

**Traumatic Memory and Space-Time in
Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness***

Shane Graham
Utah State University

In Cathy Caruth's well-known formulation, the traumatic ordeal constitutes "a break in the mind's experience of time" (*Unclaimed Experience* 61); it is characterized by "*the structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (*Trauma* 4). The knowledge of such an event, in Dori Laub's phrase, "dissolves all barriers, breaks all boundaries of time and place, of self and subjectivity" (*Testimony* 58). Consequently, attempts to represent such an event must employ "anti-narrative modernist forms," including the "disruption of linear chronology, fragmentation, narrative self-consciousness . . . [and] non-closure" (CFP).

Such formal experimentation is indeed characteristic of much post-apartheid writing in South Africa, especially of the literary works that attempt to come to terms with the country's long history of violence. Yet, as I argue in this paper, post-Freudian trauma theory presents at least three shortcomings in its applicability to the traumatic legacies of apartheid and colonialism. First, the insistence on the individual psyche and the Oedipal/familial narrative fails to account for the *collective* nature of trauma in South Africa, where politically motivated violence inflicted damage not only on individuals but also on entire communities. Secondly, the formulation of trauma as a loss of the capacity for symbolic representation tends to minimize the *material* aspects of loss—apartheid's victims lost not merely language but also land, homes, savings, breadwinners, and/or able-bodiedness. Thirdly, the emphasis on the temporal disruptions inflicted by trauma (so evident in the quotations from Caruth and Laub above) ignores the *spatial* ramifications of such violence. The need to take spatial concerns into account is made clear in the rhetoric around the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which praises the Human Rights Violation hearings for providing a *space* in which victims can tell their stories.

These shortcomings are made obvious by a careful analysis of two important post-apartheid novels, Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (both 2000). Both works employ anti-narrative modes, resisting closure and experimenting heavily with the temporal frame. But they also suggest the limitations of psychoanalytic trauma theory. *The Heart of Redness*, for instance, offers a symbol for the collective nature and the transmission of colonial trauma through the "scars of history" that the character Bhonco carries on his back. He himself has never been whipped, but his great-grandfather Twin-Twin was beaten by villagers who accused him of witchcraft, and "Every first boy-child of subsequent generations of Twin-Twin's [family] tree is born with the scars" (12). Moreover, both novels suggest that, contrary to much scholarship on post-apartheid writing and the TRC, merely recovering the capacity to narrate or represent the story is insufficient to enable healing and the restoration of agency. Rather, the novels imply, such recovery of language must be joined by material compensation and a fundamental refiguring of socio-spatial relationships in the post-apartheid dispensation.

Who Speaks? Who Listens?

The Problem of Address in Three Nigerian Trauma Novels

Amy Novak
California State University, Fullerton

This paper will examine the problem of address in contemporary trauma studies through an analysis of three contemporary Nigerian novels. Building upon the privileged position given the analyst/listener in interpreting the analysand's/trauma survivor's memories, Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, and Shoshana Felman have all explored the trauma of witnessing. Caruth identifies trauma as an ethical discourse of the Other because it "opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, *of impossibility*" (*Trauma* 10). However, this formulation, while promising a cross-cultural listening, may in fact erect a structural barrier to such an understanding in so much as it positions the Other in the position of "impossibility" while situating the addressee in the illuminated space of knowledge and the possible.

What are the implications of this privileging when reading post-colonial trauma narratives? Tracing Freud and Caruth's discussion of the Tancred and Clorinda myth, I find at the beginnings of modern trauma theory an originary silencing of the colonial Other, a usurpation of the colonized's history by the colonizer. To consider how trauma narratives and theory might move beyond this colonial binary, this paper will analyze the narration of trauma in three contemporary Nigerian novels: *Graceland* (2004) by Christopher Abani, *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) by Helon Habila, and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) by Sefi Atta. Reading these novels, this analysis will consider three issues: First, how is colonial trauma inscribed beneath the surface of contemporary experience in each of these novels? Secondly, what narrative strategies are employed to report contemporary traumatic experience and how do they compare with those Anne Whitehead identifies in her work on Western trauma fiction? And lastly, how do the discourses of gender shape the narration of trauma in of these novels, two with male protagonists and one with a female protagonist? After investigating these three textual questions, the paper will conclude by considering how this analysis expands the frameworks employed to understand the intersections of race, gender and trauma, namely by probing the way in which these texts complicate the position of addressor/addressee.

Selected Bibliography

- Abani, Christopher. *Graceland*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004.
- Atta, Sefi. *Everything Good Will Come*. Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2005.
- Caruth, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.
- . *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub, M.D. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Ed. and Trans. James Strachey. Vol. 18. London: Hogarth, 1953-74.
- Griswold, Wendy. *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000.
- Habila, Helon. *Waiting for an Angel*. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2004.

Collective Traumas, Singular Pasts: Violence, Fiction, and Self-Creation in Condé's *Desirada*

Nicole Simek
Whitman College

In French Antillean literature, the desire to reconstruct history is nearly ubiquitous. "Every Antillean novel, with remarkable consistency, seems to need to present itself as 'the history of the Antilles,' covering several generations," remarks René de Ceccatty with some dismay in his review of Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé's novel *Desirada* ("Les exils de Maryse Condé," *Le Monde*, Oct. 3, 1997). Brought on in part by Antillean history's institutionalized exclusion under French colonization, this history's absence from collective memory—as well as the writer's urgent desire to "cure" this absence by reconstituting the past—can also be read, Edouard Glissant argues, as an effect of trauma:

Would it be ridiculous to consider our lived history as a steadily advancing neurosis? To see the Slave Trade as a traumatic shock, our relocation (in the new land) as a repressive phase, slavery as the period of latency, "emancipation" in 1848 as reactivation, our everyday fantasies as symptoms, and even our horror of "returning to those things of the past" as a possible manifestation of the neurotic's fear of his past? (*Caribbean Discourse* 65-66)

The analogy between the individual psyche and the collective unconscious that Glissant proposes here challenges prevailing understandings of trauma today as a deeply unsettling event that *disrupts* a personal history and sense of self, an event that throws into question the ways in which identity and the world are experienced as coherent and meaningful. Despite disagreement today over the mechanisms through which trauma is experienced and remembered, critics generally converge in defining the phenomenon as an overwhelming life-threatening experience, accompanied by feelings of extreme fright and helplessness. Viewed thus, trauma is a break from the norm, an interruption of an existing sense of the self as anchored in a decipherable past. Within this framework, discussions of postcolonial phenomena such as colonialism, racism, and cultural assimilation—phenomena in which psychic violence and alienation from history *are* the norm—have been limited.

Beginning with a consideration of "postcolonial" trauma's place in contemporary trauma theory, this paper will focus on the treatment of memory, violence, and self-creation in Maryse Condé's 1997 work, *Desirada*. *Desirada* revolves around the trauma of rape and the transmission of traumatic personal histories, but links this transmission to larger historical problems of self-determination. For the novel's protagonist, self-determination is an on-going problem bound up with the disturbing relation between narrative and historical truth. Drawing attention to the ethical dilemmas involved in constructing an identity through the past—and, particularly, through others' trauma narratives—the text also focuses on the self's inevitable dependence on the discourse of others—the need to incorporate pre-existing interpretative frameworks and narratives in order to make sense of the world. Highlighting the impact of violence on memory and self-representation, *Desirada* raises a number of questions: To what extent are existing conceptions of trauma useful for analyzing the traumatic disruptions peculiar to Antillean history and the persistent anxieties, identity crises, and representational dilemmas they produce? How can trauma be understood and dealt with if it is inherent in the schemes of representation that have formed a social group and that remain the predominant examples from which this group can draw to think its identity? Focusing on *Desirada*'s exploration of trauma, subjectivity formation, and narrative, this paper will examine how the novel sheds light on the relation between structural and historical traumas, violence and symbolic violence, and witnessing and postmemory.