

**A SENTIENT HISTORY: SENSORY MEMORY IN WOMEN'S LITERATURE
OF THE CARIBBEAN DIASPORA**

by

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Abstract

The slave trade and colonial regimes disrupted the collectivity and history of the Caribbean populations. The absence of firsthand victim accounts in institutionalized historical records, e.g., chronicles of national history, and the current displacement of diasporic communities negate the effectiveness of 'lieux de mémoire', relegating collective memory to an abstraction of cultural remnants and personal narratives. However, several contemporary Caribbean works present a female protagonist with an embodied connection to history and culture, despite a lack of experiential knowledge and/or removal from the communal context. The corpus of this study includes Marie Célie-Agnant's *Le livre d'Emma* (2001), Simone and André Schwarz-Bart's *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (1967), and Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996).

I approach this phenomenon by investigating the meanings associated with physical sensations that trigger reminiscence and their connections to collective memory. I link trans-generational memory to the acculturation of Caribbean women's bodies as sites of history and position sensory memory as a form of 'living' memory that transcends geographical displacement and temporal distance. The continuity of sensory memory establishes embodied solidarity between ancestors and the 'postmemory' generation who are faced with cultural alienation.

Preface

This thesis is the original and unpublished work produced solely by the author, Brittany Austin Glenn.

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Introduction

Our senses are shaped by cultural, historical and geographical contexts. Seemingly almost a paradox, an individual becomes part of the collective through their personal senses. Since outside of their original context the senses do not shed their acquired meanings, sensory memory can serve as a link back. This link not only gives them a physical connection to the distant homeland, but also to the culture and history that is embedded in that environment. Moreover, it connects individuals to a collective consciousness that is rooted in their native society. This powerful ability of remembrance that the senses evoke sparked an investigation into sensory memory in the Caribbean context.

Memory is a central problematic in Antillean literature since the slave trade uprooted the native populations, breaking familial, cultural, and geographical connections. Furthermore, the absence of firsthand victim accounts in institutionalized historical records, e.g., chronicles of national history, and the current displacement of diasporic communities negate the effectiveness of what Pierre Nora calls the "lieux de mémoire", relegating collective memory to an abstraction of cultural remnants and personal narratives (Nora 7). However, several contemporary Caribbean works present a female protagonist with an embodied connection to history and culture, despite a lack of experiential knowledge and/or despite removal from the communal context. I approach this phenomenon by

investigating the meanings associated with physical sensations that trigger reminiscence and their connections to collective memory. I link trans-generational memory to the acculturation of Caribbean women's bodies as sites of history and position sensory memory as a form of living memory that transcends geographical displacement and temporal distance. The continuity of sensory memory establishes embodied solidarity between ancestors and the 'postmemory' generation who are faced with cultural alienation.

I examine the following three contemporary Caribbean novels and the presence of sensory memory therein to establish modalities of trans-generational collectivity: 1) *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* (1967) by the Guadeloupien author, Simone Schwarz-Bart, and her French husband, André Schwarz-Bart; 2) *Le livre d'Emma* (2001) by Marie Célie-Agnant who is of Haitian origins; and 3) *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996) by Gisèle Pineau, a Guadeloupien writer.

All of these authors are internationally renowned in the field of Caribbean literature, and this corpus serves as a strong example of the sensory memory phenomenon. All of these novels are set in a 'post-colony' context where the female protagonist in exile is a member of the 'postmemory' generation. Also, all of these authors have lived outside of the Caribbean for extended periods, adding unique firsthand insight into cultural alienation. This study is meant to be a detailed investigation of sensory memory in a contemporary Caribbean diaspora context.

The first chapter of the study is the theoretical framework. I discuss working definitions and relevant theories. Topics such as collective consciousness and postmemory are highlighted so as to frame the analyses of the novels.

The second chapter of the study, entitled “Memory in the Body,” examines the way historical signification is cognized through the senses. The sensorial memories are laden with both personal and cultural meaning. Although the protagonists are geographically displaced, they can connect with their family and cultural collective.

The third chapter, entitled “Metaphysical Travel,” explores the manner in which sensory memory provides a bridge to the homeland while the protagonists live in exile. The connection to the homeland also implies a connection to the collective and the history that the landscape holds. This chapter will also examine the effect of isolation on the body since the senses primarily function through an interactive environment.

The fourth chapter, entitled “Transmission,” discusses the trans-generational transmission of memory and how the senses are involved in this process. This chapter strives to answer the question, how are embodied connections to history passed down? Familial and cultural systems of transmission will be examined as well as how these methods are affected in a diasporic context.

The ensuing conclusions of the study place the body as a primary site of memory. It is a site of living memory for both personal and collective history.

Sensory memory is a channel of living memory that is not limited by geographical proximity. This aspect of sensory memory is especially relevant for the current population distribution in which Caribbean peoples have been disseminating to metropolitan areas throughout the world.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

To my knowledge, the subject I have chosen, sensory memory in francophone Caribbean literature, has very few precedents on which to build. The theoretical framework for this study encompasses research from many different fields in order to provide a multifaceted foundation for such a topic. The purpose of this chapter is to delineate relevant theories as well as define key terms of this investigation.

It is important to note that when the term Caribbean is used, I am only referring to the French Antilles, specifically Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti. While other islands in the Caribbean have experienced similar patterns of colonization, this study is specific to those islands that are relevant to the literary works being analyzed here. All of these islands were a part of the French slave trade and the pursuits of French colonization. While it is important to note that Martinique and Guadeloupe remain overseas-departments (*départements d'outre-mer*, D.O.M.), which means they remain under France's political and economic jurisdiction, and Haiti became an independent republic in 1804, a detailed historical analysis for each country is not central to this study.

The Caribbean diaspora is unique in several ways. The size of the Caribbean diaspora makes it remarkable to the extent that Monica Jardine notes, "Caribbeans had become the most mobile people in the postwar world economy" (Jardine 274). Although the numbers are comparable, the emigration from the Caribbean is not

deemed a mass exodus since there has been movement over time rather than one mass departure. The numerous places where the emigrants settle and the number of people who emigrate distinguish the Caribbean diaspora. For the Caribbean people, there have been several centers of immigration. Nations with larger economies, such as the United States, England, France, and Canada are popular destinations to start a new life. In fact, the literary works in this study portray protagonists who move to these former colonial nations and the tensions that persist between the cultures. These tensions manifest in society as discrimination in terms of race, gender, age, and economic status. The isolation that immigrants feel in the métropole is evidence to the failure of France to make full citizens of the inhabitants of the overseas-departments.

Individuals who take part in diasporic migrations do not all have identical motives for their departure. The range of reasons for emigration includes a hope of improvement in socioeconomic status, a quest for further education, escape from political turmoil, and a perceived greater freedom abroad to name a few. Elaine Savory distinguishes between two conditions of emigration, exile, and ex/isle. She defines exile as “the condition of separation from the country of birth” and ex/isle as separation from the “original cultural identity and connection” (Savory 170). Exile is a physical separation that is experienced by all of the protagonists in the literary works of this study and is indeed shared by all diasporan populations. The latter condition designates a psychological rupture. Savory uses Edward Said’s ‘traveling

theory' to frame the experience of ex/isle, stating that in each new environment the individual experiences a renewal of self (Savory 170). By this theory, however, each individual who experiences exile also experiences ex/isle. This condition should be qualified by adding that each individual is successful to a different extent in renewing the self in a different environment.

Depending upon the success of individuals in renewing themselves within the new environment, the emigration experience varies for each. For those individuals who move to countries with a history of imperial pursuits, racial discrimination and stereotypes cultivated during the colonial era are a primary challenge to life in the new land. The process of renewing the self is hindered by these self-images forced upon them. These issues are often compounded by cultural alienation, which is a frequent consequence of emigration, even in those countries with heterogeneous populations.

The Caribbean diaspora also affects those who remain within national borders. Family and community members strive to maintain connections with those who have left home and so the collective network is an external effort as much as it is an internal one. Jardine describes this reciprocal struggle:

Thus, both the movement "out" and the groups that reside "in" are situated within a battle to redefine the historical parameters of the Caribbean Atlantic space – contemporary Diasporic practices are therefore engaging a series of dynamic tensions between Diaspora/nation and nation/Diaspora that now

exist openly at the center of the struggle for a Caribbean modernity. (Jardine 275)

The collectivity has an added struggle overcoming physical distances as well as incorporating the experiences of diasporans within the collective consciousness. For this study, the working definition of collective consciousness is based on the definition of Émile Durkheim and refers to “a shared, intersubjective understanding of common norms and values among a group of people” (Gurbuz 143). As diasporans experience alienation, their larger collectivity, within and outside of national borders, experiences a break in this continuum.

This discussion of the problem of the Caribbean diaspora does not imply a romanticized life within the homeland, nor does it imply a solution of remaining within national borders. A brief history of the collective, independent of the diaspora, merits examination to provide the context of current conditions. The native populations of the Caribbean islands, the Taino people, were decimated by imperial conquest. The new populace included the French imperial colonizers, military and civilian alike, and enslaved peoples. The slave trade, which transported individuals from Africa to these colonies, can be considered the original diaspora; thus the slave populations were all diasporans, alienated in the face of atrocious conditions. This is the original break in the continuum of collectivity for those individuals of African heritage who were exiled to the colonies as slaves. As Édouard Glissant explains, “This dislocation of the continuum and the inability of the

collective consciousness to absorb it all, characterize what I call a nonhistory” (qtd in Duchanaud 2).

Glissant’s nonhistory refers to the rupture in the collectivity, as well as in the collective history, that occurred during slavery. The slaves, who were taken from a multitude of countries, were separated from their collectives and brought to a strange land. This disorientation from abduction to a foreign space and the disruptive nature and displacement of the slave trade compounded the inability to form a collective among the population of slaves. They were not unified in culture, language or nationality and they were unable to immediately establish a shared identity through their shared experience. Individuals were alienated within the enslaved population and they were alienated from the dominant culture of the colonizers. This foundational phenomenon leads Glissant to posit alienation as a “backbone of Martinique’s history” and this can be considered true for the other francophone Caribbean nations (Duchanaud 2).

The physical dislocation resulted in separation from the *lieux de mémoire*, which Nora defines as “where memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (Nora 7). This represents a break of the historical continuum within the collectivity. As Nora describes, “the less memory is experienced collectively, the more it will require individuals to undertake to become themselves memory-individuals” (Nora 16). Historical alienation among the enslaved population can then be added to cultural alienation. The struggle to transmit cultural memory becomes the burden of

individuals, without the traditional filial structures and societal mechanisms on which the population formerly relied.

The rupture of continuum that began with the slave trade was furthered after abolition through French policies of colonization whereby the formerly enslaved populations were subjected to a second-rate citizenship granted by the imperial powers. Colonization of territory was accompanied by a cultural assimilation of the populace that the French called the *mission civilisatrice* (the civilizing mission). As Alice Conklin points out:

The notion of a civilizing mission rested upon certain fundamental assumptions about the superiority of French culture and the perfectibility of humankind. It implied that France's colonial subjects were too primitive to rule themselves, but were capable of being uplifted. Last but not least it assumed that the Third Republic had a duty and a right to remake 'primitive' cultures along lines inspired by the cultural, political, and economic development of France. (Conklin 1-2)

The colonized population was forced to adopt French cultural values, including their language and historical narratives. In Africa as in the Caribbean, the colonizers denied the existence of local history in favor of their own. Furthermore, the French education system taught the French history and language at school and the youth appropriated this French identity that could never truly be theirs. Thus, the

Caribbean collective consciousness was founded in part upon these fragmentations of identity and culture.

Cultural assimilation and historical revisionism resulted in a conflict between history and memory in the Caribbean. While the Caribbean populations relied on oral traditions from their African heritage, the French discredited this practice in favor of their written documentation. Western cultures also promote a linear pattern of retelling history and a focus on dates and written artifacts of events. This view, belonging to the Western world, deems individual memory as potentially unreliable because it is personal and not “objective”. However, history to the Caribbeans, as Glissant explains, is based on “natural events, retaining only their ‘explosive emotional meanings” (qtd in Duchanaud 3). This view of history incorporates personal memory into the collective consciousness. Memory is one of the strongest bonds, rooting the collective into the present and establishing a temporal continuum. Qi Wang’s definition of collective memory is “a socially shareable memory system that encompasses active, constructive processes of both individuals and collectives in time and space” (Wang 305). This active and constructive view of collective memory describes the modern Caribbean experience where the collective has been physically decentralized and has experienced a break in the temporal continuum of memory.

The Caribbean system of memory, to the extent that it is based on this kind of collective memory, relies upon trans-generational transmission. Transmission most

often occurs within family structures, although that is not to say that it is always the parents who pass down memory to their children. Networks of relatives fulfill this same duty, closing the generational gap of memory. These traditional communal frameworks were not intact amongst the enslaved population. While in African and Caribbean societies traditional rituals and stories transmitted historical knowledge, in the diasporic context these traditional rites are not readily available and so the family is the primary source. Family members provide family history as well as cultural history, rich with lived experience. On the other hand, this quality of memory is not the focus of most national history records, even though there exist many vivid slave narratives. Nicolas Russell explains the problem: "History books present the past in a schematic way that does not resemble the memory of past lived experience" (Russell 796-797).

The shock described by Glissant as a consequence of slavery and colonization is a traumatic experience that has affected many generations of Caribbeans. Traumatic theory is helpful in shedding light on the transmission of this historical trauma from generation to generation. A communicative memory system that is inclusive of personal accounts is described by Marianne Hirsch as 'postmemory', or "a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but (unlike post traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove" (Hirsch 106). Hirsch distinguishes this form of traumatic recall from post traumatic stress disorder, implying that the recall

is not involuntary but is purposely constructed for the purpose of transmission to close the generational gap of memory. What is unique to this kind of transmission is that it transfers emotional experience along with knowledge. Hirsch refers to Jan Assmann as he describes the benefits of this transmission: “Communicative memory is ‘biographical’ and ‘factual’ and is located within a generation of contemporaries who witness an event as adults and who can pass on their bodily and affective connection to that event to their descendants” (Hirsch 110). It is private and public at the same time, relaying lived experience but also imparting important historical knowledge.

In the 21st century, the history of slavery and its public representation has been a particularly heated national issue in France. In 2001, the French government approved legislation to recognize slavery as a crime against humanity. Although this appeared as a step forward, one stipulation of a subsequent law passed in 2005 required teachers to present the “positive benefits of colonialism”, which was later revoked after widespread public backlash. Then in 2009, a monument for the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery was erected in the Jardin du Luxembourg in France. To assist in this memorial work, a committee was established. The Committee for Memory and History of Slavery works to preserve authentic remembrance of victims in face of political forces that would seek their own benefit.

Although public memorials are symbolic of the necessity and significance of collective memory, these commemorations are not based on the lived experience of

the victims and they are inherently limited geographically. These are “lieux de mémoire”, physical places in which memory is held, such as the landscape of events, the location of monuments, and the interior of national boundaries. Since the “lieux de mémoire” are not accessible to all of the diasporan population, they cannot be an effective, primary component of the system of collective memory. Furthermore, according to the idea that history is confined to a geographical space, individuals who emigrate from the homeland are omitted from the historical consciousness of the collective, even though through culture and identity they are still very much connected. Also, while “lieux de mémoire” have the ability to promote a collective historical consciousness within national borders, they do not have the capacity to anchor the meaning of the past through the passing of time. Manmade representations risk “monumentalization” where the symbol replaces memory. In abstract form, these representations of memory lose their effectiveness as the generations go by and “representation often replaces lived experiences which are in danger of fading into the past” (Liburd 156).

Pierre Nora distinguishes between the material “lieux de mémoire” and the immaterial “milieux de mémoire”. The “milieux de mémoire” are intangible artifacts of memory that are often culturally based, such as songs, rituals, and cuisine (Liburd 156). Robert Nelson and Margaret Rose Olin explain how a “milieu de mémoire” is relevant to an active and constructive system of collective memory:

A milieu de mémoire is communal, belongs to public life, functions through a network of associations with diverse places, spaces, and groups, relies upon metonymic constructions, and, like human memory, condenses, abridges, alters, displaces, and projects fragments of the past, making them alive in the present for particular groups. (Nelson and Olin 74)

These “milieux de mémoire” are mobile, just like a diasporan population, and can be experienced with the same embodied effect in different locations. It is a form of living memory that resides in the body, invoking the past experience instead of replacing it with an abstraction. Moreover, since it is communicative in nature, it has the ability to expand the collective consciousness at the same time as reinforcing it. However, this is not to say that all “milieux de mémoire” are created equal. Consider the day of remembrance that France established as May 10. This can be considered a “milieu de mémoire” since it is culturally based, however, this “milieu de mémoire” does not extend to “diverse places, spaces, and groups” since it is only recognized in France and its territories. Furthermore, this day of remembrance seems to simply mark the end of an era instead of representing the dynamic interaction of the past and the present, comprising many different nations, covering several centuries of histories, and impacting the lives of countless individuals.

A “milieu de mémoire” appeals to the need for a form of living memory. The essential quality of living memory is that it is experienced through the body, creating a personal and intimate connection with history. The body is the site where

history is first experienced and so it is in the body that a genuine remembrance can be held. Living memory is a way to recall the actual lived experience and, in doing so, renews the historical consciousness of a collective. Since living memory is not geographically limited and because it is focused on the lived experience, rather than symbolic meaning or factual representation, it is a convincing collective memory model for the diaspora. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf explains this point particularly well:

Diasporicity concerns the lived experiences of embodied beings and bodily practices which have been (actual or by association) 'rooted' in a place, and which by being uprooted and re-routed to another place produce a sort of dis-positioning and re-positioning... This means that theorising *black* diasporic identity and expressive agency needs to be grounded in affective social practices, experiences, relations of power, and habits of bodily being. (Bakare-Yusuf 147)

Thus the theorizing of black diasporic identity involves its inclusion into the collective consciousness. The displacement and replacement within another country makes an expansive collective consciousness a necessity and requires a reciprocal flow in the collective memory system. Emigrants should be able to contribute and glean from the memorial system, instead of being relegated to a missing link. To this effect, living memory could be a solution since living memory is an embodiment of culture and history and is a way to be 'rooted' in both places.

Living memory is also essential in the context of traumatic history, such as the slave trade and colonization. Chronologies and archives dehumanize the lived experience of individuals and allow the inquirer to be detached physically and emotionally, focusing on dates and numbers. Also, the atrocities experienced during these centuries often cannot be sufficiently communicated through language alone. Roberta Culbertson describes the problem when the body is separated from memory:

We lose sight of the body's own recall of its response to threat and pain, and of the ways in which it "speaks" this pain, because this wordless language is unintelligible to one whose body is not similarly affected, and because without words the experience has a certain shadowy quality, a paradoxical unreality. (Culbertson 170)

This quotation accurately reflects the experience of many victims who feel that language cannot effectively express their memory. The "paradoxical unreality" refers to the embodied knowledge of traumatic memory in a society that dismisses such ways of knowing in favor of written documentation. The victim deals with a painful burden of proof to verify the traumatic experience. Furthermore, victims are often faced with feelings of pity or shame when communicating their account that create a double victimization. However, Culbertson's argument that bodies that are "similarly affected" only comprehend the language of the body is refuted by postmemory. It is not necessary that every individual in the collective have exactly

the same lived experience. Rather, it is a matter of being able to transmit living memory to create a collective consciousness that transcends generations.

The essence of living memory is embodiment, the perception through the senses. The significations of our sensory perceptions are formed within a cultural and historical context. As much as the senses shape our perception of the world, the world in which we grow up equally forms our senses, giving them qualitative and affective meaning. While, our senses have personal meanings, they are also shaped by our connections with others. Cultural values and family history create collective meanings, but interaction outside of the collective also shapes our senses. Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes sensory perception as transcending the body to create a “field of *contact with otherness*” (Hass 33). Our senses shape how we perceive others and form immediate judgment before there is even an exchange between individuals. Through our senses we form a reciprocal connection to our environment, our collective, and to others. Due to this connection and the embodiment of lived experience, I purport that sensory memory is essential to the collective memory system of the Caribbean diaspora.

As Jamie Carnie explains, the primary function of sensory memory is to “establish a basic continuity in the series of sensory quality presentations which occur during perception” (Carnie 218). Thus, when we are looking at an image, it is not perceived intermittently as if we were under a strobe light. He further explains that sensory qualities are inherently relational, connecting “events between the

location from which the presentation occurs and the points to which the presenting is done” (Carnie 114-115). In other words, the object of our perception, including its particular temporal and spatial context, forms a relationship with our senses. The meanings attributed to these associations depend on how the circumstances are cognized, leading the sensations to activate certain metaphoric resonances.

Ironically, while sensory memory is in part devoted to short-term perceptual continuity, the relative triggering of metaphorical resonances makes it an incredibly powerful tool of lifelong remembrance.

Martin Conway’s article on episodic memory and autobiographical memory explains how sensory memory ends up in long-term storage, “These sensory-perceptual episodic memories do not endure in memory unless they become linked to more permanent autobiographical memory knowledge structures, where they induce recollective experience in autobiographical remembering” (Conway 1375-1376). The recollective state that Conway refers to is the lived, or in this case relived, experience of memory. The environment is recreated through the senses, bringing embodied memory to bear on that environment. It is important to note that autobiographical memory can be accessed separately from sensory perceptions and when this happens “recollective experience is absent and, instead, access is accompanied by feelings of knowing” (Conway 1382). This kind of historic knowledge does not recreate the lived experience as the sensory does and although Conway’s study specifically references autobiographical memory, sensory memory

is not limited to individual experience. The foundation of the senses refutes perception or feeling as being only personal. Our sensory perception contains meaning from a collective, which includes historical and cultural information. Furthermore, postmemory depends on the transfer of embodied memory, making it collective memory instead of just individual. Hirsch explains postmemory as “a *structure* of inter and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience” (Hirsch 106). I believe that sensory memory is key to this structure wherein a memory can be appropriated as one’s own, especially from a generational remove.

Sensory memory can be accessed through sensory cues in the external environment, and this triggers the recollective experience. The rest of this thesis will examine the sensory memory in three novels of the Caribbean diaspora, particularly the way in which sensory memory connects the individual to the greater collective and the manner in which it is transmitted.

Chapter 2: Memory in the Body

Landscape has long been regarded as a primary site of historical knowledge as episodic layers of time create a palimpsest of memory in geographical space. From Victor Hugo to Édouard Glissant, authors have used this trope to highlight the intersection of time and space. This intersection allows landscapes to act as “lieux de mémoire” since they hold the memory of events within them. However, in the contemporary Caribbean Diaspora context “lieux de mémoire” are not an inclusive channel for postmemory work. This chapter adds the body to time and space, forming a matrix of memory that activates ancestral and cultural collectives within the individual. In the three novels in this study, the senses are the pathways to historical knowledge and recollective experience.

Marie-Célie Agnant’s novel, *Le livre d’Emma*, focuses around Emma Bratte who is a patient in a Québécois psychiatric hospital while she is under investigation for the murder of her young daughter. Originally from Haiti, Emma speaks French but refuses to speak it to Dr. MacLeod as he evaluates Emma’s mental state. Flore, a Haitian woman who has been living in Québec, is employed as an interpreter for Dr. MacLeod but she unexpectedly becomes very involved in Emma’s account.

In *Le livre d’Emma*, sensory memory is a representation of an inescapable past that perseveres despite its eclipse by Western historical hegemony. Emma dispels the Western misconception of the past, saying to Flore, “Avant de vous

parler de Fifie, je dois vous dire quelques mots sur ce temps que l'on croit passé et que l'on nomme temps jadis" (Agnant 27). Emma brings to light the fallacy of time as a universalism, and in doing so, rejects the labeling of descendants of slavery as heirs of history and illustrates the circular configuration of time. This position contradicts the linear construction of time that Dr. MacLeod subscribes to as he refuses to see any relation between the past events of slavery and the present investigation into the murder of Emma's daughter. During her confinement and questioning, Emma experiences the past's perpetual presence through her senses.

Emma's first memory and ultimately her most powerful memory is the blue of the ocean that surrounds Grand-Lagon, Haiti. The blue becomes the focus of her memories in the asylum, "Pendant longtemps, elle n'avait eu de mots que pour décrire le bleu intense qui enserre en permanence un lambeau de terre abandonnée au milieu de l'océan, là où ses yeux s'étaient ouverts sur le monde" (Agnant 7). The blue becomes more than an isolated memory as it shapes her sensory faculties and becomes a filter through which she perceives the world. She is reminded of Grand-Lagon with the sight of any body of water. For example, the river that is outside of her room at the asylum is a constant focal point for Emma as it triggers the resonant meaning of the blue from her memory. At the surface, it seems that the blue is portrayed as a common metaphor, representing an ever-present melancholy in the population of Grand-Lagon but Emma reveals the more significant historical meaning of the blue, "Cette eau qui la baigne depuis le jour de sa naissance, cette

eau, dans son bleu si bleu, cache des siècles de sang vomis des cales des négriers, sang de tous ces Nègres que l'on jetait par-dessus bord" (Agnant 125). The blue of the ocean both contains and hides the victims of the slave trade. The ocean was where it all began for Kilima, Emma's ancestress, and for all of the victims of the slave trade. They made the long, miserable journey in the hull of the cargo ships, surrounded by the blue. The blue was their escape and their prison, their life and their death. With the blue flooding Emma's vision, she is continuously on the same journey of her ancestors, the Middle Passage.

The madness that the ocean causes is also a vestige from the slave trade. Emma speaks to the origin of the madness, saying "l'intensité du bleu cause une manière de folie" (Agnant 21). The intensity of the blue as a visual qualification fuses with the emotional significance of the ocean's intensity. The blue invokes the chaos that occurred inside the hull of the ships, where the slaves were packed in too tightly to move, barely fed, abused, and treated as chattel. The blue, with its geographical and temporal significance, also encompasses this emotional trauma that the victims of the slave trade experienced.

As the historical significance of the ocean is perceived as a color, the water's odor of death also acts as a historic referent. It is the manifestation of murders committed for centuries during the slave trade. Emma illustrates the shore of Grand-Lagon to Flore, "mais il y a également cette odeur âcre de sel qui, en permanence, sature l'air, sans chasser cette haleine de mort, ces remugles de sang,

charriés vers nous par un vent d'éternelle folie venu de la mer, apporté dans les cales des bateaux négriers" (Agnant 31). Contrary to the ephemeral nature of smell, this stench of death is eternal. Odor as evidence of the crimes during the slave trade appears in other works of Caribbean literature, such as Glissant's *Le quatrième siècle*. History is experienced through the senses, as an inhalation is a reminder of gruesome events. As with the blue, Emma also equates the smell with the madness on the ships. The effect of these sensations in recreating the madness is essential to reliving the past. It goes beyond denoting dates, events, and characters. During an interview, Agnant attests to the importance of reliving the madness, "la folie, seule, permet de rétablir l'atmosphère de violence dans laquelle a grandi Emma et qui est l'héritage que lui a laissé l'aventure coloniale" (Ghinelli 147).

Emma relives the horrors of the slave trade that her ancestors experienced through her senses and her torment represents the collective pain body of the black Caribbean woman, embodying all of the abuse that has accumulated over the centuries. Emma dissects the female body as she explains the significance of the black woman to colonialist interests:

Il fallait, je vous dis, de la bonne sueur de Nègresse pour féconder la canne, le coton, le tabac ; son ventre, pour porter les bras qui servaient à couper cette canne et récolter le coton ; son sexe pour noyer la rage et la violence de toutes les brutes, Nègres ou Blancs. (Agnant 27-28)

This excerpt portrays the unique position of the female body during slavery. Black females are valued for the strength of their limbs to work the land. The black womb becomes a metonymical representation of the continuation of the slave trade, as the woman is an economic tool for perpetuating the supply of slave labor through forced breeding (In the novel, this phenomenon is further illustrated by the accounts of Kilima and Tamu.). Her vagina is the space of convergence of the white and black race through the act of rape. Yet, white men are not the only sexual aggressors; black women are doubly victimized by black males. The black women are regarded by men merely as a sum of parts and not as a whole being. The continuation of this view in modern society is symbolized by the dismemberment of Emma's daughter, Lola. The hatred of the black female is experienced through the body as a temporal continuum.

Sensory memory is a channel through which the suffering of the black female is evoked. The disdain that Emma feels starts with being the sole living child after the birth of quintuplets, "la sage-femme au visage déconfit, qui, comme Fifie, aurait préféré nous voir mortes toutes les cinq" (Agnant 62). She already feels unwanted by the first two people who bear witness to her existence and Emma even imagines Fifie using herbs and other concoctions to try to abort the pregnancy (Agnant 97). However, Emma's survival is distinguished by a momentous cry that Fifie cannot forget, "Il s'agissait, je le savais, du souvenir de ce jour où mon cri, pareil à un scalpel, lui avait déchiré le corps" (Agnant 64). This aural memory serves to remind

Fifie of the physical pain, shock, and grief that accompanied Emma's birth. The cry of the child returns to the mother's body after she has birthed her into the world, creating a reciprocal connection between the two. The memory of this cry also integrates Fifie into the same problematic of motherhood as her ancestors, such as Kilima, who feared putting a child into the world due to the suffering she would endure. This cry then represents the continuum of suffering of the black female that continues even during the postcolonial era.

While the memory of the cry reminds Fifie of Emma's presence, to Emma the cry represents the absence of her four stillborn sisters. This cry began within a persecuted female collective and it is perpetuated in the same situation, as Emma explains, as that of the women who are confined in the asylum, "Nous hurlons pour toutes celles à qui on refuse le droit de se faire entendre" (Agnant 71). The stillborn infants could represent the four matriarchs that comprise Emma's ancestry: Kilima, Emma, Rosa, and Fifie. It could also be a reference to the subaltern class that has been silenced in Western institutionalized history that forgets the victims of the slave trade. While this cry also represents her triumph in surviving erasure, it is also an embodied act of subversion that brings to bear the history of the victims of the slave trade that has been obscured by colonialist revisionism.

As Emma connects to a historical and ancestral collective through sensory memory, Mariotte is also able to form this connection in *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes*. In the novel by Simone and André Schwarz-Bart, the protagonist, Mariotte,

resides in a hospice in Paris. As she struggles to document her experiences in a journal, Mariotte's yearning for the past manifests in a craving for a special dish from her pays natal, Martinique. Focusing on this meal allows her to revisit the past and pushes her to explore the world outside the walls of the hospice.

In *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, sensory memory is unrelenting in its tenacity. Although Mariotte strives to disown her past and resign herself to meaningless existence in the French hospice, her memories invade her senses and trigger recollective experience. Mariotte delves into her past by reminiscing about the taste of the dish that gives the book its title and she recreates the episode from which the dish earns its personal significance. Mariotte's mother makes the meal on the day that her grandmother, Man Louise, dies in order to give her a last comfort before she passes away. The dish is a symbol of the Martinican collective as her mother sells portions of the meat to the community in order to pay for the clothes that her grandmother wishes to be buried in (Schwarz-Bart 112-113). Furthermore, this collective is inclusive of those members who have been displaced, such as Raymoninque who is in prison. Mariotte's mother undertakes a journey in order to give Raymoninque the leftovers of the dish that did not sell. The inclusion of this member of society echoes the inclusion of those Caribbeans, like Mariotte, who live their lives in exile or geographical displacement. He is also representative of the courageous Martinicans who acted in resistance to the oppressive colonial regime.

Mariotte accompanies her mother on the journey to take Raymonique the meal, and even when she is young, the smell has a profound effect on her, “Et alors, quand il a soulevé la feuille de bananes étalée sur la portion de porc, tout ce bon manger m’est apparu et l’odeur était si exaltante, désespérante, attendrissante aussi, que je me suis retenue à grand mal de pleurer...” (Schwarz-Bart 134). The immediate sensory trigger intensifies the emotional impact of the meeting with the beloved Raymonique and the death of her grandmother. This aspect of sensory memory coincides with Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy about how meaning becomes associated with sensations. Referring to sights specifically, the sensations “bear meaning within and because of the complex relation between the figure and its background” (Hass 32). This background can be the landscape or the situation in which the figure is located. For Mariotte, the background is the death of her grandmother, the sale of the food to the community for her grandmother’s benefit, and the reunion with Raymonique, with “le cœur percé de ces vieilles questions” about her relationship with him (Schwarz-Bart 133). Thus, the multiple circumstantial and emotional meanings converge in the dish so that its memory is rooted in an ancestral and cultural collective.

The individual elements of the dish also contribute to its historical significance. Mariotte remembers all of the ingredients down to the spices that give its unique flavor. She pines for one spice in particular, “un jus de piments Tourterelle” (Schwarz-Bart 243), which is a hot pepper native to the Caribbean and

a popular component of the cuisine (Houston 36). The mixing of individual ingredients to create the meal mirrors the heterogeneous collective that the Créole culture represents. Even though they are a part of a greater whole, each ingredient has its own distinct flavor and its own cultural and historical significance that it adds. The multifaceted Caribbean culture is experienced through taste on an individualistic and collective level.

The *porc aux bananes vertes* is the center of Mariotte's search in France as she leaves the hospice and goes into the town that she has avoided for years. The quest becomes a narrative of embodied imagination through sensory memory:

et puis tout disparut et vit à nouveau devant elle un plat de nourriture pays d'origine et eut l'impression de tomber le visage en avant mais se retint deux mains à la canne rigolant malgré elle car de comprendre que son ivresse ne venait pas du cœur ni du vin ni des cigarettes mais de l'odeur de vie, des couleurs de beauté, du goût de tendresse qu'il y avait ladite quelconque cheval a son point de vue oh oui dans un plat de porc avec des bananes vertes!...Et (Schwarz-Bart 246)

The manifestation of the dish renders a realization of its deeper meanings. The aromas are life, the colors are beauty and the taste is tenderness. She beholds the physical sensations with the emotional counterparts that have been imparted to the dish. She does not have to recall the entire experience to feel it within her body. *The porc aux bananes vertes* becomes an embodied symbol of the past that impacts the

body as it does the spirit and mind. The aborted sentence that finishes the quote, and finishes the book as well, is taken to be Mariotte's expiration. The dish creates parallelism between generations, as it was present on the day of Man Louise's death and Mariotte's sensory memory conjures it on the day of her own death. The dish marks the circular movement of time as it unites past and present, childhood and death. It also unites the exiled daughter of Martinique with her collective consciousness as well as connecting her to the matrilineal line of her family.

Another instance of sensory memory in the novel is the recurrence of the N'goka drumbeat. It often appears around Raymonique since he plays the instrument but a greater significance is revealed as the drum's connection to the body, history, and landscape:

Il vous battait, Raymon, le gros tambour N'goka aussi bien que ses ancêtres d'Afrique, c'est-à-dire : avec la fougue d'un amant ; la délicatesse, douloureuse, d'un Vray-homme pour sa fille ; et le respect qui fait hésiter les doigts, au bon moment, quand la peau du tambour rendue tout chaude, odorante, se met à vibrer toute seule, dirait-on, et que le batteur devient l'instrument de la musique secrète qui coule dans les veines des hommes, dans les branches des arbres et le contour sinueux des rivières. (Schwarz-Bart 140)

The N'goka's drum's cultural and historical influence started with its invention. It originated in Guadeloupe where the colonized population would make drums from

the barrels of traded commodities, *gros quarts*, from where the name came (Lafontaine 76). The music's representation as the blood of Caribbeans demonstrates the interconnection between history and the body. The sound of the N'goka drum comes back to an emotional Mariotte:

Et, comme je sentais de maigres illusions de larmes couler le long de mes joues, un bref son de tam-tam a jailli de l'autre bout du réfectoire, emplissant l'énorme salle d'une seule bulle vibrante. J'ai soulevé une paupière pour voir ce qui se passait, mais nul ne semblait rien entendre cependant que les battements se rapprochaient de moi, au point de se confondre avec ceux de mon cœur gonflé à éclater !.. Et soudain, ça a été, dans ma tête, une brève et souffreteuse sonorité de *ti-bois* chantant sur le fuseau allongé du tambour *N'goka* (Schwarz-Bart 93)

The drum accompanies the wave of emotion that Mariotte feels after an antagonistic inner-dialogue where she shames herself for her void of memory and the emptiness of her body. The beat of the drum represents the triumph of life in a dying body and the existence of the collective within the individual. The ancestral roots of the drum and the seemingly unconscious reactivation of its beat portray an embodied connection to a historical collective that will never forsake her, even if she no longer believes in herself.

Mariotte's relationship with the past in the twilight of her years contrasts to Gisèle's fascination as a child in *L'Exil selon Julia*. Where Mariotte resists

reminiscence in vain, Gisèle yearns to discover her roots. In *L'Exil selon Julia*, Gisèle Pineau recounts her childhood after her family moves from Guadeloupe to Paris with her paternal grandmother, Julia. Gisèle and her brothers and sisters witness the struggles of Julia as she tries to navigate the urban landscape, the French language, and western culture. At first, the children are unable to relate to their grandmother but when she returns to Guadeloupe, they realize that she has given them an invaluable connection to the history and culture of their native land.

Gisèle's family moved from Martinique to Africa and then to France within Gisèle's first years of life. To her, unearthing the past is more than an intellectual curiosity; the desire is represented as a physical necessity:

J'ai longtemps gardé le sentiment d'avoir perdu quelque chose : une formule qui perçait jadis les geôles, un breuvage souverain délivrant la connaissance, une mémoire, des mots, des images. J'ai nourri en moi cette perte, pesante comme un deuil, manque sans définition. Affamée de savoir, assoiffée d'une essence authentique, empressée de retrouver le fondement même du monde, je chargeai mes épaules d'un amer équipage. L'Afrique lesta autrefois ces cruels bagages... (Pineau 20)

The search for Mariotte's past mirrors the quest for the primordial beginning that faces the Caribbean collective. Since Gisèle was so young when she lived in Africa, vestigial visions and a piercing absence compose her memories of that period. The Caribbean populations, who were exiled from their own homeland in Africa, carry a

similar relationship to their African past. This disruption, as Glissant termed it, is represented by a physical lack, a hunger and a thirst that invoke the yearning of sensorial faculties. This conceptualization refutes Western institutionalized history, as dates cannot provide holistic knowledge to satisfy the mind and the spirit. The embodied connection to her ancestral and cultural collective that Gisèle craves is reaped from sensorial memories.

The first part of the novel, entitled “Noir et blanc”, demonstrates the lack that characterizes Gisèle’s search for the past while the final part of the novel, “Couleurs”, illustrates the completion of a vivid continuum that is her past. Gisèle and her siblings use sensorial memories as well as the stories from Man Ya to reanimate the lives of their grandmothers during their youth:

Nous entendons les babillages de la boutique de Louise, les bruissements du jardin, le boucan de la rivière, les chuchus de la source, les grognements des animaux. Et toutes les odeurs des alentours, tous les sons, ramassés par les vents, vont et viennent, prennent chez les uns pour emmener chez les autres, et ainsi, tout long, nuit et jour. (Pineau 139)

These memories recreate the environment of a more prosperous time, before a friend deceived Papa Boule and Man Louise still had her shop. Gisèle becomes a participant in this history, experiencing the same sensations as her ancestors and taking part in the nature of Guadeloupe. In participating in their past, Gisèle creates an embodied connection with the matriarchs, Man Ya and Man Louise, and gives life

to an episode in her familial history that is undocumented. The vividness of this aesthetic of memory, as if it were her own first hand memory, attests to the sensory faculties' ability to enrich the past.

Through the senses, the body becomes a primary storage place of memory that is individual, familial, and collective. In each novel, sensory memory recreates an event or episode from the past in a manner that is both physically and emotionally engaging. Forming an embodied connection to the past and reliving the experiences of their ancestors, the protagonists perpetuate a temporal and historical continuum that occurs through the senses. The circular pattern of the sensations from generation to generation is the foundation of a familial and cultural connection.

The powerful recreations of the past that Gisèle and Emma experience echo Hirsch's theory about the postmemory generation, as they are able to "remember" the events that their ancestors experienced (Hirsch 106). This kind of postmemory recollection is distinguished by physical sensations that produce an authentic quality of experience. Without these sensations, recollections are only knowledge-based instead of experience-based. The embodiment of history unites the body and mind, subverting patriarchal modes of remembrance that eclipse the role of the body in authentic ways of knowing.

The novels mainly portray sensory memory as a phenomenon that occurs in the female body and this seems to perpetuate the gender dichotomy of

female/feeling, man/thinking, but this is false. As women are the traditional sites of memory for the family in the Caribbean culture, their ability to manifest history is collectively more fine-tuned. Also, the rigid structure of the traditional male as logical and insensitive hinders them from embracing this embodied form of remembrance. Furthermore, the emotions and physical sensations that sensory memory triggers are accompanied by historical knowledge, the cerebral element, which breaks down this dichotomy.

Chapter 3: Metaphysical Travel

Sensory memory allows the individual to blend geographical and temporal borders to the effect that movement is created between two spaces. Mary Gallagher uses the term *ici-là* to describe the Caribbean modulation of space but it can be translated temporally as well. She describes *ici-là* as “emphasizing a distinct sense of connection and simultaneity between the local and the distant, between here and (over) there” (Gallagher xiv-xv).

The metaphysical travel that appears in Caribbean women’s novels is an act of resistance. While the body is trapped, metaphysical travel is a way to escape and shield the individual from pain, both physical and psychological. Some novels refer to this as freeing your spirit, though your body may be trapped, as in Simone Schwarz-Bart’s *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*; others call this the soul. Instead of a spiritual escape, the novels in this study provide an embodied sense of travel as it happens primarily through the senses. The relocation of the body through the senses is a way to travel to a specific time and/or place. This chapter investigates the ability of sensory memory to facilitate metaphysical travel.

In *L’Exil selon Julia*, metaphysical travel is a form of resistance to the oppression and alienation that Julia experiences while in exile in Paris. She has a much different experience than Gisèle since she has never traveled outside of Guadeloupe. France has a much harsher climate with four seasons, a bitterly cold

winter, and snow that she has never experienced. Since she is illiterate, and does not speak any French, Julia, though highly resourceful and bold, cannot easily find her way through the metropolitan city.

Even the concept of time in France is different from that of Guadeloupe. Julia's own notions of time and space that have shaped her body and senses deceive her in exile. She is constantly disoriented and the physical and emotional distress eventually culminates in a debilitating illness. Western medicine is unable to treat her but through her own determination she comes up with a way to build a bridge to Guadeloupe to cure her homesickness: she uses sensory memory to visit her home in Routhiers:

Elle peut marcher dans les allées de sa jeunesse le matin et s'asseoir au mitan de son jardin le midi. Si sa chair se souvient des volées du Bourreau, son esprit la libère, elle abandonne son corps et s'en va couler son âme dans des petits moments de joie, auprès de sa source, à Routhiers. (Pineau 84)

Julia seeks relief through her senses, recreating the environment where she finds comfort. Even though her body is trapped in the cold climate of a foreign place, Julia's sensorial memories can make her feel as if she were an ocean away from where she really is. This act of resistance gives her the strength to persevere through her suffering until she can return home.

Julia passes on to her granddaughter this form of metaphysical travel through sensorial memories. However, Gisèle does not engage in this embodied

form of memory to escape exile. Since she was only a child and did not live in Guadeloupe very long, she has to keep her few sensory memories vibrant in order to not lose them. She seeks to regain the country of her origins that she is afraid of losing:

Alors, rêver au Pays. Quêter parfums et plaisirs de bouche auprès de la mémoire. Réinventer une mer caraïbe. Se poster sur un bord de plage. Attendre le retour des pêcheurs. Haler les canots parmi les habitués, comme si l'on n'avait jamais quitté le Pays. Regarder les poissons danser leur mort au fond des nasses. Et s'en aller, avec son butin : deux barbarins, un soleil, trois chats et une gorette, dans l'ombre d'un panier. Plus tard, fermer les yeux, sucer une tête de poisson rouge, écraser un pavé de fruit à pain dans la sauce court-bouillon et suer sous le feu d'un piment. Revivre tous ces goûts-là. Inspirer et roter. (Pineau 121)

The sensations from her time in Guadeloupe inflame her creativity and she uses her imagination to fill in the gaps of memory. Through this use of sensory memory, “the birthland is both conjured and physically actualized through fragrant whiffs of memory” (Mehta 35). These sensations are a bridge to her native land where she reconnects with the Guadeloupian collective in the daily life of the society while she resides in France. Reliving these tastes, sights, and smells gives her an authentic sense of belonging to the culture, even though she has lived abroad for so long.

While Gisèle's sensory recollection is a conscious effort to recreate the environment of her homeland, Mariotte's travel is sparked by an external trigger. For Mariotte, an external trigger sparks her reminiscence that recreates the environment of Martinique. Among her belongings are dozens of old photos, scraps of clothing, and a *siguine* leaf from Martinique. Conventionally in Western culture, photos are primarily a memorial reference, however Mariotte foregoes these in favor of the leaf as it sparks a powerful recollection:

Et parfois des éclats de voix anciens, tel coin de ciel, le goût violent d'un fruit surgissaient à ma conscience...Pourtant je me savais de nouveau en Martinique, à cette qualité indicible mais reconnaissable entre toutes, à cette présence d'un monde ancien qui grouille soudain en nous, ainsi qu'un million de vers dans la dépouille du présent. Et les yeux fermés de plaisir, de douleur, je caressais aveuglément la feuille de *siguine* qui reposait, toujours vivante, sur la table ; et qui me répondait, par instants, en émettant un léger crépitement électrique, comme venu d'une substance magnétisante.

(Schwarz-Bart 67-68)

The touch of the leaf triggers a synesthesia of sensory memories to recreate the environment of Martinique as if she were really there. Parallels are drawn between Mariotte and the *siguine* leaf as she deems them "sœurs oubliées d'un même exil" (Schwarz-Bart 45). The leaf can be interpreted as a metaphor for Mariotte's body, illustrating the intersection of nature, body, and memory. Martinique, and the

history it contains, is an electric force that radiates from within the leaf, giving it life just as the past does to her declining body. Even though the leaf is long dead, its existence is more than its present state as it encompasses a history, culture, and identity. The leaf helps her realize that her aging body is more than just an empty shell. Reconnecting with the nature in Martinique through sensory memory awakens life within Mariotte and provides consolation to her during her exile. Her present self with the *siguine* leaf becomes one with her past self in Martinique where the *siguine* leaf was part of a common cultural dish.

In *Le livre d'Emma*, the ocean that surrounds Haiti is constantly in the forefront of Emma's vision. It is not a matter of willing it to appear, as it is perpetually with her, "La première chose que l'on voit quand on vient au monde à Grand-Lagon, c'est le bleu ... Ce bleu était présent le matin de ma naissance... Il s'est fauilé sous mes paupières, et tous les autres matins par la suite, je l'ai retrouvé" (Agnant 21-22). As the blue slips under her eyelids, the internalization is involuntary but permanent, and this landmark of her country stays with her even while abroad, rendering her life inseparable from Haiti. She is rooted in Grand-Lagon even as she travels. This instance of sensory memory invokes the geographical and temporal sense of *ici-là*, subverting a dominant rooting in one location. The blue also has historical significance, as it represents the journey of the slaves in the Middle Passage, and so this sensory memory connects her spatially with her ancestors who made that same voyage.

The investigation into the history of slavery and persecution of blacks evokes powerful sensations that transport Flore through the geographical triangle that is the Middle Passage. The recollections are not limited to the time period of slavery as they show how the events of slavery evolved later into racially charged hate crimes against blacks. She relives the experiences of the victims through sensorial memories that are provoked in Emma's performance of her history:

Emma me projette dans cet océan opaque de l'identité niée. Avec elle, j'ai entrepris un long et pénible voyage dans la cale d'un navire, dans l'enfer des plantations, je suffoque ; esclave marronne, j'ai à mes trousses des meutes de chiens affamés...Je parcours les rives du Mississippi, découvre des Nègres pendus aux branches des sycomores. Je vois Billie Holiday, agonisante, sur les trottoirs de la blanche Amérique construite de sueur et de sang noirs et, dans mon sommeil, sa voix lancinante ne me quitte pas...*strange fruit, strange fruit*, dit sa chanson. (Agnant 71-72)

While this passage demonstrates the power of imagery to provoke strong emotions, it also illustrates the geographical and temporal fluidity of sensations. Flore travels from the hull of a ship at sea to the plantations of the Caribbean islands and then to the pavements of North America. Along with temporal and geographical motion, these sensations provoke movement between cultures. This travel illustrates the dynamic relationship between past and present events as well as the correspondence between the histories of different nations and cultures. The

temporal continuum that this movement creates across geographical spaces unifies a historical collective that is not encumbered by manmade delineations of identity, such as nationality. Through the senses, the individual channels this historical collective, resisting the forces of separation caused by diasporic migrations.

The connection to the Caribbean that sensory memory gives individuals living in exile is essential to the perpetuation of the collective memory. This embodied connection to the native land is what keeps alive their authentic history in face of the Western historical revisionism that is propelled by forces of globalization. The loss of memory and subsequent dissipation of the historical collective is illustrated in the novels as an estrangement between the individual and the native land. The struggle to remain connected to the landscape of the homeland while in exile is part of the same battle.

In *L'Exil selon Julia*, Gisèle's connection to Guadeloupe comes from sensory memories as well as the teachings and stories of Man Ya and her maternal grandmother, Man Bouboule. Man Bouboule taught Gisèle how to have an embodied connection with nature so that she can glean the knowledge and history that is present therein. Man Bouboule warns her about what will happen if this connection to the land is lost:

Les oreilles auront perdu l'écoute des signes soufflés par les créatures qui sont sur terre juste pour alerter et présager. Les gens ne verront pas les petites feuilles descendre-filer trop vite dans la rivière. Ils ne sentiront pas le

sol se défaire sous leurs pieds. Ils n'entendront même pas la course des fourmis-folles. Non, il ne suffit pas de babiller. Il faut se nourrir de l'enseignement des ans, et apprendre à lire les pages des nuages, les humeurs du soleil, les dessins ronds du ciel... Un jour, crois moi, cette Antille, qui nous porte à présent, ne sera pas plus qu'un canot perdu en pleine mer, ballotté, démâté, un pays évanoui qui vivra seulement dans les songes des Blancs, dans le souvenir des Créoles échappés en France ou en Amérique. Qui se souviendra de nous autres ? (Pineau 47-48)

This warning from Man Bouboule addresses the consequences if the collective should cease to utilize the ways of knowing found in nature. The interface between nature and individuals is the senses. Knowledge from nature can be gleaned from knowing how to hear, look, and smell. Referred to as the "enseignement des ans" by Man Bouboule, this way of knowing has been passed down, from generation to generation, forming a historical continuum that unifies the Caribbean collectivity. Without this way of knowing, the history that will live on will be the accounts of the White colonialists or in the memories of Créoles who live in the colonialists' land. These two groups make up the privileged majority, relegating Man Ya and the victims of slavery and colonization to voicelessness. The "nous autres" are those who will suffer from the loss of memory; they will be the ones who are forgotten. This embodied memory is the authentic history of the oppressed Caribbeans, the Others, the victims of racial and cultural hegemony.

Neglect of the sensorial connection to nature is not the only threat to the collective memory. Social alienation can cause a detachment from nature since it dulls the senses that are fundamentally social, and thus external stimuli for sensory memories are absent or reduced. *Le livre d'Emma* and *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes* portray protagonists who are confined while in exile. Emma's imprisonment within the asylum mirrors Mariotte's confinement within the hospice. The institutionalization of the black female is a powerful metaphor for their treatment in society. The white world would like to forget the atrocities of slavery by relegating them to the "dead" past and obscuring the sequential nature of events. Emma is deemed crazy because she sees the influence of the past every day. The spatial and social imprisonment stifles the senses and slowly kills the spirit. Emma expresses this to Flore, saying, "En m'enfermant ici, ils sont vraiment parvenus à me ravir mon âme" (Agnant 174). What is keeping her alive is the unfinished task of the transmission of her history.

In *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*, the hospice symbolizes the demeaning care that the west provides for black women. The squalid conditions paired with the "charitable" nuns who are the caregivers are reminiscent of the *mission civilisatrice* where oppression and exploitation rode under the banner of humanity. Without genuine companionship and social interaction, Mariotte's life is relegated to a daily routine of chamber pot changes and cafeteria menus. Her alienation is two-fold since the hospice is alienated from the external society and she is culturally and

racially alienated from the other inhabitants of the hospice. This detachment weakens her resilience and she begins to even doubt the reality outside of the walls of the hospice. She is blinded by her monochromatic present to the extent that she tries to stifle the past within her. She writes in her notebook:

je me sentais à la fois honteuse et désespérée de voir que le passé continuait de grouiller sous ma peau, comme de la vermine dans une maison abandonnée ; que ni le grand âge, ni la résignation ne le désarmaient ; et que sans doute la mort elle-même n'arriverait pas à tuer ces instants de ma vie, qui flotteraient au-dessus de moi la nuit, ainsi que ces chauves-souris velues et piaillantes dont nous autres nègres de la Martinique disons qu'en elles revivent les péchés, les souffrances et les larmes, et l'agitation aveugle de ceux qui ne sont plus. (Schwarz-Bart 15)

Her description of these repressed memories is one of exasperation. She compares sensory memories within her body to pests in an abandoned house but she cannot will the past to fade. The desired detachment from the past mirrors a certain Western belief that the past is dead and gone. Although she tries, she cannot embody this paradigm. In fact, she reaffirms her roots as a Martinican here by using the “nous” pronoun, anchoring herself in the Martinican collective. However, it is the absence of this collective that is palpable in her body. Reconnection to the collective through the nature of the homeland is later achieved through sensory memories that are triggered by the siguine leaf.

By blurring temporal and geographical boundaries, sensory memory subverts the politics of location for Caribbeans who live in exile. This connection to the native land preserves cultural and historical ties, thereby strengthening the cohesion of the collective. This embodied experience has further benefits for the individual such as providing physical and psychological comfort, whether it is by recreating joyous moments from the past or by reconnecting with a collective that is physically or temporally distant. An embodied connection to the homeland proves essential for both young and old diasporans as a way to reaffirm familial roots and cultural identity in the wake of alienation caused by geographical displacement.

Metaphysical travel is also a way to relive the past in a rhizomatic sense since there is not one dominant root. The recollective space happens somewhere in between two locations, subverting the dominant métropole. Furthermore, this sensorial travel is a manner in which relational histories are experienced by blending geographical and temporal borders. Sensory memory then provides a dynamic continuum that subverts hegemonic concepts of space and time that oppress individuals of the Caribbean diaspora.

While this function of sensory memory is an effective tool for the individual in exile, it is also essential to the existence of the Caribbean collective. Gleaning knowledge through the senses is a way of knowing that is a cultural and historical practice, connecting the generations through its continuation. This way of knowing subverts a Western history that has stifled the accounts of the victims of slavery and

colonialism. While maintaining the transmission of this way of knowing does not preclude a population that is geographically centralized, individuals of the diaspora can maintain this way of knowing and they can even further develop it while outside of the Caribbean.

Chapter 4: Transmission

Sensory memory is internally and externally triggered. On the one hand, individuals can recall a sensation that brings them back to the past and they can relive the experience without any external stimulus at all. On the other hand, a smell, a taste, a touch or an image can trigger the individual's memory. However, the postmemory generation has to acquire these sensations through transmission instead of experience. They appropriate the experiences and the sensations of the past so that they become a part of the history of their ancestors. The key to this embodied connection is an embodied method of transmission. An embodied method of memorial transmission fosters a connection between the transmitter and the audience, in turn fostering integration into the collective historical consciousness. These methods include performance-based transmission such as orality, which is present in many Caribbean literary works.

One important benefit of performance-based transmission methods is that they engage the audience in the act as much as the transmitter. The audience is able to connect more deeply to the information being conveyed because it is an embodied form of communication. Orality is founded on the reciprocal connection between individuals while writing is removed from bodily ways of knowing.

Describing the intimacy of orality, Steven Feld explains:

This reflexivity is embodied doubly: one hears oneself in the act of voicing, and one resonates with the physicality of voicing in acts of hearing. Listening and voicing are in a deep reciprocity, an embodied dialogue of inner and outer sounding and resounding built from the historicization of experience... The soundingness of hearing and voicing constitute an embodied sense of presence and memory. (Feld 226)

Thus, there is an embodied presence of memory for both the transmitter and the audience, reinforcing the connection to the memory for the transmitter and allowing the audience to cultivate a deeper relation to the history. This engagement is demonstrated in *Le Livre d'Emma* through Flore's appropriation of Emma's history, as well as in *L'Exil selon Julia* through Julia's transmission of Guadeloupian history to her granddaughter, Gisèle.

Trans-generational transmission not only unites a collective through consciousness, but also connects them through bodily practice. A powerful example of this phenomenon is the song that is passed down through Emma's matriarchal line. The song resonates African heritage through its language and point of origin. First heard in the hull of the slave ship where Kilima undergoes the journey across the ocean, the song is in fact Kilima's sole memorial link back to Africa:

Elle n'avait gardé pour tout souvenir de sa vie passée qu'une seule chose : la voix de sa mère, Malayika, cette voix, comme la morsure d'une bête dont le

poison violent s'était infiltré en elle... Le bateau s'en va et Malayika hurle,
hurle son âme sur la grève. (Agnant 148)

The memory of the voice of Malayika represents her continual presence in Kilima's life. Her voice takes shape as a song, providing comfort to the frightened Kilima during the long voyage. The song continues to be passed on to each generation and appears when protection or support is needed. This transmission evokes the memory of Malayika as well as African heritage. The lyrics of the song are in Swahili and the imagery portrays the African landscape so that cultural and geographical ties to Africa are evoked as well. Although different voices continue the song, the matriarchal lineage is embedded in the song through its historical significance and the repeated embodied practice of singing that the song perpetuates is an active form of remembrance.

This song is also part of the history that Emma transmits to Flore, along with other songs, poetry, storytelling, expressions, and gestures. Previously, Emma had tried to write this history but was rebuked. Emma wrote her thesis on the history of slavery and defended it at a university in Bordeaux but the committee rejected it because, as the jury saw it, "Elle était incapable de démontrer certains faits qu'elle avançait" (Agnant 73). The thesis did not allow her to align empirical data with the personal accounts of the victims that are contained in her personal memory. This event exemplifies the dialectic of history/memory where the oppressed are silenced by the institutionalization of memory. The "colonialists" dismiss her ways of

knowing because they do not conform to their own. Without documentation, personal accounts are not an acceptable form of knowledge in this academic arena, especially accounts that are a generation or more removed. However Emma succeeds in performing her history, giving important historical knowledge that carries emotional and personal significance.

Although, Emma is the primary transmitter of historical knowledge in the novel, Flore is not a passive witness. As Emma reanimates history, Flore's senses are engaged so as to really experience the lives of Emma's ancestors. In doing so, Flore appropriates the history of Emma. The connection between transmitter and audience becomes so deep that Flore likens it to losing herself in Emma and appropriating her identity saying, "je ne parvenais plus à dissocier mon existence de celle d'Emma" (Agnant 117). This represents the reciprocity between the individual and the collective. Flore is able to engage in the history that Emma performs because an embodied connection is formed in the intimacy of transmission. This engagement is so complete that she feels changed by the experience and realizes that she is a part of the collective consciousness that accompanies this history. The appropriation also represents continuity in that the past is transmitted again and the past continues to influence the present.

Le Livre d'Emma portrays an interconnectedness of two Caribbean females who are not related, which is important to transmission in the diasporic context. As the traditional family unit is geographically dispersed, transmission cannot be the sole charge of family members. Just as other mothering has become an accepted part of the

Caribbean familial structure, which also appears in *Le Livre d'Emma* and *L'Exil selon Julia*, members of the collectivity must take on the responsibility of transmission outside of traditional family structures. However, as *L'Exil selon Julia* demonstrates, transmission through family members is particularly effective in cases where it is possible.

Gisèle and Julia's narratives become intertwined by the history that Julia transmits to her granddaughter and the sensorial narratives that Gisèle creates with this information and her imagination. Even though Gisèle was born in Guadeloupe, she left at an early age and her memory of the land is made up of sensorial memories from visits to the house of her maternal grandmother, Man Bouboule. Man Ya's performance of the history of Guadeloupe gives Gisèle an embodied connection to the land and forms an interconnection between the girl and her grandmother. The history that Julia performs orally for the children makes the past come alive:

Pour nous seuls, des Nègres sortent de l'antan où ils marchaient avec des fers aux pieds. Des vies désolées remontent les ravines de l'oubli... Les longueurs de mer traversées. Le fouet. La misère des champs de cannes. Le poison. Les langues avalées. Le fouet. Le tambour qui bat comme un cœur dans la nuit. La désespérance. Les chaînes. La peur. La ruse. Le fouet... (Pineau 84)

The children experience the history through the bodily sensations that Julia evokes, the crack of the whip, the taste of poison, the beat of the drum, and the intense emotions that accompany them, misery and desperation. Gisèle is not physically

removed as if she were reading facts about a previous time period; she is engaged bodily in the performance. Orality as the medium of transmission further manifests the continuum of a cultural practice since it is an element of African heritage. Through sensorial engagement, Gisèle develops an embodied connection so that she can relive the past of her Caribbean and African ancestors even though she grows up in France.

Along with a connection to the history of Guadeloupe, Man Ya is able to transmit an embodied connection to the land. Gisèle realizes the culmination of Man Ya's teachings when she returns to Guadeloupe for the first time:

Alors, nous comprîmes réellement ce que Man Ya nous avait apporté...Sentes défrichées de son parler créole. Sentiments marcottés en nous autres, jeunes bois étioles. Senteurs révélées. Elle nous avait donné : mots, visions, rais de soleil et patience dans l'existence. Nous avait désigné les trois sentinelles, passé, présent, futur, qui tiennent les fils du temps, les avait mêlés pour tisser, jour après jour, un pont de corde solide entre Là-Bas et le Pays.

(Pineau 217-218)

Gisèle and her brothers and sisters only spent a short amount of time in Guadeloupe as children, but Man Ya builds them a bridge to Guadeloupe through her stories. Even though they grew up in France, Gisèle refers to France as the "Là-Bas", representing a deeper connection with the land of Guadeloupe despite the disparity between the amounts of time spent in each country. Julia has imprinted in the

children the smells of the country through the food that she prepared for them and so the crops and the food that is made from them are a part of the children's bodily existence even before they return to the country. Along with the history, the culture, and the landscape, Man Ya teaches the intersection of time to the children. She teaches them that the past, present, and future are interconnected. In this manner, the past is never dead and continues to be influential and important. Man Ya's engaging transmission practices rival those of books which represent archived knowledge.

While orality is not recognized in many Western discourses of knowledge, it serves an important purpose in historical transmission. Orality has the ability to carry forward firsthand accounts of those people who did not have the opportunity or ability to write down their experiences. Orality also gives those who are illiterate the ability to pass on this information. For instance, Mattie, who is illiterate, is the person to transmit the history of the matrilineal line to Emma. Julia cannot read or write either, but both women are still able to pass on their own experiences as well as those that were passed on to them. The oral tradition does not interfere with the written system in either of these tales. Mattie supports Emma's education, helping her to acquire materials as well as encouraging her throughout her studies. Julia also places importance on the education of the children and even tries to learn letters herself. As we have seen in both *Le Livre d'Emma* and *L'Exil selon Julia* orality creates an important embodied connection to history that is a level of engagement

beyond reading a history book. Without a place for orality within the memorial system there is a risk of losing these precious accounts.

In contrast to both *Le Livre d'Emma* and *L'Exil selon Julia*, there is no clear embodied form of transmission in *Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes*. However, the protagonist does speak to the ineffectiveness of written language to convey history. Mariotte, explains the shortfalls of language in conveying meaning:

La tête sous un couperet, je me résignerais peut-être à l'emploi de vocables mineurs, tels qu' « incident », « vibration » ou « clapotis » (ce dernier se rapprochant le plus de son objet). Mais en dehors de ces circonstances, propres à en faire plier plus d'un, le respect de la langue française interdit formellement qu'on dise: « Un *clapotis* vient de se produire dans ma vie. »
(Schwarz-Bart 12)

Comparing this mysterious event that happened to her to a “clapotis” suggests that it is not an incident with a fixed beginning and ending. The image of lapping waves suggests that the incident reoccurs continuously, an action in the past that continues to influence the present. However, that is as close as Mariotte comes to describing the event and the only other information that she is able to write is that the event occurred in Bogota in 1916. The only information that she is able to convey through writing, the date and place, mirrors a certain Western tradition of history. It is devoid of personal or emotional meaning. This also reflects her attitude vis à vis her sensory memory to which she does not assign any merit until later on in the novel.

Though Mariotte is attempting to write her personal history, she does not choose to reveal it to anyone while living in the hospice. Most of the other residents of the hospice are white and French and so Mariotte is culturally and racially alienated. She has been there so long that she denies herself the belief in reality beyond the walls of the hospice; no one ever comes to visit her. Mariotte's alienation and difficulties remembering underline the social nature of memory. The search for the past coincides with the search for the collective as she yearns for the ethnic dish over which so much cultural and historical knowledge was shared. Moreover, the racial alienation and obscuring of Mariotte's memory in the hospice parallels the situation in France. While Martinicans are considered French citizens and are literally part of the population, their history is not equally represented within the French collective.

In *Le Livre d'Emma* and *L'Exil selon Julia*, the historical transmission to the postmemory generation is successful due to the embodied connections with the history formed by an engaging performance-based method. Even though the audience is removed geographically and generationally, they come to be a part of the collective consciousness through active participation in memorial work. This memorial work exceeds basic knowledge of historical events in that it also passes on embodied cultural practices that invoke an authentic remembrance of previous generations. In the novels, these generations are synonymous with the matriarchal lineage of each protagonist. Bringing to light the lives of these women is an act of

resistance to colonialist historical transmission that ignores these participants in their history.

Conclusion

The novels in this study portray an aesthetic of sensory memory in a diasporic context. While the body is the site of memorial storage, the senses are the communicative channels that intake and then reanimate the past. For Emma, sights, smells, and sounds provide physical proof of the atrocities of the slave trade. While French revisionism attempts to cover its tracks in the annals of national history, French guilt remains evident in the memorial landscape. Furthermore, due to the strong memorial power of the senses, sensations and their historical significance remain with the individual outside of the environment. For instance, the blue of the ocean, synonymous with Emma's home, Grand-Lagon, and the graveyard of the victims of slavery, is echoed in every body of water. Diasporic migrations encompass a cartography of memory that is experienced through the senses.

The matrix of memory that is formed by the intersection of time, body, and environment conjures a space for authentic recollective experience. The individual reanimates the past so that historical knowledge is not just acquired intellectually, but relived and appropriated physically. This intimate connection solidifies participation within the collective consciousness through shared experience, creating an inclusive form of identification within a heterogeneous population. For Gisèle, who is so young when she leaves her native land of Guadeloupe, this connection with the history and culture is vital to her understanding of her identity.

At the same time, it is important that Gisèle consciously sought out this recollective experience and meditated on her memories in order to recreate it.

For Julia, sensory memory provided a sort of metaphysical travel that brought her back in time and space to Guadeloupe. The alienation in the foreign land and culture of French left her physically ill but her senses gave her respite. While the sensory memory reinforces cultural, historical, and ancestral ties to the homeland, it also provides comfort to those living in alienation. Furthermore since the space created through sensory memory happens somewhere in between two locations, it succeeds in subverting the dominant métropole.

Sensory memory binds individuals to their native land during diasporic migrations. Through physical remembrance, the environment of the native land can be conjured through the senses. This sort of metaphysical travel can provide comfort to an individual suffering from a life in exile like Julia. The movement created through sensory memory echoes Gallagher's concept of *ici-là* and this physical indeterminacy creates an inclusive space that subverts hegemonic notions of locality. It gives individuals agency in their physical locale while living in exile. However, for Julia, sensory memory is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, she takes comfort in the memorial experiences that steep her in the sights and smells of home; on the other hand, they also seem to hinder her existence in the new place and serve as another barrier to her in the new land. If an individual relies too much on sensory memory for an escape, he or she may not be able to become accustomed

to a new land or culture. This may prohibit an individual from the “renewal of oneself” that Said claims is essential to any kind of travel, and is presumably more important when traveling to a place that is to be a new home.

As the Caribbean population becomes more and more decentralized, the native environment becomes a distant site of historical and cultural knowledge. By accessing the landscape through sensory memory, the connection with nature is maintained and this, in turn, perpetuates collective memory. As such, sensory memory prevents estrangement when the exiled individual lives abroad for a sustained period of time.

The trans-generational transmission of embodied memory can be effectively accomplished through performance. Performance-based methods engage the senses of the transmitter and the receiver. The acquisition of knowledge is not a passive process, but a dynamic exchange between individuals. The reciprocity of this process creates a bond between the individuals that echoes the interconnection of the past and present.

Sensory memory incorporates emotional, historical and cultural experience to create an authentic recollection of the past. The synesthetic fluidity of the senses reflects the relational nature of sensory memory. Blending geographical borders and generational divides, sensory memory also highlights the interconnection of our world. Integrating the mind and the body, sensory memory subverts Western modes of remembrance that eclipse the role of the body in authentic ways of knowing.

While this study has focused on the five traditional senses in our own day, many other studies expand upon these to include, for instance, temperature and pain. More information on how the body responds to and is impacted by its environment will lead to more informed conclusions about this phenomenon. Greater understanding of the role that society has played in gender stereotypes will also bring to bear more information on the similarity of the sexes in the capacity for bodily ways of knowing.

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