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Unforgetting Trauma: Dionne Brand's Haunted Histories

Erica L. Johnson
anthuriumcaribjournal@gmail.com

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Dionne Brand's novel, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999), is a haunted story in which history "loops and repeats." The concepts of "hauntings" and "ghosts" that drive this essay reflect Brand's representation of the experience and legacy of trauma while maintaining Brand's attention to a corporeal as well as a psychological impact of trauma in a transgenerational context. Brand's project—as she has stated in interviews and makes clear in her writing—is that of "unforgetting."¹ Here Brand poses a critical problem, for how is it possible to "unforget" trauma? As trauma studies have shown, trauma evades memory in individual experience: trauma is "registered rather than experienced. It seems to have bypassed perception and the consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche" (Hartman 537). Trauma "remains unprocessed—not 'knowledge' in the usual sense, yet felt in the body" (Kaplan 147). Does the body's memory, the inscription of trauma in the body, constitute memory, as the 19th century Trinidadian slave, Marie Ursule, foresees when she envisions "the lives of her great-great-grandchildren . . . perhaps she can leave it [memory] in bones or gestures muscular with dispossession"? (20).² Brand's novel both enacts and informs trauma theory in that the trauma of slavery, and Marie Ursule's experience of trauma in particular, haunt and shape the lives of her descendents, yet at the same time Brand details an artistic process of "unforgetting" through which she represents the unrepresentable experience of trauma. Brand's evocative and poetic portrayal of the themes of trauma, memory, inheritance, and diasporic experience compels a reading of trauma theory not only as it illuminates her text, but as it is reconfigured by the novel.

A logical place to begin, given the generations of ghosts who haunt *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, is with Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's notion of the phantom as a figure of the transgenerational haunting of trauma, but first I will consider the extent to which trauma theory exists in a vexed relationship to literary and critical work concerned with African diasporic experience, for Brand's reimagining of trauma reveals the potential disconnect between traditional psychoanalytic theories of trauma and black experience. At its most basic level, this disconnect results from the European cultural and historical underpinnings of psychoanalysis from which trauma theory emerges; as Claudia Tate puts it in her lengthy and considered defense of her project in *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels*, many would charge that psychoanalysis "advances Western hegemony over the cultural production of black Americans, indeed over black subjectivity" (5n). Similarly, Christopher Lane introduces *The Psychoanalysis of Race* by refuting the claim that "psychoanalysis for too long has been misperceived as ahistorical and politically naïve" (2). Perhaps the most salient axis of psychoanalysis and theories of race can be located in the extensive body of criticism devoted to Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytically informed critique of colonial ideology.³ Yet these particular citations are taken from works that recoup the potential of psychoanalytic theory to illuminate black experience. As J. Brooks Bousin argues—directly after acknowledging the extent to which psychoanalytic theory has emerged from study of "the dominant white culture"—"a race-cognizant application of shame and trauma theory . . . shows that African Americans have been forced to deal not only with individual and/or family shame and trauma but also with cultural shame and racial trauma" (6). By emphasizing cultural context in particular, Bousin charts a direction for the study of trauma in literature that reflects

experiences that were *not* taken into account in the development of psychoanalytic theory and its branch of trauma theory. Through a focus on trauma as not only a psychological concept, but as a culturally-transmitted marker of communal history and experience, Bousin concludes that “trauma affects not only the individual but also, as studies of those victimized by the Holocaust have shown, victim-survivor populations, and the effects of trauma can be transmitted intergenerationally” (8).

The idea that trauma is a transgenerational presence is central to Abraham and Torok’s discussion of the “phantom,” a concept that lends itself to the analysis of diasporic experience. While Abraham and Torok work within a clinically-informed psychoanalytic framework through which they focus on the individual psyche and how best to treat their patients, their attention to the hauntings of the individual psyche serves as a point of departure for cultural and literary analysis as well. Their translator takes this cue when he notes,

the concept of the phantom moves the focus of psychoanalytic inquiry beyond the individual being analyzed because it postulates that some people unwittingly inherit the secret psychic substance of their ancestors’ lives . . . here symptoms do not spring from the individual’s own life experiences but from someone else’s psychic conflicts, traumas, or secrets. (Rand 166)

Rand’s explication of Abraham and Torok provides a bridge between psychoanalytic work and cultural analysis when he points out that “shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possibly even entire nations” (171) can be understood through the *application* of Abraham and Torok’s work. While Rand does not actually perform such an application, he makes the important observation that Abraham and Torok’s concept of the phantom can be understood as “the interpersonal and transgenerational consequence of silence” (168), an observation that potentially illuminates not only the impact of silenced histories on the individual psyche, but the dynamics of silenced history more generally. Brand’s goal of “unforgetting” history, like Toni Morrison’s project of evoking “rememories,” addresses the extent to which the histories and individual stories of African diasporic experience have been stricken from written historical record.⁴ It is the expansion of psychoanalytic theory’s understanding of silence with respect to the individual psyche to our perception of how silence plays out on the level of collective psychological experience that is important here.

The parallels between trauma theory’s take on individual trauma and discursive patterns of historical representation emerge from the common problem of silence. In the case of trauma theory, the narration of trauma is seen to be impossible in light of the break between experience and language that characterizes trauma. In Cathy Caruth’s influential phrase, trauma figures as “unclaimed experience;” the question is whether this experience is *claimable* through methods of representation other than that of mimetic narrative. Morrison’s rememory and Brand’s unforgetting present methodological possibilities which address the unrepresentability of trauma while at the same time claiming traumatic experience. One important way in which they do this

is to narrate trauma through collective experience rather than rehearsing the trauma scenario in which the individual victim has no access to his or her discreet experience. Brand, like Morrison, resituates trauma narrative as an endeavor of collective, interpersonal memory. Ashraf Rushdy defines Morrison's rememory as the signification of "a magical anamnesis available to one not involved in the originary act, a Kantian noumenon substantiated into what Freud calls 'psychical reality'" (304); after applying this theory to her novels, he concludes that "discrete scenes become a coherent whole in this interpersonal anamnesis" (Rushdy 321). Through this apprehension of trauma narrative as an interpersonal construction, we see how Brand too finds a way to "unforget" trauma.

Brand's poetic unforgetting is imbricated in the larger question of historical representability as well. A similar problem emerges in the case of trauma narrative and in the case of diasporic historical narrative in that trauma is seen to be unrepresentable; in historical record, vast swaths of experience have been erased or never represented, a problem central to numerous literary texts concerned with diasporic experience. Édouard Glissant goes so far as to characterize Caribbean consciousness as, in effect, "nonhistorical;" he argues that Caribbean historical consciousness is the product of "shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces. This dislocation of the continuum and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all, characterize what I call a nonhistory. The negative effect of this nonhistory is therefore the erasing of the collective memory" (Glissant 62). The silence or erasure of history forces the question of how to approach the history of those long denied a voice. Silence resonates at the heart of each scenario, yet the resonances are deeply perceptible. Caruth suggests that, "through the notion of trauma . . . we can understand that a rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not" (11).

Another Caribbean writer, Maryse Condé, approaches the problem of silenced history in her novel, translated as *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*. In this postmodern text, Condé reconstructs the story of Tituba, a slave who appears in the records of the Salem witch trials. Mimicking the language of the extant historical document, Condé recreates the scene that the document records:

It seemed that I was gradually being forgotten. I felt that I would only be mentioned in passing in these Salem witchcraft trials about which so much would be written later, trials that would arouse the curiosity and pity of generations to come as the greatest testimony of a superstitious and barbaric age. There would be mention here and there of "a slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing 'hoodoo.'" There would be no mention of my age or my personality. I would be ignored. As early as the end of the seventeenth century, petitions would be circulated, judgments made, rehabilitating the victims, restoring their honor, and returning their property to their descendants. I would never be included!

Tituba would be condemned forever! There would never, ever be a careful, sensitive biography recreating my life and its suffering. (110)

Tituba's thought is only partially belied by its context in Condé's careful, sensitive fictional biography. While Tituba can be imagined, and while her absent history can be "mobilized," none of this changes the fact of her absence.⁵ Condé both creates a biography for Tituba and mourns the loss of history and biography, for Tituba's is one of many stories that are forever lost. Later generations will never know what she knew about the witch trials, nor will we ever know about her life more intimately; by extension, Condé implies, groups who have been historically silenced do not find mimetic representation in historical narration. Like psychoanalytic theory's description of the trauma scenario, the silenced, lost, or unrepresentable historical "fact" continues to make an appearance, albeit as something other than "fact:" "in its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11). Condé's novel plays out the fact of loss—or the loss of fact—against its consequences in such a way that we see how even silenced histories and experiences continue to be present, if in the form of haunting rather than narrative.

This historical scenario dovetails again with trauma theory in that it forces us to be attentive to that which is *not* apparent, and to interpret resonant absences as representations of the "real." Isabel Hoving argues in her analysis of Caribbean texts that "in women's writing in the postcolonial, silence is often the privileged space through which the construction of subjectivity and the issue of representation is thought . . . [it] is also used to open a space where the counterdiscursivity and the materiality of the female postcolonial embodied self can begin to be written" (27). Hoving's attention to the interplay of silence and materiality in the symbolic systems of the Caribbean women writers she analyzes is apt, and in the case of Brand we will see how it is that silence can be routed and represented through the body and through intergenerational connections. This methodological stance can be characterized as a reading of hauntings, insofar as the concept of haunting speaks precisely to the impact of silent, invisible, and absent elements on reality. Avery Gordon, in her extended analysis of haunting, argues persuasively that the present, material world is thoroughly haunted. In a passage on Morrison and memory she writes, "the propinquity of hard-to-touch, hard-to-see abstractions powerfully crisscrossing our concrete quotidian lives is key" (Gordon 168). Between Abraham and Torok's phantom and Gordon's theory of sociological haunting, a rhetorical as well as substantive case for a methodological connection in the reading of trauma narrative and historical discourse becomes all the more compelling. Ultimately, silenced histories can be read as communal trauma narratives. Furthermore, Rand points out that Abraham and Torok's notion of the phantom is derived from a specific folkloric tradition through which a certain kind of ancestor haunts his or her descendents: "those who were denied the rites of burial or died an unnatural, abnormal death, were criminals or outcasts, or suffered injustice in their lifetime" (Rand 167). The resonances

with African diasporic experience are clear given the vast injustices and murderous treatment perpetrated on the fictionalized historical characters represented in Brand's text.⁶

The Crypt of Trauma

Rushdy expands on Freud's notion of the primal scene to define it as "the critical event (or events) whose significance to the *narrated life* becomes manifest only at a secondary critical event, when by a preconscious association the primal scene is recalled" (303, emphasis mine). Although this definition of the primal scene is not framed within the specific context of trauma theory, it raises the central question of trauma through the suggestion that a gap exists between a "real" point of reference and the narrated life that forms the substance of literary representation. Rushdy sees other critics—including Freud himself—as all too ready to devalue memory on the basis of the interchangeability between the "real" and "fantasy" in memories of primal scenes. In the case of trauma, in particular, the inaccessibility of any actual scene is precisely what results in the elliptical, repetitive nature of memories that are not so much memories as such as they are re-registrations of the unremembered trauma. Because Rushdy works through Morrison's texts though, he is able to illustrate the interpersonal nature of memory and the subsequent "cruelty" of discrediting individual memory simply because it exists at an angle to narrative. The false distinction between the real and the fantastic collapse in collective memory, and in Brand's poetics.

As Abraham and Torok caution, any metapsychological concept of reality is predicated on silence in that reality "is born of remaining concealed, unspoken . . . the fact of reality consists in these words whose covert existence is certified by their manifest absence" (158, 160). By acknowledging the impasse between not just trauma and language but reality and language, Abraham and Torok helpfully dismantle any distinction between reality and fantasy, allowing us to turn our attention to the more consequential properties of reality as an adjective: that is, to the real consequences of what Abraham and Torok refer to as the "crypt" where unarticulated reality resides in their "topography of reality." The question of whether this unarticulated material is realistic or fantasmic is superfluous, for "in either case, the tomb's content is unique in that it cannot appear in the light of day as speech" (Abraham and Torok 159). At this point, they basically equate reality with silence, a move with powerful consequences for our ability to approach silenced histories, for they then offer an examination of the ways in which silenced reality *circulates*. By looking at the ways in which encrypted reality is circulated, we defer the project of excavating "truth" for that of understanding its currency among the lives of real subjects. This approach to reality as a descriptor—of the real lives, the real effects, and the real consequences of trauma—is of particular importance to reading Brand's text, for literary circulation of traumatic knowledge is paramount to representation.

Brand defies the unrepresentability of trauma in two ways: first, she presents her readers with a representation of a scene of trauma. Although Brand does not suggest that this scene will make its way into its victims' memories as such, her description of the scene grafts memory onto

materiality in such a way that memory is no longer the purview of the individual psyche and hence no longer as perishable. She recounts what resonates in the narrative as a powerfully emblematic if not “primary” experience in her story of Marie Ursule, who orchestrates a mass suicide among the slaves on the aptly named Mon Chagrin estate. The event is described as a chilling response to the entrapment of the commodified body: for “the body was a terrible thing,” and along with the other slaves, she and they “had plotted together, they had given the mind this mystery to work out, how to ignore the body, how to reach the other shore” (17). Yet this act of termination, this final denial of the body, lays the groundwork for the novel’s articulation of a history that “loops and repeats;” thus, the mass suicide is represented as a haunting primal scene. Moreover, the poisoning figures as the source and product of memory even before it occurs, as we see in Brand’s description of Marie Ursule’s consultation with the Caribs for the recipe: “she and they sat in each other’s contradictions, the straggle of Caribs moving reluctantly toward memory, Marie Ursule, willingly” (3). The poisoning occurs at a key axis of memory so although it will not live on in narrative memory, it is a central point around which both narrative and memory revolve.

Of course, this representation of a scene of trauma is more descriptive than substantive, given the nature of trauma narrative. As Kali Tal points out,

if the goal is to convey the traumatic experience, no second-hand rendering of it is adequate. The horrific events that have shaped the author’s construction of reality can only be *described* in literature, not recreated. Only the experience of trauma has the traumatizing effect. The combination of the drive to testify and the impossibility of recreating the event for the reader is one of the defining characteristics of trauma literature. (121, emphasis mine)

Hence Brand’s description of a scene that carries the weight of being primary to subsequently traumatized psyches is metaphorical as much as it is representative. The representation of a moment of trauma is committed in such a way that the moment functions not as a primal scene so much as a source of haunting. This shift from referent to ghost is extremely important. As a source of psychological and transgenerational haunting, the horror of Marie Ursule’s story continues to have undeniably real effects on individual lives. No longer is the question of accuracy the most important with regard to memory, for whether the event is recalled or not, it *acts* upon Marie Ursule and her descendents. Brand not only presents her reader with a scene of trauma, but she transposes the scene in such a way that she bridges the gap between traumatic memory and narration.

The second way in which Brand unforgets trauma drives the entire novel. That is, memory “thickens” bodily form in the novel, so foundational is it to existence. Given this ontological dynamic, by which bodily existence and the process of living are articulated by memory, the problem of forgetting is crucial and results in what Marie Ursule foresees as “the lives of her great-great-grandchildren . . . they would come to be whatever impulse gathered the

greater in them, like threatened forests flowering” (20). She anticipates the likelihood that these children will not possess memory that explains to them their experiences of exile and dispossession, although she entertains the possibility that their bodies as well as their minds will be imprinted with the unconscious knowledge of her trauma. The scene of the mass suicide is not remembered as such, for *At the Full and Change of the Moon* critically charts the silence that surrounds this historical event at the same time that Brand decenters the primacy of a discreet, reality-signifying scene by showing how discreet events of desperation or brutality exist in a symbiotic relationship with other events, past and future. Indeed, if reality is signified by silence as Abraham and Torok suggest, the repercussions and circulation of one event *through* other interrelated events enable us to understand the nature of the trauma.

Thus the interrelated nature of events—be they the scenes of trauma or scenes more accessible to mimetic memory—has the effect of demystifying any primal scene as a privileged explanation for the symptoms experienced by the trauma victim. More importantly, one of Brand’s contributions to the understanding of trauma is to dismantle the primacy of any single event in order to arrive at the point where, as Rushdy says, “only slavery stands alone as cause and curse” (318). Instead of functioning as an explanatory, privileged site of trauma, the scene of the mass suicide and its equally horrific repercussions signify the institution of slavery. Thus, the events with which the reader is presented signify an entire *system* of history in which the characters are ensnared. On a more intimate level, Brand presents her reader with an example of another event that illustrates trauma *en mise-en-abyme*. The mass suicide that appears to form the crux of Marie Ursule’s fate is the second revolt she leads. In the case of an earlier revolt, she is caught and sentenced to wear an iron ring on her leg for two years; later, “the memory of that ring of iron hung on, even after it was removed. A ghost of pain around her ankle. An impression. It choreographed her walk and her first thoughts each day”(4). Not to belabor the clear parallels between the ghostly ring and trauma narrative, the material event and object are gone, yet they persist in encircling the material present. The language that Brand uses in this passage also reflects the importance of hauntings in her text, for the material impact of the absent ring perfectly illustrates the way in which dead, silent, unremembered, and invisible presences shape characters’ lives.

Heirs and Exiles

One character in particular is shaped by the dialogue between forgetting and remembering, and that is Marie Ursule’s surviving partner, Kamena. Kamena exists essentially as an embodied ghost, and in his status as such he illustrates the legacy of trauma as Lawrence Langer describes it: “The survivor does not travel a road from the normal to the bizarre back to the normal, but from the normal to the bizarre back to a normalcy so permeated by the bizarre encounter with atrocity that it can never be purified again. The two worlds haunt each other . . .” (in Tal, 119-20). A figure of this haunting, Kamena inhabits two worlds not only psychically, but physically; Brand describes Kamena as moving “from the realm of the physical into a completely different realm—into thought. From flesh into thought” (in Abbas 4).

Kamena's one goal is to return to Terre Bouillante, a Maroon community where he once found refuge. His transposition from flesh to thought mirrors the nature of his journey, for relocating Terre Bouillante is not a matter of *remembering* a route. In Kamena's case, as in the case of the narrative as a whole, memory is replaced by the dynamic of haunting, and if Kamena is to arrive at his desired destination, he needs not to remember, but to become a ghost—the ghost of the Kamena who first arrives as an escaped slave, when “somebody had tied a rope around his belly in the rain and half dragged him to Terre Bouillante through the mud and forest, he was not alive in any plain way” (30). Living in the Maroon settlement, “Kamena acquired its ghostliness” (32). He thus concludes that he can only relocate the settlement as he did the first time, as “the end of himself somehow and his last moment of hope and when he was beyond it” (32). He must not so much remember as embody memory in much the same way that trauma cannot be remembered so much as re-experienced.

What is important about Kamena's existence as both a living person and a ghost, then, is that his ghostly state is described as devoid of memory, for “what he know of his life was not worth remembering” (32). His desire to return to Terre Bouillante—clearly an existential state as much as a location on the island—speaks to his desire to occupy a moment free of history, free of memory. Lest one conclude that it is possible to in any way dispense with history and memory, Kamena finds that he is caught in the imperative of memory, a scenario that forces the conclusion that memory and history can be embodied, haunting, or silenced, but that even “that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities” (Gordon 17). In lieu of remembering, Kamena displaces his memory onto his daughter Bola, to whom he returns between fruitless journeys in order to ask her to “hold” his memories for him. His forgetting ultimately ravages him: “The last day she recalled of him, he was burnt up with walking and dried away with crying, starved with remembering. ‘Hold this for me,’ he said, his cheeks emaciated from lack of water and his joints whistling like reeds, ‘-----’” (60). Kamena illustrates the excruciating toll exacted by memory through his knowledge that the alternative to remembering is to live as a ghost. The ghost does not need to remember insofar as s/he occupies a haunted space in which s/he *embodies* memory and *enacts* memory on others. The ghostly Kamena becomes Gordon's seething presence, thus liberating himself from the “taken-for-granted realities” of traumatic experience. Kamena's ghostliness reflects not his physical death but the death of memory in such a way that we see how false the distinction between “accurate” and “inaccurate” memory is, faced as we are by the distinction between memory and existence.

Ghostly as he is, Kamena refers us to the figure of the phantom as a means of circulating memory and knowledge. Torok describes the phantom as a result of “*a direct empathy with the unconscious or the rejected psychic matter of a parental object . . . the phantom is alien to the subject who harbors it . . . the diverse manifestations of the phantom . . . we call haunting*” (181). On one level, Kamena asks Bola to remember geographical points on an imagined map; however, his final request that she “hold” the memory of “-----” alerts us to the fact that he

passes on silenced as well as voiced memories. He also asks her to “hold” unconscious psychic material, and in this transaction the two illustrate the creation and maintenance of the transgenerational phantom. Abraham writes, “The phantom is therefore also a metapsychological fact: what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (171). Indeed, the hauntings through which traumatic memory circulates in Brand’s text hinges on metapsychological fact, for the transgenerational phantom forces the reader to hear history at the same time that it encrypts individual characters’ memories.

Furthermore, Bola’s inheritance of unvoiced memory is made clear through the phantom of her mother as well, for initially (and arguably, persistently) Bola does not make a shift from semiotic to symbolic perception of the world: “She only knows time in the memory of Marie Ursule now” (26). Since memory thickens form, Bola inherits her mother’s haunted geography when, after she and Kamena flee the scene of the slave revolt, she lives in the now deserted place where Marie Ursule was enslaved by Ursuline nuns. That memories of Marie Ursule’s past surface in Bola’s narrative, rather than in Marie Ursule’s, speaks to the presence of Abraham and Torok’s phantom for Bola’s memories of the nuns are alien to her own experience, yet they are concrete fixtures in her world. As I stated earlier with regard to the utility of Abraham and Torok’s phantom, the phantom emerges not only from an individual unconscious, but its points of origin are multiple and indicative of social as well as individual reality. Brand makes it clear that the hauntings of Culebra Bay arise from multiple sites of memory as well as from the interstices of the nuns’ historical narrative which, because it is told from the point of view of dominant power, silences the historical fact of their crime. Of Culebra Bay, she writes,

[t]his place is imagined over and over again. Each fragment belonging to a certain mind—a reverie, a version—each fragment held carelessly or closely. Which is why it still exists. Nothing happened here. Nothing extraordinary for its time. Two nuns held slaves like any priest or explorer or settler in the New World. It is others, the ones they held, who keep the memory, who imagine over and over again where they might be. It is they who keep the details alive and raw like yesterday. (43)

The disconnect between experience and memory that defines trauma narrative is seen here as an articulating principle of the novel.

Thus Bola occupies a paradoxical position for, on the one hand, she is a vessel of memory and knowledge in that she witnesses the ghost-worlds spawned by her parents’ suffering and trauma. On the other hand, though, she refuses to testify in any narrative or concrete manner. Given the vast number of children to whom she refuses to “tell” history, Bola emerges as what Caroline Rody refers to as an archetypal figure in Caribbean literature: a mother-of-forgetting. Rody defines the mother-of-forgetting as a figure of colonized consciousness who cannot pass on to her children their own histories, or, by extension, a communal, ethnic, or national history. In the latter case, the mother-of-forgetting refers generally to Caribbean consciousness as Glissant

describes it: as rent by an unarticulated experience of trauma that precludes the consolidation of a collective identity in the present. But again, Brand's poetics of haunting intercede to complicate any understanding of forgetting as a lack of knowledge about the past, for how are we to define knowledge at this point? The children may not know about Marie Ursule's and Kamena's lives, but Bola does bequeath to them the phantom whose source lies in her own parents' psychic lives.

For example, there is Priest, who fulfills Marie Ursule's prophecy that her great-great-grandchildren will live like "threatened forests flowering;" moreover, Priest's embrace of the physical world to the exclusion of the need to historicize or remember echoes Kamena's experience as an embodied ghost. Priest "loved the anonymous gristle of a dark street . . . he loved the mixed unidentifiable flesh of it squeezed through his fingers . . . this was the heart of the world, he thought, palpable and brutal, sucking in blood and pumping it out callously without thought, just instinct, that was its only mission and he was like a vein in it, hungry and just as ruthless" (173). There is Maya, another great-great-grandchild who contemplates her love of "drift" and the "phases and shapes and parts of her body" (220) as she sculpts diverse tableaux of herself in her prostitute's window in Amsterdam. Maya's pursuit of detachment, of weightlessness and drift is confounded by her daughter's inheritance of the memories that Maya begrudges her. Even in her attempt to become another mother-of-forgetting, Maya is confronted with a child who is "flooded in crimson and the weight of a man falling, then she is flooded in airy fields and then she is flooded in Willemstad streets, sometimes she is buying the hearts of cactus in a market, and then she is flooded in glass cases and windows . . . she is drenched in things her mother will never tell her" (225). There is Eula, who writes a blue airmail letter from Canada to her dead mother, reflecting on her exilic existence and observing, "[h]istory opens and closes, Mama. I was reading a book the other day about the nineteenth century and it seemed like reading about now. I think we forget who we were. Nothing is changing, it is just that we are forgetting" (234). Again, this is spoken in the context of a narrative whose momentum builds toward a grand, collective unforgetting of a family history that is traced back to the nineteenth century. Each of these children is possessed by a phantom, made manifest primarily through the common experience of exile. That is, the psychic exile experienced by Marie Ursule and Kamena becomes manifest in their descendents through a proliferating narrative of exile.

This brief summary of individual characters' experiences of the transgenerational phantom serves to illustrate, not only the haunting consequences of trauma, but the extent to which this trauma translates directly into the experience of exile. Defined as a broken journey or a broken narrative, exile mirrors the psychological experience of the break between traumatic experience and narrative. Charlotte Sturgess draws these parallels as well in her comment that migrant Caribbean characters are "suspended on the border between worlds, where the 'real' is deferred and transit assured, the character's displacement would seem above all to translate the impossible terms of discourse in a narrative where reference cannot be secured" (205). The language in this quote also brings us back to the problems of the "real" and referentiality central

to the impasse between trauma and narrative, exile and memory. While it is not possible to go into a review of the literature on exile that would do this enormous literary trope justice, it is important to point out the salient features of exile vis-à-vis *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Namely, exile is portrayed as a geographical reality underlying the very existence of diaspora; more specifically, Brand's characters experience exile as geographical displacement through the family's dispersal throughout the western hemisphere, yet Brand's attention to the internal lives of her characters throws exile into relief as an existential condition that results from their inheritance of their ancestors' traumas—their phantoms. The characters that live in distant, hostile environments in Europe and North America, and the characters that remain in Trinidad experience exile to an equal degree. Nowhere is this made clearer than in the case of Bola's great-great-granddaughter, who is also named Bola. The namesake's inheritance of her family's hauntings is abundantly evident.

Perhaps the most important point to make about Bola's exilic existence and engagement with her family's ghosts is that she defies the logic of exorcism. That is, Abraham proposes that, "once known, understood, and exorcised, the phantom should go from our unconscious, vanish into the reality whence it had come, disappear into a bygone and vanquished world" (190). In the context of her analysis of ghosts' roles in representing silenced ethnic histories, Kathleen Brogan also broaches the idea of exorcism as an endpoint when she writes that "the masterplot of the cultural ghost story [is] a paradigmatic movement from possession to exorcism" (3). Exorcised ghosts and phantoms signify "cures" and "releases" from trauma. In the person of Bola, however, Brand shows haunting to be a more complex and less linear manifestation of history than any narrative of haunting that might result in exorcism.

Unlike the migrant exiles that strive to forget, Bola thinks of herself as a vessel of memory. Indeed, she is overwhelmed by memory in the sense that she spends her entire life rehearsing her childhood in order to freeze time in a moment before her grandmother's death. Rather than lose her grandmother, Bola elects to live with her ghost. One consequence of her embrace of the text's ubiquitous ghosts, however, is Bola's exile from the world of the living. Others' perceptions of Bola's exile as a symptom of insanity raises a critical question about the importance of collective memory for phantoms are clearly something that everyone in her family inherits. Unlike Priest, Eula, Maya, and others whose exile takes the form of physical dislocation but who maintain even the most vexed family relationships, Bola withdraws from any marker of metapsychological reality that might signify her grandmother's death. Because Bola lacks an interpersonal dialogue through which to remember, she is described by others as "not in the world." She counters, "At least I *am* always in the world. My sisters are forgetful but I remember *everyone* . . . I never forget" (289-90, emphasis mine). In Bola's case, then, the transposition of traumatic memory into the condition of exile reflects the *necessity* of interpersonal and intergenerational negotiations of the phantoms of trauma.

Bola's memory exists at an angle to that of others because while others' memories may be interpersonal, hers is cumulative. While she does not claim to remember events, she does

claim to remember *everyone*; her awareness of past lives and phantoms is thus so vast and decentered that the idea that cognition of trauma takes the “form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche” (Hartman 537), only partially described Bola given the context of the novel’s many circulating traumas. That Bola suffers the consequences of trauma is clear through her severely split psyche as it is portrayed in several passages. For example, she becomes estranged from language, as we see when she reads a letter intended to correct her retreat into a haunted world: “The words my mother read were in gibberish and I had to put the g’s and l’s back in to understand. ‘Deagelar Magalama, Hogolope yogolo argarla wegelell agalan egelenjoygologyigiling thegle begelest ogolof hegeleath’” (283). She becomes alienated from her own voice and her own face: “I could hear the echo of myself against the cemetery and hear it clang on the gates with the iron curls so sometimes I would have to speak in my mind also” (267). The painful division between Bola’s internal and external perceptions of herself and of reality, thus play out through her misrecognition of her own voice, as well as her estrangement from her living family members. Each schism articulates the banishment of the “real,” and once the “real” is relinquished, Bola comes face to face with ghosts and silences.

Bola’s exile from the “real” is illustrated in a beautiful and eerie passage in which Brand describes her response to mirrors, for not only does this passage reveal a psychic split, but it charts the multiple sources for her social and psychological state of exile from her ancestors’ collective trauma to the personal trauma of losing her beloved grandmother, who Bola thinks of as her mother. Brand writes,

. . . when our mother came back from the hospital in her coffin, something had happened to the mirrors. So that when our mother and I arrived this last time and my mother told me to leave the covers I was disturbed by the mirrors underneath. They had turned into jumbies and I knew every time I passed by them, I knew that they were not mirrors any more. I had glimpsed someone there. She was there and I could only see her eyes, which were closed and only opened for a minute to watch me and then I dropped the cover. In that simple moment I saw that she was not me, not a girl with her mother coming happily home, but she was . . . I cannot say what she was . . . (283)

At the point where mirroring becomes a non-mimetic process, referentiality can be said to be thoroughly dismantled with regard to individual identity, the site of trauma, and the source of memory. Because Bola lives in a house haunted by numerous ghosts, the jumbies that Bola glimpses in her own mirror image refer to multiple lives; clearly, she herself becomes ghost-like through her failure to engage what Slavoj Žižek would call “symbolic identification,” or the social audience through which one necessarily projects one’s self-perception. She also lives with the ghost of her grandmother, whose image is implicated because it also appears in another case of non-mimetic mirroring. Finally, as Abraham points out, “the phantom is . . . a metapsychological fact: what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (171). Bola lives with not only the ghost of her grandmother, but the secrets buried in her

grandmother, including that of Marie Ursule. Indeed, Marie Ursule's ghost is very much a presence in Bola's haunted house, for she arrives as the grandmother's visitor, "a lady, came limping to our house as if one foot was sore . . . She had a heavy ring around her ankle and a rope around her throat. I loosened the rope, I fanned her as I had fanned our mother when the sun was too hot" (285). Bola's hospitality toward the phantom serves to open the "crypt" of transgenerational haunting without exorcizing it.

Bola's concluding chapter suggests that history does not progress toward an end or point of resolution, but rather that it continues to circulate and to affect metapsychological reality. In psychoanalytic terms, Bola *incorporates* the "love object" (her grandmother along with her grandmother's phantoms) as well as the trauma of loss within herself in such a way that she no longer has access to knowledge of loss or trauma. As Abraham and Torok put it, the melancholic incorporates loss into an "intrapsychic crypt" which is sealed off within the unconscious. Bola fits the profile of the melancholic perfectly. What is interesting, though, is that her crypt is rendered porous by Brand's trope of haunting. That is, ghosts are not products of individual psychosis in the novel. They circulate through transgenerational phantoms in such a way that Bola's conscious registration of the ghosts serves to *actualize* and corroborate the silenced histories that haunt the other characters.

By seeing Bola as a site of cumulative, communal trauma, we see how her exilic existence in her haunted house is an act of unforgetting. Bola provides hospitality for the ghosts; she listens to them and lives with them, sustaining their presence in the world. As a melancholic, Bola cannot mourn, for "when, in the form of imaginary or real nourishment, we ingest the love-object we miss, this means that *we refuse to mourn* and that we shun the consequences of mourning even though our psyche is fully bereaved" (Abraham and Torok 127). Yet Brand's text is tender and elegiac, its poetic force a means of representing the intimate experiences of haunted lives. The deferral of mourning drives the narrative across generations in such a way that the unmourned gaps in history and in memory are nonetheless observed. The routing of traumatic memory through interconnected lives and the ghosts that haunt them serves to unforget traumatic history by revealing its constant resonance in the present.

Notes

¹See Charlotte Sturges' essay, "Dionne Brand: Writing the Margins." Sturges uses the term "unforgetting" in quotes but does not attribute it, so although the origin of the term is not clear, it is one that evokes Brand's commentary on her work beautifully. For example, Brand says in an interview with Nuzhat Abbas, "You find yourself in a world of forgetting. And your project—well, mine at any rate—is remembering." In her autobiographical text, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand recounts the source of her novel in historical research—or, more accurately, how her novel emerges from the holes in the history she researched. The process she describes could well be described as unforgetting.

²I will cite quotations from *At the Full and Change of the Moon* by page number alone.

³See *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives* and *Fanon: A Critical Reader*.

⁴Morrison introduces the important concept of rememory in her novel *Beloved*.

⁵Wendy Hesford argues that the real question surrounding trauma and its interpretations is that of how trauma is mobilized to define "the real." While individuals' traumas are often privileged as "authentic," this authenticating of the victim's experience is undermined by the widely held understanding that trauma is unnarratable. Thus Hesford argues that it is not the authenticity of the trauma that affects the "real," but rather the way in which the unnarratable experience of trauma is mobilized to political effect. (8)

⁶Brand, like Morrison and Condé, takes a real historical figure and event as the source of her novel. In *A Map to the Door of No Return* and in interviews—such as "At the Full and Change of CanLit: An Interview with Dionne Brand," Rinaldo Walcott and Leslie Sanders. *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme*. 20.2 (2000)—she explains how she came across the story of Thisbee, a Trinidadian slave who was brutally murdered for leading slave revolts.

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