has removed from its imaginable futures those marginalized communities and authors who are not deemed suitable according to traditionally Western generic criteria (45). In rendering Afro-Caribbean culture the norm*,* as the story is told from an Afro-Caribbean woman's perspective, Hopkinson confronts expectations, stigmas and stereotypes her non-black and non-Caribbean readers might foster – probably due to Western sci-fi's historically prevalent accentuation of white male characters as active agents. Hopkinson asserts that her concern with Western sci-fi is not that

> it doesn't include black people; it's that our presence is curiously muted, and there are few black writers of 'speculative' fiction. As to the strategy of writing 'speculative' fiction from a black/Caribbean centre, I was looking at the sense of exile that comes with being an Afro-Caribbean person – that sense of longing for home, and not being sure whether home is Africa or the Caribbean or wherever you happen to live. I was trying to talk about something complicated, and using science fiction to do it. (Hopkinson in Simpson 108)

In line with this argument, McDonald reads the transplantation of Mami's heart into premier Uttley's body as a metaphor for the "struggle going on between science fiction (represented by Uttley's body) and all those who have been excluded from it (represented by the heart from the multicultural inner city)" – there is a "transformation-from-within" (139) and "power in choosing or claiming science fiction as one's own" (141). Moreover, I suggest that Gros-Jeanne's heart serves as a metaphor for bridging oppositions: the gaping wound in the relationship between the white bourgeoisie and the Burn community in the city centre – the latter historically viewed as the dangerous Other. In this sense, the transplant is as an act of "colonization in reverse" (Romdhani 86). When she recovers, premier Uttley feels "*invaded in some way, taken over … Bit by bit, she was losing the ability to control her own body. The heart was taking it over … Then blackness*" (BGR 237, emphasis in original). In the end, instead of subjugation, the heart enters a symbiosis similar to spirits and their servers (Bustamante 25). Both sides will benefit: Uttley is "a new woman now" (BGR 237l). I suggest that the "new woman's" process of "healing" (BGR 237) could be read as positive and refers to her transformed, more just, outlook and aspirations towards society and its underprivileged minorities. She has adopted a "healthier", more ethical vision of equality, a "social conscience" (BGR 239) that is less focused on white hegemony and rather highlights the importance of community, empathy and an aspiration for healing and growth. I therefore suggest that the nation will most probably be fortified by the transplant of the "alien organ" (BGR 237). With a literally "changed heart" filled with empathy and traditional knowledge, the recovered Uttley makes substantial changes to her political agenda: she will support entrepreneurs instead of convincing big businesses to move back to the Burn (BGR 239). The two Torontos – the mostly white, affluent, and seemingly ethno-centric suburbs, and the ostracised Burn – will hopefully move from a state of split and fragmentation into a state of reunion: a state of more equal, interdependent partnership based on hybridity, re-evaluating the former politics of segregation. The ones at the fringes of society are spatially relocated at the very centre. Through the social and cultural resignification of the Burn in "the ring", they are subversively showcased as the very core of a more encompassing future national renewal. Thus, the internalized mentality of "us vs. them" could finally be cracked open, certain persevering social dynamics could be changed, the assumed alien otherness could be altered into productive multiplicity and suburbanites might hopefully rethink their label of the inhabitants of the Burn as "rats" (BGR 240).

Hopkinson's framing of social concerns with Afrofuturism is in line with Jacques Stephen Alexis' theories on Caribbean literature. Bill Ashcroft et al. paraphrase his argument that authors with a cultural background of "Afro-Amerindian-European syncretism" (147) should reject realism "as a suitable mode for Black-Haitian expression" (148) – it should rather be accompanied by "the strange and the fantastic, of dreams and half-light, of the mysterious and the marvellous" (148). Accordingly, Hopkinson claims in an interview that she perceives speculative fiction as a "great place to warp the mirror, and thus impel the reader to view differently things that they've taken for granted" (Hopkinson in Glave 149). Afrofuturism allowed her to deal with highly charged issues "without the hassle of the messy real world power politics" ("Maybe" 105), permitting an unsettling of hegemonic ideas of "politics, culture, race, power, sex, sexuality, gender …. It's in the nature of the genre to allow one to step outside the box and examine what's in it and think about what might be excluded and why", she explains (Hopkinson in Simpson 108-9). In *Brown Girl*, Hopkinson makes use of the speculative

to address identity formation of diasporic and immigrant subjects by looking at the way in which marginalization and prejudice constrain and wound people to this day. The generic multiplicity of the Afrofuturist novel comprises a strong realist element, which allows for the realist and recognizable depiction of dire social conditions, racialized structures, and culturally specific references. Simultaneously, the element of the fantastic facilitates the inclusion of and fuses with spiritual cultural traditions, beliefs and agencies that run counter, precisely, to this realist narrative in a narrow sense and tradition. Thus, it is the generic hybridity of the Afrofuturist novel, in particular, which allows for this speculative and revised multi-cultural horizon. Hopkinson's skilful mix of social criticism with Caribbean spirituality, a Yoruba tradition of Myalism, African mythology and traditional Caribbean monsters such as the loogaroo, the soucouyant or the zombie comes naturally for her, as she postulates, because "[a]ll the Caribbean characters inhabit hybridized worlds" (Rutledge 599) – including herself:

> We are the people who have more than one place or identity or culture that's home, and we're struggling to find modes of expression that convey how we've had to become polyglot, not only in multiple lexicons but also in multiple identities. The classical forms of artistic expression give us a base from which to work, but from there we have to break the codified forms and create new voices for ourselves. (Hopkinson in Rutledge 599)

The futuristic elements, such as the dystopian setting or advanced medical treatments in the realms of transplantation, render the novel something more than Caribbean magical realism: it "makes use of [a] process of reflection, refraction, and decomposition to articulate the complex subjectivity of the doubly displaced" (Wood 317). In drawing a universal picture of the experience of people of colour in a postcolonial environment, who need to negotiate two spaces, Hopkinson "points towards the inherent brokenness of the ideological systems inherited through colonialism – and through her dystopic vision, she suggests the necessity of alternative frameworks that re-privilege the subjectivities of the disempowered to challenge and perhaps change such systems" (Olutola 76). The novel imagines and re-imagines colonial relations with the goal of highlighting and revolting against imperialist assumptions and current socioeconomic inequities. *Brown Girl* therefore functions as a "counter-discursive strategy of resistance" (Wood 316). Hopkinson asserts this assumption when she predicts that "in the same way that women writers and readers are claiming a place in the fantastical genres, there will begin to be more diverse expressions of people's lived experiences of race, culture, class, sexuality, social structures, and gender" (Hopkinson in Nelson, "Making" 113). By highlighting the horrors of a violent and racist colonial history in her futurist setting and addressing the prejudices towards people of colour, thereby questioning rigid categories of Otherness and difference, Hopkinson pushes boundaries and joins many contemporary sci-fi writers of colour, who currently endeavour a decolonization of the genre by criticizing neo-colonial practices through imagining a more equal postcolonial world. In mixing up different genres, Hopkinson creates a fusion of urban realism, revised cyberpunk, traditional folklore, and futuristic speculation which is characteristic of her writing. As she assesses herself, with her work emerging from a Caribbean context, "fusion fits very well; that's how we survived" (Hopkinson in Nelson, "Making" 99). Thus, mixing up elements of fairy-tales, science fiction, fantasy, horror, Caribbean folklore, and realism expresses her hybrid identity as an Afro-Caribbean writer. In this sense, *Brown Girl* feeds into the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory I try to work towards in this dissertation.

Resisting the Past: Creole Language and Traumatic Muteness

Closely connected to the importance of community, the second aspect that is identity-establishing in Ti-Jeanne's life is the meaning and utilization of language. The Afro-Caribbean-Canadians of the Burn use a very distinct creole vernacular, which becomes, as I argue, identity-establishing for Ti-Jeanne because it provides her with a distinct sense of belonging. It is used as a marker to distinguish both the different nationalities within the hybrid community of the Burn and the relationship of the Caribbeans to the larger Canadian society (Coleman 1). Hopkinson declares that a great part of the historically grown Caribbean identity is bound up in language:

> We have used [language] as a tool of resistance and politicization …. We have hybridized the different languages that were in operation in the Caribbean into creoles. Each Caribbean country has its own; …. And each creole has its sociolects that signal a speaker's class, level of education, sometimes even caste and race. On top of all that, we've gone through years of our educators trying to shame this textured, complex, rich 'bad language' out of us and make us speak only 'the Queen's English,' whatever that means to anyone who isn't actually the Queen of England. The vernaculars were seen as debased, and in many places are still so seen. (Rutledge 600)

By utilizing a sociolect in *Brown Girl*, Hopkinson reveals the hybrid world of Afro-Caribbeans in Canada to a broader audience and deliberately reclaims the vernaculars for herself as an author and the Canadian Afrodiasporic community as a whole. Hopkinson explains: "To speak in the hacked language is not just to speak in an accent or a creole; to say the words aloud is an act of referencing history and claiming space" ("Code Sliding"). By utilizing these different regiolects, Hopkinson explains further, she aims at reducing the "uneasiness around vernacular speech, especially black vernacular speech", as "they aren't just accents or ignorance" (Hopkinson in Rutledge 601). As she asserts, the creoles are "part enforced compliance, part defiance, and a whole lot of creativity" (Hopkinson in Nelson, "Making" 102). In other words, Hopkinson forms a habit of verbal resistance – her language resists domination, class, and race. For Hopkinson, this subversion, and the fusion of genres she is practising in her work, are an opportunity to create literature for marginalized groups in society.

The inhabitants of the Burn are not only using a vernacular but are in fact multi-lingual: they "code-switch" or "code-slide", as Hopkinson calls it (Rutledge 601; "Code-Sliding"), between different sociolects, dialects and what is considered generally as Standard English, depending on the situation. The characters thus have a choice as to which language and linguistic register to draw on, a choice they actively and strategically exploit. The ability to code-switch, which, as Hopkinson claims, is in itself a "subversion of the dominant language" (Hopkinson in Glave 149), is widespread in postcolonial diasporic cultures, and the skilful mixture of languages into creoles carry tiny nuances and textures of meaning. The characters in *Brown Girl* are mostly Jamaican and Trinidadian, which Hopkinson herself speaks most handily (Nelson, "Making" 193; Simpson 103). Tony, for example, was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad's capital (BGR 84), and therefore speaks a respective vernacular in the novel. As with most of the Burn residents, his speech "waver[s] between Creole and Canadian" (BGR 19), which reflects his hybrid, multiple identity – and his pride thereof. Language hence becomes the medium through which the characters negotiate their identities as both Canadian and Caribbean (Coleman 2). Extending this beyond the specificity of the novel, language, and code switching in

particular, thus become the medium through which individuals negotiate being diasporic. In the pivoting innate to code switching - an ability to step into and out of - lies the charge of thirdness. By having her characters speak a hybridized language, and thereby creating powerful hybridized configured identities, Hopkinson is, as she sees it, "literally culture-jamming" ("Maybe" 107): she forces her audience to confront and take into account the unique and complex life experiences of black diasporic individuals, who face dislocation and juggle several cultures and languages. As Jillana Enteen observes, Hopkinson's particular combination of Canadian English with Trinidadian and Jamaican recalls "the histories of the middle passage, slavery, and imperialism" (263). Similarly, Gros-Jeanne recognizes the traumatic legacy of slavery and its destructive ideologies, which are mostly silenced in the present: "From since slavery days we [African] people get in the habit of hiding we business from we own children even, in case a child open he mouth and tell somebody story and get them in trouble. Secrecy was survival, oui. Is a hard habit to break" (BGR 43). Hopkinson clarifies that not the people, but the situation they find themselves in is to be blamed for this muteness. Ultimately, *Brown Girl* contributes to the project of excavating a forgotten or suppressed past: Hopkinson critiques dangerous silencing by subversion, and thus "actively forgets", in Nietzsche's words, the difficult past by turning it into reparative remembrance through her creative work. Analogously, her characters inherently bear the past in their bodies as a form of healing memory and enact it through their speech: they speak their own language, which emerged from this history, but is appropriated as a marker of their hybrid identity. In other words, Hopkinson's unique language simultaneously encodes and reformulates both past and future (Enteen 267), while helping the characters to heal and establish a configured identity through acknowledging the past and imagining a better future.

Voudoun Spirituality: The Remembered Space of the Caribbean

The inhabitants of the Burn not only distinguish themselves through certain vernaculars of speech, but especially unite around their African-derived religion, as Coleman observes (5), which is part of their distinct pan-African identity. By drawing from a pool of spiritual practices from different African countries, its unique design forms a part of the characters' identities, as I will argue, and constitutes a "valid epistemology of care and community building" (McCormack 252). The third aspect which triggers Ti-Jeanne's healing process, tightly interwoven with the aspects of language and community, is thus the acceptance and appropriation of Voudoun spirituality or Myalism, which comprises beliefs in reincarnation and transcendence of spirits into her life – a spirituality which she manages to turn into a source of empowerment.

As outlined above, Ti-Jeanne's main conflict revolves around the stark contrast between Western medicine and Caribbean Voudoun tradition, stemming from her indecisiveness of where to place herself culturally. The contrast is full of tension, but not unbridgeable, as Gros-Jeanne exemplifies through her embrace of an alternative epistemology to produce healing. She productively combines two seemingly unreconcilable practices – Canadian medication and Caribbean spiritual healing and herbalism – into a uniquely configured framework. As we have seen, *Brown Girl* thus challenges the binary of religion/science through blending Afro-Caribbean with Western practices. It is this hybrid identity Gros-Jeanne showcases, which serves as an

example worthy of imitation for Ti-Jeanne towards the end of the novel. Though reluctantly, she makes room in her life for her Caribbean obeah power, the supernatural Sight gift she has inherited from her mother and grandmother. This process starts when she realizes that "[s]he had to come back to Mami. Just long enough to find out how to control the dreams, keep the spirits out of her head. Then she'd be free" (BGR 105). However, she fails to realize that the resolution of her problem is not cutting the spirits out, but rather accepting them in, and ultimately transforming them into agential forces enlarging her own agency. This ability seems to have been impaired by her trauma, as trauma or life stress can affect spiritual well-being (Harrell 48). Only by establishing a link to her patron spirit Legbara, her Eshu, can Ti-Jeanne regain authorship of her own life and work through her traumatizing past. Her guardian, Legbara, is a deity which appears regularly in Caribbean Voudou. Also called Legba, Eshu, Prince of Cemetery the Ghede, or the One in the Black Cape, he is an African-Caribbean trickster deity "responsible for crossroads, cemeteries and the opening of gates, including the gate of communication with other gods" (Hurston in Bustamante 20). Her "tophatted, skull-faced" (BGR 225) spirit father, who appears as a Jab-Jab as well, first turns up when Gros-Jeanne performs a meticulously described Voudoun ritual, which Ti-Jeanne is reluctant to attend, as she remembers the "occasional screams, grunts, and moans" (BGR 87) from the times she overheard her grandmother and her followers performing a ceremony in the chapel on their farm. She had participated one time, but, being frightened, she afterwards refused to take part in any more ceremonies (BGR 87). Even though she is sceptical, Ti-Jeanne observes the sequence and internalizes the symbolic meaning of particular objects, which will later save her life when she has to face her cruel grandfather. Being increasingly haunted by her visions, Ti-Jeanne ultimately recognizes that she cannot escape her legacy. She surrenders to Gros-Jeanne and finally agrees to learn and use her magical faculties: "Yes, Mami. I sorry, Mami. I ready to learn from you now" (BGR 126). Gros-Jeanne is subsequently able to pass on her knowledge about herbalism and medicinal drugs, before she continues to teach her granddaughter how to "serv[e] the spirits", how the peculiar mixture of different Afro-Caribbean religious beliefs is labelled in the novel. As a third-generation immigrant, Ti-Jeanne follows a different route to reconnect with her cultural heritage than her mother and grandmother, while still assimilating, to a certain extent, into the urbanized Western lifestyle she encounters (Reid 307). When Gros-Jeanne, as the first-generation immigrant, attempts to hold the family together, her demanding way of passing on her knowledge drives her daughter away, who was, at the time, rather attracted to the independence and individualism of the Western way of life. Gros-Jeanne's high expectations almost cause Ti-Jeanne to resist in a comparable way, rejecting the Caribbean traditions, heritage and Gros-Jeanne's authoritarian upbringing (307). Finally, though, as Frederick postulates, Ti-Jeanne "makes and remakes herself from myriad 'tools' available in the Burn; in other words, who she is can be understood as autochthonous, formed out of the place in which she finds herself" (11-12). As identities are negotiable and can be assumed and fashioned, Ti-Jeanne finds access to the hybridized Caribbean community by incorporating the spiritual aspect of her identity into her configured set of multiple identities – and thereby creates a syncretic identity for herself.

In passing on her knowledge about root-work and Caribbean herbal medicine, Gros-Jeanne remembers the space of the Caribbean for her granddaughter, which empowers her on her journey towards a hybrid configured identity. I propose here that the use of memories of the Caribbean for Ti-Jeanne's process of trauma

assimilation and re-configuration of her identity is essential. As the narrative progresses, Ti-Jeanne's lived reality is increasingly informed by this remembered space. In other words, her cultural memory finds expression through her work as a spiritual healer and herbalist. This not only enables Ti-Jeanne to come to terms with her Self, but could also be read as a counter discourse of resistance for the Afrodiasporic community spread across the world (Wood 318). The remembered space of the Caribbean functions as a protective presence, similar to how Afrodiasporic slave communities reconstructed Africa and its syncretic religions after the Middle Passage both as a means of opposition and a method to continue to articulate their culture in the new space. The distinct Afrodiasporic religious practices hence can be viewed as a technique for dislocated minorities to make sense of the new environment into which they find themselves placed. In this sense, traditional Caribbean culture becomes a means for the configuration of identities that are constantly challenged by the dominant Canadian host culture. This argument is underlined by Daniel Yon's case study in Metropolitan Toronto, which found that Afro-Caribbean identities and subjectivities often are a product of and a reaction to the marginalization, racism, exclusion, and eurocentrism the minority faces (491). The notion of "serving the spirits" thus is a conglomerate of belief systems which shapes a new pan-Caribbean identity through the creation of a pantheon of spirits, irrespective of the colonizing country and the African country of origin. In this light, the mixture of Caribbean religious practices described are, as Laura Salvini postulates, "both generating and regenerating a multi-layered global identity" (181). The syncretic pan-Caribbean, Afrodiasporic spiritual practice that Gros-Jeanne describes and practices serves as a metaphor for the intermixture of different Afro-Caribbean backgrounds in the Burn, underlining the importance of this community. Additionally, by weaving together different strands of spirit belief, Hopkinson stresses the firm link between the different peoples of the African diaspora, who are bound together by a similar fate.

Along with her amalgamation of spiritual beliefs, Hopkinson merges "the techno-scientific architecture of the city with the religious iconography of the Caribbean" (Wood 324), thereby decolonizing and subverting common perceptions of diasporic living. This merging becomes apparent in the duppy persona, who is the spirit of Gros-Jeanne's daughter and Ti-Jeanne's mother Mi-Jeanne, aka Crazy Betty, the homeless woman from the street, who was lost to madness during the riots. In introducing this postmodern religious fusion, Hopkinson effectively captures "how more than one being can exist in one body" (McCormack 253) – exemplified both by Mami Gros-Jeanne, the healer and nurse, and the spirits "riding" and physically changing Ti-Jeanne, when she finally lets them (BGR 117). Ti-Jeanne is "simultaneously herself and co-existing with the ancestors who also manifest as distinct beings. Selfhood is more than one being in one body, while still remaining attached to a sense of a singular identity that is evidently intertwined with the bodies and minds of more than human others" (McCormack 256). Being "ridden" by her spirit father, being "possessed" – a highly charged term which I reluctantly use in lack of one with a less negative connotation – alters Ti-Jeanne's sense of Self, but the consequence is not further disintegration, fragmentation, or loss of identity. Instead, Ti-Jeanne's traumatically fragmented Self is sent on the path to healing through the addition, pushed into a direction of empowerment. By reconnecting with her heritage, she "become[s] an interlocutor not only for the traditions she has abandoned and her present life, but also for the disconnected worlds of mortals and spirits" (Bustamante 21). In other words, she crosses boundaries not only of humans and gods, but also of national

identities – her Canadian and her Caribbean identities as such – which has the reader think of Canadian national identity in a new and more inclusive way. It is then only fitting that the spirit of the crossroads is her spirit father. Like him, she starts to cross boundaries and moves fluidly between cultures. Still, Ti-Jeanne reminds us that a complete sense of wholeness is not attainable by any human ever. Nevertheless, by uniting worlds that often seem unconnected and irreconcilable by incorporating and individually configuring her multiple selves as a Caribbean-Canadian single-mother and spiritual seer, Ti-Jeanne has achieved a huge step on her journey towards healing. This tightrope walk, this split, between European and Caribbean culture, which Ti-Jeanne has to overcome (or otherwise risk the life of her family and her own), seems to echo and expand Du Bois's concept of 'double consciousness'. Hopkinson herself argues that "[f]or people from diasporic cultures there's more than a doubled consciousness. It's occupying multiple overlapping identities simultaneously. Throw in identities formed around politics, gender, class, sexual preference, etc. and you have quite the stew" (Rutledge 599). Thus, *Brown Girl* "considers and affirms the formation of Canadian identity as 'both/and' rather than as 'either/or'" (Frederick 9), successfully undermining binaries. Hopkinson thus introduces elements of Caribbean culture and religious practices into Ti-Jeanne's life, rendering her living space, Riverdale Farm, a hybrid between Canadian and Caribbean influences to challenge her to accept her heritage and the non-normative facets of her Self and then transforming them into agential forces enlarging her own agency. *Brown Girl* thus exemplifies the myriad of possibilities of how one can belong to nations: She "'Caribbeanizes' this Canada – *and* 'Canadianizes' her Caribbean – she does much more than insert formerly excluded selves into an imagined idyll", as Frederick expresses it (10, emphasis in original). Ti-Jeanne is simultaneously connected to her Caribbean heritage and at home in Canada. By proposing this new way of relating to nations, Frederick continues, Hopkinson "imagines healing rifts between [common] conception and her lived reality, a healing that challenges the idea that immigrants must sever connection to pre-migration realities to belong to the North American space" (10). The recognition of this new possibility changes Ti-Jeanne's perception of her responsibility towards her community – a responsibility her grandmother has long carried.

Through the reality of living alongside the spirits of ancestors, the understanding of a chronological sequence of past, present, and future in the novel is challenged. This, again, renders members of the communities increasingly aware of their respective roles within their area of influence, which is passed on along generational lines. Mi-Jeanne, for example, strongly defines herself through the responsibility she carries towards the community as a gifted healer and perceives her profession as a form of "calling" or destiny, which has to be conveyed to the subsequent generations (BGR 36). When Ti-Jeanne realises that her Caribbean cultural heritage is not a fixed body of knowledge, but a "process of continual adaptation and recombination from many available resources" (Reid 308), she has to redefine her idea of freedom: "not freedom from the spirits, but freedom to move between different spiritual and cultural worlds" (308). In doing this, she is able to fulfil her predestined role as the saviour of the community after the power balance between her grandparents Gros-Jeanne and Rudy is destroyed by Gros-Jeanne's death. The positive communal change Ti-Jeanne initiates in defeating Rudy is enabled because she drops traumatizing socially constructed doctrines about the impossibility of uniting several national and cultural identities in one body, thereby reintegrating formerly

fragmented cultural memory about the Caribbean into her newly configured identity. As Romdhani sums up, she "begins to realize that true power is a we-self power …. Caring and empathizing with others is a source of power and knowledge rather than a sign of powerlessness" (85). After years of trying to escape her responsibilities and her emotions, Ti-Jeanne embraces her connection to the spirit, and thereby her Afro-Caribbean heritage, and finally finds access to the freedom and power she had been looking for. This embrace literally manifests, and is especially visible, in the final scenes of the novel, when Ti-Jeanne ultimately lets go of her fears and wraps her arms "trustingly around [Papa Legbara's] neck" (BGR 225). It is especially interesting to observe how Ti-Jeanne deliberately tries to let go of rational thinking and rather relies on her instinct and emotional connection in the final battle scene against Rudy: "*Not to think, not to think. Instinct alone*", she repeats to herself several times (BGR 209, emphasis in original). By removing the "blinding veil of misunderstanding" (Anatol 37), she can finally begin the journey of healing and recovery from trauma. Rudy rightly observes that "Girl-pickney… like your granny teach you some of she antics after all" (201) – her increased knowledge in Afro-Caribbean spirituality enables her to destroy the calabash to which Rudy's duppies, including her mother Mi-Jeanne, are confined. The community of the Burn is freed of their maleficent oppressor because Ti-Jeanne has mastered the Caribbean spiritual practices passed on to her through family tradition.

Zombification as a Metaphor for Trauma

In an attempt to control her life, Rudy poisons Ti-Jeanne to transform her into a zombie (BGR 210). Zombies, in common linguistic usage, are mindless beings robbed of their autonomy and controlled by another, and therefore are often seen as closely related to trauma in research. Metaphorically, as Romdhani explains, the term 'zombie' is used in Voudou and in "some theories of violence … to refer to the effects and affects of trauma, which is said to result in 'zombification'" (73). Similarly, Sarah Olutola argues that the zombie figure embodies a "latent psycho-social trauma" by "expos[ing] and critiqu[ing] the continued suffering of African diasporic peoples under racialized economic structures" (64). In this context, the zombie figure represents the psychic trauma which pervades our global world of capitalism (Olutola 70), and "black people's history of oppression, exploitation, and demonization" (Romdhani 72). In other words, zombies, in their never-ending suffering, are metaphors for the ongoing struggles that black people have encountered since the Middle Passage and are a "haunting reminder of slavery and thus of how a colonial order continues to structure everyday Canadian life" (McCormack 256). In *Brown Girl,* zombies are symbols for "the consequential shame that members of the African-Caribbean diaspora may experience from a legacy of oppression, which, significantly, includes internalizing a white Western perception of their African and Caribbean cultural inheritance" (Romdhani 72). By including zombies in her novel, Hopkinson reveals "ways to emotionally heal this trauma for the African-Caribbean diaspora" (73). The creation of zombies produces a split between body and spirit. Rudy's abusive command, which involves slaughtering people, splits his zombified daughter Mi-Jeanne in two, for example: her spirit is captured in the calabash, while her body wanders the streets of the Burn as "Crazy Betty". In trauma research, it is assumed that the subject "splits" off part of itself or of its identity when confronted with an overwhelming situation. After the original trauma occurs, the body continues with daily

life, while the mind is held captive in the past, failing to "engage in the present" (van der Kolk 220). In *Brown Girl,* as Romdhani specifies, "the experience of trauma can … result in the spirit leaving the body and existing in the middle world with spirits such as the jab jab …. This is the world that Mi-Jeanne, as a duppy-soucouyant-zombie, inhabits" (84). When Rudy attempts to traumatize Ti-Jeanne as well, by trying to convince her of being responsible for the death of her mother, "emotional pain and trauma cause her to float out of her body over the CN Tower" (Romdhani 85). Ti-Jeanne, though, having newly configured a multiple, hybrid Self, is able to resist Rudy. When she feels her body getting paralyzed by Rudy's poison, which marks the start of her transformation into a zombie, she concentrates on what Mami had told her earlier: "the centre pole is the bridge between the worlds" (BGR 221). The centre pole, effectively bridging the gap between Western and traditionally African belief systems, refers to the CN Tower, the landmark of Toronto's skyline, on whose top floor Ti-Jeanne fights Rudy: "For like the spirit tree that the centre pole symbolised, the CN Tower dug roots deep into the ground where the dead lived and pushed high into the heavens where the oldest ancestors lived. The tower was their ladder into this world" (BGR 221). The CN tower, where Rudy resides, at first a symbol of postcolonial domination, turns into a symbol for the connection between the spiritual and the material worlds (Bustamante 24). It is a means for Ti-Jeanne to access the Caribbean spirits, but she also uses it to "ground her sense of spirituality" (Reid 310). In other words, the tower stands for feeling connected to her heritage, while simultaneously finding a home in Canada. It reconnects past and present, the material world with the spiritual world, and the Toronto landscape with Caribbean traditions (Bustamante 24). Thus, I argue that the tower is, on the one hand, the sacred space Ti-Jeanne needs to reach her spirit father Legbara, but, on the other hand, it also incarnates Ti-Jeanne's Caribbean-Canadianness and the individual, syncretic use of her spiritual gifts. While being paralyzed, she finds the power to call on all the Seven African Powers at once (BGR 221). Her summoning call proves to be effective, as Legbara appears in smoke: "Papa had heard her!" (196). She achieves this thitherto unheard-of feat by combining Western technologies and African traditional spiritual practices, thereby establishing her own unique and hybrid way of dealing with challenges, which, in the end, is more powerful than one of the two alternatives separately. The conventions of the fantastic thus allow for the imaginative construction of a character who manages to incorporate both the postmodern technology and her traditional Caribbean culture in her identity, thereby fulfilling her spiritual inheritance: the "shift from tradition to syncretism [is] complete" (Salvini 185). As Frederick sums up, Ti-Jeanne, "simultaneously young woman; black; mother; pan-Caribbean; diasporic African, and servant of the spirits is, fantastically Canadian" (14). It is in this moment of creating new forms of expression from within, I argue, that Ti-Jeanne fully embraces her hybrid, configured identity as a diasporic individual. In other words, Ti-Jeanne adopts a multifaceted, autonomous identity through the adaptation of traditional knowledge to her postcolonial condition. Ti-Jeanne has "done good", as her grandmother assures her (BGR 225), while the wicked Rudy is destroyed, by exerting a spiritual power which is hybrid and adapted by Ti-Jeanne "to the needs of the location" (Wood 324). She addresses her "uneasiness toward her multiple, overlapping identities by welcoming her hybridized self" through acceptance, transformation, and syncretism, and ultimately invites her Caribbean origin in. Without directly becoming her grandmother's successor and thereby fulfilling restrictive societal expectations, she makes peace with her spiritual powers and hence can resist the "suffocating and imprisoning aspects of her

heritage, that, to a greater or lesser extent both of her grandparents represent, and adapt her awareness of the Caribbean to its Canadian context" (Wood 323-24). I therefore propose a reading of the novel which suggests that both preventing and healing zombification (thus traumatization) are crucial for the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, which can be attained through "reclaiming and reconnecting with African cultural heritage" (Romdhani 73). Thus, by re-appropriating her ancestors' culture, Ti-Jeanne serves as an example of this reconnection by reclaiming a Caribbean and Canadian past, present and future (Olutola 75) and by connecting the formerly separate spaces comprising her reality: she realizes that it is knowledge that matters, not the biological conditions of our bodies (Salvini 190). Freeing herself of her old traumas and reversing the "split" in her Self by incorporating all aspects of her personality into a coherent but fluid set of identities, Ti-Jeanne reclaims her agency by reconnecting to her Afro-Caribbean spiritual heritage and simultaneously liberates her mother from her state of enslavement by reconnecting the duppy spirit to her body. In line with Simpson, I therefore propose that through Ti-Jeanne's process of self-actualization, Hopkinson addresses the "need to bridge the gap between generations, to reconnect spiritually with the self, and to claim the liberating (rather than the destructive) aspects of one's history" (112). In this way, Hopkinson highlights the constructive potential of a multicultural Canada and diasporic hybridity in general.

Over the course of the novel, Ti-Jeanne has developed personally, and has learned self-control, independence, autonomy, and self-worth through the process of working through her trauma. As an independent, accomplished woman, she is able to overcome her addictive obsession with Tony (BGR 246) and fend for herself. It is only after her own healing process advances, and her place in the Afro-Caribbean community is found, that she can free herself from toxic relationships and simultaneously fully develop and deepen the human relations that empower her. She no longer experiences her baby as a burden and is able to enjoy his presence: he "fill[s] her with glee" (BGR 247). Because she is finally building a relationship with him, she is also ready to name him, thereby confirming his lasting existence in her life. In doing so, she begins to heal the transgenerational traumatic pattern of her family. Being at ease with her multiple identities and having let go of deadlocked dichotomies, Ti-Jeanne ultimately fills her predestined space: she develops into a caring mother and a potent hero for her community. She is still positioned, though, as Wood observes, "on the threshold, at the crossroads of cultures, religions and spaces, and it is clear that this confluence requires constant mediation" (324). The process of internalization, imitation and performance of Ti-Jeanne's identity is necessarily fluid, needs continuous negotiation, and will inevitably change over time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have proposed a reading of Ti-Jeanne as being profoundly traumatized due to alienation and marginalization, which is caused by racism and classism. The personal consequences of social and political inequalities and oppressions are strongly interconnected to these structural and systemic factors. These include childhood abandonment and physical abuse, the inheritance of destructive behaviour in relationships, and a socially constructed clash of two seemingly unreconcilable identities, her Canadian and her Caribbean Self. These factors evoke feelings of shame, fragmentation and compartmentalization, resulting in unsettled

relationships with her child, his father, and her grandmother, and nightmares and visions strongly resembling schizophrenia. To grow, I have argued that Ti-Jeanne must gain access to her spirituality and embody the Pan-Caribbean religious traditions passed down to her from her grandmother. Additionally, she resolves parts of her trauma, discovers her destiny, and establishes a certain sense of cohesiveness, when she recognizes certain socially conditioned behavioural patterns in herself and starts relying on the safety net of the close-knit community of the Burn, which is tightly related to the powerful identity marker of a Creole language. Ultimately, by defeating Rudy, she stops limiting and sabotaging herself and her growth, configures a hybridized, fluid diasporic identity, and forms lasting social relations, especially with her baby. I have shown that Ti-Jeanne flourishes in her community, celebrates her heritage, values her newly found hybrid cultural identity, forms supportive relationships, and fulfils her predestined role. Synecdochical for her community, she emerges as an ambassador of hope and perseverance for people who find themselves in mourning or stuck in destructive relationships, who are on the search or recovering from trauma, by showcasing the power of faith, traditions, family and community for guidance and support. On a societal and political level, she offers a new perspective of rethinking restrictive "us-versus-them" binaries prevalent in our own reality. Thus, the novel serves as a reminder that only collaboration and empathy, not domination and exploitation, provide the right way to take.

Hopkinson underlines that power structures and their continuous effect infuse societies worldwide. In conclusion, I therefore argue that *Brown Girl* reveals that self-formation and healing from trauma constitute a continuous process, which is perpetually influenced by power structures and dominant discourses. In this sense, the novel contributes to the ongoing necessity to work through difficult and haunting issues, such as marginalized hybrid bodies and identities, as well as a traumatic past after hegemonic oppression, to imagine and envision a more desirable future, which includes alternative societal configurations and power relations. The novel's extrapolation from the mundane world allows Hopkinson to investigate what the future might look like, for example by imagining cultures in which people of colour are not alienated (Hopkinson in Rutledge 593). This corrective is particularly important, as it contributes to the Afrofuturist assertion that black people will continue to exist in the future. The fantastic elements in the novel work against the erasure and forgetting of black pasts by "re-writing … the pain and suffering caused by racist regimes of power" (Olutola 75) and provide the required dynamics for overcoming the dystopian situation. Thus, Hopkinson seems to aim at inserting black historical and cultural trauma into the collective memory of Canada. In this regard, *Brown Girl* is concerned with both the past and with the future. In this sense, as a socially critical literary text in the political traditions of Afrofuturism, the novel serves as a vehicle for suppressed traumatic memory and aids, in typical counter-narrative manner, in envisioning a better future for the marginalized and oppressed of our current reality.

Putting traumatic experiences into words is extremely difficult, as they are inherently "unspeakable". Afrofuturism and its possibilities, for example the inclusion of the zombie figure, open up a vehicle for expressing personal and collective issues. It also opens up ways of coming to terms with, and working through, both personal and society's collective traumatic memories, and contributing to the remembrance of the ones

in the Afrodiasporic community in Canada who have suffered due to a suppressed past and an ongoing present of racism, alienation and marginalization. Using her writing as a vehicle for socio-political criticism and as a form of what Griffins calls textual healing, Hopkinson reminds her audience that the answer to societal issues is not forgetting and suppressing historical facts. Instead, it is crucial to actively remember the past and question stereotyping and binary thinking. To counteract discrimination, Hopkinson encourages her Western readers to identify with a character from another cultural background, and her Afro-Caribbean audience to be hopeful about a better and more equal future for themselves and other groups of people at the margins of society. She achieves this, as I have argued, by constantly recuperating denigrated traditional African practices and belief systems and foregrounding characters from minorities. Encountering spiritually, culturally, and racially complex and inclusive characters may trigger reconsidering socially established and seemingly insurmountable "differences" between long-established, former immigrant "Canadians" and more recent immigrants to Northern America from the Caribbean. Hopkinson's distinctive suggestion for being "Canadian" thus challenges readers to act in accordance with these new perspectives and how identities are perceived in the public imaginary. The novel imagines an alternative future for transgenerationally traumatized societies – a future of independence and equality, which has overcome binary thinking, discrimination, and the conflict of polarised economic and ethnic identities, at the intersection of past, present, and future, thereby extending the promises for tomorrow.

Ultimately, *Brown Girl* is a story of transformation and hope: in configuring hybrid cultural identities, the characters find ways to actively resist colonial, racist, and sexist structures, which have created communities of individuals who are traumatised through violence. Thus, they are highly agential and not victims of colonialist ideologies. In this sense, the novel challenges fixed notions of identities and belonging and offers a new perspective of seeing the world and a platform for marginalized individuals. The multi-generic Afrofuturist novel is particularly suited to this task. Afro-Caribbean readers who share the spiritual dimension referenced in the novel can incorporate the depicted spirituality in the story world into their understanding of what a realist narrative may include, while readers who do not share this spiritual background are free to read the spiritual elements of the narrative within the novel's genre convention of the fantastic. Just as the CN tower and Mami's transplanted heart are symbols of unification, the novel itself bridges the gap between two seemingly irreconcilable worlds and identities. *Brown Girl* hence becomes a symbol of hope and transformation for diasporic and immigrant individuals, as well as for postcolonial societies as a whole. In agreement with Afrofuturism's ability to create new worlds through words, the hybrid, an Afro-Caribbean heart beating in a Western body, becomes a symbol of anti-racism and anti-colonialism – of the possibility of symbiotic, peaceful and equal living between cultures, and the acceptance of seemingly contradictory identities, who are incorporated into an individually configured set of selves. Thus, *Brown Girl* gives new meaning to the term 'multiculturalism' and emphasizes the role of hybrid identities within this space.

Chapter Seven:

Envisioning the Future – Trauma and Identity in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*

Introduction

Who Fears Death (2010) by Nnedi Okorafor is a futuristic coming-of-age story set in post-nuclear Sudan. The novel, which resists easy categorization, mingles African traditions and myths mostly drawn from Yoruban and Igbo cosmology, fantastic elements and spirituality, while dealing with issues such as identity, dislocation and hybridity. Traumatic racial conflict, violent oppression, and rape as a war weapon, are central themes of the novel, which reflects on the traumatic experience of social exclusion and alienation based on various systems of oppression, such as race and gender. As Okorafor explains in an interview with Ytasha Womack, "[t]here's shamanism, there's Juju in it, there's magic, genocide, female circumcision. It deals with issues of African men and women" ("Sci-Fi Author"). The narrative is additionally steeped in the struggle of diasporic individuals to find a place of belonging between cultures. In interrogating notions of identity configuration, dislocation, trauma and its healing in the context of hybridity, or in-betweenness, through the speculative trope of dystopia, Okorafor unsettles and critiques the lingering neo-colonial ties and interconnected forms of oppression faced especially by Afrodiasporic women. Simultaneously, the novel allegorically alludes to overt and covert systemic oppression and contemporary slavery in societies today, for example racism-related and postcolonial trauma, and gendered violence. While intriguingly representing powerful African female role-models, the novel, as an example of what I have termed Afrospeculative trauma narratives, especially encourages its readers to reconsider and envision the identities and the future of women and Afrodiasporic communities in contemporary society.

The novel is set in the post-apocalyptic Seven Rivers Kingdom, which is inhabited by two warring people: the lighter-skinned Nuru, who have Arab features, and the darker-skinned Okeke, who have African features. They differ not only in skin colour but also in status: the Nuru, living in the fertile West, violently oppress, enslave, and systematically decimate the Okeke, whose home is mainly the harsh desert of the East. Even though the Eastern Okeke, removed from the centre of conflict, are somehow aware of the atrocities happening in the West, where the Nuru attempt to exterminate the last free Okeke, they are too complacent to act, as they believe the genocide will not reach them. To ensure their ongoing pre-eminence, Nuru soldiers carry out institutionalized mass rapes of Okeke women in order to bind them to their people through their children and "destroy Okeke families at the very root" (*Who Fears Death* 21; in the rest of the chapter referred to as WFD). This proves to be effective, firstly, because Okeke women do not practice abortion and, secondly, because in their culture, the women's social shame after rape is so overwhelming that their husbands could not stay with them even if they wanted to. Hence, the Nuru militants use forced impregnation and rape as a tool of war. The violent hierarchy of this societal constellation is justified by a creation story in the people's religious tome, the so-called "Great Book" (WFD 92). The protagonist who will eventually remake the world and free the Okeke

from the cruel oppression is the seemingly powerless but in fact revolutionary and strong-willed girl Onyesonwu (Igbo for "Who Fears Death"), who is the novel's first-person narrator and orally tells her life story to a chronicler, who will preserve and write it down after her death. She is the mixed-raced child of an Okeke woman named Najeeba and her rapist, the Nuru "General" Daib, who was hoping to create a son powerful in magic. Onyesonwu, who indeed turns out to be a mighty sorceress, is characterized by an outstanding hybrid appearance, which is classified as *Ewu:* children like her, who are born from rape, have "sand-colored skin" (WFD 5), freckles, and look "neither Okeke nor Nuru, more like desert spirits" (WFD 26). It is believed that the *Ewu*-born eventually become violent because of the way they were conceived (WFD 32). Therefore, both Nuru and Okeke reject them as dangerous and treat them as outcasts and troublemakers.[31] In a desperate, but ultimately unsuccessful, cry for acceptance into the Okeke community in Jwahir, where Onyesonwu lives with her mother and stepfather, she takes part in a traditional female circumcision rite – against the will of her parents. It is during this so-called Eleventh Year Rite that Onyesonwu's exceptional magical powers surface and that she enters the spiritual world. Her genocidal father Daib, the powerful sorcerer and chief of the Nuru, instantly attempts to kill her, as he discovers her gender, as well as her abilities as a sorceress and shapeshifter. She is not the son he wished to father: as a girl, she is a "failure" (WFD 154) and therefore a great danger to the arduously established totalitarian regime through which he gradually enslaves and massacres the entire population of the Okeke. With the reluctant help of her misogynist teacher Aro, the sometimes dogmatic Onyesonwu discovers her magical destiny, a prophecy which predicts the arrival of an *Ewu* girl to end the slaughter, and to rewrite the Great Book in order to disrupt omnipresent ideologies about racial and gender hierarchies.[32] As Onyesonwu, equipped with will-power and waywardness, is the only person powerful enough to defeat the Nuru, she follows her destiny and goes on a quest towards the West to confront her father and his kind together with her *Ewu* lover, Mwita, and her Okeke girlfriends, Diti, Luyu and Binta, as well as Diti's husband Fanasi. On their way through the desert, they discover a third but peaceful ethnic group living as nomads in the desert: the Red People, also called the Vah, who aid the group in preparing for their destiny. The main part of the novel details Onyesonwu's journey to save the Okeke from tribal violence and oppression and to avenge her mother and herself, but also how she processes both her personal, postcolonial and her transgenerationally inherited colonial traumas in order to be prepared for the final fight. Throughout her journey, Okorafor drafts Onyesonwu as a complex, powerful, and intelligent character, despite – or perhaps because of – the atrocities she faces. These include discrimination due to her ethnicity, her gender, embodied memory of rape, and general violence in the hierarchical society she inhabits.

---

[31] Even though she is marginalized and discriminated against by the Okeke community, Onyesonwu sympathizes with her mother's people, as she spent most of her childhood years among them, after her mother returned from her years of exile and isolation in the desert.

[32] I propose here that, in *Who Fears Death,* Okorafor works with the archetypical story or myth of the prophesized protagonist who is chosen to end the world's sickness. The story of Jesus in the Bible and Joanne K. Rowling's world-wide bestselling *Harry Potter* series are other famous examples using this story line.

In this chapter, I will outline how Okorafor utilizes the genre conventions of Afrofuturism, especially in the form of dystopia and futurism, exemplified in her protagonist Onyesonwu, to portray the potentially traumatic effects of racism- and sexism-related colonial and postcolonial trauma in diasporic or culturally hybrid individuals. In other words, I will show how the Afrofuturist elements in the story highlight the haunting nature of cultural trauma when it is not adequately dealt with. This argument is underlined by several observations: by placing human beings in a post-apocalyptic context of chaos and destruction and by including themes such as female genital mutilation and weaponized rape, Okorafor points to the danger of passivity in the face of current oppression and implies dissatisfaction with the world's current state of being. In critiquing and unsettling simplistic binary thinking, cultural supremacy, as well as racial and psychic normativity, Okorafor writes a counter-narrative to historically Western and male-centred dystopian texts as a form of textual healing, and thereby contributes to the creation of a future where black people are present, empowered, and active. In doing so, I claim, she shows "postcolonial speculative fiction's potential as a site for counterhegemonic discourse, as a space for examining possibilities that are not available within mainstream realist literature" (Burnett, "The Great Change" 134). In the same vein, I will argue that *Who Fears Death* revises the reader's understanding and image of postcolonial Africa, free from neocolonial ties, thereby setting the stage for a re-imagined future of African and Afrodiasporic people in a form of projective remembrance. By suggesting the possibility of a multiply configured, fluid identity for diasporic and hybrid individuals, Okorafor not only encourages the assimilation of her own traumatic memory into narrative memory, but the collective historical trauma of society as well. In this chapter, I discuss how Onyesonwu's experiences as a female, mixed-race child of rape in an environment rife with genocide, rape, and violence are transformed and lead to posttraumatic growth and a productive, multiply configured identity. Essentially, I argue here that, by offering new ways of conceptualizing colonial and postcolonial trauma and its healing, the novel feeds into the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory being carved out in this dissertation.

The Trauma of War, Genocide, Enslavement, Violence and Religious Ideology

I will first turn to a characterization of the Seven Rivers Kingdom, which is typified by traumas evoked by war, genocide, enslavement, violence, and religious ideology. The Seven Rivers Kingdom is a fundamentally dystopian landscape inhabited by an inherently dualistic society, where war has been raging for a long time. Genocide, practices of ethnic cleansing, enslavement of and both physical and psychological violence against the less powerful, darker-skinned Okeke are widespread. The last free Okeke are hunted down and the population subsequently lives in relentless fear and anxiety. Onyesonwu describes the scene as follows: there are "dead, charred, mutilated Okeke people. Okeke women being raped. Okeke children with missing limbs and bloated bellies. Okeke men hanging from buildings or rotted to near-dust in the desert. Smashed-in babies' heads. Slashed bellies. Castrated men. Women whose breasts had been cut off" (WFD 10). Evoking fear, horror, hopelessness and doom, the novel's atmosphere echoes collectively traumatizing events such as the Middle Passage of deported slaves to America, the genocides in Armenia or Ruanda, violent European colonization in Africa, or the Holocaust in Germany (Eyerman; A. Ward). The justification for the way the Nuru tribe treats the Okeke is to be read equally metaphorically. It is based on constructions of difference,

which are codified in the so-called Great Book. This collection of religious texts considered holy by both ethnic groups, can be read, among others, as an intertextual reference to the Bible and its use in the Antebellum South. The way the Great Book institutionally supports the exploitation, enslavement, and genocide of the Okeke draws clear parallels to colonialists using the Biblical story of the curse of Canaan (or the story of Ham) and other selected texts as a rationalization for the violent deportation and enslavement of African people in the transatlantic slave trade. Similar to how the African slaves' forced labour for rich white plantation owners in the United States was justified by the Bible, the dark-skinned Okeke are systematically (or systemically) oppressed and enslaved due to a creation story found in the Great Book. According to this story, Ani, the goddess whom both Nuru and Okeke worship – who is probably derived from the Igbo goddess Ani – marked the Okeke with darker skin and intended them to be slaves, as they caused a disaster in the past by rebelling against an unfair treatment they received. Therefore, they are now being punished for their behaviour, and the Nuru seem to be divinely ordained superior. In this sense, as Burnett concludes, the Great Book "justifies not only a slavery-based colonialism, but also an active policy of genocide" ("The Great Change" 142).

In *Birds of Heaven,* Ben Okri writes that "[a] people are as healthy and confident as the stories they tell themselves. Sick story-tellers can make their nations sick" (18). I read the society religiously adhering to the Great Book's "sick stories", which are deeply engrained in cultural discourse, as a case in point for Okri's observation. The religiously justified racism against, as well as traumatic exploitation and enslavement of, the dark-skinned is, strikingly, not questioned. As most Okeke seem to accept the Great Book and its racializing dogmas, the racism seems to be deeply rooted and internalized in the cultural identities of both Nuru and Okeke as a form of intellectual colonialism. This powerfully shows how oppressors can keep their position not only through conventional military power and occupation of land, but because they "imprint ideologies onto themselves and the oppressed that remake the oppressors as extensions of the divine and the oppressed as something less than human" (Burnett, "The Great Change" 144). Moreover, it also echoes Fanon's insightful conceptualization of internalized racism, which he articulates in *Black Skin, White Masks.* As S. Hall explains: "It is one thing to position a subject or set of people as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge'" ("Cultural Identity" 226). By imposing the so-called "knowledge" about their presumed inferiority onto the Okeke in the classificatory system, the Nuru have succeeded, similar to the pattern slaveholders used in the Antebellum South, to change the self-image of the oppressed group of people. Their identity is fragmented, and the Okeke sustain this image through internalized ethnocentrism. As Okri further observes, "[t]o poison a nation, poison its stories. A demoralized nation tells demoralized stories to itself", which can "help along the psychic destruction of the … people" (17). The power that the Great Book exerts over both ethnic groups is so strong that they willingly succumb to it, internalize it, and allow it to influence their self-image – it has exactly the demoralizing effect that Okri describes. Onyesonwu's mother Najeeba, for example, wearily wonders: "She was an Okeke. What business did she have being hopeful?" (WFD 23). The idea of hope seems to be a remote concept for the Okeke. The feeling of being deprived of hope and energy and being overwhelmed by horror and helplessness is, as van der Kolk explains, a symptom regularly found among trauma survivors: "It takes tremendous energy to keep functioning while carrying the memory of terror, and the shame of utter weakness and vulnerability" (2). In an environment such as the Seven

Rivers Kingdom, where individuals are exposed to racism, death, violence, and hurt, we can assume that a relatively high percentage of the population would suffer from the minor to major traumas van der Kolk refers to. I even argue that the novel centralizes the notion of trauma in radical ways, as the Okeke are subjected to a collective cultural trauma as a people.

The protagonist Onyesonwu calls this trauma a "curse" – an intolerable, unbearable burden which has to be lifted. Being an exception to the apparently widespread feelings of hopelessness and resignation among the Okeke, she soon realizes that people succumbing to the creation story of the Great Book are "a sad miserable unthinking lot" (WFD 337). She exclaims: "Oh, how our traditions limit and outcast those of us who aren't normal" (WFD 234). In another instance, she explains: "To be something abnormal meant that you were to serve the normal. And if you refused, they hated you … and often the normal hated you even when you *did* serve them" (WFD 236; emphasis in original). Even though Onyesonwu is socialized in the deeply devout environment of the Seven Rivers Kingdom, she claims to not believe in Ani (though, being proved wrong, she later revises this statement). She has read the Great Book several times (WFD 24) and, not despite of, but therefore, rejects the cultural identities that are manifested in its religious claims. The older Onyesonwu gets, the more she becomes aware of the book's deficits: "I'd read the Great Book many times. I'd learned to read using [it]. By the time I could read it with ease, I also hated it" (WFD 133). Onyesonwu believes that "the Great Book … was mainly crafty lies and riddles" (WFD 237). Again, Okorafor paraphrases what Okri, whom she greatly admires ("Organic Fantasy" 281), has spelt out: "Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies" (21). In *Who Fears Death,* the consequences of the lies spread by the Great Book are institutionalized racism, sexism, and violent suppression. Through the Great Book as a metaphor for the Bible and its gruelling interpretation in the past, Okorafor suggests that racism is socially constructed and can have traumatic, fragmenting, and demoralizing effects on affected groups in society, and that hierarchies and categories are not fixed, but can be cracked. The Seven Rivers Kingdom's religiously justified hierarchy is thus revealed as constructed and not a "natural", God-given state. Onyesonwu blatantly blames the Great Book for the various forms of oppression that prevail in society: "*I'm going to burn my copy of the Great Book*, I thought. *It's the cause of all this*. I want to drop to my knees and beg Ani to burn the West to the ground" (WFD 50, emphasis in original). Here, a skilfully layered spatio-temporal critique surfaces: 'the West' is doubly encoded in the novel, as the term is quoted in highly suggestive contexts and invites readings as *both* a displaced, yet specific and horrendous regional conflict and as the global pattern of Western imperialism. Even though "change takes time" (WDF 378) in the Seven Rivers Kingdom, Okorafor offers a possible version of the future at the novel's ending where racism and imperialism are eliminated, thereby pointing to the need to deconstruct racial and sexual discrimination and oppressive power structures in our current reality as well.

The argument that the Seven Rivers Kingdom is a society strongly marked by collective trauma is even more convincing when considering that Okorafor was inspired by the institutionalized rape and tribal genocide happening in Western Sudan. The novel's notion of a war rooted in racial ideologies and its accompanying sexual violence as a tool of oppression is based on an article by Emily Wax, titled "We Want to Make a Light

Baby" (2004), which is about the methodical rape of African tribes by Arab militiamen, the Janjaweed, in Darfur, Western Sudan. Wax describes the situation as the

> result of long-simmering ethnic tensions between nomadic cattle and camel herders, who view themselves as Arabs, and the more sedentary farmers, who see their ancestry as African…. [T]he victims and others said the rapes seemed to be a systematic campaign to humiliate the women, their husbands and fathers, and to weaken tribal ethnic lines. In Sudan, as in many Arab cultures, the child's ethnicity is attached to the ethnicity of the father. (Wax)

As Okorafor explains in an essay published on the social literary platform *Goodreads*, Wax's article "created the passageway through which Onyesonwu slipped into [her] world" (WFD 420), and it also showed her "why the people in [the] story's town disliked Onyesonwu so much, and why she was so troubled" ("The Writing"). The institutionalized rape and the ethnic cleansing in *Who Fears Death* thus are explicitly tied to the recent tribal genocide in modern Sudan and its psychological consequences. Research agrees that both the Sudanese tribal genocide as well as slavery in America had and continue to have dramatic psychological consequences on the respectively suppressed and violated groups (Eyerman; A. Assmann "Einführung"). Since strong resemblances to historical collective traumas reverberate through the narrative in *Who Fears Death,* I read the population of the Seven Rivers Kingdom as a metaphor for the collective wounds of trauma in our contemporary world. As Burnett argues, "[t]he speculative genres are particularly adept at this type of complex paralleling of the speculative with the historical without the need for at least loose adherence to the realities of the historical record, whereas a stricter adherence to 'reality' is expected in realist fiction" ("Isn't Realist Fiction Enough?"). Therefore, Onyesonwu, as a part of a larger society drowning in war, fear, and hopelessness, is also affected by the psychological consequences induced by her violent surroundings.

The overriding theme of enslavement and violent suppression in *Who Fears Death* not only bears strong resemblance to the Bible and its use in 19th-century America, but also the novel's proximity to African American slave narratives – both in content and in form. The latter is especially visible through the story's typical autobiographical frame of Onyesonwu orally retelling her own experiences in order to preserve them and uncover the full scope of slavery's atrocities, which is often found in slave-narratives as a form of what Griffin calls *textual healing* or what van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela term *bibliotherapy*. As far as similarities to the content of slave-narratives are concerned, Burnett discovers parallels to Martin Delany's *Blake, Or the Huts of America,* Frederick Douglass' *Narrative,* Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (*My Left Arm* 79). In this tradition, I propose that *Who Fears Death,* next to being what I have termed an Afrospeculative trauma narrative, could also be read as a so-called 'meta-slavery narrative', a genre which is a combination of (neo-)slave narratives and speculative or science fiction, where the experience of slavery, as Lavender argues, finds its "ultimate expression" (*Race* 15): it expands the term 'slavery' to "a range of abusive socioeconomic arrangements, including unpaid manual labor, sexual trafficking, reproductive exploitation, indentured servitude, and debt bondage" (Dubey 798). This description bears strong resemblances to Elia's definition of contemporary slavery. Meta-slavery narratives thus employ the genre conventions of neo-slave narratives, take advantage of science fiction's estrangement effect, and thereby critique current issues by "extrapolat[ing] and magnify[ing] current trends that are fostering novel practices of enslavement" (799). Thus, I propose that on a metalevel, enabled by the speculative trope of

futurism or dystopia, Okorafor is concerned with and strongly critiques the oblivion of two major collective traumas in our contemporary world: the ongoing tribal genocide in modern Sudan and the aftermath of slavery in the United States, whose terrible yoke, though abolished centuries ago, continues to linger in the present (and arguably in the future) in the form of contemporary slavery, racial and gendered violence, and oppression.

The Trauma of Racism: Discrimination and Alienation Due to Ethnic Hybridity

Having characterized the societal structures of the Seven Rivers Kingdom, I will now turn to the specific position inhabited by the *Ewu* in the novel. Onyesonwu experiences the racial discrimination, social exclusion and contemporary forms of slavery Elia and Dubey refer to in a distinct, intersectional way due to her mixed-raced heritage in the form of postcolonial and racism-related trauma. She is *Ewu* – the child of a Nuru father and an Okeke mother, born from violence and rape, and therefore considered an outcast by both ethnic groups. As a hybrid child conceived through rape, she is believed to be unsightly, and thus faces violent marginalization and alienation both covertly and overtly. Racism is at the origin of her existence: it is the reason why her father had raped her mother in the first place and, consequently, why she is born looking different from the rest of society. As Onyesonwu observes, "[j]ust by looking at me, everyone can see that I am a child of rape" (WFD 7). Ssaiku, the Red People's village sorcerer, for example, tells Mwita and Onyesonwu: "You're both so strange to look at. I know Nuru and I know Okeke. The *Ewu*-born make no sense to my eyes" (WFD 285). Using the word 'strange', Okorafor clarifies that the *Ewu* represent the unknown and the unfamiliar. Next to the extraordinary, non-categorizable outward appearance the *Ewu* share, the negative associations both Okeke and Nuru make with the bodies of *Ewu* persons is articulated in a pathological fear, which is mainly rooted in the assumption that children of rape will necessarily become violent too. Hence, the *Ewu*-born are believed to be evil and bringers of bad luck. The way they are conceived, through rape, evokes hate, fear, and disgust: "people mention [Mwita's] 'unhealthy' skin and 'foul' odour and how no matter how many books he read, he'd only amount to something bad" (WFD 60). Consequently, they are tolerated but mostly shunned in the East, whereas they are relegated to prostitution in the West (WFD 220). The residents of Jwahir, where Onyesonwu grows up, perceive her as ugly and harmful, and are not afraid to tell her so: "People sucked their teeth, grumbled, and shifted their eyes when I passed" (WFD 8). In one instance, a group of girls her age, "bloated and complacent", as she describes them, provoke her by calling her "[t]oo ghastly to marry" (WFD 162). Later, a man denies her right to exist altogether: "You're an Okeke woman's curse. May Ani help your mother by taking your life" (WFD 367). Only rarely is there at least an ambiguous response towards her appearance:

> It was odd. Mostly, people shunned me because I was *Ewu.* But sometimes women crowded around me. "But her skin," they would say to each other, never directly to me. "It's so smooth and delicate. It looks almost like camel's milk." "And her hair is oddly bushy, like a cloud of dried grass." "Her eyes are like a desert cat's." "Ani makes strange beauty from ugliness". (WFD 9; emphasis in original)

The women describing Onyesonwu's outward appearance tie in with semantic fields of nature and myth, which resemble a kind of admiring exoticism. Thus, as E. Jones observes, the *Ewu* are always "the embodiment of a denigrated and castigating difference" (*Medicine* 66). Both Nana the Wise, the head of the female group of elders in Jwahir, and Aro, Onyesonwu's reluctant teacher, attempt to explain the origin of this marginalization

to her: "People hate what they don't understand" (WFD 100) and "[p]eople fear the unknown" (WFD 155), they justify themselves. I therefore propose that one of the reasons why the *Ewu*-born are excluded is because they do not fit in either of the two dominant categories – and are not allowed to blend in because of their constant transcendence of boundaries. E. Jones supports this view by arguing that "[i]n an essentially bi-ethnic culture, there is no socially respectable space for ethnic hybrids" (*Medicine* 65). Instead, *Ewu* people embody the unsubstantiated, but deeply ingrained, human fear of racial impurity. Onyesonwu's experience thus recalls what many contemporary diasporic people face, as they find themselves juggling two cultures and subsequent feelings of dislocation.

Onyesonwu soon realizes that even the albinos in the Okeke community are treated better than herself: "They weren't outcast as I was", Onyesonwu explains: "[They] looked at me with the same fear and disgust as Okekes of a darker shade. Even to *them,* I was other" (WFD 32, emphasis in original). The albinos in the Okeke society, called Noahs, "basically *looked* Okeke" (WFD 32, emphasis in original), whereas *Ewu* people do not. Here, Okorafor uses the term 'other' to describe Onyesonwu's hurt feelings of alienation and marginalization. Most people avoid her, some are fascinated by her in ways that border on exoticisation, yet she is always the subaltern Other in the sense Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak utilizes the term in "Can the Subaltern Speak" (66). Paralleling immigrant or diasporic experience, Okorafor strongly marks her protagonist's *Ewu* identity as marginalized Otherness by deliberately overutilizing the word '*Ewu'* throughout the first few chapters of the novel. Onyesonwu realizes that "people always had to remind me of what I was" (WFD 97). She is her mother's "sand colored daughter" (WFD 29), not just "her daughter", and people refer to her as *Ewu* constantly: "Do you know where you are, *Ewu* girl?" (WFD 97, emphasis in original) and *"*they stared at my *Ewu* body" (WFD 40, emphasis in original) are only two examples. It is especially this experience of being stared *at*, of being exposed and vulnerable, that is traumatic for Onyesonwu, as the process of "objectification" and degradation resembles and draws parallels to the effect of the "white gaze" – an idea that George Yancy investigates in his book *Black Bodies, White Gazes* (2008) – or the related "colonial gaze", as referred to in John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), which has also been outlined by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks.* Through the concept of the "white gaze", Yancy explores the different ways "the black body … is torn asunder through the internalization of the white gaze" (xxiii), which "install[s] the Black body as inferior, a 'thing' fit for comedy, hypersexuality, and animal-like" (xxiii). Similarly, the "colonial gaze" condemns the person who is looked at and fixes the identity of the Other: it "distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its object, the one looked at" (Rieder 7). The "regulatory processes of white normativity are played out on the body of the colonized" (16). In Onyesonwu's case, the attributes "evil" and "violent" are attached to her body through that gaze, which she experiences as traumatizing, as it robs her of her identity and denies her subject status. Skallerup Bessette supports the argument of the white gaze as being traumatic by associating the words 'trauma' and 'dangerous' with the white gaze ("They Can Fly" 172). She observes that "[t]he ability to have people see a black body as it really is inside, instead of how the white gaze perceives it to be is an important disruption not only for those looking, but, more importantly, for those who are victims of the gaze" (171). In this sense, Okorafor both exposes and disrupts the power of the white or colonial gaze in *Who Fears Death* by making Onyesonwu the

story's narrator, which enables readers to see her body "as it really is inside" (171) and perceive her and the world from her viewpoint. By offering readers the possibility of identifying and empathizing with the protagonist and seeing the world through her lens, the novel highlights "the cultural and ideological complexities of what it means to relate to 'distant others'" (E. Jones, "Africana Women" 186). Okorafor hence effectively uncovers the white gaze by reversing the relationship of "looking at" and "being looked at", in a form of bibliotherapy. Readers recognizing their own experiences in Onyesonwu's life might thus be empowered by Okorafor's means of textual healing.

Onyesonwu's way of narrating her story reflects her troubled, traumatically fragmented identity and sense of Self. Sometimes it seems like her ability to coherently retell her story is lost, as the experiences are too overwhelming to be put into words. Her traumatic experiences are "unspeakable". As trauma is inherently unrepresentable, the experimental mode of Afrofuturism allows for ways of portraying trauma which reach further than realist fiction's genre conventions. Chapter 61, for example, consists only of an abstract picture of a peacock, which resembles an ancient mural painting, and lacks any text. As I have already spelt out in Chapter Four on *The Gilda Stories,* pictures convey meaning in a way text is not able to. Thus, we are reminded of drawing and painting, or art in general, as a well-established, scholarly recognized method in trauma healing to enter the subconsciousness and the encapsulated fragments of traumatic memory (cf. van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 59). The narrative often shows traits of a stream of consciousness, as Onyesonwu's report, especially about her travels in the spirit world, is not structured coherently. Particularly in the scenes where Onyesonwu has her near-death-experiences, the descriptions are chaotic and difficult for the reader to decipher. This sense of chaos and destruction is reinforced by the non-linearity of the plot, which features several flashbacks. Thus, language and style in *Who Fears Death* are reminiscent of trauma. As van der Kolk explains, it is "enormously difficult to organize one's traumatic experience into a coherent account – a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end" (43). Indeed, "trauma is primarily remembered not as a story …, but as isolated sensory imprints: images, sounds, and physical sensations that are accompanied by intense emotions, usually terror and helplessness" (70). I therefore argue that Okorafor reflects Onyesonwu's trauma in her writing style.

Several times, Onyesonwu refers to a feeling of losing her Selfhood: "If it weren't for them [her girlfriends] coming today, you'd have found me in my bed losing my…self" (WFD 145), she tells Mwita. In another instance, while fighting Daib, she says: "I lost parts of myself with each of his words … My journey had been a waste. I was nothing" (WFD 396). As a consequence of the traumatic marginalization and the hateful treatment she receives, Onyesonwu suffers from loneliness and has depressive episodes. Feelings of shame, self-hatred, as well as "anxiety, rage, guilt, and fear", as Onyesonwu describes them (WFD 163), overburden her – she feels "[h]opeless beyond hopeless" (WFD 364). The perception of being exposed, shamed, and stereotyped for her biological body starts to dominate her personal life from an early age: she refers to herself as being "demonized" (WFD 278) by society and her childhood is marked by constant "[h]umiliation and confusion" (WFD 15). She often indulges in negative self-talk and refers to herself as toxic: "I was trouble from the moment I was conceived. I was a black stain. A poison" (WFD 14), she tells herself. Similarly, in

other instances, she says: "I was poison. I had no right" (WFD 32), "I bring shame to you …. My existence is shame!" (WFD 48) and "… I was suddenly hit with a self-loathing so deep and profound that I started raising my hands to gouge out my own eyes! That I was then going to tear my own throat with my nails. *I am awful. I am evil. I am filth. I should not be!*" (WFD 59; emphasis in original). In another instance, she explains: "I was full of it – full of damage" (WFD 101). She strongly condemns herself and feels utterly guilty for herself and her behaviour: "I am nothing …. The immediate consequence of my actions for me was an almost unbearable cloak of sorrow. I felt like scratching at my skin, gouging my eyes out, killing myself. I sobbed and sobbed, ashamed of my mother, disgusted with myself, wishing my biological father would finally erase my body, memory, and spirit" (WFD 232). Onyesonwu's physical feeling of being marked as a poison, stain or filth resemble what Julia Kristeva has famously defined as "abjection", the state of literally being cast off. In Kristeva's understanding, abjection means the loss of a person's ability to keep up any distinction between Self and Other, Self and non-Self when confronted with one's corporeal reality: It is the "psychological impulse to define the limits of the subject", which "engenders feelings of corporeal repulsion towards matter such as fingernails, excrement or shed hair that are neither subject nor object, neither Self nor comfortably Other" (Ilott and Buckley 404).

From the examples above, one can observe that the notion of shame is especially prevalent in the novel. Her self-perception bears strong resemblances to the feelings of shame, disgust and detachment towards their Selves often described by trauma survivors, which are often evoked by the experience of feeling weak and vulnerable (van der Kolk 2). When Onyesonwu has done something she later regrets and is ashamed of, it is Mwita who helps her, but she perceives this act of support as degrading as well: "It was always so humiliating. I would do something and I'd always need Mwita to put me back in order. As if I had no control of my abilities, my faculties, my body" (WFD 250). She even feels guilty for certain things that are not within her capabilities: "It wasn't my fault, I know, but back then I felt everything was. I was the chosen one. It was all my fault" (WFD 252). She continuously repeats negative affirmations like a mantra: "I had failed …. I tried to pull my shameful face away …. *Failure,* the voice in my head whispered. *Defeat. Death"* (WFD 320; emphasis in original). Society's prevailing discourse perpetuates Onyesonwu's feelings. The *Ewu* are, as E. Jones rightly observes, "seen as pariahs, vectors of shame and destroyers of culture" (*Medicine* 76). It is this notion of shame that Onyesonwu has to abandon in order to fulfil her destiny as the prophesized *Ewu,* who saves the Okeke from extermination.

The Trauma of Rape: Violent Conception and Embodied Memory

Onyesonwu is "troubled" (Okorafor, "The Writing") not only because of the treatment she receives from society as an *Ewu* and the atrocities of genocide and war which she has to witness, but also because of her biological ancestry and her violent conception. It is this notion of personal trauma, which is symptomatic of the societal, collective trauma pervading the Seven Rivers Kingdom, that I will focus on in this section. When Onyesonwu is only eleven years old, she learns about the nature of her biological father and her violent conception. Her mother "hadn't been detailed about the rape …. All of this was *between* her words" (WFD

35; emphasis in original). As readers, though, we get an exhaustive description of the rape as a weapon of war and can draw conclusions about a raped woman's role in the society of the Seven Rivers Kingdom. As Najeeba's first husband Idris, with whom she seems to have had a loving marriage, demonstrates ("They ran into each other's arms and held each other for several minutes" WFD 41), Okeke men are not able to stay with their wives after they have been raped by a Nuru soldier, as women are considered impure afterwards. Even though he "shout[s] with joy" (WFD 23) when she staggers home after her torture, he steps back, "his eyes spill … tears but his face harden[s]" (WFD 24), as soon as he realizes that Najeeba has been "stained". Najeeba, accustomed to the cultural norms, is already expecting her husband's reaction and fully accepts his refusal, knowing that her life will be forever changed. Abused women in the Seven Rivers Kingdom are deprived of all their dignity and rights as full members of the community. Through the speculative trope of futurism, Okorafor demonstrates that, in addition to the trauma of rape, unjustified and often additionally traumatic stigmatization and accusations of self-infliction are and will continue to be part of our societies if we do not actively combat them in the present. In other words, gendered violence as well as its result, personal and cultural traumas of rape, will continue to haunt our world if survivors are not protected and supported through a change in the overall culture. It is the structures that maintain race and gender violence, Okorafor suggests, that must be destroyed if sustainable transformation is to occur.

As Onyesonwu is the daughter of a rapist and mass murderer, she hoards strong negative feelings against her biological father, ranging from hatred to disgust towards herself. The rape her mother endured becomes an important part of her own identity and it reinforces the feelings of self-loathing, shame and guilt she hoards because of her status as *Ewu*. As a "product" of violence, as she calls it, she is disgusted by her biological body: "I stifled an urge to vomit, and then an urge to tear at my skin. I wanted to hug my mother, but at the same time I didn't want to touch her. I was poison" (WFD 32). Onyesonwu's strong revulsion against her biological origin and her resultant physical appearance as Other strike down in certain behaviours that could be classified as symptomatic of her troubled identity. She has a compulsive aversion against mixed food, for example: "Everything was mixed together and the sight of it made me lose my appetite. I've never liked my food to mix" (WFD 281). Her relationship with food reveals the trauma hidden behind the delicate topic of hybridity, violent conception, and the marginalization based on her appearance. Okorafor explains that in her work, "food is very important. When looking at the food of various cultures through a fantastical lens, as I'm naturally inclined to do in my stories, something else begins to happen. Suddenly, within these foods, the complexities of cultural conflict become very clear …. I also like to use food as a cultural signifier" ("Organic Fantasy" 279). Onyesonwu's conflicted relationship with mixed food could thus be read as a meaningful and important way of reflecting her trauma rooted in violent systemic oppression and marginalization as well as gendered violence.

The negative feelings she hoards towards herself perpetuate themselves, as Onyesonwu relives her mother's rape as an embodied experience several times, which resembles, I argue, a transgenerational transmission of trauma. Because of the two women's spiritual and magical gifts, Onyesonwu witnesses her mother's trauma first-hand through visions. The speculative element of magically induced visions in the novel allows for a

transgenerational inheritance of Najeeba's traumatic experience of rape to Onyesonwu, but it also enables the subsequent healing. Onyesonwu, again, transfers the trauma to the Okeke people on the market in Jwahir. When Onyesonwu realizes that the Okeke in the East are deliberately ignorant and naïve about the slaughter that is going on in the West, Onyesonwu furiously instils a collective vision in the people on the market: she takes them "into what [her] mother went through" (WFD 163) through magic, and shows them the atrocities endured by the Okeke in the West first-hand:

> We watched him ravage and destroy my mother. She was limp beneath him. She'd retreated into the wilderness and there she'd waited as she watched. She always watched. She had an Alusi in her. We felt the moment my mother's will broke. We felt her attacker's moment of doubt and disgust with himself. Then the rage that came from his people took him again, filling his body with unnatural strength. I felt it inside me, too. Like a demon buried under my skin since my conception …. There was screaming from everywhere …. I was so transfixed by the screaming that it took seconds for me to realize that it had started coming from the people in the market. I pulled in the vision as one folds up a map. Around me, people sobbed. A man fainted. Children ran in circles. *I didn't think about the children!* I realized. (WFD 163f; emphasis in original)

Only a few hours later, Onyesonwu conjures the same vision up a second time, because her friends Luyu, Binta and Diti ask her to do so. This time, she says that "it wasn't as jarring for me the second time" (160-61). What Okorafor describes here is an example of the reverberating effects of transgenerational and collective trauma. The original trauma occurs when Onyesonwu's mother is raped: "Ani had killed Najeeba and left her still alive" (WFD 23) describes what the traumatic experience destroyed in Najeeba. She splits off part of her Self, experiencing the situation from outside her body as an Alusi, watching from above, as if it was not her body being destroyed. As the horror of rape is so overwhelming, she is not able to reintegrate the fragmented piece of memory into her Self and her life story. Instead, she unconsciously and involuntarily seems to pass the trauma on to her daughter: by desperately wishing for Onyesonwu to become a powerful sorceress, she hopes that her daughter would eventually "avenge her suffering" (WFD 35), so she can find closure. Onyesonwu, again, spreads the trauma further to the people of Jwahir through the vision "gathered from [her] mother's experience" (WFD 160-61). By experiencing the rape first-hand, as if she had been Najeeba herself, Onyesonwu embodies the memory of the rape as her own and is similarly traumatized by it. This process allegorically portrays the transgenerational transmission of trauma over generations in our current world, whose characteristics and mechanisms are still investigated by current trauma researchers. As Western trauma research has not yet found convincing explanations for cause and functionality of transgenerational trauma in human bodies and psyches, Afrospeculative fiction, and the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory emerging from it, offer a valid alternative explanation for the phenomenon, which incorporates the supernatural and magic. In this sense, Afrofuturism blatantly displays how the speculative fiction is actually better suited to representing our world and its suffering than realist fiction. As Frederic Jameson writes, "the representational apparatus of science fiction … sends back more reliable information about the contemporary world than an exhausted realism" (384). After all, he continues, "actual reality is always far more complex than any realism will ever allow for" (384). As it is precisely the use of magic that allows the reader to engage the trauma of sexual violence in this instance, we are reminded that Afrofuturism allows us to deal with reality in ways that realist literature is not able to, as it operates in a "much freer way" (S. Delany, *Starboard Wine* 29). In other words, Okorafor demonstrates that realist fiction is actually not enough to portray the complex histories and

experiences of the African and Afrodiasporic people, as it "deeply limits both its present and its future" (Burnett, "Isn't Realist Fiction Enough?" 119). Magic as a genre trope of Afrofuturism aids Okorafor to exemplify the lingering aftermath of historical and structural colonial and postcolonial traumas, which have not been adequately resolved, and to express the ways in which neo-colonialism and patriarchy are still palpable in our contemporary world. In other words, the potential consequences of these oppressive systems are intrinsically implicated in the future she envisions. Summing up these findings, Onyesonwu's connection to her biological father Daib has traumatizing effects on her for three reasons: firstly, on a personal level, due to her biological relationship to a rapist, and because she is a direct product of the shameful act of her mother's rape. Secondly, transgenerationally, as Onyesonwu relives her mother's trauma as an embodied memory through magically instilled visions. Thirdly, Onyesonwu is part of a collective cultural trauma, because of the violence Daib inflicts on the Okeke as a people, and the Okeke women in particular. As Daib oppresses and slaughters one half of the Seven Rivers Kingdom's population – a society Onyesonwu is, even though not warmly welcomed, still a part of – she is threatened by his ongoing violence both personally and on a societal level. This observation metaphorically hints at the close connection between personal and collective colonial and postcolonial trauma, which I have already spelt out in Chapter Six, in my analysis of *Brown Girl in the Ring*.

Alongside strong post-traumatic feelings of self-loathing, shame and guilt, as analysed above, the disclosure of Onyesonwu's biological origin spurs hatred and an urgent desire for revenge against her genitor: "I could have killed someone after my mother told me this story" (WFD 31). She gets lost in violent thoughts of revenge about both Idris and her father Daib, leading her into a downward spiral of negativity: "*Betraying bastard*, I thought, tears stinging my eyes. *If I ever find you, I'll cut off your penis*. I shuddered, thinking how I wanted to do worse to the man who'd raped my mother" (WFD 32; emphasis in original). Throughout the narrative, these feelings of hatred and her desire for revenge continually perpetuate themselves: "I wanted so badly to kill my father. It would have been like killing a thousand of those men who attacked me. I would avenge my mother, I would avenge myself" (WFD 238-39). I argue here that Onyesonwu's desire for revenge, to mitigate shame and to find normalcy and belonging, motivates her strongly to go on her quest, which eventually results in posttraumatic growth. They are her central motives for pursuing and destroying Daib and trying to heal the racial and sexist tensions pertaining to the relationship between Nuru and Okeke as well as between men and women in the Seven Rivers Kingdom. Despite its violent nature, Onyesonwu's destructive desire for revenge ultimately leads to the enhancement of the living conditions for the Okeke people in the Seven Rivers Kingdom. Here, in showcasing how, despite all adversities, trauma does not necessarily lead to victimization, violence or passivity, but how it can trigger transformative activism leading to profound social changes, Okorafor contributes to the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory I work towards in this dissertation.

Onyesonwu's trauma manifests both physically and in her dreams, which is a consequence of trauma often observed in survivors, as van der Kolk argues. She is frequently "plagued by nightmares" (WFD 141) and "terrible headaches" (WFD 141, 151), during which she sometimes "stop[s] existing" (WFD 15). In fact, she seems to be so accustomed to being in pain that she needs to mention her headache's absence specifically

(WFD 151, 169) and describes them as "*my* headaches" (WFD 146, my emphasis). For the duration of her magical training with Aro, she experiences them in an especially strong form (WFD 159), and as she leaves Jwahir, they reach an all-time high: "As I walked, I rubbed my throbbing temples and then the back of my head. The headaches, so soon after leaving Jwahir… it seemed too ominous. Two days later, the pain was at full blast. We had to stop for two days and for that first day, I wasn't even aware that we'd stopped …. While I was in my tent writhing in pain and shouting at phantoms, the others were nervous" (WFD 173). The novel suggests that these headaches can also be read, apart from being a symptom of strong psychic pressure, as a spiritual experience. Depending on whether readers take on a "Western scientific" lens or an "African spiritual" lens while interpreting the novel, Onyesonwu's headaches could have different meanings: symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder or spiritual forebodings of the martyrdom Onyesonwu will have to endure. Onyesonwu herself considers them "ghosts of the future" (WFD 202), as she is going to be stoned to death, and it is exactly those stones that she can feel hitting her head during her episodes of pain. As E. Jones argues, the moments "in which Onyesonwu is physically ill can be understood as transitional spiritual initiations in African culture" ("Africana Women" 196). Hence, the symptoms Western trauma researchers might read as and PTSD, emerging from a complex pattern of a person's individual constitution and lived experiences, could, similar to Jess's condition in *The Icarus Girl*, also be read as spirits infiltrating Onyesonwu for her benefit. Yet, both interpretations could be valid and are indeed different sides of the same coin. The author's Nigerian-American background additionally supports this ambivalence in readings. Okorafor's ambiguity around the interpretation of Onyesonwu's condition directly feeds into the distinct "decolonized" Afrodiasporic trauma theory I work towards in this dissertation. It considers spirit infiltration an acceptable possibility in the realms of trauma, which is as valuable and plausible as scientifically measurable neurological processes in the brain, thereby considering the distinct experiences of diasporic and immigrant individuals.

The Trauma of Sexism: Gendered Violence, Oppression and Rejection

Despite most scholarly attention circling around the ethnic conflict, I argue that much of the novel's conflict centres on a hierarchical constellation of genders, a deeply ingrained societal norm in the novel. In this section, I will therefore focus on the oppositional relation between male and female by which the society of the Seven Rivers Kingdom is predominantly characterized. In fact, I will argue that it is epitomized by the objectification of women, sexual violence, and fixed gender roles. Being a woman, Onyesonwu regularly encounters obstacles triggered by misogyny and sexism: she is not allowed to develop her magical abilities, which she desperately needs to protect herself and the Okeke, as female sorcerers are considered dangerous and unpredictable. The reason why Onyesonwu is not considered apt as a sorcerer is thus rooted in traditional gender hierarchies.

From her childhood years, Onyesonwu is socialized into this patriarchal and even misogynistic society, which denigrates and suppresses both mixed-race people and women. She is hence doubly discriminated against due to her skin colour and her gender, and, as a result, experiences a constant feeling of being powerless and worthless. Whereas Mwita is granted a certain kind of freedom exactly *because* he is male and *Ewu*, Onyesonwu is doubly bound because of her biological characteristics as female and *Ewu*. This two-fold

discrimination as woman and *Ewu* evokes strong similarities to how black women have been and often continue to be doubly discriminated against due to their colour and their gender in our reality. Even though there are exceptions, such as the Ada (who is portrayed as an empowered, educated and highly respected woman in the society – she is married to Aro but still owns her own home) and Nana the Wise, most women in the Okeke society are dependent on men in one way or another. Onyesonwu's mother Najeeba, for example, can only return to and become a proper member of society after her exile in the desert, when Onyesonwu's stepfather marries her and thereby reintroduces her into society as a "whitewashed" valid member. Over the course of the story, Onyesonwu develops a profound feeling of injustice around the treatment of women and even finds it to be a source of conflict with Mwita: "Those old beliefs about the worth and fate of men and women, that was the only thing I didn't like about Mwita. Who was he to think that he was entitled to be the center of things just because he was male? This had been a problem with us since we met" (WFD 274-5).

Okorafor mainly exemplifies the gendered role division predominant in the Seven Rivers Kingdom through the common practice that magical women are only to become healers who assist the male sorcerers, and not sorcerers themselves. Mwita supports this traditional constellation and visibly struggles to accept that he is a gifted healer, which is traditionally a woman's job, when he tells Onyesonwu: "*I* should be the sorcerer, *you* should be the healer. That's how it's always been between a man and a woman" (WFD 274; emphasis in original). Ultimately, Mwita is able to overcome this dogma and accepts and even supports Onyesonwu's strength, but the society as a whole is far from acknowledging him. The extent to which this traumatizing gender hierarchy pertains to belief systems in *Who Fears Death* is especially revealed by the male category of 'sorcerer', into which the characters cannot place Onyesonwu. Okorafor seems to deliberately problematize both the terms 'sorceress' and 'she-wizard' ("*She-wizard?* I thought. *What kind of title is that?*", WFD 279; emphasis in original) for a female magician. Similarly, she avoids the historically problematic term 'witch', which has been used as a pejorative term for women producing magic since around 1468, when Heinrich Kramer, a German churchman, published his treatise *Malleus Maleficarum* (*The Hammer of Witches)* on how to hunt women he deemed morally corrupt, and which spurred the subsequent "witch hunt" all over medieval Europe (Federici 166). Okorafor's choices in language are thus constitutive as well as illustrative of the problems in the societies of the Seven Rivers Kingdom, and, metaphorically, in our societies today, where sexism is often encoded in grammatical structures and where the request for gender-neutral language is often met with hostility.

The patriarchal structures described above become especially observable in the characters of Aro, Onyesonwu's spiritual father, and Daib, her biological father. Their sexist world views inhibit and undermine, but ultimately counter-intuitively foster, Onyesonwu's growth and healing process. As I have outlined, the institution of sorcery in *Who Fears Death* is both highly patriarchal and selective. Consequently, access to magical knowledge is traditionally gendered, which forms one of the novel's main conflicts: the impossibility for Onyesonwu as a woman to access relevant information. There is a constant tension between what Onyesonwu needs and longs to know and what society decides is appropriate for her to need and long for. This is one of the reasons why Aro refuses to accept Onyesonwu as his pupil in magic and does not allow her to

take the ritualized test of initiation. His decision is reinforced by his peer sorcerers and seers, who all decide to refuse an *Ewu* woman as the prophesized saviour of the Okeke due to societal gender expectations. Several characters described as wise or powerful in *Who Fears Death* seem, to a certain extent, to support the patriarchal power structures of the Seven Rivers Kingdom: Aro, Nana the Wise, who is town elder and head of the Eleventh Year Rite performers; Ssaiku, the wise man of the Red People; and Rana, the Nuru seer, who prophesizes the coming of an *Ewu* girl, but who changes both the gender and the ethnicity of the prophesy to a Nuru boy because his ideology hinders him from accepting the truth. None of the four has expected a girl or a child of rape as the bearer of the prophecy, who will overturn the hierarchy between Nuru and Okeke, and end the violence and war in the country. As E. Jones asserts, "Okorafor portrays these gender and ethnic biases as entrenched for even the most knowledgeable and powerful members of society, tasked with knowing that the things we think we know do not always add up" (*Medicine* 87). Their failure to acknowledge the truth almost leads to total disaster: the eradication and/or complete enslavement of the Okeke people.

The intersectional discrimination Onyesonwu experiences is portrayed as especially tragic, as the time passing until Onyesonwu is ready for going on her quest of transformation gives Daib the opportunity to focus on taking further steps towards domination and devastation. As Onyesonwu almost misses her goal of saving the Okeke from violence and avenging her mother's rape because of gender-based rejection, sexism and discrimination, her position as a doubly marginalized person evokes in Onyesonwu what van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela define as trauma, which is "characterized generally by the falling apart of a life narrative" (59). The barriers she faces strongly inhibit the development of Onyesonwu's magical faculties and her growth, and ultimately delay the liberation of the Okeke from the Nuru's violent grip. Metaphorically, the averted disaster might allude to the danger of a history repeating itself, as racism and neo-colonialism are on the rise in our contemporary world. Moreover, as the text highlights the Wises' ignorance and prepossessions, the reader can draw critical parallels to contemporary political and social leaders who are either not aware or do not feel appointed to tackle social injustices, such as racism and sexism, which keep marginalized groups from reaching their full potential.

The underlying reasons for female discrimination in *Who Fears Death* is their ability to bear children, which apparently makes them dangerous and more powerful as sorcerers. Mwita reveals to Onyesonwu, "'[Aro] won't teach you because you're a girl, a *woman*!' … He slapped his hand against my belly. 'Because of what you carry here! You can bring life, and when you get old, that ability becomes something else even greater, more dangerous and unstable!' … You were born in the wrong body" (WFD 68-69; emphasis in original). In another example, Aro tells Onyesonwu: "If you became pregnant while still learning, you could get us all killed" (WFD 126). This assumption seems to be historically documented in the novel: a woman once got pregnant during her magical training and accidentally killed a whole village (WFD 147). Hence, society concluded that women cannot and should not be trusted with sorcery, as their biological capabilities expose society to danger. As E. Jones states, "Onyesonwu is not merely a casualty of war, but she exhibits herself to be a warrior and sorceress, commanding her female power in a way still linked to women's reproductive power, but one with devastating social consequences" (*Medicine* 82). As Onyesonwu struggles against this

conception, the reader might be reminded of gendered exclusion in our contemporary societies, where women are similarly deprived of certain types of power and knowledge in the name of biology. The dangerous aspect of Onyesonwu's sexuality, and that Aro and Mwita were at least partly correct in being apprehensive about, is later confirmed, when the pregnant Onyesonwu, in rage, decimates the male part of an entire village population. Onyesonwu's uncontrollable rage culminates in the final battle scenes, where "women ran amok" (WFD 400) and Onyesonwu kills all men capable of impregnating women (WFD 401). By dramatizing the fear of women's power, the novel exemplifies how sexism and prejudice continue to pervade our contemporary societies and alludes to the dangers these oppressions carry. Even though it proves to be true at the end of the story that the ability to create and sustain life is potent and even dangerous, it seems that Aro's desire to control Onyesonwu because of his fear of her power is the real reason for his rejection, and not her biological capability to bear children. Onyesonwu discovers this as well: "You… you won't teach girls or women because you're *afraid* of us! Y-y-you fear our emotions" (WFD 114; emphasis in original). In another example, Onyesonwu observes: "He looked at me in that way again, as if I wasn't worthy" (WFD 148). By trying to diminish her self-worth, I claim, Aro attempts to control the all-too-powerful Onyesonwu. As a woman, he asserts, Onyesonwu is a "failure" (WFD 118) and "can't measure up. Even in… gentler skills …. [Y]ou're filthy with woman blood as we speak" (WFD 71). By describing Onyesonwu's menstrual bleeding as "filthy", he reveals his secretly harboured misogynist thoughts.

Alongside women's biological ability to bring life and the corresponding patriarchal fear of powerful women, Mwita gives a third reason why Aro rejects Onyesonwu as a pupil. It is her (deeply personal) emotional instability, which seems not to be connected to her biological gender. Instead, as I argue, it is probably rooted in her trauma: "Precisely why he won't teach you! You act like a woman. You run on emotions. You're dangerous …. You're irrational at times, more irrational than any woman or man. But it's not because of what's between your legs" (WFD 80). Apparently, Onyesonwu has little control over her emotions. She is "unlearned and uncontrollable like an animal" (WFD 117), as Aro puts it. As Onyesonwu gets increasingly frustrated and desperate, full of fear of her father's evil eye, which aims at killing her in the spirit world, she is indeed "angry all the time" (WFD 150). On the one hand, her mood swings, irritability and feelings of anger and anxiety could be traced back to her traumatic state. On the other hand, though, Onyesonwu's revolt against her suppression with anger is comprehensible and can be read as feminist commentary on gender violence. One argument for the latter is the increasing urgency of Onyesonwu's magical training: her frustration due to the ongoing rejection and exclusion, especially considering her obvious talent, is understandably growing with time, as Daib and his regular attacks pose a greater and greater threat to her life. She knows that she can only defend herself by being able to know and control her magic. It therefore comes as no surprise when in one instance, she bursts out in tears: "It's not bad enough that I'm *Ewu* and that that thing wants to get me! I had to be female too. That crazy man you live with loves and hates you but he just hates me! Everyone hates me!" (WFD 72). She later explains: "Rejection. Such things will quietly creep up on a person. Then one day, she finds herself ready to destroy everything" (WFD 111). This rejection is the most prominent obstacle in Onyesonwu's life, and it is, as I have argued, deeply traumatizing for her. When Aro finally grudgingly reconsiders his doubled rejection of Onyesonwu as a pupil, both because of her hybrid ethnicity and her gender,

the novel stimulates critical thought about our current societal structure and might inspire readers to envision a future where discrimination and marginalization do not exist.

Her emotional instability has another reason as well, though. Over the course of the story, Onyesonwu suffers the loss of several of the people closest to her, among them her stepfather and her friend Binta, for whose death she hoards strong feelings of guilt. When Onyesonwu's stepfather dies, in the very first pages of the novel, she explains: "My life fell apart …. I knew then that I would be different. I knew in that moment that I would never again be able to fully control the fire inside me. I became a different creature that day, not so human" (WFD 3). The death of this father figure leaves her devastated and forever changed. It is in this moment, I propose, that her original trauma occurs. Before this, she describes herself as a "happy child" who did not care about people debasing her due to her *Ewu*-ness. As a child, Onyesonwu is blessed with ignorance, but as she grows older, her awareness increases, and she begins to clearly perceive how she is treated in society. Her intense process of grieving aggravates her psychological condition. The overall atmosphere of her descriptions and the number of times Onyesonwu cries throughout the plot suggest that she is deeply sad – I even argue that she shows strong signs of depression. As Onyesonwu repeatedly bursts out in tears, Aro remarks: "What is it with you women? … Must everything make you cry?" (WFD 158). Arguably, he confuses Onyesonwu's personal experience of dealing with trauma with his stigma of women being overly emotional, which again lays bare Okorafor's skilful subversion and disruption of oppressive gender stereotypes.

Next to her spiritual father, Aro, another key male figure in Onyesonwu's life, opposes her even more strongly because of her gender: her biological father rejects her as his offspring because she is female and therefore attempts to kill her in the spirit world several times. The highly toxic relationship with her father evokes strong dimensions of trauma, not only because he has raped her mother. Daib laments: "[Najeeba] should have given me a great, great son. Why are you a girl? … It's your *dirty* blood. You were born *wrong*" (WFD 365; emphasis in original). Calling her blood "filthy", Aro associates her biological body with being "dirty". Womanhood is deemed undesirable and revolting to the two patriarchs. Next to the humiliation and shame he has caused her mother, as I have analysed above, Daib's rejection and the fear he instils in her are Onyesonwu's main drivers for going West to fight her progenitor. She feels the urge to defeat him mostly due to personal hatred – the liberation of her people from the Nuru's oppression is only her second most important motif. Hence, as far as her personal reasons are concerned, her purpose is to kill him for revenge rather than to rewrite history, fulfil the prophecy and save her people. Again, the novel shows how deeply personal and collective trauma are intertwined. Okorafor seems to allude here to the personal crises and psychological scars that could be conjured by historical trauma in the future, as the past continues to return, if societies do not deem it necessary to make important changes to eliminate racism and sexism in the present.

As I have outlined above, being female and *Ewu,* Onyesonwu suffers deeply from the hierarchical societal structure in the Seven Rivers Kingdom. She desperately longs to be "normal" (WFD 35) and therefore tries to "buy" the community's acceptance by participating in the Eleventh Year Rite – a tradition where eleven-year-old girls have their clitoris' cut off – despite her fear and her parents' condemnation of the practice. Okorafor's introduction of the Eleventh Year Rite, or clitoridectomy, relates to the practice of female genital mutilation

(FGM), the traditional removal of some or all of the external female genitalia, conducted to this day in several countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Especially in the West, FGM is often perceived and depicted as a form of male domination and of control over women's bodies and minds. As E. Jones explains,

> [a]s a rite of passage that initiates girls into the cult of African womanhood, female genital cutting echoes cultural ideas about sexual purity and serves to bind women to their ethnic group …. The ability to marry within the 'right' ethnic group and produce offspring is regarded as a woman's essential reason for existence …. Women who lack the appropriate status assume an embodied difference that places them outside the broader culture. (*Medicine* 69)

In addition to the mutilation of their clitorises, the girls are expected to hold little stones under their tongues in order to slow down their talking for the remainder of their life (WFD 45). Hence, the practice of FGM in *Who Fears Death* not only successfully oppresses female sexuality, but also inhibits women's verbal expression. Onyesonwu's mother finds both practices "primitive and useless. She didn't want [Onyesonwu] to have anything to do with it" (WFD 34). Yet, Onyesonwu feels that, if she does not undergo this practice, her existence would make matters worse in the community for her mother and her husband, Fadil, whom she lovingly refers to as papa,: "I brought dishonor to my mother by existing. I brought scandal to Papa by entering his life …. My parents carried enough shame" (WFD 35-36). She tells them: "Mama, Papa, I bring shame to you …. My existence is shame! Mama, I'm pain to you … since the day I was conceived …. Papa, you're a well-loved blacksmith. Mama, you're his wife. You both have respect. I'm *Ewu…* To not do it would bring *more* shame" (WFD 48; emphasis in original). Onyesonwu seems to reason that if she is at least accepted as a woman by undergoing the Eleventh Year Rite, it is easier to bear being rejected as *Ewu.* It is thus this heightened awareness of her embodied difference and otherness that leads Onyesonwu to the decision to participate in the ritual: "… at eleven, I still had hopes. I believed that I could be normal. That I could be *made* normal. The Eleventh Rite was old and it was respected. It was powerful. The rite would put a stop to the strangeness happening to me" (WFD 33; emphasis in original). The "strangeness" she refers to here is her magical powers, which gradually come to the surface as she grows up.

Onyesonwu's desperate act to take part in a traditional female circumcision rite, a practice secretly aiming at undermining women's power, in order to overcome the markers that cast her outside of the Okeke community, will eventually not improve her social situation. What she does not seem to understand (yet) though, is that as an *Ewu,* she will never be able to marry either a Nuru or an Okeke, even though she is willing to demonstrate her belief in this ideological cultural practice – she is still the embodied difference and therefore placed outside the broader culture. Her exertions to find normalcy and find a place of belonging are in vain, because "as the product of rape, she is forever deemed unfit for marriage and motherhood" (E. Jones, *Medicine* 77) and will never be a "fit" citizen for the Seven Rivers Kingdom. Making use of speculative fiction's innate estrangement effect here, Okorafor skilfully draws parallels to our contemporary world. Onyesonwu's dilemma again echoes the diasporic experience Burnett describes in "Isn't Realist Fiction Enough?". Onyesonwu's desire to find access to and acknowledgement from society is not fulfilled. Mwita tells her: "They'll still think you're evil …. They *will* always see us as evil. Even if you have yourself… cut" (WFD 53f; emphasis in original). To a certain extent, Mwita is right: the community as a whole still rejects Onyesonwu, but the voluntarily shared endurance of female genital mutilation, which functions as a transition from childhood to adulthood in the

Okeke community, equips her with a group of close friends, to whom she is bound for life. This bonding experience seems to, at least to a certain extent, compensate for the prejudice and the feelings of rejection she receives. Her new peer group consists of Luyu, an exceptionally brave, rebellious, and strong-willed girl, who lives her sexuality freely; Diti, who is characterized as rather shallow and loves gossiping; and Binta, a troubled girl who suffers from continuous sexual abuse by her father. In other words, the ritual comes with a sense of community and friendship, whose members share knowledge about their personal lives. Moreover, through their participation in the rite, the girls gain certain rights and a voice to utter their concerns as adults. As E. Jones explains, there is "no therapeutic biomedical benefit from female genital cutting; rather, the benefits passed on are generally social, cultural and political, conferring womanhood status and access to rights and privileges upon the initiates" (*Medicine* 72). Hence, even though she is continually ridiculed and excluded for her *Ewu*-ness, Onyesonwu emerges from the circumcision as less of an outsider, as she is granted certain rights in the adult Okeke community.

Yet, her decision to be circumcised and "the conforming power of society" cause her "to make a choice that ultimately brings as much harm as good" (E. Jones, *Medicine* 81). The extremely painful initiation rite into adulthood, which is conducted without any form of anaesthetic, serves as a way of controlling women and their bodies by inflicting traumatizing physical pain on them. Local indigenous beliefs suggest that "female genital cutting is about women's power, not about subjugation" (74), but nevertheless, "the practice remains a form of sexual violence" (75), as E. Jones argues. Considering that such soaring pain almost necessarily evokes some sort of physical and emotional trauma in the mutilated girls, I feel inclined to agree with Jones. Even though the eleven-year-old girls in *Who Fears Death* participate in the rite voluntarily for different reasons,[33] they only "knew that a piece of flesh was cut from between [their] legs and that circumcision didn't literally change who [they] were or make [them] better people. But [they] didn't know what that piece of flesh *did*. And because it was an old practice, no one really remembered *why* it was done" (WFD 35; emphasis in original). Not only is the procedure itself traumatizing, but the lifelong consequences as well: the scalpel used in the procedure holds a charm for inflicting excruciating pain on the girls as soon as they feel sexual pleasure outside marriage. The magic will persist until the next initiation into womanhood – marriage – takes place. Okorafor intriguingly connects the ritual to trauma, as Onyesonwu experiences her own death during the initiation: "she is forced into the spirit wilderness by the trauma of circumcision during the Eleventh Rite", E. Jones writes (*Medicine* 85). In Western trauma research, Onyesonwu's mental excursion to the spirit world would probably be read as the commonly reported dissociative experience of trauma survivors who observe themselves from afar while experiencing a traumatic event. Indeed, this process can be explained

---

[33] As E. Jones rightly argues, when it comes to eleven-year-old girls being voluntarily circumcised, one can hardly speak of consent, as they do not know what the consequences of the rite are: "the initiation event occurs at an impressionable age when the capacity to make mature, independent choices is mitigated by strong psychological and social pressures to conform to community standards. Thus, so-called consent is made within a context of communal considerations and pressures" (*Medicine* 76). Thus, their consent "is not what would be considered 'informed'" (80).

neurologically: the human brain seems to be capable of "splitting off" a part of the consciousness in the face of horrendous events as an act of self-preservation. As mentioned in Chapter Three on *Kindred,* the resulting traumatically fragmented memories of the original event, "[s]ights, sounds, smells, and touch are encoded as isolated, dissociated fragments, and normal memory processing disintegrates. Time freezes, so that the present danger feels like it will last forever" (van der Kolk 60). The neurological process described as dissociation in Western trauma theory is given an alternative, distinctly Afrodiasporic explanation in *Who Fears Death,* in the form of retreating to the spirit world. Thus, Okorafor outlines an Afrocentric way of looking at and dealing with trauma.

During the process of becoming a trained sorceress, Onyesonwu is able to regrow her own clitoris as well as her friends', which enables her to access her full abilities as a sorceress. She also stops keeping the stones in her mouth. In doing so, Onyesonwu is presented as a powerful feminist, which clearly depicts the novel's criticism of female genital mutilation and other 'cultural' practices that continue to oppress women.[34] It also demonstrates Okorafor's utopian vision of, and her transformative approach towards, female empowerment, which she especially specifies in the epilogue, where one of the so-called Chassa's twins (WFD 412), who has written down Onyesonwu's oral account of her story, is summarizing the subsequent events after Onyesonwu's death:

> As we were walking back to Onyesonwu's body, my sister yelped. When I looked at her, she was floating an inch off the ground. My sister can fly. We would later find out that she was not the only one. All the women, Okeke and Nuru, found that something had changed about them. Some could turn wine to fresh sweet drinking water, others glowed in the dark, and some could hear the dead. Others remembered the past, before the Great Book. Others could peruse the spirit world and still live in the physical. Thousands of abilities. All bestowed upon women. There it was, Onye's gift. In the death of herself and her child, Onye gave birth to us all. This place will never be the same. Slavery here is over. (WFD 413)

What reads like an individual's memory at first, changes at the end of the quote into the account of a chronicler for the whole community, explicitly the women,. Okorafor suggests that Onyesonwu's sacrificial death awakened the women of the Seven Rivers Kingdom and instilled hope for positive change in them. Injustice, corruption as well as harmful traditions and power structures are defeated, and the marginalized groups in society gain in status and respect.

As E. Jones states, "*Who Fears Death* portrays women as those who wield the ultimate power to change the cultural scripts writing sexualized and ethnicized violence into their society" (*Medicine* 88). Without being

---

[34] However, Okorafor simultaneously articulates that it takes time for the mind to adapt to the new sexual liberation as well. Onyesonwu tells Mwita, referring to him as well as men in general: "[W]e've been raised to feel that it's wrong to open our legs, even when we want to. We weren't brought up to be free as… as *you* are" (WFD 289; emphasis in original). Moreover, it is important to note, though, that the ritual of the surgical removal of the clitoris in the novel is encouraged and protected by a circle of women, not men. It shows how women, too, "participate in oppressive ways perpetuated by problematic cultural ethics", as E. Jones claims (*Medicine* 89-90). Additionally, the close group of friends gradually falls apart after the reversion of the mutilation. This disintegration of the friendship circle complicates ideas of femininity in the story, unsettling the ways in which we think about women's relationships to each other.

placed into an idealized and romanticized environment, the strong female characters in the novel hence become figures of identification for those Afrodiasporic women who, due to dominant cultural scripts, might face discrimination and feelings of isolation and subsequently might struggle with the configuration of a hybrid, multiple identity. *Who Fears Death* can therefore be read not only as an important document in the ongoing process of reparation, healing and projective remembrance, but also as a counter-narrative against the misrepresentation of Afrodiasporic women by canonical authors in general through the act of dismantling stereotypes: the female *Ewu,* Onyesonwu, is the force that brings about change, and challenges the male institution of sorcery, whereas her partner Mwita takes on the traditionally female role of a healer. Luyu is sexually promiscuous and refuses marriage, and the girlfriends in general talk unapologetically about their sexuality and their female bodies. As the Vah's wise man Ssaiku concludes, for example, Luyu is "like a man in [her] bravery and [her]… other appetites" (WFD 347). Just as Onyesonwu does with the Great Book, Okorafor hence resists oppression by rewriting "all those lies" (WFD 6) that have been told about both people of colour as well as women, and especially African women, and how they have been written. By producing female centred Afrofuturist texts with powerful, opinionated, multi-dimensional characters, Okorafor thus counteracts a current trend in African literature she disapproves of: "Many African male authors tend to portray African women and girls as being invisible, voiceless, or marginal" ("Of Course" 131). In representing these non-conformist characters and in examining issues from an intersectional viewpoint, incorporating gender, ethnicity, and race, Okorafor challenges, reverses and dismantles gender and race stereotypes and prejudices and draws a powerful counter-narrative to predominantly Eurocentric and male canonical literature in speculative fiction. On the level of narrative discourse, Okorafor thus pursues her goal of self-representation and claims a place in the literary canon for Afrofuturistic representations of Afrodiasporic woman.

Posttraumatic Growth through Energy, Communication and Shapeshifting

Instead of flinching in the face of the rejection she experiences as woman and *Ewu*, Onyesonwu's strong-willed character drives her from passivity to activity. As she grows up in a society that offers no space for her, Onyesonwu must pursue her own reasons for existence, and find meaning and a place of belonging. Okorafor thus portrays Onyesonwu as someone whose identity is strengthened not despite, but exactly because of, the traumatic experiences she encounters in her life. She is able to heal herself with her magical powers, which reflects an ability to use her mind to overcome violence or trauma. Her assumed status as being victimized by trauma is thus subverted and corrected in the novel. In this section, I will therefore describe three main drivers that aid her in this process of empowerment and posttraumatic growth: energy, communication, and shapeshifting.

After Aro finally agrees to teach Onyesonwu, he reveals the four Mystic Points to her, which Okorafor derived from Igbo cosmology ("Writing Rage" 24), and which will help Onyesonwu in reaching her full magical potential. He also discloses her three gifts, with which she will be able to fulfil her destiny, and which additionally, as I argue, serve as tools for healing and re-integrating her trauma into a multiply configured identity. Her journey towards acceptance and healing is thus a journey of posttraumatic growth. Her three

unique gifts are energy, shapeshifting, and singing: "We all have our own tools. One of yours is energy, that's why you anger so easily …. Another of your tools is that you can change your shape. So already, you have tools to work two of the four Points. And now that I think of it, you have one to work the third. You can sing. Communication" (WFD 155). Onyesonwu's gift of energy, which often appears in the form of anger, needs to be controlled to have a cathartic effect. Even before she starts her journey towards the West, she attempts to channel her effervescing feelings through meditation, which helps her to calm down, as she lives under "constant stress" (WFD 74). Onyesonwu also repeats affirmations to herself. Repeating her name, meaning "who fears death", "in [her] mind like a mantra" (WFD 361) gives her strength to endure and heal, to stay calm, patient, and controlled. Meditation and using mantras are well-established tools for healing often practised by trauma survivors, as van der Kolk emphasizes (63), as they can help the traumatized person to both access hidden, suppressed, or dissociated emotions, and calm down after agitation.

When her friends discover her second gift, singing, and are "amazed" by her voice, it gives Onyesonwu strength and confidence: "… for once, I was proud" (WFD 152). She narrates: "I kept singing …. It smoothed away my anxieties and sadness" (WFD 287). Similar to how meditation works, the soothing effect and the ability to express her feelings and identity through singing support Onyesonwu in regulating her emotions and processing her trauma. Singing and chanting is considered a "uniquely human way to instill a sense of hope and courage" (van der Kolk 333). In fact, as we have seen in *The Gilda Stories*, the healing effects of music and art in general are proven to have positive effects on troubled human psyches (van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 59). Mwita realizes this when he tells Onyesonwu: "'You should [sing] more,' he said. 'Your voice heals you. You look … better now.'" (WFD 198). It is also through singing that Onyesonwu is able to rewrite the Great Book, the codification of society's fundamental, ideological and harmful belief systems, and heal her world from horrific injustices and violence. As soon as she holds the book in her hands, Onyesonwu discovers that it is written in a language she cannot understand. So instead of using written words, Onyesonwu makes use of orality to change the book: "Then I began to sing. I sang the song that I had made up when I was four years old and living with my mother in the desert. During the happiest time of my life. I had sung this song to the desert when it was content, at peace, settled. I sang it now to the mysterious book in my lap" (WFD 408). The rewriting of the poisonous stories in the Great Book is a process of healing through the evocation of idyllic memories of Onyesonwu's past and her family. She does not immerse herself in the Great Book to change it – which would, for all its worth, still be another way of proliferating this discourse. Instead, in an act of re-narrativization through singing, she replaces her own and the collective trauma of society, elicited by the hatred and fundamentalism the book contains, with reparative remembrance – she "actively forgets" the traumatic history yoked with silence, thereby reintegrating memory into a coherent story, and relying on positive and empowering values such as family and equality. This emphasis on the importance of orality, mantra-like chanting and singing, paired with the focus on community, which recalls traditional tribal practices, feeds into the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory that I attempt to articulate in this dissertation.

In the process of Onyesonwu rewriting the Great Book, Okorafor also bridges the gap between her own two seemingly irreconcilable cultures. Metaphorically, she fuses oral (traditionally associated with African

cultures) and print (traditionally associated with Western cultures) tradition. Onyesonwu orally narrates the story, which is later documented in written form by several people. One of these homodiegetic narrators is a Nuru soldier, whom Onyesonwu addresses several times throughout the text; another is a Nuru woman, whose family was part of the resistance against Daib. Additionally, Sola, Najeeba and Aro narrate parts of the story. This framework of reaffirming voices around a text, who confirm the accuracy and credibility of the main narrator, resembles the prefaces of written accounts of former slaves who narrated their stories in the form of slave narratives. By putting her novel in the tradition of former slave narratives, I argue, Okorafor again alludes to and critiques ongoing forms of structural violence based on race, long after slavery has officially been abolished in the United States. Thus, the rewriting process functions, as E. Jones explains, "as an allegory for the use of narrative and its role in healing not simply on an individual level, but on a broader cultural level" ("Africana Women" 196). The redemptive power of storytelling is consistent with van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela as well as Frances Pheasant-Kelly, who propose re-narrativization and bibliotherapy as an effective way to heal both personal and collective traumas.[35]

After she has fulfilled the prophecy and rewritten the Great Book, Onyesonwu tells her audience: "… this kingdom, it will change after today. Read it in your Great Book. You won't notice that it has been rewritten. Not yet. But it has. Everything has. The curse of the Okeke is lifted. It never existed, *sha*" (WFD 378, emphasis in original). As a great leader, Onyesonwu understands the power of stories and that they can "change an age, turn an era around", as Okri puts it (18), by conveying a new set of values: "Stories are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals or nations live by and tell themselves, and you change the individuals and nations" (21). She has fulfilled her calling to liberate the Seven Rivers Kingdom from untrue stories and rewrite its history from scratch, thereby releasing traumatic memory. Consequentially, she also rewrites the collective and cultural memory of her people, freeing them from trauma. In outlining this process, Okorafor offers a possibility for contemporary collectively traumatized societies to actively forget traumatic history by excavating the traumatic past. In doing so, she actively contributes to the dismantling of oppressive structures in the present and originates a culture of remembrance that will serve the future of all members in society.

Onyesonwu's third gift is her ability to change her shape or of being Eshu (WFD 60), through which she can enter the "Wilderness" and even make herself invisible. This gift opens up two important opportunities for her: firstly, she finds a way to discover and heal her Self, and secondly, she can retreat from the horrific reality she finds herself in: "For the first time in my life, I could escape. When things felt too tight, too close, I could retreat to the sky" (WFD 63). She is still herself, "but from a different perspective" (WFD 63). It seems like by viewing her life and her Self from a different angle, Onyesonwu is able to gradually reintegrate her trauma, acknowledge her multiple Self as woman and *Ewu,* and, through the cathartic effect, develop a new, positive

---

[35] Not only written words and orality in the context of the rewriting process, but language in general, is an important concept in *Who Fears Death.* Onyesonwu, Daib and Mwita all have the power to inflict great harm by merely speaking special words, and Nsibidi, a powerful magical script, appears on several occasions, even on Onyesonwu's hands.

self-image. She feels empowered and thus can allow "the body to have experiences that deeply and viscerally contradict the helplessness, rage, or collapse that result from trauma" (van der Kolk 3). She gradually regains self-mastery and develops into a more knowledgeable subject not only about herself but also about the world around her, as she preserves the knowledge of what she turns into (WFD 63). From a perspective rooted in Western trauma theory, the experiences of shapeshifting and making herself insignificant allow Onyesonwu to dissociate from reality: when she faces horrifying and painful moments, she escapes into the Wilderness. This behaviour, according to Eurocentric trauma research, functions as an automatic defence mechanism in the face of trauma. Van der Kolk refers to this process of splitting off from the Self as "depersonalization" (71). The state of split, which relieves the person from feeling, is triggered by the brain in overwhelming situations that overburden the individual to protect the person experiencing a traumatic situation from even worse psychological consequences. From this perspective, Onyesonwu's shapeshifting represents the necessary process of "checking out" on her journey towards reintegrating the traumatically split-off parts of her Self. This reading is underlined by the necessity Onyesonwu feels to come back to her physical body after a certain amount of time to not lose herself: "to remain a vulture for too long always left me feeling detached from what I could only define as being a human" (WFD 119).

Yet, Okorafor offers an alternative explanation to Eurocentric conceptualizations of dissociation as a neurological coping mechanism in trauma survivors that is rooted in magical and spiritual experiences. The speculative element of shapeshifting allows Onyesonwu to reflect on herself and her life from a distance and to relax from the tension she faces in her *Ewu* body. She remarks, "[a]s a vulture, the vulture that was Aro, my mind was singular, sharp, and confident. I knew that if I focused and was audacious I could defeat Daib. I understood that I was extremely powerful now, that I could do more than the impossible. But as Onyesonwu the Ewu Sorceress shaped by Ani herself, all I could think about was the thrashing Daib had given me" (WFD 349-50). It is this vulture that is her favourite animal to turn into: "as a vulture, the world was open to me" (WFD 70). One reason for this preference, I propose, might be the vulture's ability to fly. The deeply ingrained human wish to be able to "fly away" is often associated with the wish to disappear or run away, as Okorafor explains in "Organic Fantasy" (280): "It was my sadness and fascination with these ideas of flight and the tragedy of those at Igbo Landing that led to my many stories about people who can still fly" (280). In connecting this historic site of the mass suicide of Igbo people in Georgia in an act to refuse slavery with the idea of flying in her narrative, Okorafor effectively uses the genre tropes of Afrofuturism to allude to and visibilize collective historical trauma. Similarly, flying is a way for Onyesonwu to find a connection to her Self and to start healing her trauma. Okorafor thus contributes to a distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory, which finds different and transformative ways of making meaning from the experiences surrounding the occurrence of colonial and postcolonial trauma and feeling dislocated as a diasporic individual. In her essay "Organic Fantasy", she describes how the idea of shapeshifting had always appealed to her as an Afrodiasporic woman. She explains that shapeshifting, for her character Onyesonwu, who is caught between seemingly fixed sets of identities (being half Nuru and half Okeke), as well as for herself, is a way to "most clearly and honestly portray how I experienced [a situation]. To write myself as a shapeshifter … most accurately shows just how jarring the cultural shifts were to me. It is the most truthful way of telling the truth. For me, fantasy is the most

accurate way of describing reality" ("Organic Fantasy" 278-279). She portrays this state of being a cultural shapeshifter as a "discomfort of the warring dominant cultures within her, the American and the Nigerian" (281). The shapeshifting experience thus allows both author and character to accept and embrace multiplicity and opens up the possibility of a hybrid, configured identity which celebrates fluidity:

> I can't help who I am. And who I am is reflected in what I write …. Almost every story I write is set in the place where my parents immigrated from in 1969 …. And these stories aren't 'normal', oh no. They cannot be …. I credit much if not most of this to two things. The first is my complex African experience, which on many levels has been a series of cultural mixes and clashes between being American and being Nigerian …. The friction of my cultures and my personal idiosyncrasies produce literary fairy dust …. [T]he fantasy that I write is far more than what is on the surface. I am not just 'making stuff up'. There is a method, purpose and realness to my madness. ("Organic Fantasy" 276-77)

Okorafor references Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the last line: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (2.2.195). In the play, madness is a crucial theme, and research heatedly discusses whether the protagonist is mad, distracted, depressed and traumatized or whether he plays a skilful role, negotiating a threatening life-situation, and consciously scripting, *authoring,* his own madness as a political strategy. From this perspective, and remembering that her writing is "far more than what is on the surface", Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* might be read as an elaborate socio-political instrument which narrativizes trauma with a distinct, socio-political purpose in mind. Okorafor also elaborates on the degree of autobiographical and personal involvement in the novel, for example, in "The Writing of *Who Fears Death"*, where she quotes a Nigerian man who warned her that "you can't write about something without it writing about you" (24). She reveals that the grief of her deceased father as well as her thoughts on "change, cultural shift, and chaos" are reflected in the novel's very first sentence: "My life fell apart when I was sixteen. Papa died" (WFD 1). In another instance, Okorafor explains: "Some speculative fiction may be unconcerned with realism, but mine sure as heck is deeply concerned with it". ("Writing Rage" 25)

Thus, in "blending … African cultural tradition with futurity which typifies Black speculative fiction" (Burnett, "Isn't Realist Fiction Enough?" 119), Okorafor creates a unique and hybrid form of literature full of magic and technology, which in itself exemplifies her own concerns with hybridity, diasporic living and identity configuration as well as healing. As she explains, her work does not have the same roots as traditional fantasy; instead, it is "directly connected to [her] conflicting American and Nigerian cultural experiences and her own views of the world" ("Organic Fantasy" 275). She therefore calls her work 'organic fiction', which she defines as a form of fiction which "emerges from the very nature of its story" (275). She continues that "[l]ike most forms of fantasy, [organic fantasy] has the power to make something familiar strange. This allows one to experience even the most overdone ideas in fresh ways" (278). Furthermore, having gone through the experience of feeling isolated and alienated as an Afrodiasporic individual in a Western surrounding, Okorafor explains that she writes Afrofuturism to make sense of her own Self: "I was a sort of outcast in multiple communities. So I grew up with little interest in 'fitting in'. I just did my thing. And I'm still doing that", she said to Jeremy Jones from Clarkesworld Magazine. In the character Onyesonwu, who is caught between multiple identities – intelligent but overly emotional, almost irascible; vulnerable teenager but powerful sorceress and mighty shapeshifter; Nuru and Okeke; loved daughter and hated, rejected and neglected product of rape; marginalized *Ewu* but powerful hero of her people; and a lover who takes on the traditionally male

role in the relationship – Okorafor, who shares Onyesonwu's experiences with racism, rejection, hybridity and the search for her Self, thus seems to process some of her own experiences of being African and American.

Embracing Hybridity: Spirit Infiltration, Resurrection and Discovering Choice

Alongside her three gifts, another aspect that eventually aids Onyesonwu in acknowledging her multiple Self and healing the wounds of her traumas is the frequent infiltration of spirits and the resulting near-death experiences she undergoes throughout her life. In this section, I will outline how these resurrections lead to Onyesonwu's embracing her hybridity and discovering the power of choice. Throughout the novel, Okorafor makes use of speculative fiction and science fiction's mirror function by alluding to the deeply ingrained human fear of infiltration and the accompanying perceived loss of power and identity. Gerald V. O'Brien explains: "Invasion from the 'outside,' whether it be by aliens, germs, bugs, forms of brainwashing or propaganda, or any other hazard, is the stuff of nightmares and countless science fiction books and movies" (2). Invasion of the body from an external force is often considered destabilizing for Western identity, which is usually based "on the credos of individualism and an absolute distinction between Self and Others" (Spivak 66). But Onyesonwu subverts this fear: in order to process her traumatic past and to be able to accept and celebrate her Self as it is, Onyesonwu has to be invaded by spirits, and die and be reborn several times. Only then has she gathered the power to destroy Daib and find peace with her hybrid Self.

The first time Onyesonwu is involuntarily infiltrated by a spiritual power happens during her childhood. She recalls the feeling as follows: "There were doors in my head, doors made of steel and wood and stone. The pain as from those doors cracking open. Hot air wafted through them. My body felt odd, like every move I made would break something. I fell to my knees and retched. Every muscle in my body seized up. Then I stopped existing. I recall nothing. Not even darkness. It was awful" (WFD 15). The materiality of these images is mirrored in the physical reaction Onyesonwu has during the infiltration. After the event, she feels humiliated and confused and deduces that she apparently had "just spontaneously died and returned to life" (WFD 15). The second time, magic infiltrates her during the procedure of the Eleventh Year Rite: she becomes transparent, meaning that she temporarily loses her physical appearance. When she recalls the event, she realizes that "I had died…yet again" (WFD 43). The third time she is resurrected during her initiation rite. She tells Mwita afterwards: "Mwita, I died" (WFD 138). The fourth time, Onyesonwu deliberately goes on a fast to provoke her spiritual travel into the Wilderness. The more in charge of her magical capacities Onyesonwu is, the more she seems to be able to regulate and utilize the infiltration for her own advantage. Her apprenticeship in sorcery thus propels her out of her passive status into an empowered state of agency.

The final step towards the assemblage of all her respective identities finally occurs when Ting marks her "with a symbol of the crossroads where all your selves will meet" (WFD 316), as only when her Selves are reconciled will she be able to find catharsis: "She's releasing" (WFD 316), Ting calls it. Thus, Onyesonwu can finally feel, accept, and embrace

> [e]very part of me that was me. My tall *Ewu* body. My short temper. My impulsive mind. My memories.
> My past. My future. My death. My life. My spirit. My fate. My failure. All of me was destroyed. I was
> dead, broken, scattered and absorbed. I was a thousand times worse than when I first changed into a

bird. I remember nothing because I was nothing. Then I was something. I could feel it. I was being put back together, bit by bit …. [M]y spirit and body were utterly completely obliterated … as It resembled me, it arranged me in a new order. An order that made more sense. I remember the moment the last piece of me was returned. (WFD 316f; emphasis in original)

In this passage, Okorafor clarifies for the first time that the series of "deaths" that Onyesonwu has undergone is necessary for her to reconcile her Selves, her multiple identities, in order to find peace. After the experience, Onyesonwu says, "it all slammed into me. Who I was, why I was, how I was, when I was.…More came in that moment. More of who I now was. I smiled, and then I laughed" (WFD 317). Similar to how Jess enters the wilderness in *The Icarus Girl* on her journey to self-discovery*,* Onyesonwu's trips into the spirit world can be considered a form of posttraumatic growth. In *Who Fears Death*, the historically dreaded penetration and infiltration of the Other is portrayed as oppositional to the Western science-fictional one, which destroys the intruded subject. Even though Onyesonwu is bodily harmed, the infiltration is ultimately beneficial to her mind and sends her on the path of healing and reconciling of her multiple identities. Therefore, as E. Jones argues, we must "understand the initiations Onyesonwu undergoes as growth and power gained through the process of death and rebirth leading to integration" (*Medicine* 86). On her journey, Onyesonwu finds access to her feelings, acknowledges them and subsequently experiences healing. This might inspire diasporic or immigrant readers to embrace and celebrate their multiplicity as well, thus "releasing" collective cultural trauma. Okorafor suggests that this experience is spiritual. It is not Ani who changes Onyesonwu's self-conception, but the "Creator", "It Who Cannot Be Touched" (WFD 316). I therefore argue that the procedure Onyesonwu undergoes strongly resembles the process that most religions and spiritualities describe in order to achieve a state of, for example, "being saved" (Christianity) or "being enlightened" (Buddhism): becoming present and aware, accepting what is, getting to know oneself (which resembles what I call identity configuration in this thesis) and consequently experiencing relief from worldly burdens (which I refer to as trauma healing). In conceptualizing a unique spiritual framework distinct of Afrodiasporic speculative fiction and based on various African spiritual traditions and sources, Okorafor offers a distinctly Afrodiasporic way of looking at trauma and its healing.

In her society, Onyesonwu is considered dangerous for two reasons: because she is *Ewu,* and therefore believed to have been born violent, and because she is a female sorcerer. Onyesonwu tells the reader: "I felt it inside me, too. Like a demon buried under my skin since my conception. A gift from my father, from his corrupted genetics. The potential and taste for amazing cruelty. It was in my bones, firm, stable, unmoving" (WFD 163). In the beginning of the story, Onyesonwu does not counteract the expectation that she will react violently towards challenges. On the contrary: she often reacts instinctively and without self-control, letting her anger roam freely. She remarks: "When I'm truly angry, when I'm filled with violence, all things are easy and simple" (WFD 221). When she is furious at Aro, for example, she uncontrollably shouts at him, and finally almost kills him. In another instance, she physically attacks Diti because her friend deeply hurts and insults her by remarking that Onyesonwu is "used to living like an animal in the sand" (WFD 208). As the story progresses, though, Onyesonwu understands the power of choice. She does not have to carry out the cultural script, which states that *Ewu* is equal to violence, and her biological descent from a villain does not have to define her personality. This realization, in which Mwita has an important role to play, has a strong impact on

her self-perception and prompts her to take responsibility for her own actions. Hence, I will now turn to the importance of choice on Onyesonwu's journey, especially the choice of non-violence.

Mwita constantly reminds her of her choice in life when it comes to the use of violence, which she gradually internalizes. He reminds her that she is not what people think she is: "'Remember,' he shouted. 'This is not what we are. No violence! It's what sets us apart!'" (WFD 222). He keeps telling her that self-control "is what will make you and me different. Different from the myth of the *Ewu,* different from those we'll face in the West. Control, thought and *understanding*" (WFD 210; emphasis in original). Similarly, her mother tells her: "[The Okeke] think that an act of violence can only beget more violence. I know this isn't true, as you should" (WFD 32). Still, Onyesonwu is tempted to give in to the stereotype about her *Ewu*-ness on several occasions: "Not for the first time I suspected that whatever I'd do in the West would be violent. Despite what Mwita said and believed….It was reality. I was *Ewu,* who would listen to me without the threat of violence?… They hadn't heard me until they feared me" (WFD 236). But later in the narrative, Onyesonwu explains: "Mwita and I had discussed how we would never flat out succumb to the violence people, Nuru and Okeke alike, believed *Ewu* were prone to by nature" (WFD 372). Over time, Onyesonwu learns to reverse the stereotype attached to her appearance by controlling her temper through healing the root of her angry feelings and through applying the principle of choice instead of purely reacting to triggers in her environment. In one example, instead of blindly attacking, she heals a discriminatory man. Scenes like these recall what S. Hall calls the third strategy of reversing stereotypes: contesting them from within ("The Spectacle of the 'Other'" 274). Onyesonwu efficiently contests, undermines, and deconstructs the stereotype associated with her biological features by behaving exactly the opposite of common expectation. Consistent with this, Okorafor challenges stereotypes by including both male and female and ethnically diverse characters who are complex by being vulnerable and brave at the same time.

Instead of succumbing to stereotypes and social expectations, Onyesonwu acknowledges her flaws and decides to work through, reverse, and actively forget the transgenerational trauma of embodied rape, racism-related trauma, and the dualistic and rigid worldview she has been exposed to through her socialization. Thus, Okorafor posits that, yes, our world is damaged and complicated, but that matters should not be categorized into binaries such as male/female, hate/love, and tradition/innovation, as the Great Book does, as it relies on images of "light and dark", "beauty and ugliness", "clean and dirty", "good and evil", "night and day" to portray the so-called difference between Nuru and Okeke (WFD 342). As Burnett argues, the Great Book holds a double nature: "it is beautiful and horrible, liberatory and oppressive, familiar and unknowable, embodied and othered, containing both print and oral tradition, reading and listening" ("The Great Change" 147). I argue that, similarly, Okorafor suggests every human being has a potential to move in both directions. It is only choice which makes all the difference. This argument is exemplified by Mwita, in his own exceptional embodied existence as the son of a loving Nuru-Okeke-couple. His conception is mindboggling to Onyesonwu, as her deeply ingrained cultural framework does not include the possibility of a love relationship between the two warring people. Also, to her, *Ewu* equals hatred and rape. As Burnett observes, in this instance Okorafor "takes a form of non-heteronormativity (interracial sex) often historically associated with oppression (in this

case, rape and concubinage) and recasts it as a source of resistance" ("The Great Change" 145). Mwita's existence and position between the two ethnicities disrupts Onyesonwu's narrow-minded understanding of good and evil in the ethnic conflict of Nuru versus Okeke. He tells her: "It's not as simple as you think. There is sickness on both sides. Be careful. Your father sees things in black and white, too. Okeke bad, Nuru good …" (WFD 166; emphasis in original). As Burnett puts it: "When Onyesonwu's relentless criticism of the oppressive social order becomes ideologically dogmatic and thus starts to represent the very order she opposes, Mwita … intervenes and forces Onyesonwu to question every assumption … exposing the dangers of such simplistic formulations and the moral surety they engender" ("The Great Change" 148). Mwita also recognizes Onyesonwu's own potential to both sides when he tells her: "you scare me.…You resemble your mother mostly.…But I see it [your resemblance to your father] in the eyes now. You have his eyes" (WFD 184). Without Mwita's guidance, Onyesonwu could easily have fallen prey to a similarly radical ideology as Daib's. He is, as Burnett states, "what holds her back from seeing the world through her father's eyes" ("The Great Change" 145), as he is offering her a new perspective: she does not need to succumb to given ways. This "awakening", as Qiana Whitted calls it, leads Onyesonwu to "the realization that there is wisdom and strength through difference" (210). In disrupting dichotomizing categorization, Okorafor offers the reader an alternative way of seeing our world. On a broader level, the novel thus surfaces and critiques current societal issues and looming cultural traumas in our reality today, which are as tangible in our world as in the Seven Rivers Kingdom. All too often rooted in dichotomic sorting of people into the categories of Self and Other, they manifest, for example, in rigid power structures, lopsided knowledge systems and questionable value judgements.

Onyesonwu not only learns to accept and control herself, but gradually manages to stand up for herself and against the discrimination she receives as an *Ewu* by telling Nana the Wise, for example, to not call her *Ewu:*

> "And why not? Isn't that what you are?"
> "I hate that word."
> "Ewu or girl?"
> "Ewu, of course."
> "Is that not what you are?"
> "No," I said. "Not in the way the word means." (WFD 109)

Similarly, she tells her girlfriends: "'I am what I am but I am *not* EVIL!' … *Papa never felt I was evil,* I thought" (WFD 125; emphasis in original). And in the moment, she declares this, "the tension broke between [her] friends and [her]. Just like that. Even at the moment, [she] felt it. Less weight". (WFD 125). By voicing and affirming her worth, her self-perception and her relationships begin to change. By extension, putting her trauma into words finally releases it and opens up possibilities for healing and growth. These leaps of self-confidence also occur in other areas of her life. As far as gender preconceptions are concerned, Onyesonwu shirtfronts Mwita: "Just because you were born a male does *not* make you more worthy than me" (WFD 139; emphasis in original). In another instance, she tells Diti: "If I'm so disgusting to you, then you should've stayed home" (WFD 133). In rejecting the negative connotations of violence and evil that are attached to the word '*Ewu*', she refuses to be classified and stereotyped – and she realizes that she has a choice to counteract these associations. In another instance, she takes responsibility for how she wants to be perceived by telling the

sorcerer Sola, her mentor, that she is "human" and "Eshu", but she does not mention "*Ewu*" (WFD 134). The stereotypical *Ewu* is not part of Onyesonwu's self-defined, hybrid und multiple identity. As E. Jones puts it, "[e]mbracing her identity … [Onyesonwu] taps the combined power of these stereotypes to bring about the death of the men at the center of the conflict. Through her actions, Onyesonwu breaks out of the self-imposed controls that limit her use of power based on the negative attitudes toward women and Ewu" (*Medicine* 89). Stylistically, Okorafor works with italics for the word '*Ewu'* throughout the novel, in order to reveal the word as a hollow label. She seems to suggest that a person's identity should not be defined by such a negatively connotated word because every person – given supportive structures and systems that are affirming of human capability – has the potential and the freedom of decision to become who he or she wants to become.

Similarly, I propose that Okorafor advocates that people are not just born evil or violent, but are made so by inequalities, oppressive, unjust and hierarchical systems and social practices, as well as fundamentalist thought patterns. This is exemplified by Luyu, who teaches Mwita and Onyesonwu about the effect of social indoctrination in the society of the Seven Rivers Kingdom: "Look at the Vah people … who openly embrace juju …. Eyess was born into a community that thought this way, so though she won't ever be a sorcerer, she doesn't fear sorcery. Now see Daib, born and raised in Durfa where all he sees and learns are that the Okeke are slaves and should be treated worse than camels" (WFD 369). In a comparable way to how she positions *Ewu* people as outcasts because they cannot be categorized, Okorafor indicates here that innate evil or violence does not exist, but that their expression is rooted in social conditioning and unequal social structures and systems. Still, individual agency cannot and must not be denied, of course. This argument is observable in one distinct example: in the book's logic, Onyesonwu would have been linked to her father and his evil, instead of to her mother, had she been born a boy. Aro explains to Onyesonwu: "If you had been a boy, he'd have had an ally instead of an enemy" (WFD 128). Because she had a stronger connection to her mother as a girl, Onyesonwu turned into a saviour and liberator instead of an oppressor (WFD 144). Okorafor suggests here that it is *because* of her gender that she is able to end the genocide against the Nuru and overturn the gender hierarchy in the Seven Rivers Kingdom, not in spite of it. What seems to be celebratory of strong womanhood and a critique of the gender stereotype of girls being meek, docile and in service to men at first glance, is in fact problematic and revealing of binary thinking. I argue, though, that it is not necessarily the case, as this good girl/bad boy dichotomy suggests that Onyesonwu would have been evil or an ally to her father had she been a boy. Instead, I ascribe her ability to end the genocide, re-write the Great Book with all its composite inequalities and thus remake the world of the Seven Rivers Kingdom, to her mother's feminism and strong will. As she was reared by her feminist mother, Onyesonwu's actions and thinking are equally based on feminist principles. It is thus her socialization which determines her character.

Najeeba is a powerful shapeshifter as well, and serves as a strong role-model of endurance, hope, kindness and morality for Onyesonwu. Even though she does not join the young people on their long journey to the West, Najeeba supports her daughter by travelling "within" as an *Kponyungos*, called "to *alu*" (WFD 333) and thereby spreading the news of Onyesonwu's arrival among the people in the West. As E. Jones observes, her

character "negates the stereotype of rape victims as passive and useless shrapnel in the wreckage of war" (*Medicine* 88). She continues that

> [i]t is Onyesonwu's mother Najeeba who represents the tide of change; refusing to die after being raped and abandoned by her husband; disapproving of the ritual of circumcision for her daughter; and praying that Onyesonwu will become a great sorcerer who will bring about peace …, it is the force of her will that enables Onyesonwu's audacity to take root and flourish. A great cultural ethical change comes, and it resides in the will of women. (*Medicine* 90)

When Onyesonwu learns about her mother's magical abilities and her strong contribution to the success of her journey, she realizes how strong her ancestry has made her. In an interview with Whitted, Okorafor comments on the vital role of family in *Who Fears Death.* She explains that she herself

> was taught early on the African form of family [where] aunts and uncles aren't always blood. It's not taboo or shameful to spend more time with your aunt than your mother. And it's normal and beneficial for one to be raised by many. So for example, if your father is a jerk, you just look to that good uncle …. When there is trouble, there are options in order to deal with the trouble. This naturally comes out in my work. (210)

The knowledge of her powerful and stable familial roots, as I argue, reinforces the process of reclaiming and healing her traumas and she is finally able to accept herself and her multiple, configured identity. By highlighting the importance of ancestry and a close-knit community for the process of overcoming trauma, Okorafor again feeds into the distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory this dissertation aims to outline. In the following section, I will therefore focus on the importance of community and a place of belonging for Onyesonwu's healing process.

Finding Home in the 'Third Space'

As I have outlined above, ethnically as well as socially, Onyesonwu belongs neither to Okeke nor Nuru. Her "placelessness" as an *Ewu* is, as E. Jones argues, "what enables her to eschew the traditional roles of both women and the Okeke set forth in the Great Book. Rejected by both cultures, no ritual inclusion can fully generate a social place for her, since, as an ethnic hybrid, she can never produce proper Okeke or Nuru offspring" (*Medicine* 85). But this "placelessness" does not mean that there is no space for her. Despite the adverse situation she faces in society as a whole, Onyesonwu is surrounded by people who love and care for her, who accompany and help her on her dangerous and demanding journey. Among them are her lover Mwita, her mother Najeeba, her stepfather and her circle of girlfriends. She explains: "Of all the people in the world, my mother and Mwita were the two that I could fully trust to never ever hurt me" (WFD 194). I argue that these social relations – some of them biological, some chosen – serve as a safety net for the stricken Onyesonwu in the face of society's discrimination and her biological father's hatred.

Moreover, Onyesonwu indeed has a physical home, which she gradually discovers. The description of her appearance as similar to a "desert spirit" (WFD 25) indicates where she can find a sense of belonging. During her travels through the desert, Onyesonwu and her friends encounter the fabled Red People or Vah, a nomadic desert people. They pose, as E. Jones argues, a "challenge to the biethnic Nuru/Okeke social structure whose

rigid notions of identity and belonging deny the Ewu a place in society" (*Medicine* 85).[36] They are "a tribe of people who are neither Okeke nor Nuru" (WFD 65), considered a "myth" by the majority of people (WFD 65), and who are not recorded as existent in the Great Book – most probably because they pose a threat to the binary constellation of the Seven Rivers Kingdom and its ideologies. In other words, as E. Jones claims, their characteristics reveal "new possibilities beyond the limited biculturalism in which Onyesonwu and her friends have lived" (*Medicine* 85). Moreover, they indicate the shortcomings and deficiencies of the universally acknowledged and sanctified "knowledge" of the Great Book, which inculcates deeply problematic practices and beliefs. Their mere existence represents an alternative paradigm for the cohabitation of different people and crosses traditionally set and seemingly unbreachable boundaries. The nomadic tribe's "moving village" (WFD 273) indicates that they belong nowhere and everywhere at the same time, denying the dichotomy of Nuru and Okeke by welcoming everyone who does not fit into these two ideological categories. Movement and change therefore seem to be favoured over dominant discourses about fixed categories. Additionally, they are progressive and open-minded as far as gender and sexuality norms are concerned: their lives are sexually open ("Everyone seemed to be having intercourse with everyone", WFD 292) and they practice gender egalitarianism as well as witchcraft, known as juju, in their daily lives (WFD 369). They have women, such as Ting, Ssaiku's apprentice, in leading spiritual positions and a "Chieftess" called Sessa (WFD 271). It hence does not come as a surprise that they have "no issue with *Ewu* people" (WFD 294). Onyesonwu "was welcome [there]" (WFD 293). The Vah seem to be a people free of prejudices and racism. Sola, the Wise, who is not assigned to any ethnic group in the book but becomes Onyesonwu's mentor, declares that "Nuru and Okeke are so like their ancestors. If I could wipe this land of you all and let the Red People roam and multiply, I would" (WFD 340).

Several things fall into place for Onyesonwu during her time with the Red People. She has an important realization: "I was raised in Jwahir … but I'm from the desert. That's my home" (WFD 265). She starts taking her *Ewu*-ness less seriously and develops a sense of humour towards her difference. When her friend Diti suggests that she is going to be famous, she can laugh about her destiny: "I suspected that I'd be more infamous than famous" (WFD 144). In another instance, when a little girl from the Red People tells her "[y]ou look strange", she laughs as well, and simply replies "I know" (WFD 281). Other people's reaction to her appearance or their perception of her as a person do have a less devastating effect on her emotions. She explains: "By this time in my life, I saw myself through Mwita's eyes. I was beautiful. That is one of the greatest gifts Mwita gave me. I could never have seen myself as beautiful without his help" (WFD 277-78). She re-enters the state she was in as a happy child roaming around in the desert: "content, at peace, settled" (WFD 376). For Onyesonwu, the desert represents a place "in-between", in Bhabha's terms, not only physically, between Okeke and Nuru, but also symbolically, because it is the home for those who do not fit into either of these two rigid categories. It is a space where difference is welcomed, and where double-ness,

---

[36] Some scholars propose that the Vah could represent Amerindians, a group of people often said to deconstruct the dichotomy between black and white merely through their existence (E. Jones, *Medicine* 85).

hybridity or multiplicity does not result in discrimination, but is celebrated. Onyesonwu explains: "When you're in the desert, you have to *be* in the desert …. When people, *any* kind of people, want to travel with you, you don't reject them unless they're cruel" (WFD 198; emphasis in original). It is a place where ethnicity, skin colour, race and gender do not matter, as long as people are peaceful. As representatives of their living space, the desert's inhabitants are presented as inclusive and hospitable. By including this utopia, Okorafor seems to suggest that people all over the world should strive for a similar condition in their societies. This is especially relevant, as diasporic individuals often struggle with feelings of displacement and not belonging because their host societies are not welcoming. Okorafor herself reveals in an interview with Womack that, as an African American, "[it]'s like you belong but you don't belong" ("Sci-Fi Author"). In Homi K. Bhabha's terms, the desert can be considered as a "third space" or a space "in-between" (*The Location* 55), which offers diasporic individuals and those who find themselves not fitting in a place of belonging. As McLeod puts it, the "border subjectivities" that Bhabha refers to – diasporic individuals who reside in-between cultures and are coined by fluidity and hybridity, in contrast to the illusion of a stable and fixed identity – no longer rely "on fixed notions of home and identity to anchor them to a singular sense of self. Rather, the loss of these fixed ideas has been transformed into a hopeful new paradigm where motion, multiplicity, errancy, unpredictability, hybridity and impurity are gleefully welcomed" (254). This newly found identity consists of multiple identities, which are individually configured and which are "more than the simple sum of all identifications" (Schachter 171). This identity assemblage will constantly evolve and change over time.

By introducing the Red People and providing a 'third space' or alternative communal model for people like Onyesonwu to belong, Okorafor celebrates the concepts of fluidity and hybridity, and rejects rigid patterns of binary and ideological thinking. Onyesonwu is not only coined by hybridity because her mother is Okeke and her father is Nuru, but also because she is human as well as Eshu, which means she can change into different shapes. After the rewriting of the Great Book, Sola explains to the reader that "Onyesonwu's very *essence* was change and defiance" (WFD 415; emphasis in original). In other words, her whole being is characterized by hybridity and fluidity, but also by self-reliance and a strong will. In the beginning, both this hybridity and her seemingly uncontrollable power are deeply problematic for Onyesonwu and even a source of trauma, but as the novel progresses, she acknowledges her multiple Self and draws strength from her hybridity. By configuring a multiple identity for herself, she starts to heal and discovers her uniqueness and beauty. Thus, through Onyesonwu's personal development, Okorafor successfully deconstructs the idea of a fixed, stable identity and of the ideology of rigid, dichotomous categorizations in society, thereby offering a new way of thinking about diasporic subjectivities and identities, which is distinctly diasporic.

Conclusion

In dealing with racism, sexism, gendered violence, and discrimination in a productive way, *Who Fears Death* as a novel bears the redemptive power of storytelling. As Okri states, stories can be "either bacteria or light: they can infect a system, or illuminate a world" (33). In the same vein, *Who Fears Death* functions as a story of light. Making creative use of her particular position as a female Nigerian-American writer, Okorafor

provocatively confronts our own world with the societies in the Seven Rivers Kingdom. By changing and rewriting the Great Book's "infected" and toxic stories and exposing a side of the text that has been made opaque, Onyesonwu as Okorafor's autobiographical agent utilizes her "outcast identity and civic placelessness", as E. Jones puts it, to challenge "the cult of tradition and seek ways to resolve the larger problem of her society, such as genocide and oppression" (*Medicine* 86). Despite being conceived through rape and having lived the life of an outcast in society, Okorafor portrays Onyesonwu as an empowered, feminist woman who makes her own decisions and pursues her goals independently. Metaphorically, Onyesonwu attacks not only her wicked biological father, but also his imperialist and racist ideology. I therefore argue in line with Burnett that, in her narrative, Okorafor "is able to imagine and create a truly independent, truly postcolonial West Africa, free of Western hegemonic bonds in ways that are simply not possible outside the genre" ("The Great Change" 147). Hence, Okorafor openly voices social critique about the neo-colonial situation in our current reality. Moreover, *Who Fears Death* effectively challenges racist as well as sexist hierarchies and re-evaluates deadlocked societal structures. By imagining a future where traumatic supremacist Othering is still a reality, Okorafor acknowledges that the contemporary issues concerning imperialism, racism and sexism and the traumas they evoke will not be solved by time alone, but will perpetuate and haunt our societies if countermeasures are not taken and traumatic memory is not turned into active, reparative remembrance. Afrofuturism's strength lies, as Okorafor asserts, in "mingling past, present and future" ("Sci-Fi Stories" 7:30). And it is especially the persistence of the traumatic past of colonialism, slavery, and racism into the present that *Who Fears Death* is concerned with. As she explains in "Organic Fantasy", Okorafor is very much aware that, especially in the United States, "issues of race continue to lurk around corners" (277). Through Afrofuturism as a medium, and the specific generic form and content of *Who Fears Death,* Okorafor engages with rigid power structures, cultural supremacy, as well as systemic sexism and racism without giving easy answers for the question on how to overcome these deep-seated beliefs, prejudices, and biases.

In the interview with Whitted, Okorafor reports: "I see the world as a magical place and therefore that's how it comes out in my work. I am interested in looking into the future, usually that of Africa and that's why what I write is considered Afrofuturism" (208). She argues similarly when she elaborates on the genesis of the novel in "The Writing of *Who Fears Death*": "*Who Fears Death* was a tidal wave and hurricane combined. It consumed all of my creativity and sucked in all the issues I was dealing with and dwelling on. It mixed with my rage and grief and my natural furious optimism". This optimistic view of the future is noticeable when closely examining the novel. By creating a temporal distance, the futuristic, dystopian setting of *Who Fears Death* enables Okorafor to address important controversial and delicate issues from a different, outside perspective. She believes that "one human culture cannot just enter and live harmoniously with another. One has to truly try, accept and work at it" ("Organic Fantasy" 279); therefore, Okorafor encourages her readers to think outside of their comfort zone, inspiring them to view themselves, the past and the present differently and to imagine a fairer, more desirable future. Referring to her mostly North-American readers, Okorafor especially stresses the importance of Afrofuturism's estrangement effect: "I think American audiences could benefit from stepping out of themselves more often, out of what is familiar" (Whitted 210). Her novel thus

epitomizes the possibilities for literary works to be utilized to provide readers with a fresh outlook on the future, and to bring about change to the way they place themselves within it. In other words, Okorafor rewrites the past as well as imagines a different future to critique and inspire change in the reality we inhabit in the present.

In summary, I have proposed in this chapter that Onyesonwu's quest to deliver the Okeke from the Nuru's atrocities has three functions: first, to liberate herself from the haunting effects of trauma and reintegrate her identity into a configured multiple Self; second, to avenge her mother and to heal the wounds her evil father has inflicted on the family; and third, on a collective level, to fulfil the prophecy about an *Ewu* sorceress who will free the Okeke from their bond and break up ancient, but deeply oppressive, traditions about restricting gender and race hierarchies. By physically battling her father's Nuru armies and by rewriting the Great Book's toxic underlying stories and society's deeply ingrained scripts, she not only takes on a liberating role for herself, but also for her family and the society she grew up in. *Who Fears Death* as an Afrofuturist product similarly fulfils three functions. Firstly, in its function of bibliotherapy, its production serves as a vehicle for working through the author's own traumatic experiences of losing her father and being a Nigerian-American diasporic individual, who constantly juggles two cultural identities. Secondly, *Who Fears Death* allegorically illuminates and critiques damaging thought and behavioural patterns in our society today and offers an alternative vision for the future, thereby working through the haunting memories of the past. In this sense, the Afrofuturist novel, in its unique ability to provide cognitive estrangement, can help to relieve collective traumas and turn traumatic memory into positive, reparative remembrance. Thus, Okorafor narrates a story which imagines a future where this work is being done, while simultaneously working through a traumatic past and critiquing our present. She believes that "African science fiction's blood runs deep and it's old, and it's ready to come forth, and when it does, imagine the new technologies, ideas and sociopolitical changes it'll inspire. For Africans, homegrown science fiction can be a will to power" ("Sci-Fi Stories" 8:45). Hence, Okorafor takes a revisionist approach, as she challenges past and current notions of colonialism and patriarchy and re-imagines the future. And thirdly, *Who Fears Death* functions as a counter-narrative to dominant canonical Western-centred speculative fiction, which often portrays female and African characters as predominantly invisible or marginalized. In this role, the novel is able to provide representations of non-stereotypical and identifiable characters for readers who have historically not found themselves represented in dominant speculative fiction works.

Chapter Eight:
Conclusion

It has been the aim of this dissertation to establish the distinctive ways in which contemporary Afrodiasporic female authors imagine and portray the personal and collective colonial and postcolonial traumas emerging in the realms of intersectionally oppressive systems such as patriarchy, gender-based violence, neo-colonialism, and systemic racism and inequality. By means of five Afrofuturist case studies in the form of speculative fiction novels, I have analysed the ways in which the multiple forms of personal and collective traumas that these oppressive systems induce will persist if not adequately dealt with. As Kenneth Kidd puts it, collective cultural traumas are events which require "new vocabularies of trauma" (123). These new vocabularies must especially take into consideration the various ways trauma might be induced, perceived and processed by an individual or a collective, such as the African diaspora, which I have focused on in this dissertation. In this regard, I have critiqued the usefulness of conventional trauma theory and its Eurocentric roots beyond Western contexts, since Afrodiasporic individuals and communities are likely to experience and process trauma in very particular ways, unsettling these conventional theories of trauma, and revealing their limitations.

I have discussed that one way of processing colonial and postcolonial trauma is through Afrofuturism, where authors, in their politics of "recovering lost black histories and thinking about how those histories inform a whole range of black cultures today" (Yaszek, "Race" 2), and "imagin[ing] black futures that derive from colonial experiences" (Barr x), narrativize traumatic experiences in a distinctly Afrodiasporic way. Mitchell claims that Afrodiasporic women's writing focuses on "healing and liberatory practices in ways that African American men's works do not" (*The Freedom* 177). In an attempt to carve out a way of thinking about diasporic trauma which incorporates the distinct experiences of Afrodiasporic individuals, I have therefore turned to a specific form of Afrofuturism authored by women, which tells stories about societies in trauma and the denial of these traumas. I term this Afrospeculative trauma narratives, with the aim of beginning to carve out what I have termed an Afrodiasporic trauma theory. The distinctly Afrodiasporic and Afrospeculative approach to trauma is interested in the mind and the body on equal terms, as well as spiritual forms of accessing trauma. It aims at decolonizing currently dominant Eurocentric trauma theory and the disruption of the prevalent trauma paradigm. It does so by deconstructing the body/mind binary through body awareness and acceptance, by celebrating hybridity, fluidity, and multiplicity, and by putting special emphasis on memory-work and re-narrativization as bibliotherapy. Moreover, this theory suggests a shared culture and tradition; community and a strong social network; relationships and connections; localized modes of belief, rituals, spirituality, magic; and creole language as identity markers for Afrodiasporic individuals and as healing tools for political activism. Thus, this thesis set out to critique and destabilize Western conceptualizations of trauma theory in the realm of diasporic experience, as its current eurocentrism does not incorporate ways of understanding and expressing trauma outside of its narrow boundaries. In other words, I have attempted to work towards a more relevant trauma theory that centres Afrodiasporic individuals and societies, in which both the body and spirituality are included in comprehending the traumatic past – where community, embodied

experience and tradition are tools for healing, where time is conflated instead of compartmentalized, and where the notion of a fixed and stable identity is rejected. This trauma theory emphasizes the potential inherent in trauma for stimulating posttraumatic growth, the possibility of personal development, and gesture towards the multiple Afrodiasporic identities that might be configured in the process, both in author and reader, but also in contemporary societies generally. Depending on their cultural, racial or gender background, readers might read the five novels I have chosen as science fiction, while others adopt a distinctly African, spiritual perspective, as the texts refuse to privilege one explanatory model over the other. This possibility of "choosing one's lens" or not needing to make the choice at all, portrays the hybrid cultural identities the Afrodiasporic authors bear and is indicative of a distinct Afrodiasporic way of perceiving the world. Thus, in examining the ways in which the state of trauma is explored in literary texts which "resonate with more than one cultural environment" (Gunning 120), the theory I have tried to carve out does not set out to reduce the issue to a choice between two dichotomous states. Instead, I have revealed multiple ways in which Afrofuturism offers techniques of working through trauma and empowering individuals and societies, essentially creating a distinctly Afrodiasporic theoretical lens. Of course, my analysis is only one amongst many, and it is necessarily limited. The same research questions could have been analysed differently, or completely different questions could have been asked of the same texts.

In engaging slavery and its aftermath as horror, *Kindred* and *The Gilda Stories* are especially concerned with rethinking the past and excavating a traumatic, yet silenced, history which continues to linger in the present through transgenerational transmission, in the form of various systems of oppression. The speculative tropes the novels engage with – time travel and vampirism – enable the conflation of past, present, and future in ways that make the consideration of past atrocities imperative, as they impact the present and the future. In *Kindred,* in excavating memories about America's slave past, actively forgetting it and thus turning it into reparative remembrance, Butler creates representational space for formerly marginalized groups of society and elicits empathy in her readers, thereby fostering the necessity of personal confrontation with and responsibility for the past. In suggesting that the mind/body split must be closed for individuals and society to find relative peace, *Kindred* contributes to a distinct Afrodiasporic trauma theory. Through vampirism in *The Gilda Stories,* Gomez similarly conflates past, present, and future, highlighting queer black women's distinct struggles over the centuries and thus gives historically marginalized groups in society a platform, while emphasizing how historical traumas continue to affect the present. Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* and Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* focus, in particular, on the distinct diasporic space immigrants inhabit and the challenges their experiences contain – especially the experience of being torn between several cultures that is induced by dominant insistence on normativity and rigid categorization. Both novels suggest spirituality, in the form of Yoruban *abiku* and *ibeji* myths and Caribbean Voudou, as a valid and productive lens for understanding and conceptualizing trauma. They employ ancestral spirit possession to understand the physical body as a site for knowledge of the past and its effect on the present, thereby emphasizing the traumatic repercussions of the past in the present. The novels especially outline how rigid, dichotomous societal structures might have traumatizing effects on individuals and marginalized groups of society, as these belief systems direct them to the assumption that hybridity needs to be rejected instead of embraced as a healing tool

that moves away from trauma. In doing so, the texts unsettle harmful belief systems rooted in socially constructed binaries by suggesting a 'third space' for diasporic individuals, where hybridity, fluidity and multiplicity are desirable and celebrated. The idea of a 'third space' is also prevalent in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*. Both *Who Fears Death* and *Brown Girl in the Ring* highlight how racism, sexism and other forms of oppression might pertain in the future by means of futurity and dystopia. Asserting an Afrodiasporic and African future by extrapolating from a present where neo-colonial oppressions continue to affect diasporic individuals, the two novels highlight what the future of black women might look like if we do not counteract in the present and start to imagine an alternative future now.

In subverting narratives of black women as always and only victims, who are traumatized and injured, and therefore pathologized, the Afrofuturist novels outline journeys of growth of empowered black women, who are, as E. Jones puts it, "healers and/or spiritual leaders, as well as proponents of belief systems that lack legitimacy at the beginning of their tales" ("Africana Women" 195). They initially reside between competing and seemingly contradictory elements of different cultures as culturally liminal figures: they face murderous assaults from different origins, in the form of villains such as Rudy in *Brown Girl,* Daib in *Who Fears Death* and Rufus in *Kindred,* or greedy vampire hunters in *The Gilda Stories* and evil spirits in *The Icarus Girl*.[37] Thus, they must battle for their own survival *and* that of their communities and families – and they eventually succeed. Ultimately, they embrace their status as healers and leaders despite their originally subjugated status. In this sense, the Afrofuturists contribute to what E. Jones has termed the rewriting of "old yet persistent cultural and societal scripts that undercut the authority of black women as healing agents in their personal lives as well as that of their communities" ("Africana Women" 187). The novels thus demonstrate the ways in which female diasporic individuals subvert their subjugated statuses, while simultaneously challenging dominant narratives of authority, retrieving denounced African spirituality and traditions as sources of legitimate authority and knowledge instead. Moreover, the novels develop a framework of ethics, connection, and relatability, which "result[s] in patterns of relating more humanely across difference" ("Africana Women" 186). In the five novels examined, the reader is confronted with unconventional characters. In choosing extraordinary but also drastic ways to struggle against a system that depraves them of their rights as humans and women due to race, class, and gender ideologies, they show us, through self-examination, that processing trauma is painful but necessary for posttraumatic growth, empowered living, and the configuration of diasporic identities. The protagonists have understood that denying their unique, hybrid diasporic Selves will only allow the wounds to endure. In this sense, the novels act as literary spaces where alternative resistant modes of existence are embraced and valued, and where readers are offered space for healing.

Two ways of how Afrospeculative trauma narratives are especially significant have emerged from my study: firstly, in their representative function, Afrospeculative trauma narratives provide intragroup support and figures of identification for contemporary survivors of racism-related and postcolonial trauma who formerly

---

[37] That the protagonists in *Kindred, Brown Girl* and *Who Fears Death* are assaulted by their own male ancestors is especially noteworthy and might be a path needing pursuit in further research projects.

did not see themselves and their experiences represented in literature. Moreover, through its function as bibliotherapy, Afrofuturism can provide a way for readers belonging to subjugated social groups in dominating societies to talk "indirectly about their trauma by discussing the literary narrative" (van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 58). Both in form and content, the five Afrofuturist novels investigated in this thesis are strongly concerned with the function of stories and how narrating, writing, and reading them bear the potential to aid individuals and groups – be it protagonist, author, or reader – in configuring a multiple, hybrid identity and in eliciting a process of continuous posttraumatic growth and healing. Secondly, in their pedagogic function – as genre fiction is increasingly introduced to classrooms and available online – Afrofuturist narratives like the ones examined may elicit empathy in their readers, who again might make changes in their future behaviour. As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie put it in an interview with *The Economist*, "to read literature is to become alive in a body that is not your own" (5:20). In inhabiting bodies that are not our own through the act of reading, and the shared experience generated by narratives, the relatability to and visibility of seemingly "distant Others" increases. Thus, the Afrofuturists contribute to the project of "humanizing others who exemplify embodied difference by fleshing out the complexities of multiplicity and intersectionality in the formation of individual and collective identities" (E. Jones, "Africana Women" 194). Scholars such as Esther Jones and Priscilla Wald have already claimed that sci-fi, and Afrofuturism in particular, enable the reader to question habituated and naturalized thought patterns and assumptions about certain behaviours and the way difference is constructed. Afrofuturism should therefore not be regarded as an "untenable, fantastical and therefore absurd proxy for 'factual science'" (E. Jones, "Africana Women" 191), but rather be appreciated for its ability to approach questions of social justice by interrogating humanity's fundamental conceptions of identity (191). Thus, as the five Afrofuturists develop "alternative ethics derived specifically from denigrated African religious traditions", they potentially enlarge the readers' "habits of mind as a means of increasing empathic actions toward alien Others" (194). As the novels examined in this dissertation are populated with characters and situations which fundamentally challenge our cultural and social scripts, as well as our habituated patterns of thinking about gender, race, and class, they contribute to the endeavour of textual healing and potentially stimulate posttraumatic growth in exceptional ways. Yet, they also show us that any meaningful liberatory project – including healing and reintegrating traumas, reconciling, discovering, and balancing multiple identities – is chaotic, frightening, and obliges the individual to leave behind all that is known and convenient.

On the level of narrative discourse, the five writers turn to Afrofuturism to claim a space, critiquing the systemic and cultural nature of violence and oppression, mostly in the form of racism and sexism, both against themselves and their communities. In their counter-narratives, the Afrofuturists thus envision an alternative future and revise the rigid generalizations and devaluations encountered by black women to initiate a process of healing both on a personal and on a societal level. In writing against the "blackness as catastrophe" trope (Yaszek, "Race" 2), they "stake claim for themselves and for their communities in the global future imaginary" (1). Afrofuturists hence situate themselves in the past to firmly position themselves in the present. They redefine human identity and common, simplified, and binary assumptions about belonging. The status of their protagonists as outsiders of mainstream society allows the authors to criticize the dominant culture's

dichotomous world views and belief systems, which delimit their capacity for healing as well as personal growth and prosperity. The five Afrofuturists celebrate hybridity and multiplicity and, in Toni Morrison's words, "invent" themselves as black diasporic women ("Black Woman" 63).

To convey their message, the five Afrofuturists address the continued relationship between past, present, and future. In doing so, they not only question the level to which slavery, colonialism and racism continue to exist in the present, but they also imagine a future where currently open wounds have become scars and where "a new model of racial community…becomes possible" (Vint 246). The five novels are all deeply rooted both in historical realities and in present-day concerns in our societies, which are particularly faced by Afrodiasporic women. Thus, the diasporic authors are concerned with time in two different ways. Firstly, they look at the past and point to the need to remember the historical realities of slavery, colonialism, and their underlying racism. Secondly, by looking at the future, they envision a society which has "move[d] beyond this past and into a transformed world" (Vint 255). For this transformation to happen, the traumatic past must be acknowledged and integrated into the collective cultural identity, instead of being repressed. Thus, the novels urge us to "actively forget" the traumatic past by forging a culture of remembrance, because, as Toni Morrison has spelled out in her novel *Beloved,* silence conjures up ghosts, but they can be dispelled by collective exorcism. This is exemplified by the protagonists' initial ignorance about their familial history or ancestry, which contributes in large parts to the crises they experience. While negligence on the part of Dana, Gilda, Jess, Ti-Jeanne and Onyesonwu is also notable, it is mostly the cultural, political, and social circumstances in which their families find themselves that prevent the protagonists from a full disclosure of their past. Thus, as Afrofuturism, especially authored by women, represents a tool for reparation and recovery uniquely suited for our momentary historical situation in all of its intricacies and unsteadiness, it becomes our duty to go through the ritual of memory again and again to protect ourselves from the continuous effect of a traumatizing past in the present by acknowledging, supporting and giving scholarly attention to cultural artefacts produced by artists belonging to historically marginalized and silenced groups of society. Thus, by reading Afrofuturism and other forms of retellings and counter-narratives through an intersectional lens and by conceptualizing theories of identity formation and trauma healing uniquely suited to the experiences of diasporic living, we can begin to make out a new way for the future. Moreover, analogously to the protagonists, who, as Vint posits, "experience healing when they accept even their scarred parts" (255), we need to accept history and all its ambiguities as a piece of ourselves, because only then can we resist its influence on our present and strive towards collective healing.

Essentially, the five Afrofuturist works I have explored have one common, emancipatory goal: questioning Eurocentric representations and boldly proclaiming the humanity and value of Afrodiasporic individuals by challenging and fighting against destructive stereotypes. The novels re-narrate the past and envision different, possible futures for people, especially women of African descent across the globe, through the speculative, while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of continuously working through historical trauma. As Darieck Scott outlines, the process of "reopen[ing]…wounds, to begin a healing can only be understood as an ongoing process – a healing that *is* that process rather than the end of process" (130; emphasis in original).

When considering healing a continuous process, it is not accidental that the five novels all resist closure: as many scholars in cultural trauma theory have pointed out, "narrative devices to convey trauma must necessarily be disrupted, reiterated, recursive and non-closured" (Visser 277). In this sense, they are contributing to erase what Hirsch calls 'postmemory', the transgenerational inheritance of traumatic memory. Instead, they "actively forget", in Nietzsche's terms, an unjust and traumatic past, and foster reparative and projective remembrance with their creative work instead. The five novels, in different ways, but effectively, use speculative fiction as a tool to re-write the past of black women and replace it with a more just vision of the future, reintegrate traumatic memory into a coherent life narrative, celebrate hybridity and multiplicity, and send themselves, their audience and collectively traumatized societies on a journey of posttraumatic growth.

Afrofuturist narratives have thus two important functions and goals. Firstly, speculative fiction, especially Afrofuturism, is a mode where diasporic concerns over identity, representation, meaning, power and politics, and the implications of trauma, can be addressed in a unique way. As I have shown, the genre's de-familiarizing effect, often referred to as cognitive estrangement, achieved through the speculative elements in a story, allows authors such as Butler, Gomez, Oyeyemi and Hopkinson to re-envision social realities and pathological stereotypes, while the reader sympathizes with characters different to him- or herself without prejudice. Controversial issues such as racism and slavery can be addressed, as Madhu Dubey argues, as the genre allows writers "to meet the challenge of imagining possible futures unbound by the racial scripts of the past" (802). Not only does Afrofuturism deconstruct and subvert deeply ingrained worldviews through uncovering the negative implications of colonialism, slavery, racism, misogyny and marginalization by rewriting the past, where marginalized groups' voices were not heard: it also bears the possibility of portraying and envisioning, even extrapolating, a post-colonial future with all its possibilities. Speculative narratives, in comparison to realist narratives, are less exclusively associated with real-world conditions and therefore are in the unique position to conceptualize alternative views on past, present and future, while nevertheless being rooted in reality, to a certain extent. Afrofuturism can convey social critique, uncover problems, evoke empathy, and advocate for change to make meaningful progress today. Moreover, Afrofuturism carries a subverting and transforming power regarding canonical science fiction narratives of authority, which traditionally have supported colonialism, and regarding ongoing hegemonic ideologies. It comes as no surprise, then, that Afrofuturism "speaks most clearly to those who are dissatisfied with the way things are" (Mosley 405). Secondly, the mode's inherent defamiliarization effect provides a representational platform for the feelings of otherness in diasporic individuals, as well the possibility of expressing the "unspeakable" in trauma, aiding both reader, writer, and society in general in reintegrating traumatic memory into the personal and collective history. In its unique ability to perform bibliotherapy through metaphorical and allegorical portrayal, Afrofuturism is better suited to grapple with and describe the lived experience of marginalized groups of society living in the diaspora compared to realist literature, as the genre's tropes allow an emotionally honest exemplification of traumatic experiences, such as dislocation, alienation, hybridity, otherness, and marginalization. Indeed, as Nnedi Okorafor is convinced, Afrofuturism is "the most accurate way of describing reality" ("Organic Fantasy" 279). In comparison to realist, mimetic fiction, the genre conventions of Afrofuturism enhance the author's toolbox in describing and expressing the magnitude of their mental,

physical, and emotional experiences as female diasporic individuals, which might open up the road to healing of both personal and collective trauma.

Due to spatial and temporal limitations, my research has not covered the practical implications of its findings. It has also not covered related topics, such as reader traumatization and textually induced trauma, and only slightly touched on the healing potential writing holds for Afrofuturist authors. There are other novels that potentially offer important insights into trauma and healing, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*, and yet others, still to be written. Moreover, my dissertation has only portrayed one way of processing colonial and postcolonial trauma, which is Afrofuturism, but it has been unable to pay thorough attention to other possible tools and methods for healing. Thus, further research is necessary to fill these gaps.

As I have outlined in this conclusion, Afrofuturism and, in particular, narratives addressing topics such as border-crossing, hybridity, diasporic living, racism, sexism, and their psychological consequences are perfectly positioned for commenting on our current situation, where the ongoing reality of neo-colonialism, imperialism, exploitation, and ethnic wars force economically destitute people to leave their home countries to live in countries where they face institutionalized racism and other forms of marginalization. The refugee crisis in Europe and the recent #blacklivesmatter movement are a case in point for the repercussions of the injustices and wrongs of the past in the present. If the critique and possibility for identification voiced through Afrofuturism are uniquely suited for our current situation, an important question arises: what do we do with the critique and how can we apply it to our lived reality? How can the genre's ability to soothe wounded souls and to hold accountable hegemonic systems that are responsible for the trauma be put into practice on a broader scale? Or, in other words, how can humans act on the ideas this genre provides? There are no easy answers, and finding them would certainly go beyond the limited scope of this doctoral thesis. It is work that must still be done.

References

Aarons, Vitcoria and Alan L. Berger. *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation*: *Trauma, History, and Memory.* Northwestern UP, 2017.

ADAA (Anxiety and Depression Association of America). "Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/posttraumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/symptoms. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Adams, P. L. "." *Wiley Series in General and Clinical Psychiatry: Stressors and the Adjustment Disorders*, edited by J. D. Noshpitz and R. D. Coddington. John Wiley & Sons, 1990, pp. 362–391.

Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: Identity, Feminism and Honest Conversations." *The Economist*, 5 Oct. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=o_hsWRVR8_M. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

African Union. "Report of the Meeting of Experts from Member States on the Definition of the African Diaspora." Wayback Machine Internet Archive, 22 Feb 2012, web.archive.org/web/20120222043530/http://www.africa-union.org/organs/ecossoc/Report-Expert-Diaspora%20Defn%2013april2005-Clean%20copy1.doc. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. U of California P, 2004.

Alloa, Emmanuel, et al. "Figurations of Postmemory. An Introduction." *Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies,* vol. 4, no. 1-2, Spring/Fall 2015, pp. 1-15.

Anatol, Giselle Liza. "A Feminist Reading of Soucouyants in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring* and *Skin Folk." Mosaic. An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal,* vol. 37, no. 3, Sept. 2004, pp. 33-50.

Anderson, Reynaldo and Charles E. Jones, editors. *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness.* Lexington Books, 2015.

Anderson, Reynaldo. "Afrofuturism 2.0 & The Black Speculative Arts Movement: Notes on a Manifesto." *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora,* vol. 42, no. 1-2, Spring/Winter 2016, pp. 228-233.

Arise Sexual Assault Services. "Effects of Sexual Violence." www.arisenm.org/effects-and-recovery/. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Arva, Eugene L. *The Traumatic Imagination: Histories of Violence in Magical Realist Fiction.* Cambria Press, 2011.

Ashcroft, Bill, et al. *The Empire Writes Back.* Routledge, 1984.

Assmann, Aleida. *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft. Grundbegriffe, Themen, Fragestellungen*. Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2011.

Assmann, Jan. "Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität." *Kultur und Gedächtnis,* edited by Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher. Suhrkamp, 1988, pp. 9-19.

Aydin, Ciano. "How to Forget the Unforgettable? On Collective Trauma, Cultural Identity, and Mnemotechnologies." *Identity,* vol. 17, no. 3, 2017, pp. 125-137.

Balaev, Michelle, editor. "Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered." *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 1-14.

Ball, Alan, creator. *True Blood.* Your Face Goes Here Entertainment, Warner Bros. Domestic Television, 2008-2014.

Bamberg, Michael. "Identity and Narration." *The Living Handbook of Narratology,* 23 May 2012, www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/identity-and-narration. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Barber, Tiffany E. "Cyborg Grammar? Reading Wangechi Mutu's *No je ne regrette rien* through *Kindred.*" *Afrofuturism 2.0. The Rise of Astro-Blackness,* edited by Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones. Lexington Books, 2016, pp. 3-26.

Barr, Marleen S., editor. *Afro-Future Females. Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory.* Ohio State UP, 2008.

Bast, Florian. "'No.': The Narrative Theorizing of Embodied Agency in Octavia Butler's *Kindred.*" *Extrapolation*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2012, pp. 151-181.

Bentall, Richard P., et al. "Childhood Adversities Increase the Risk of Psychosis: A Meta-analysis of Patient-Control, Prospective- and Cross-sectional Cohort Studies." *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, vol. 38, No, 4, June 2012, pp. 661–671.

Berry, Mary Frances, and John W. Blassingame. *Long Memory: The Black Experience in America*. Oxford UP, 1982.

Bhabha, Homi K. "Culture's in Between." *Artforum International,* vol. 32, no. 1, Sept. 1993, pp. 167-170.

---. "The World and the Home." *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives,* edited by Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Elia Shohat. U of Minnesota P, 2004.

---. *The Location of Culture.* Routledge, 1994.

Black, Claudia. *Changing Course: Healing from Loss, Abandonment, and Fear.* Mac Publishing, 1999.

Bond, Victoria. "Vampire values: the eternal power of Jewelle Gomez's The Gilda Stories." *Curve*, July-Aug 2016, p. 30+, Academic OneFile, link.galegroup.com /apps/doc/A459349634/AONE?u=27uos&sid=AONE&xid=1a7b0a85. Accessed 9 Jan 2019.

Bonfante, Larissa and Judith Swaddling. *Etruscan Myths.* U of Texas P, 2006.

Boudreau, Kristen. "Pain and the Unmaking of Self in Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*" *Contemporary Literature,* vol. 36, no. 3, U of Wisconsin P, 1995, pp. 447-465.

Bould, Mark. "The Ships Landed Long Ago: Afrofuturism and Black SF." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, *Afrofuturism*, July 2007, pp. 177-186.

Brah, Avtar. "Diaspora, Border And Transnational Identities." *Cartographies Of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge, 1996, pp. 178-210.

Brown, Laura S. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* edited by Cathy Caruth. John Hopkins UP, 1995, pp. 100-112.

Bryant, Cedric Gael. "'The Soul has Bandaged Moments': Reading the African American Gothic in Wright's *Big Boy Leaves Home*, Morrison's *Beloved* and Gomez's *Gilda*." *African American Review*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2005, pp. 541-553.

Bryce, Jane. "'Half and Half Children': Third Generation Women Writers and the New Nigerian Novel." *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 39, no. 2, 2008, pp. 49-67.

Bull, Malcolm. *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision and Totality*. Verso, 1999.

Burnett, Joshua Yu. "'Isn't Realist Fiction Enough?': On African Speculative Fiction." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 52, no. 3, 2019, pp. 119+. Gale Academic Onefile, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A600451070/AONE?u=27uos&sid=AONE&xid=d331e46c. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

---. "The Great Change and the Great Book: Nnedi Okorafor's Postcolonial, Post-Apocalyptic Africa and the Promise of Black Speculative Fiction." *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 46, no. 4, Winter 2015, pp. 133-150.

---. *My Left Arm, Her Twin Blades: Narratives of Resistance in Black Speculative Fiction.* Florida State University Libraries, 2014.

Bustamante, Elena Clemente. "Fragments and Crossroads in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring.*" *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal*, no. 4, Spring 2007, pp. 11-30.

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Beacon Press, 2004.

Butzer, Günther and Joachim Jacob, editors. *Metzler Lexikon literarischer Symbole.* J.B. Metzler 2008.

Carroll, Lewis. *The Hunting of the Snark.* Macmillan Publishers, 1876.

Carstens, Delphi and Mer Roberts. "Protocols for Experiments in African Science Fiction." *Scrutiny 2: Issues in English Studies in South Africa*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2009, pp 79-94.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. John Hopkins UP, 1996.

Chrisman, Allan and Joseph Dougherty. "Mass Trauma: Disasters, Terrorism, and War." *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America,* vol. 23, no. 2, Apr 2014, pp. 257-279.

Coleman, Monica A. "Serving the Spirits: The Pan-Caribbean African-Derived Religion in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring.*" *Journal of Caribbean Literatures,* vol. 6, no. 1, Summer 2009, pp. 1-13.

Comer Kidd, Davida and Emanuele Castano. "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind." *Science*, vol. 342, no. 6156, Oct 2013, pp. 377-380.

Cooper, Brenda. "Diaspora, Gender and Identity: Twinning in Three Diasporic Novels." *English Academy Review,* vol. 25, no. 1, 2008, pp. 51-65.

Craps, Stef and Gert Buelens. "Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Novels." *Studies in the Novel,* vol. 40, no. 1-2, 2008, pp. 1-12.

Craps, Stef. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, no. 1, pp. 139-167.

Crossley, Michele L. "Introducing Narrative Psychology." *Narrative, Memory and Life Transitions.* U of Huddersfield, 2002, pp. 1-13.

Crossley, Robert. "Critical Essay." In: Butler, Octavia E.: *Kindred*. Beacon Press, 2003, pp. 256-284.

Cuder-Domínguez, Pilar. "(Re)Turning to Africa: Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara* and Lucinda Roy's *Lady Moses.*" *Write Black Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature,* edited by Kadija Sesay, Hansib Publications, 2005, pp. 300-313.

Culbertson, Roberta. "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-Establishing the Self." *Literary History*, vol. 26, no. 1, Winter 1995, pp. 169-195.

Davin, Eric Leif. *Partners in Wonder: Women and the Birth of Science Fiction*. Lexington, 2006.

de Girolamo, G. and A. C. McFarlane. "The Epidemiology of PTSD: A Comprehensive Review of the International Literature." *Ethnocultural Aspects of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Issues, Research, and Clinical Applications,* edited by A. J. Marsella et al. American Psychological Association, 2001, pp. 33-85.

Delany, Samuel R. "Return…A Preface." *Tales of Nevèrÿon.* Wesleyan UP, 1993.

---. *Starboard Wine: More Notes on the Language of Science Fiction*. Wesleyan UP, 2012.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000.

Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. "Critical Race Theory: An Annotated Bibliography. 1993: A Year of Transition." *University of Colorado Law Review*, vol. 66, 1995, pp. 159-193.

Dery, Mark. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose."*Flame Wars. The Discourse of Cyberculture,* edited by Mark Dery. Duke UP, 1994, pp. 179-222.

Doerer, Kristen. "'*Gilda Stories*' Offers a Glimpse of Sexuality in Society." *The Bates Student*, 6 Feb 2013, thebatesstudent.com/2013/02/06/gilda-stories-offers-a-glimpse-of-sexuality-in-society/. Accessed 9 Jan 2019.

Donadey, Anne. "African American and Francophone Postcolonial Memory: Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Assia Djebar's *La Femme Sans Sépulture.*" *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 39, no. 3, Fall 2008, pp. 65-81.

DSM-5: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

Dubey, Madhu. "Speculative Fictions of Slavery." *American Literature*, vol. 82, no. 4, Dec 2010, pp.779-805.

Du Bois, William E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk.* Norton, 1999.

Eaglestone, Robert. "'You Would Not Add to My Suffering if You Knew What I Have Seen': Holocaust Testimony and Contemporary African Trauma Literature." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 40, no. 1-2, 2008, pp. 72–85.

Elia, Adriano. "Old Slavery Seen Through Modern Eyes: Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* and Haile Gerima's *Sankofa.*" *Other Modernity: Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies,* Feb 2019, pp. 20-30.

Elias, Norbert. *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners.* Urizen, 1978.

Enteen, Jillana. "'On the Receiving End of the Colonization': Nalo Hopkinson's Nansi Web." *Science Fiction Studies,* vol. 34, no. 2, *Afrofuturism,* July 2007, pp. 262-282.

Eshun, Kodwo. "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism." *The New Centennial Review,* vol. 3, no. 2, *Globalicities: Possibilities of the Globe,* Summer 2003, pp. 287-302.

Evans, Diana. *26a.* Vintage Books, 2006.

Extrapolation, edited by Javier A. Martinez, Andrew M. Butler, Michael Levy, Wendy Pearson, John Rieder. Liverpool UP, www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/journals/id/71/. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Eyerman, Ron. *Cultural Trauma. Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity.* Cambridge UP, 2001.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press, 1952.

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch.* Autonomedia, 2004.

Flagel, Nadine. "'It's Almost Like Being There': Speculative Fiction, Slave Narrative, and the Crisis of Representation in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *Canadian Review of American Studies*, vol 42, no. 2, 2012, pp. 216-45.

Frable, Deborrah E.S. "Gender, Racial, Ethnic, Sexual, and Class Identities." *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 48, 1997, pp. 139-157.

Frederick, Rhonda. "'Stories of What If': *Brown Girl in the Ring* and Literary Fantasy as Theory." *FIAR,* vol. 11, no. 1, 2018, pp. 6-18.

Fromm, Gerard, editor. *Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma Across Generations.* Kamac, 2012.

Fry, Joan. "'Congratulations! You've Just Won $295,000!' An Interview with Octavia Butler." *Poets & Writers*, vol. 25, no. 2, Mar-Apr 1997, pp. 58-69.

Fusco, Virginia. "Love and Desire in the Post-Modern Era: *The Gilda Stories* or How Black Feminism Challenged Gothic Literary Tradition." *Dossiers Feministes*, vol. 18, 2014, pp. 245-258.

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. "Critical Fanonisms." *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 17, 1991, pp. 457-470.

George, Rosemary Marangoly. *The Politics of Home.* Cambridge UP, 1996.

Gergen, Kenneth J. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life.* Basic Books, 1991.

Gilligan, James. *Violence: Reflections on Our Deadliest Epidemic.* Kingsley, 2000.

Gilroy, Paul. *Between Camps*. Penguin, 2000.

---. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.

Glave, Dianne D. and Nalo Hopkinson. "An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson." *Callaloo,* vol. 26, no. 1, Winter 2003, pp. 146-159.

Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation*. Columbia UP, 1997.

Gomez, Jewelle. "But Some of Us are Brave Lesbians: The Absence of Black Lesbian Fiction." *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, edited by E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson. Duke UP, 2005, pp. 289-97.

---. "Femme Erotic Independence." *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian gender*, edited by Sally R. Munt. Cassell, 1998, pp. 101-108.

---. "Of Afrofuturism and Social Change." *The Gay & Lesbian Review*, 21 June 2016, glreview.org/article/of-afrofuturism-and-social-change/. Accessed 9 Jan 2019.

---. "Recasting the Mythology: Writing Vampire Fiction." *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger. U of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, pp. 85-92.

---. "Speculative Fiction and Black Lesbians." *Signs,* vol. 18, no. 4, *Theorizing Lesbian Experience,* Summer 1993, pp. 948-955.

--. *The Gilda Stories. A Novel.* Firebrand, 2004.

---. *The Gilda Stories.* Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition. City Lights Publishers, 2016.

Good, Byron J., et al. "Postcolonial Disorders: Reflections on Subjectivity in the Contemporary World." *Postcolonial Disorders*. U of California P, 2008, pp. 1-40.

Govan, Sandra Y. "Connections, Links, and Extended Networks: Patterns in Octavia Butler's Science Fiction." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 18, no. 2, Science Fiction Issue, Summer 1984, pp. 82-87.

Griffin, Farah Jasmine. "Textual Healing: Claiming Black Women's Bodies, the Erotic and Resistance in Contemporary Novels of Slavery." *Callaloo*, vol. 19, no. 2, *Emerging Women Writers: A Special Issue*, Spring 1996, pp. 519-536.

Grossman, David. *Writing in the Dark. Essays on Literature and Politics*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008.

Gunning, Dave. "Dissociation, Spirit Possession, and the Languages of Trauma in Some Recent African-British Novels." *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 46, no. 4, *What is Africa to Me Now?,* Winter 2015, pp. 119-132.

Habila, Helon. *Waiting for an Angel.* W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*. Harper & Row Colophon Books, 1980.

Hall, Lynda. "Passion(ate) Plays 'Wherever We Found Space': Lorde and Gomez Queer(y)-ing Boundaries and Acting In." *Callaloo*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2000, pp. 394-421.

Hall, Stuart, editor. "The Spectacle of the 'Other'." *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices.* Thousand Oaks, 1997, pp. 225-239.

---. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford. Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222-237.

Hampton, Gregory Jerome and Wanda M. Brooks. "Octavia Butler and Virginia Hamilton: Black Women Writers and Science Fiction." *English Journal*, vol. 92, no. 6, 2003, pp. 70-74.

Haraway, Donna J. *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Free Association Books, 1991.

Harrell, Shelly P. "A Multidimensional Conceptualization of Racism-Related Stress: Implications for the Well-Being of People of Color." *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* vol. 70, no. 1, 2000, pp. 42-57.

Hartmann, Ivor, editor. *AfroSF: Science Fiction by African Writers*. StoryTime, 2013.

Heller, Tamar and Patricia Moran. "Introduction: Scenes of the Apple: Appetite, Desire, Writing." *Food and the Female Body in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Women's Writing.* State U of New York P, pp. 1-44.

Hentges, Sarah. *Girls on Fire. Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature.* MacFarland, 2018.

Herman, Judith Lews. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror.* Basic Books, 1992.

Hirsch, Marianne. "Past Lives. Postmemories in Exile." *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travellers, Outsiders, Backward Glances,* edited by Susan Rubin Suleiman. Duke UP 1998, pp. 418-446.

---. "Postmemory." *Postmemory.net,* www.postmemory.net/2012/01/04/hello-world/. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Hollinger, Veronica. "Fantasies of Absence: The Postmodern Vampire." *Blood Read: The Vampire as a Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger. U of Pennsylvania P, 1997, pp. 199-212.

Holmgren Troy, Maria. "Between Memory and History: The Nineteenth Century in Jewelle Gomez's Vampire Novel *The Gilda Stories* and the TV Series *True Blood*." *American Studies in Scandinavia*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2010, pp. 57-73.

Hooks, bell. "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination." *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler. Routledge, 1992, pp. 338-346.

---. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black.* South End Press, 1989.

Hopkinson, Nalo and Uppinder Mehan, editors. *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004.

Hopkinson, Nalo. *Brown Girl in the Ring.* Warner Books, 2001.

---. "Code Sliding." *Black Net Art,* blacknetart.com/Hopkinson.html. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

---. "Maybe They're Phasing Us In." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2007, pp. 99-107.

---. "Nalo Hopkinson: Many Perspectives." *LOCUS*, vol. 42, no. 1, Jan. 1999, pp. 76-77.

---, editor. *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction.* Invisible Cities Press, 2000.

Hout, Syrene. "Cultural Hybridity, Trauma, and Memory in Diasporic Anglophone Lebanese Fiction." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2011, pp. 330-342.

Hron, Madelaine. "*Ora na-azu nwa:* The Figure of the Child in Third-Generation Nigerian Novels." *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 39, no. 2, Summer 2008, pp. 27-48.

Hua, Linh U. "Reproducing Time, Reproducing History: Love and Black Feminist Sentimentality in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *African American Review*, vol. 44, no. 3, Fall 2011, pp. 391-407.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. Harper and Row, 1990.

Hutcheon, Linda. "Colonialism and the Post-Colonial Condition: Complexities Abounding." *PMLA*, vol. 110, no. 1, *Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition*, Jan I995, pp. 7-16.

---. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, 1988.

Hutnyk, John. "Contact Zones." *Hybridity and Diaspora*, written by Virinder Kalra, Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk. Sage, 2005.

Ibrahim, Habiba. "Any other Age: Vampires and Oceanic Lifespans." *African American Review*, vol. 49, no. 4, Winter 2016, pp. 313-327.

Ilott, Sarah and Chloe Buckley. "'Fragmenting and becoming double': Supplementary twins and abject bodies in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl*." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature,* vol. 51, no. 3, 2016, pp. 402-415.

Jackson, Sandra and Julie Moody-Freeman. "Editorial Note: The Genre of Science Fiction and the Black Imagination." *African Identities.* vol. 7, no. 2, *The Genre of Science Fiction and the Black Imagination,* May 2009, pp. 127-132.

---. *The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism and the Speculative.* Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2011.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself.* Digireads, 2005.

Jameson, Frederic. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions.* Verso Books, 2007.

Jameson, Misty L. "'There was Sense in That': Making/Having 'Sense' in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *English Studies in Africa*, vol. 62, no. 1, 2019, pp. 50-57.

Jenkins, Jerry Rafki. "Race, Freedom, and the Black Vampire in Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*." *African American Review*, vol. 46, no. 2-3, Summer/Fall 2013, pp. 313-328.

Jesser, Nancy. "Blood, Genes and Gender in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and *Dawn*." *Extrapolation*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2002, pp. 36-61.

Johnson, Judith E. "Women and Vampires: Nightmare or Utopia?" *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, Winter 1993, pp. 72-80.

Johnson, Charles. *Being and Race: Black Writing Since 1970.* Bloomington UP, 1988.

Jones, Esther. "Africana Women's Science Fiction and Narrative Medicine: Difference, Ethics, and Empathy." *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness,* edited by Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones. Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 185-205.

---. *Medicine and Ethics in Black Women's Speculative Fiction.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Jones, Miriam. "*The Gilda Stories*: Revealing the Monsters at the Margin." *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture*, edited by Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger. U of Pennsylvania P, 1997, pp. 151-167.

Jones, Rebecca. "Nigerian 'Third Generation' Writing and the Idea of Home in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*." *African Renaissance,* vol. 8, no. 2, 2011, pp. 39-58.

Journal of Literature and Trauma Studies, edited by David Miller and Lucia Aiello. U of Nebraska P, nebraskapressjournals.unl.edu/journal/journal-of-literature-and-trauma-studies/. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Kaplan, E. Ann. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature.* Rutgers UP, 2005.

Keen, Suzanne. "A Theory of Narrative Empathy." *Narrative*, vol. 14, no. 3, Oct 2006, pp. 207-236.

Keehnen, Owen. "Family Matters. Coffee with Jewelle Gomez." *Queer Cultural Center*, queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/Gomez/GomezIntvw.html. Accessed 1 May 2019.

Kenan, Randall. "An Interview With Octavia E. Butler." *Callaloo*, Vol 14, no. 2, Spring 1991, pp. 495-504.

Kidd, Kenneth. "'A' is for Auschwitz: Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory and the 'Children's Literature of Atrocity'." *Children's Literature,* vol. 33, 2005, pp. 120-149.

Koolish, Lynda. "To Be Loved and Cry Shame: A Psychological Reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *MELUS*, vol. 26, no. 4, Oxford UP, 2001, pp. 169-195.

Kovattana, Amanda and Jewelle Gomez. "The Jewelle Gomez Stories as Told to Amanda Kovattana." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2001, pp. 79-86.

Kubitschek, Missy Dehn. *Claiming the Heritage: African-American Women Novelists and History*. UP of Mississippi, 2001.

Kurtz, J. Roger. "Literature, Trauma and the African Moral Imagination." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies,* vol. 34, no. 4, 2014, pp. 421-435.

LaCapra, Dominick. "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25, no. 4, Summer 1999, pp. 696-727.

---. *History and Memory after Auschwitz*. Cornell UP, 1998.

---. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. John Hopkins UP, 2001.

Landsberg, Alison. *Prosthetic Memory. The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture.* Columbia UP, 2004.

Langer, Jessica. *Postcolonialism and Science Fiction.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Larson, Pier M. "Reconsidering Trauma, Identity, and the African Diaspora: Enslavement and Historical Memory in Nineteenth-Century Highland Madagascar." *William and Mary Quarterly,* vol. 56, no. 2, *African and American Atlantic Worlds,* April 1999, pp. 335-362.

Lavender, Isiah III. *Race in American Science Fiction.* Indiana UP, 2011.

---. "Ethnoscapes: Environment and Language in Ishmael Reed's Mumbo Jumbo, Colson Whitehead's The Intuitionist, and Samuel R. Delany's Babel-17." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2007, pp. 187-200.

Leitch, Vincent B., editor. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Norton & Company, 2001.

Leroy, Fernand, et al. "Yoruba Customs and Beliefs Pertaining to Twins." *Twin Research,* Apr. 2002, pp. 132-136.

Levecq, Christine. "Power and Repetition: Philosophies of (Literary) History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 41, no. 1, Spring 2000, pp. 525-553.

Lewis, Christopher S. "Queering Personhood in the Neo-Slave Narrative: Jewelle Gomez's *The Gilda Stories*." *African American Review*, vol. 47, no. 4, Winter 2014, pp. 447-459.

Lifton, Robert J. *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation.* Basic Books, 1993.

Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. U of Minnesota P, 1990.

Long, Lisa A. "A Relative Pain: The Rape of History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*." *College English*, vol. 64, no. 4, 2002, pp. 459-483.

Luckhurst, Roger. "'Horror and Beauty in Rare Combination': The Miscegenate Fictions of Octavia Butler." *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1996, pp. 28-38.

---. *The Trauma Question*. Routledge, 2008.

MacLeod, Christine. "Black American Literature and the Postcolonial Debate." T*he Yearbook of English Studies*, vol. 27, *The Politics of Postcolonial Criticism*, 1997, pp. 51-65.

Mafe, Diana Adesola. "Ghostly Girls in the 'Eerie Bush': Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl* as Postcolonial Female Gothic Fiction." *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 43, no. 3, Fall 2012, pp. 21-36.

Mbembe, Achille. "Afrofuturisme et devenir-nègre du monde." *Politique africaine,* vol. 136, Dec 2014, pp. 121-133.

---. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture,* vol. 15, no. 1, 2003, pp.11-40.

McAdams, D. P. *Power, Intimacy and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries into Identity.* Guilford Press, 1988.

McCormack, Donna. "Living with Others Inside the Self: Decolonising Transplantation, Selfhood and the Body Politic in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring." Science Fiction and Medical Humanities,* vol. 42, 2016, pp. 252-258.

McDonald, Jessica. "Beyond Generic Hybridity: Nalo Hopkinson and the Politics of Science Fiction." *Canadian Literature*, Spring-Summer 2016, pp. 133-149.

McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester UP, 2000.

Mehaffy, Marilyn and Ana Louise Keating. "'Radio Imagination': Octavia Butler on the Poetics of Narrative Embodiment." *Melus*, vol. 26, Np. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 45-76.

Meyer, Stephenie. *Twilight.* Atom, 2006.

Miller, Nancy K. and Jason Tougaw. "Introduction: Extremities." *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Communi*ty, edited by Miller and Tougaw. Illinois Press, 2002, pp. 1-22.

Mitchell, Angelyn. "Not Enough of the Past: Feminist Revisions of Slavery in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*." *MELUS*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2001, pp. 51-75.

---. *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction.* Rutgers UP, 2002.

Mixon, Veronica. "Futurist Woman: Octavia Butler." *Essence*, Apr 1979, pp. 12-15.

Modood, Tariq. *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea.* Cambridge Polity Press, 2007.

Mohamed, Saira. "Of Monsters and Men: Perpetrator Trauma and Mass Atrocity." *Columbia Law Review*, vol. 115, no. 1157, 2015, pp. 1157-1216.

"Monstrosity, n." *OED Online*. Oxford UP, June 2020. Accessed 13 July 2020.

Morris, Susana M. "Black Girls are from the Future: Afrofuturist Feminism in Octavia E. Butler's *Fledgling*." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3&4, Fall/Winter 2012, pp. 148-168.

Morrison, Toni. "Guest Column: Roundtable on the Future of the Humanities in a Fragmented World." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America,* vol. 120, pp. 715-717.

---. "The Site of Memory." *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, edited by William Zinsser, Houghton Mifflin, 1995, pp. 83-102.

---. "What the Black Woman Thinks About Women's Lib." *New York Times Magazine*, 63, 22 Aug. 1971.

---. *Beloved.* Vintage Books, 2005.

---. *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Harvard UP, 1992.

Mosley, Walter. "Black to the Future." *Dark Matter. A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora,* edited by Sheree R. Thomas. Warner Books, 2000, pp. 405-407.

Mukherjee, Bharati. "Two Ways to Belong in America." *Away: The Indian Writer as an Expatriate,* edited by Amitava Kumar. Routledge, 2003, pp. 271-274.

Murchland, Bernard. *The Age of Alienation: Fragmented Man – The Roots of his Despair and his Chances of Survival.* Random House, 1971.

Murphy, Joseph M. *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora.* Beacon Press, 1995.

Nelson, Alondra, editor. *Afrofuturism*. Special Issue of *Social Text* 71, vol. 20, no. 2, Duke UP, 2002.

---. "'Making the Impossible Possible.' An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson." *Afrofuturism.* Special Issue of *Social Text* 71, vol. 20, no. 2, Duke UP, 2002.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*. Perseus, 2009.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Untimely Meditations*, edited by Daniel Breazeale, translated by R. J. Hollingdale. Cambridge UP, 1997.

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, vol. 26, 1989, pp. 7-25.

Nünning, Ansgar, editor. *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie. Ansätze – Personen – Grundbegriffe,* 4th Edition. J.B. Metzler, 2008.

O'Brien, Gerald V. *Contagion and the National Body. The Organism Metaphor in American Thought.* Routledge, 2018.

O'Neill, Caitlin. "'The Shape of Mystery': The Visionary Resonance of Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl." The Journal of American Culture*, vol. 41, no. 1, Mar 2018, pp. 56-67.

Okorafor, Nnedi. "Of Course People Can Fly." *Afro-Future Females. Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory*, edited by Marleen S. Barr. Ohio State UP, 2008, pp. 131.

---. "Organic Fantasy." *African Identities,* vol. 7, no. 2, 2009, pp. 275-285.

---. "Sci-Fi Stories that Imagine a Future Africa." *TED*, 1 Nov 2017, www.ted.com/talks/nnedi_okorafor_sci_fi_stories_that_imagine_a_future_africa. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

---. "The Writing of *Who Fears Death*." Goodreads, 14 May 2010, www.goodreads.com/author_blog_posts/435651-the-writing-of-who-fears-death. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

---. *Who Fears Death*. Penguin Group, 2010.

---. "Writing Rage, Truth and Consequence." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts,* vol. 26, no. 1, 2015, pp. 21-26.

Okri, Ben. *Birds of Heaven*. Phoenix, 1996.

Olutola, Sarah. "Blood, Soil, and Zombies: Afrofuturist Collaboration and (Re-)Appropriation in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring." Journal of Science Fiction,* vol. 2, no. 2, Jan. 2018, pp. 64-81.

Omelsky, Matthew. "After the End Times: Postcrisis African Science Fiction." *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, vol. 1, 2014, pp. 33-49.

Oruene, Taiwo. "Magical Powers of Twins in the Socio-Religious Beliefs of the Yoruba." *Folklore,* vol. 96, no. 2, pp. 208-216.

Ouma, Christopher. "Reading the Diasporic *Abiku* in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl." Research in African Literatures,* vol. 45, no. 3, Fall 2014, pp. 188-205.

Oyeyemi, Helen. "Once upon a life: Helen Oyeyemi." *The Guardian,* 25 June 2011, www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/jun/26/helen-oyeyemi-once-upon-a-life. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

---. *The Icarus Girl*. Bloomsbury, 2006.

Parham, Marisa. "Saying 'Yes': Textual Trauma in Octavia Butler's *Kindred." Callaloo*, vol. 32, no. 4, *Middle Eastern & North African Writers*, Winter, 2009, pp. 1315-1331.

Pavlov-West, Tatjana. *Images of the Wounded Mouth: Dissonant Approaches to Trauma in Literary, Visual and Performance Cultures.* Gunter Narr, 2020.

Perry, Phyllis Alesia. *Stigmata.* Anchor, 1999.

Pfeiffer, John. "Black American Speculative Literature: A Checklist." *Extrapolation*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1975, pp. 35-43.

Pheasant-Kelly, Frances. *Fantasy Film Post 9/11*. Springer, 2013.

Phoenix, Ann and Charlie Owen. "From Miscegenation to Hybridity: Mixed Relationships and Mixed-Parentage in Profile." *Children, Research and Policy,* edited by Basil Bernstein and Julia Brannen. Taylor & Francis, 1996.

Polidori, John William. "The Vampyre." *The New Monthly Magazine and Universal Register*, vol. 1, no. 63, 1819.

Ponds, Kenneth T. "The Trauma of Racism: America's Original Sin." *Reclaiming Children and Youth,* vol. 22, no. 2, Summer 2013, pp. 22-24.

Potts, Stephen. "'We Keep Playing the Same Record': A Conversation with Octavia E. Butler." *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3, Nov 1996, www.depauw.edu/sfs/interviews/potts70interview.htm. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Prakash, M. "Slave Narratives Techniques in Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred*." *Bodhi International Journal of Multidisciplinary Researches*, vol. 8, Mar 2018, pp. 20-21.

Pringle, David, and Peter Nicholls. "Disaster." *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, edited by John Clute and Peter Nicholls. St. Martin's Griffin, 1993, pp. 337–339.

Quinn, Annalisa. "The Professionally Haunted Life of Helen Oyeyemi." *NPR Books*, 2014, www.npr.org/2014/03/07/282065410/the-professionally-haunted-life-of-helen-oyeyemi. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Ramraj, Ruby S. "Nalo Hopkinson: Transcending Genre Boundaries." *Beyond the Canebrakes: Caribbean Women Writers in Canada,* edited by Emily Allen Williams. Africa World Press, 2008, pp. 135-154.

Reid, Michelle. "Crossing the Boundaries of the 'Burn': Canadian Multiculturalism and Caribbean Hybridity in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring." Extrapolation,* vol. 46, no. 3, 2005, pp. 297-314.

Renne, Elisha P. "Twinship in an Ekiti Yoruba Town." *Ethnology,* vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 63-78.

Rice, Anne. *Interview with the vampire.* Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.

Richard, Thelma J. Shinn. "Defining *Kindred*. Octavia Butler's Postcolonial Perspective." *Obsidian III*, vol. 6/7, vol. 6, No 2/vol. 7, no. 1, Fall/Winter 2005-Spring/Summer 2006, pp. 118-134.

---. "Science Fiction as Metaphor: Octavia Butler's Ironic Transformations." *The Southwest/Texas Chapters of the Popular Culture and American Culture Conference*, 27 Oct 1983, Lubbock, Texas, p.5.

Ricœur, Paul. "Life in Quest of Narrative." *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, edited by David Wood. Routledge, 1991, pp. 20-33.

Rieder, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Wesleyan, 2008.

Rimstead, Roxanne. *Remnants of Nation: On Poverty Narratives by Women.* U of Toronto P, 2001.

Robertson, Benjamin. "Some Matching Strangeness: Biology, Politics, and the Embrace of History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred.*" *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3, Nov 2010, pp. 362-381.

Romdhani, Rebecca. "Zombies Go to Toronto: Zombifying Shame in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring." Research in African Literatures,* vol. 46, no. 4, Winter 20015, pp. 72-89.

Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. "Families of Orphans: Relation and Disrelation in Octavia Butler's *Kindred.*" *College English*, vol. 55, no. 2, 1993, pp. 135-157.

---. *Remembering Generations: Race and Family in Contemporary African American Fiction.* U of North Carolina P, 2001.

Rutledge, Gregory E. "Speaking in Tongues: An Interview with Science Fiction Writer Nalo Hopkinson." *African American Review,* vol. 33, no. 4, Winter 1999, pp. 589-601.

Rymer, James Malcolm. *Varney, the Vampyre.* Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 2010.

Said, Edward. "An Ideology of Difference." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, 1985, pp. 38-58.

Salvaggio, Ruth. "Octavia Butler and the Black Science-Fiction Heroine." *Black American Literature Forum*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1984, pp. 78-81.

---. "Octavia Butler*." Suzy McKee Charnas, Octavia Butler and Joan D. Vinge*, edited by Marleen S. Barr, Ruth Salvaggio and Richard Law. Starmount House, 1986, pp. 1-44.

Salvini, Laura. "A Heart of Kindness: Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring." The Journal of Haitian Studies,* vol. 18, no. 2, 2012, pp. 180-193.

Samatar, Sofia. "Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism." *Research in African Literatures,* vol. 48, no. 4, 2017, pp. 175-191.

San Francisco Public Library. "Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor & Jewelle Gomez, Black Comix at SF Library." YouTube, 18 Jan 2016, youtube.com/watch? v=WTDLh6Wb55U. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body*. U of California P, 1993.

Sandhu, Sukhdev. *London Calling*. Harper Perennial, 2003.

Schachter, Elli P. "Identity Configurations: A New Perspective on Identity Formation in Contemporary Society." *Journal of Personality*, vol. 72, no. 1, Feb 2004, pp. 167-199.

Schudson, Michael. "Dynamic Distortion of Collective Memory." *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past,* edited by Daniel L. Schachter. Harvard UP, 1997, pp. 346-364.

Schwab, Gabriele. *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma.* Columbia UP, 2010.

Science Fiction Studies, edited by Arthur B. Evans. SF-TH Inc. Journal, www.depauw.edu/sfs/. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Scott, Darieck. *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination.* New York UP, 2010.

Seed, David. *A Companion to Science Fiction.* Blackwell, 2005.

Setka, Stella. "Phantasmic Reincarnation: Igbo Cosmology in Octavia Butler's *Kindred.*" *MELUS*, vol. 41, no. 1, *Negotiating Trauma and Affect*, Spring 2016, pp. 93-124.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet,* edited by G.R. Hibbard. Oxford UP, 1987. Oxford World's Classics.

Simpson, Hyacinth M. "Fantastic Alternatives: Journeys into the Imagination." *Journal of West Indian Literature,* vol. 14, no. 1&2, Nov. 2005, pp. 96-112.

Skallerup Bessette, Lee. "'They can Fly': The Postcolonial Black Body in Nalo Hopkinson's Speculative Short Fiction." *The Postcolonial Short Story,* edited by Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Snider, John C. "Interview: Octavia E. Butler." *SciFiDimensions*, 2004, web.archive.org/web/20141220191628/http://www.scifidimensions.com/Jun04/octaviaebutler.htm. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Soyinka, Wole. *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge UP, 1976.

Spaulding, A. Timothy. *Re-Forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative*. Ohio State UP, 2005.

Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, edited by Winston Napier. New York UP, 2000, pp. 257-80.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory. A Reader,* edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. Columbia UP, 1994, pp. 66-111.

Stein, Howard F. "A Mosaic of Transmissions after Trauma." *Lost in Transmission: Studies of Trauma Across Generations,* edited by Gerard Fromm. Kamac, 2012, pp. 173-201.

Steinberg, Marc. "Inverting History in Octavia Butler's Postmodern Slave Narrative." *African American Review*, col. 38, no. 3, Autumn 2004, pp. 467-476.

Stocks, Claire. "Trauma Theory and the Singular Self: Rethinking Extreme Experiences in the Light of Cross-Cultural Identity." *Textual Practice,* vol. 21, no. 7, 2007, pp. 71-92.

Stoker, Bram. *Dracula.* Constable & Robinson, 2012.

Stouck, Jordan. "Abjecting Hybridity in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Icarus Girl.*" *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature,* vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 89-112.

Sue, D. W. *Micro Aggressions and Marginality.* Wiley & Sons, 2010.

Suleiman, Susan Rubin. "Judith Herman and Contemporary Trauma Theory." *Women's Studies Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 1/2, *Witness*, Spring-Summer 2008, pp. 276-281.

---. "War Memories: On Autobiographical Reading." *Auschwitz and After: Race, Culture, and "the Jewish Question" in France,* edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman. Routledge, 2006, pp. 47-62.

---. *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*. Harvard UP, 2006.

Suvin, Darko. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction. On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre.* Yale UP, 1979.

Tanritanir, Bülent Cercis. "Diasporic Trauma or Traumatic Diaspora? The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri Reconsidered." *International Journal of Social Science*, vol. 59, no. 1, Autumn 2017, pp. 103-112.

Taylor, Marjorie, et al. "The Characteristics and Correlates of Fantasy in School-age Children: Imaginary Companions, Impersonation, and Social Understanding." *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 40, 2004, pp. 1173-1187.

Tedeschi, Richard G., et al. *Posttraumatic Growth. Theory, Research and Applications.* Routledge, 2018.

Thomas, Sheree, editor. *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora*. Warner, 2000.

---, editor. *Dark Matter: Reading the Bones*. Warner, 2004.

Thompson, Robert Farris. "Sons of Thunder: Twin Images among the Oyo and Other Yoruba Groups." *African Arts,* vol. 4, no. 3, 1971, pp. 8-13.

UNICEF. *At a Glance: Nigeria.* 15 Mar. 2016, www.unicef.org/infobycountry/nigeria_statistics.html. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Van der Kolk, Bessel A. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma.* Viking, 2014.

Van der Merwe, Chris N. and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. *Narrating our Healing. Perspectives on Working Through Trauma.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

Vickroy, Laurie. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. U of Virginia P, 2002.

Vint, Sherryl. "Only By Experience: Embodiment and the Limitations of Realism in Neo-Slave Narratives." *Science Fiction Studies,* vol. 34, no. 2, July 2007, pp. 241-261.

Visser, Irene. "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* vol. 47, no. 3, 2011, pp. 270-282.

Walcott, Dereck. *Ti-Jean and his Brothers*. Paria, 1984.

Ward, Abigail. "Understanding Postcolonial Traumas." *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2013, pp. 170-184.

Washington, Mary Helen, editor. *Memory of Kin: Stories About Family by Black Writers*. Anchor, 1991.

Watson-Aifah, Jené. "A Conversation with Nalo Hopkinson." *Callaloo,* vol. 26, Np. 1, Winter 2003, pp. 160-169.

Wax, Emily. "We Want to Make a Light Baby." *Washington Post*, 29 June 2004, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A16001-2004Jun29.html. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Waxman, Chaim I. *The Stigma of Poverty: A Critique of Poverty Theories and Politics.* Pergamon Press, 1977.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860." *American Quarterly,* vol. 18, 1966, pp. 151-174.

Whedon, Joss, creator. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.* Mutant Enemy Productions, 20th Century Fox Television, 1997-2003.

Whitehead, Anne. "Journeying through Hell: Wole Soyinka, Trauma, and Postcolonial Nigeria." *Studies in the Novel,* vol. 40, no. 1-2, 2008, pp. 13-30.

Whitlinger, Claire. "From Countermemory to Collective Memory: Acknowledging the 'Mississippi Burning' Murders." *Sociological Forum,* vol. 30, no. S1, June 2015, pp. 648-670.

Whitted, Qiana. "To Be African Is to Merge Technology and Magic. An Interview with Nnedi Okorafor." *Afrofuturism 2.0. The Rise of Astro-Blackness*, edited by Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones. Lexington Books, 2016, pp. 207-212.

Wilson, John P. *The Posttraumatic Self: Restoring Meaning and Wholeness to Personality.* Routledge, 2006.

Winnubst, Shannon. "Vampires, Anxieties, and Dreams: Race and Sex in the Contemporary United States." *Hypatia*, vol. 18, no. 3, Autumn 2003, pp. 1-20.

Womack, Ytasha. "Sci-Fi Author Nnedi Okorafor talks Literature and Afrofuturism." *Post Black. How a New Generation is Redefining African American Identity*, 9 Aug. 2010, postblackthebook.blogspot.com/2010/08/sci-fi-author-nnedi-okorafor-talks.html. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

---. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture.* Chicago Review Press, 2013.

Wong, Sau-Ling Cynthia. *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance.* Princeton UP, 1993.

Wood, Sarah. "'Serving the Spirits': Emergent Identities in Nalo Hopkinson's *Brown Girl in the Ring.*" *Extrapolation,* vol. 46, no. 3, 2005, pp. 315-326.

Woodward, Joan. "Losing your Twin." *Tvillinger*, 2000, www.tvillinger.com/index-filer/kritiske_livssituationer/int-joanw-eng.htm. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

---. *The Lone Twin. Understanding Twin Bereavement and Loss.* Revised ed., Free Association Books, 2010.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando*, edited by Murk Hussey. Harcourt, 2006.

Woolfork, Lisa. *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture*. U of Illinois P, 2009.

Yancy, George. *Black Bodies, White Gazes.* Rowman and Littlefield, 2008.

Yaszek, Lisa. "'A Grim Fantasy': Remaking American History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*." *Signs. Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 4, Chicago UP, 2003, pp. 1053-1066.

---. "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future." *Socialism and Democracy,* vol. 20, no. 3, *Socialism and Social Critique in Science Fiction*, Routledge, 2006, pp. 41-60.

---. "Race in Science Fiction: The Case of Afrofuturism." *Virtual Introduction to Science Fiction,* 2013, virtual-sf.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Yaszek.pdf. Accessed 1 Sep 2020.

Yon, Daniel. "Identity and Differences in the Caribbean Diaspora: Case Study from Metropolitan Toronto." *The Re-Ordering of Culture: Latin America, the Caribbean and Canada in the Hood,* edited by Alvina Ruprecht. Carleton UP, pp. 479-498.

Zack, Naomi. *Race and Mixed Race.* Temple UP, 1993.