

'The sea has no memory': memories of the body, the sea and the land in Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997)¹

Susanne Pichler

English Department, University of Innsbruck, Innrain 52, 6020 Innsbruck, Austria. Email:susanne.pichler@uibk.ac.at

ABSTRACT. This article explores the significance of memory, of processes of remembering and forgetting, and of various types and functions of memories in Fred D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997). The British-born Guyanese writer descends into the depths of historical memory to excavate individual voices, individual and collective memories, individual and cultural traumas that revolve around a "limit event" (LaCapra, 1999: 698) in history: slavery. By giving voice to his heroine Mintah, a Fetu slave girl, D'Aguiar creates a counter-memory to Britain's official memory, and most importantly, persuades us to build an ethical attachment to memories of the past. The first part of the paper deals with theoretical and methodological issues in memory studies, investigates the complex relation between memory and literature, specifically focussing on the role and function of acts of memory in postcolonial literatures. The second part, devoted to the analysis and interpretation of the novel, will yield fascinating insights into D'Aguiar's multilayered deployment of memory.

Key words: memory boom, individual memory, counter-memory, trauma, the body, lieux de mémoire.

RESUMO. 'O mar não tem memória': Memórias do corpo, do mar e da terra em *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), de Fred D'Aguiar. Analisa-se o significado da memória e dos processos de lembrar e de esquecer, e de outros tipos e funções da memória no romance *Feeding the Ghosts*, de Fred D'Aguiar. O escritor guianense, nascido na Inglaterra, mergulha nas profundidades da memória histórica para recuperar vozes individuais, memórias individuais e coletivas, traumas individuais e coletivos que circundam um "evento limite" da história (LaCapra, 1999: 698), ou seja, a escravidão. Providenciando a voz à protagonista Mintah, uma escrava fetu, D'Aguiar estabelece uma contra-memória à memória oficial britânica e, mais importante ainda, nos incentiva a construir uma ligação ética às memórias do passado. A primeira seção desse ensaio gira em torno de problemas teóricos e metodológicos referentes aos estudos sobre a memória, investiga a relação complexa entre a memória e a literatura, focalizando a função e do papel dos atos de memória nas literaturas pós-coloniais. A segunda seção trata da análise e da interpretação do romance e produzirá discernimentos sobre o emprego multiestrutural da memória em D'Aguiar.

Palavras-chave: explosão da memória, memória individual, contra-memória, trauma, o corpo, lugar da memória.

Introduction

Since the early 1980s the interest in memory, both within the academia and the wider culture, has increased at an unprecedented velocity. Memory, it seems, is ubiquitous; scholars are "obsess[ed]" (Hamilton, 1994: 26) with processes and products of memory, numerous scholarly articles and monographs investigate what John R. Gillis suggestively calls a "free-floating, subjective phenomenon" (2005, p. 3), "[...] whose depths may be plumbed forever" (George Allen qtd. in Hutton,

1993, p. xxv), and myriad academic conferences are devoted to the dissemination of memory's "[...] social, political and cultural relevance" (Assmann, 1999, p. 16; Erll, 2005, p. 1; my translation). This trend, which Andreas Huyssen appositely calls a "boom of unprecedented proportion"² (1995, p. 5), is a response to large-scale, far-reaching transformations of present day societies and cultures. Suffice it to mention a few: the sense of a

¹ Hereafter referred to as D'Aguiar 1998 with the appropriate page number. References to the texts are from the 1998 Vintage edition.

² The contemporary memory boom, Huyssen posits, "represents [...] late modernity's equivocations and ambivalences concerning truth, embodiment, location and the temporality of hope, equivocations that had their source in the disruptions and discontinuities of post-revolutionary, urban society, whose force deepened under the impact of the holocaust and which are now being worked through in the context of late modern technologies and temporalities" (1995, p. 5).

"post-histoire" (Assmann, 1992, p. 5), an end(ing) of history (cf. Fukuyama, 2002) and historical consciousness and a resulting insecurity about how to narrate and represent the past(s)³; the pluralization of history/ies and memory/ies in increasingly multiethnic societies; the passing away of the last survivors of the Holocaust and the desire to preserve their narratives; the series of theoretical 'turns' in the humanities from the historical to the cultural to the visual to the performative. To Nicolas Pethes and Jens Ruchatz memory has developed into "a, if not *the*, new paradigm of cultural studies" (2001, p. 38; my translation). Alan Megill even goes a step further when asserting that "memory has become the leading term in our new cultural history" (1998, p. 38).

No doubt, memory has also turned into a key organising concept⁴ in other branches of the arts and humanities: take for example literary, media and film studies, history and Holocaust studies, architecture and archaeology, and – most importantly for our context – postcolonial studies. Furthermore, let us not forget that the concept of memory has always held a firm place in the natural and social sciences: cognitive psychology and neuropsychology, trauma studies, cultural and narrative psychology, neurobiology, law, sociology and political science are among the most prominent worth mentioning. Looking at this impressive spectrum of disciplines "doing memory work" (Radstone, 2000, p. 12) – some of them also on an "interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary" (cf. Erll, 2005, p. 1; my translation) basis –, one question is crucial: what exactly is it that these disciplines study? Is it ontological rather than epistemological questions? Is it memory's inside, i.e. the inner workings of the mind, the processes of storing, retaining and recalling experiences, and remembrances, or is it rather the 'outside' of memory, i.e. the discursive productions of memory? Is memory more aligned with "history, community, tradition, the past, reflection and authenticity", or rather with "fantasy, subjectivity, invention, the present, representation and fabrication" (Radstone, 2000, p. 6)? Answering

these questions adequately would certainly fall outside the remit of this paper. However, the concerns and issues raised should increase our awareness of the complexity and contestedness of many areas in memory studies – not only in terms of the disciplines' understanding of what exactly memory is, but also in what theory and methodology they use in order to investigate it. Alon Confino, for instance, bemoans that "memory [...] has developed into a fragmented field" (1997, p. 1387), a field which lacks "critical reflection on method and theory, as well as systematic evaluation of the field's problems, approaches, and objects of study" (Confino, 1997, p. 1387)⁵. The field's multifacetedness, complexity, fragmentariness, if not to say elusiveness, should not worry and upset us entirely, rather we should follow Patrick Hutton's advice: to "ventur[e] out into this highly challenging, fascinating and complex area" (1993, p. xxv) in order to gain insights into realms, that, – at first glance perhaps –, might not be pervaded by memory at all, and into others which are so to a great extent.

Let us look into two of these realms. The first concerns the indissociable link between memory and identity. Memory has a huge share in identity formation or identity construction,⁶ on the one hand, and a phenomenological ground of identity,⁷ on the other hand. "The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering [...]" (Gillis, 1994, p. 3). Conceptualizations of memory and the self mutually imply one another even if "the discourse of late or postmodernity has [...] questioned the very idea of memory as a given human faculty" (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 7). Who people are is closely linked to what they think about memory, what they remember⁸, and what they can claim to remember. Memories, like identities change over time, – we are revising our memories to suit our current identities⁹.

³ Undoubtedly, one such historical watershed that has produced a decisive crisis of representation is the Holocaust, "an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational categories, an 'event at the limits'" (Friedländer, 1992, p. 3).

⁴ The very nature of memory, and hence the interpretations we make of it, vary according to sociocultural contexts. In particular, it is essential to recognize that memory has undergone fundamental change over the history of its discussion. The following scholars have amply documented the transformations that the concept of memory has undergone: See: Donald (1991); Klein (2000); Yates, (1966). In current memory studies discourse, memory is not "an unchanging vessel" (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p. 122), but a "cultural vehicle" (Antze and Lambek, 1996: xvii) which "[...] is meaningful only within an array of different cultural-historical discourses" (Brockmeier, 2002, p. 7) and which, furthermore, carries with it a series of momentous suppositions about the world of the individual and the world of the social.

⁵ Looking at the various different theories on memory, one clearly observes that the surge and success of memory studies on both sides of the Atlantic has been supported by reconceptualizations of collective, individual and cultural memory. In the German context, leading scholars like Jan and Aleida Assmann focus on the notion of collective memory, which, for them, has a communicative as well as a cultural component. In the Anglo-American context, by contrast, the notion of cultural memory has displaced the discourses of individual (psychological) and of social memory. See: Assmann (1992); Assmann (1999); Assmann (2003); Ball (1999).

⁶ As when we search our memories in order to understand ourselves or when we offer particular stories about ourselves in order to make a certain kind of impression.

⁷ As when we know implicitly who we are and the circumstances that have made us so.

⁸ I wish to put emphasis on the process and action of the very act(s) of remembering besides memory/memories as something that we have. Sir Frederic Bartlett, considered by many to be the father of the modern psychology of memory, titled his classic work *Remembering* as a way of emphasizing the active processes of engagement in the "effort after meaning" (1995, p. 20).

⁹ This is a view of memory as a dynamic model of continuous reconstruction and elastic adaptability. See: McGaugh (1995); Moscovitch (1995); Radstone (2000); Radstone and Hodgkin (2003); Hodgkin and Radstone (2003).

Accordingly, they are representations or constructions of reality, - like history¹⁰ in fact - and subjective rather than objective phenomena. By now it has become commonplace that forgetting¹¹ is vital in identity-formation too. "Identity of any kind requires steering a course between holding on and letting go. Identity is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding" (Antze and Lambek, 1996, p. xxix).

The second concerns memory's relation to the past. Contrary to what was taken for granted for a very long time¹², memory does not store the past 'as it really was', but the past and images of the past are clearly represented, i.e. (re)constructed, in a selective way "partly, if not wholly, shaped, by the present" (Halbwachs qtd in. Coser, 1992, p. 25). The very processes or "acts of memory" (Bal, 1999), - to a great extent determined by our emotional attachments to the past and involvement in things past -, as neuropsychologist Daniel Schacter holds, always involve selection, distortion and amnesia (cf. Schacter, 1995; Schacter, 1996; Schacter, 2000) and the work of interpretation (cf. Terdiman, 1993).

True, "memories help us make sense of the world we live in" (Gillis, 1994, p. 3). Being part of the world means being part of and embedded in material, social, and historical contexts, in discourses of power and ideologies, narrative traditions, cultural and collective memories¹³. In his two pathbreaking studies, *The Social Framework of Memory* (*Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire*), published 1925, and *The Collective Memory*, published posthumously,

the French sociologist and founder of collective memory studies, Maurice Halbwachs, provided an extensive analysis of how social groups remember and perpetuate their collective pasts. He believed that groups - geographical, positional, political, ideological, generational -, exert a profound influence on the content of individual memories and help to create various illusions, condensations and distortions. His ideas, taken up by numerous scholars, are significant because they represent a first attempt to systematically discuss sociocultural factors as a source for remembering, forgetting and memory distortion. What is more, they highlight the fact that personal, individual memory is always connected to collective, social memory as is social memory to the personal. In Pierre Nora's words: "Memory is not purely individual and unique, but collective and plural" (1989, p. 8). "[...] collective memory provides both individual and society with a temporal map, unifying a nation or community through time as well as space. Collective memory specifies the temporal parameters of past and future, where we came from and where we are going, and also why we are here now" (Eyerman, 2001, p. 6). It is essential to a group's notion of itself and thus must continually be made over to fit historical circumstances.

At times, our roles in ongoing stories and discourses are self-chosen; at times, however, they are not. It is not uncommon that official framings, culturally prescribed and narratively programmed, do not allow for idiosyncratic identifications, i.e. individual and collective acts of intervention in it. Dominant social groups, nations, and states, for instance, often control what is to be remembered, and what is to be forgotten¹⁴. Hence, under diverse circumstances memories may become sites for contestation and factors in struggle since memories, - collective, individual, cultural, like/as representations of the past are malleable (cf. Schudson, 1995), within limits of course. History provides an incredibly rich source of evidence of the malleability of (memories of) the past, and instrumentalization of the past, - calculated or not -, for variable reasons¹⁵. However, there are mechanisms that check and counter it "so long as living memory, available written records, the

¹⁰ Peter Burke remarks, short and to the point, "Neither memories nor histories seem objective any longer" (1989: 98). It is not only the reliability of memory that has come into question but also that of historical truth. The relation between memory and history / historiography is complex and has been constituted in many different ways by historians and others in the last few decades. 'New historians', for example, use the capital H in 'History' to signal the difference between dominant versions of the past delivered by history as grand narrative, and other historical accounts. For accounts of theories of 'new' history, see, for instance, Keith Jenkins, *Re-Thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1999). History stands for a certain notion of truth and a certain notion of referentiality. Often it seems that history is willing to question the epistemological status of its object of study - the past - but less ready to engage with how the past itself is variously conceptualized and constituted as history, memory or archive and equally less ready to rethink its boundaries. Rather than treating memory as its rival, history could or should embrace memory as a helpful tool in yielding historical insights. Memory, because of its powerful pull towards the present, and because of its affective investments, allows more readily for a certain evasion of critical distance.

¹¹ I use forgetting in a broad, comprehensive sense, covering misremembering and repressing also. Let me add that remembering and forgetting are interdependent features not only of communicative action, and identity formation, for example, but also of institutional forms of transmission of knowledge. Forgetting is as much a function of memory-making as is remembering.

¹² The archive, the wax tablet, the storehouse, the store-room were among the most used metaphors of memory in Western literature - from Aristotle, Plato, St Augustine to cognitive psychology.

¹³ Halbwachs understood collective memories as collectively shared representations of the past. See Lewis A. Coser, *Maurice Halbwachs. On Collective Memory*, ed. and tr. Coser (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 48). Collective memory is concerned with continuity and similarity, and thus provides members of a group with a clear sense of identity and unity vis à vis other groups and their collective memory. It can take hold of historically and socially remote events but it often privileges the interests of the contemporary. Halbwachs also showed that distortions are an inevitable part of collective memory.

¹⁴ I do not suggest that memories are always necessarily altered for negative reasons. Alternations or distortions in memories may very well serve a benign purpose if they have a democratizing outcome or if they bring about a necessary readjustment of values or value systems in a particular time and place.

¹⁵ The rewriting of history as described, for example, by Orwell in 1984, or the burning of books, the destruction of inscriptions, as acts of intentional and violent cultural oblivion, are (extreme) cases of instrumentalization. It was not necessary to wait for twentieth-century totalitarianism for rulers to see instrumental value in manipulating the past. Take for example Louis XIV's censor who declared that changes in the political situation may make it necessary to suppress or correct information about the past (Burke, 1992, p. 126).

integrity of journalists and historians, and a pluralistic world where different groups make competing claims on the past endure" (Schudson, 1995, p. 355).

(Postcolonial) Literature and Memory

Literature plays myriad roles in the formation of (cultural) memory. In the introduction to the influential book *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* cultural theorist Mieke Bal posits that "cultural memory can be located in literary texts because the latter are continuous with the communal fictionalizing, idealizing, monumentalizing impulses thriving in a conflicted culture" (1999, p. xiii). Thus, the literary text is a medium - a "cultural tool", "mediational/semiotic means" (Wertsch, 2002, p. 12) -, or speaking with Jan Assmann, - a "cultural formation" (1995, p. 129) that hugely influences which memories, stories and images of the past are generated and transmitted (in the public sphere). Literature is memory externalized, a complex "lieu de mémoire" (Nora, 1989, p. 7), i.e. a site of memory, preserving, advancing, controlling and subverting cultural meaning. It does so with its very own forms and strategies of observation, and with its very own political, social, cultural, ideological functions¹⁶. It shapes and forms memory - individual, collective and cultural -, in what it remembers of the past, and, most importantly to my mind, in how and why it remembers. Novels, poems, slave narratives, autobiographies etc., repositories of individual memories, are crucial parts of the historical record that create a collective communal memory. "Wrapped up" with "a heap of signifying" (Ellison, 1952, p. 379), literary texts may inspire readers¹⁷ to remember, conversely also to forget.

In cultural and literary studies, attention to and prioritisation of memory has marked much recent and innovative research. Susannah Radstone posits that "it is a concern with memory's representation of lived experience" which "areas including [...] literary and cultural studies [...]" (2000, p. 11) share. She further explicates that they take "as its investigative starting point the memories of groups and individuals and ask how these might be related to the wider culture" (2000, p. 11-12). Theirs is a concern with the individual and the social, the inner and the outer world, processes of remembering and

forgetting¹⁸, and with reinterpreting, transforming and creating new configurations of meaning.

The works of a number of writers from the black and Asian diasporas centrally revolve around the interrelated issues of history, memory, identity, culture, remembering, forgetting, and the past. In the British context, a shift "in both literary fiction and literary/cultural studies, from history to memory and, along with it, to questions of identity, be it individual, collective, national, or cultural" (Henke, 2003, p. 77) has taken place. In contemporary multi-ethnic British literature, particularly with regard to second- and third-generation (immigrant) writers¹⁹, the identity-constituting relation to memory and acts of memory are certainly strongly emphasized upon. Unlike Henke, however, I cannot see how history has possibly been replaced by memory²⁰ seeing that history has always been a subject of pre-eminent significance for postcolonial writers and postcolonial critics alike (cf. Ashcroft *et al.*, 1989). History still figures centrally in many of their texts as well as in criticism, alongside memory. The past itself, it seems - and historians are beginning to see this too -, can variously be conceptualized and constituted as history, memory or archive. To me, history and memory cannot be set off against each other, since history and memory are categories of recollection, and neither one can be fully disentangled from the other.

Especially in a postcolonial context, memory tends to serve a very specific function. "What is called 'memory' (and Nora's *lieux de mémoire*) may become a form of counterhistory that challenges the false generalizations in exclusionary 'History'" (Sollors, 1994, p. 7-8), an exclusionary 'History' that stands for a certain notion of truth and a certain notion of referentiality. No surprise, then, that postcolonial texts have been recognized as important bearers and construction sites of memory - cultural, individual, collective -, since "[a]n architectural process of rebuilding, rewriting and rememoration" (Nasta, 2002, p. 218) is inherent in literary works dealing with the post/colonial past. This rebuilding and rememoration is often "a response to [...] a rupture" (Bardenstein, 1999, p. 148), a lack, an absence, and "a substitute, surrogate, or consolation for something that is missing" (Zeremon Davis and Starn, 1989, p. 3). These absences, ruptures and lacks are part of what characterize and distinguish the shape and texture of specific individual or

¹⁶ Advancing, controlling, subverting, preserving cultural meaning are the most common functions.

¹⁷ In order to find out which type of reader is more likely and more easily inspired by literature to remember and to forget one would need to turn to reader-response-criticism which would definitely go beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that readers who feel morally addressed are more likely to reflect upon, challenge, remember that which literature 'remembers'.

¹⁸ A case in point is Marcel Proust's classic text *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.

¹⁹ Here, memory is linked to "the problematics of writing the diasporic stories of individual human lives [...] in a variety of differently imagined geographies" (Nasta, 2002: 214). The key issue for many of these writers is identity.

²⁰ I doubt that Henke conceives of history as a form of social memory (cf. Burke, 1989).

collective memories, as are the specific components selected, highlighted, and elaborated in the construction of memory.

In many of their works postcolonial writers plunge into a discourse of memory. In doing so, they respond to ruptures in historical continuity, as it were, make up for and fill in these lacks and absences, and, at the same time, listen to (imposed) silences²¹ (cf. Middleton and Woods, 2000, p. 5). Hence, in postcolonial literatures, one of the functions of memory, among others, is to "[...] historiciz[e] the past" (Middleton and Woods, 2000, p. 5), another to serve as a counterhegemonic chronicle. Influenced by theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, postcolonial studies have explored relations and tensions between 'official' history and its contestation by unofficial, popular memory²² or "counter-memories"²³ (cf. Foucault, 1997). Thus, in telling one story about the past, other stories about real or possible alternative versions of the past are excluded, rejected and overwritten.

What is more, memory is frequently re-interpreted, and re-contextualized so that we can come to revised understandings of our individual and collective selves. This individual and collective memory work sees memory as the material for further acts of memory or re-membrance by means of which an individual's or a collective's cultural and historical formation can be seized. At times, this means dealing with utterly disturbing, disruptive, distressing, and even traumatic experiences some of which can only be integrated into one's life history and the history of a collective, a culture, belatedly, if at all.

Fred D'Aguiar and the Concept of Memory

British-born Guyanese novelist, poet and playwright Fred D'Aguiar shares with many other British-based multi-ethnic writers a deep concern with the past. His is a concern about his personal past, his people's and his ancestors' past, and the

entangled, intricate post/colonial Guyanese-British past (cf. Birbalsingh, 1993, p. 145). For D'Aguiar delving into the past is indissociably connected with an intense engagement with (the concept of) memory and with what it can do. In his novels as well as in his poetry D'Aguiar descends into the depths of historical memory and historical consciousness; he becomes, in Walter Benjamin's words, "a man digging" (1973, p. 314).

He who seeks to approach his own past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the 'matter itself' is no more than the layers which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation (Benjamin, 1973, p. 314).

Digging, in this sense, means rereading, retranslating and reinterpreting. This archaeological process locates, excavates, records and orders the finds, and in this respect, enables D'Aguiar, the archaeologist, to excavate and recover individual and collective memories, individual and collective traumas²⁴ in his ancestors' past. Likewise it empowers him to "[...] seize hold of [...] memor[ies] as [they] flash up at the moment of danger" (Benjamin, 1973, p. 255). Aware of memory's inability to deliver a full reconstruction of the past, D'Aguiar approaches "the past [...] through the twin matrices of history and memory" (O'Meally, 1994, p. 5). He refreshes the past through acts of memory, i.e. through narrativizing, making narratable and audible that which may not have been narrated before, that which may not have been heard and listened to before. What is more, he forges a "collective identity out of its remembrance" (Eyerma, 2001, p. 1) and thus actively contributes to the creation of "memory culture"²⁵ (cf. Erll, 2005, p. 34; my translation).

²¹ In her book *White Amnesia - Black Memory?* Sabine Brück argues along the same lines when she says that "the pervasive ellipses of Western historiography will only be pointed out and filled in by way of the (literary) imagination" (1994, p. 24).

²² Influenced by theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, postcolonial studies have explored relations and tensions between official history and its contestation by unofficial or popular memory.

²³ Michel Foucault's point is that the past is continually being remolded in our present discourse. What is remembered about the past depends on the way it is represented, which has more to do with the present power of groups to fashion its image than with the ability of historians to evoke its memory (cf. 1997). Therefore, the notion of memory always necessarily implies an idea of "counter-memory" (Foucault, 1997, p. 139-174) designating the residual or resistant strains that withstand official versions of historical continuity. Inspired by Foucault's thinking, postmodern historiography poses new lines of historical inquiry in the guise of counter-memories: e.g. social history as an alternative to political history; women's history to that of men's history; the history of collective mentalities to that of the history of ideas.

²⁴ I use (psychological) trauma in Cathy Caruth's sense. She posits that "[i]n 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, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (1991, p. 181). In contrast, cultural trauma, according to Ron Eyerman, "refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (2001, p. 2). Cultural trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and reworking of collective memory (cf. Eyerman, 2001, p. 1).

²⁵ I use the term 'memory culture' in Astrid Erll's (2005, p. 34) sense. Memory culture is a very broad, comprehensive term used to capture the multidimensional and plural aspects of references to the past. This broad approach allows one to study the 'past' as well as memories of the past both in a diachronic and synchronic way. In contrast to Assmann's rather static concept of cultural memory, Erll's term of memory culture clearly emphasises the dynamic, creative and plural nature of memory culture. Memory culture, as she argues, can be studied on a number of different levels. Erll mentions specific social frames under which specific societies (e.g. a feudal society, a postmodern society) remember. On another level, one can study very specific forms and formations of memory culture, e.g. mnemonic strategies that societies use to remember, needs, motives and interests that societies pursue in reconstructing the past, and also the different representations of the 'past' of societies and the various modes, means and media they use (e.g. historical novel, film, historiography etc).

The memories and traumas, i.e. the memories of trauma, D'Aguiar digs out and writes about revolve around one specific apocalyptic moment in human history²⁶: slavery. Unlike "an older generation of Caribbean writers" (Ledent, 1997, p. 271), Fred D'Aguiar, like Caryl Phillips and David Dabydeen, belongs to the "new wave of black British writers" that tackles slavery "head-on" (Ledent, 1997, p. 271). He assumes what Toni Morrison defined as the artist's moral, ethical and political task to "bear witness" (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, p. 4). Slavery becomes a "fecund site" (Ledent, 1997, p. 273) and by writing about the "peculiar institution" (Bensch, 2003, p. 31) and the Middle Passage²⁷, Fred D'Aguiar does become a witness, a witness 'after the fact'; being a witness is all the more significant because the Middle Passage was "an event without a witness"; or more precisely, 'an event eliminating its own witness' (Kardux, 1999, p. 148). One could even posit that "history was taking place with no witness (Laub, 1995, p. 65)"²⁸. In his "as-if-testimony" (Bröck, 1994, p. 29) *Feeding the Ghosts*, D'Aguiar takes a firm moral and ethical stance in that he pays homage to those "who never arrived safely on shore, to a whole nation that is under the sea" (Carabi, 1994, p. 38); he thus deliberately directs our attention to the Atlantic as a site of "historical and cultural trauma" (Kardux, 1999, p. 147)²⁹. Indeed, the Atlantic, which we as well as his characters are to revisit, is a traumatic lieu de mémoire precisely because it constitutes the deathbed for innumerable slaves, unable to testify to the ordeal, unable to tell, unable to narrate the unnarratable; "The sea is slavery" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 3) as the unmarked prologue has it. D'Aguiar invites us to remember that the sea carries memories of psychological, physical and cultural trauma. In so doing he brilliantly extends the crisis beyond the individual to embrace the wider culture, the Black Atlantic, as it were, through history and memory. He also invites us to remember that slavery not only constitutes one of the darkest chapters in Britain's history³⁰ (cf. Phillips, 1987, p. 26-27) but also that its

echoes are still audible in today's multi-ethnic Britain (and elsewhere) – if only we listened carefully. In presenting us with a "counter-memory" (Foucault, 1997) to Britain's narrative of near 'amnesia', oblivion and silence, and in teaching us our remembrances about figures of lost slaves, both in themselves and as symbols of dispossession, displacement and violence, D'Aguiar's text engages with what Paul Ricoeur calls the "ethico-political" (2004, p. 86) level of remembering.

Of course, D'Aguiar's treatment of slavery does not lay claim to objectivity, accuracy, and verisimilitude. D'Aguiar cleverly deploys the tension between 'historical truth' and 'narrative truth'³¹ as "a primary source of [the novel's] narrative energy" (Zamora, 1997, p. 41). *Feeding the Ghosts*, a revisionist historical novel³², is provocatively historical and imaginative at once, and remarkably, it does not place these modes in opposition. The historical aspects of his work are infused with mythical elements³³, a combination that makes it difficult, perhaps even senseless, to distinguish the historical from the imaginative³⁴. D'Aguiar does not intend to convey a coherent, continuous history, but rather the opposite, the ruins of history. He does not offer a critical analysis of how history came to be ruined and how history became so destructive but rather he shows the effects of history, fragments from a memory that itself is fragmented. The fragments are displayed, the wounds of history are laid open, "the nature of the pain" (Alexander, 2004, p. 8) identified. At the same time, however, attempts are being made at healing, at sealing and at remaking. Healing, sealing and remaking demand an incredible effort, and sometimes involve intensive pain in overcoming traumatic experiences, and in working through.

Memories of the Body, the Sea and the Land in *Feeding the Ghosts*

Feeding the Ghosts, framed by a prologue and an epilogue, is emotionally resonant in its testimony to

²⁶ The Holocaust is commonly perceived as the apocalyptic moment in human history. Some critics, however, have accepted that slavery was "a kind of prolonged Holocaust in itself" (Mantel, 1997, p. 40). This is not say that I am suggesting that slavery and the Holocaust be equated.

²⁷ Walvin estimates that "12 million Africans" (1998, p. 185) were deported and had to undergo the Middle Passage.

²⁸ Dori Laub's quotation defines a very specific quality of the Holocaust. Again, I do not want to draw too close a parallel between slavery and the Holocaust due to the singularity of the event(s).

²⁹ Kardux holds that "[f]or the millions of Africans aboard the slave ships, the Atlantic was a Lethian stream in the classical sense, transporting them from a vital cultural past to what Orlando Patterson has called the 'social death' of slavery" (1999, p. 147).

³⁰ Carl Plasa and Betty J. Ring assert that "In Britain the subject of racial oppression has been examined primarily in relation to colonialism, postcolonialism and imperialism but much less fully with regard to the problematic

of slavery" (1994, p. xiv). "Something that does not fit within the established structures of thinking and feeling is likely to be excluded from remembrance", as Irwin-Zareck underlines (1994, p. 52-53).

³¹ The distinction between historical and imaginative discourse has had a fundamental impact on Holocaust studies. It may seem obvious that art itself can have a say in this matter.

³² Revisionist historical novels, according to Ansgar Nünning, insist upon their own history-effects, maintaining a productive tension between their status as literature and their status as history, even while they acknowledge the ways in which postmodernism compromises any easy claims to historical representation and referentiality. Nünning identifies five different types of historical novels: documentary, realistic, revisionist historical, metahistorical novel and historiographic metafiction. For an explanation of these terms cf. Nünning: 1995. Recognizing a crisis in referentiality, however, does not necessarily mean that all referential claims to history must be relinquished.

³³ The ghost of the title appropriately functions as leitmotif. The ghost and its function in trauma discourse will be discussed later.

³⁴ It is precisely literature, or fiction, and the strategies of fiction more broadly, i.e. narrative technique, semantization of place and space, focalization etc., and not history that are allowed the narrative flexibility that is crucial to the telling of the stories postcolonial writers are telling us, as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub propose (cf. 1992).

the historiographical document of the death of 131 Africans at the hands of profit-hungry British slave traders and investors on board the slave ship *Zong* in 1781. When sickness affects several of the crew and many of the slaves below decks, the Captain, Luke Cullingwood, decides to fling hundreds into the Atlantic, in order to claim money from the insurers. He is recorded as justifying his decision on the grounds of a scarce and diminishing water supply. Furthermore, he is also said to have posited if slaves died through illness and suicide on board the ship, the owners would have to bear the cost; but if they were thrown overboard or killed to safeguard a ship's safety, the insurers would have to underwrite the losses. The killing of the slaves in this fashion was not new but the sheer numbers involved meant that the resulting court case became the subject of much attention. The initial trial found for the claimants but the case returned to the courts when the insurers refused to pay the required £30 compensation for each slave who died. At the second trial, the presiding judge, Lord Mansfield, agreed with the claimants seeing that slaves were mere property or goods, there was no 'impropriety' in the action; yet he also granted a new trial. Walvin notes that no records of the subsequent trial exist (cf. 1993, p. 20). And yet the case of the *Zong* led to abolitionist support and a preliminary bill was passed in 1790 which "ruled out insurance claims resulting from slave mortality through natural death or ill treatment, or against loss by throwing overboard of slaves on any account whatsoever" (Walvin, 1993, p. 20).

In retelling the tale of the *Zong*, D'Aguiar retrieves individual voices and probes into the characters' minds and thoughts. In particular, he breathes life into the "unwritten interior" (Morrison, 1995, p. 92) of his heroine Mintah, a Fetu slave girl, whereby he grants her agency and dignity. However, far from centering exclusively on the slave(s), D'Aguiar incorporates a polyphony of voices (cf. Bakhtin, 2000, p. 315), and a multiplicity of conflicting and contesting perspectives³⁵ of ('white') slave traders justifying their actions, of insurers and claimants openly articulating pro- and anti-slavery sentiments, and of slaves silently voicing their bewilderment, abhorrence and impotence. In terms of narrative technique, he masterly moves from internal to external perspectives, third- to first-person narratives, and from dialogues to interior monologues. D'Aguiar's use of these narratological

devices is part of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a "verbal give-and-take" (2000, p. 31). Due to the heterogeneity of the characters' perspectives, the reader is forced to negotiate the 'voices' between the utterly contradictory accounts of Mintah, the Captain, and the first mate, Kelsal, for instance. It is precisely in this clash of languages and ideologies (cf. Bakhtin, 2000, p. 315) that the gaps and silences become apparent. One account requires re-evaluation in the light of the others; this allows for a more balanced and just investigation into the complex mechanisms propelling the colonial machinery. The voices we hear contain within themselves voices and memories of other characters, voices and memories of other pasts, other histories, other traumas. This clearly shows that D'Aguiar is deeply concerned with ways of telling, with ways of telling how contested memories vie for a place in history, for instance, with how (traumatic) experiences may be internally remembered as well as externally re-presented and re-enacted, with how individual memories reach out beyond the skin to spin and (re-)design transhistorical and transcultural affiliations.

In the first and longest part of the narrative, an omniscient narrator describes the daily routine of the slavers' torturing, whipping and lashing of the African "cargo" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 12). Add to this the throwing overboard of slaves, women, men and children, "small bones adding to a sea of bones" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 90). The conversations between Captain Cullingwood and Kelsal are meticulously recorded so as to better understand their motives behind disposing of the sick slaves, a righteous deed, in their eyes. Unsurprisingly enough, the slaves are denied a voice, they are merely talked about – if at all, they are "thingified" (Césaire qtd. in: Davies, 1991, p. 249), referred to as a "miserable, tangled mass of humanity, [...] a sea of eyes [...] indistinguishable one from another" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 19). Yet this changes once the Captain decides to fling healthy slaves, men, women, mothers and children, "at this sea" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 3). Confined below deck, the slaves, all of a sudden the focalized, articulate their fears, sorrows, pains, and desires. Although they remain unheard by the crew members, they are heard by Mintah. Mintah, "able to read and write" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 31), is the spokeswoman for her fellow sufferers; she yearns to learn why they are treated the way they are treated. Fearing she might incite a rebellion, Kelsal teaches her her place on the ship – she is whipped, she is lashed, she is used, she is abused. Scared she might disclose a dark spot in his past (cf.

³⁵ Quantitatively speaking, the perspectives of the 'white' characters clearly predominate, but qualitatively speaking, it is Mintah's that outweighs the others, since in a number of passages she functions as focalizer and homodiegetic narrator.

D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 131), Kelsal orders she be thrown over board despite the fact that "she would fetch a good price in Jamaica [...]" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 47). Miraculously, Mintah survives, manages to get on board again, hides in a storeroom, befriends Simon, the cook's assistant, who not only cares for her but also falls in love with her (cf. D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 103). Mintah survives the Middle Passage, is "auctioned to a plantation" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 205) in Maryland, buys herself free and decides to move to Kingston, Jamaica, since in Maryland Mintah is said to help "runaways get to the North" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 207). She spends the rest of her life working with wood, carving figures out of wood, - 131 all of them reminders of the throwing overboard of her 131 fellow slaves. Memories of the happenings on the Zong keep disturbing her in her dreams, flash up time and again, haunt her till the end of her days, which, we may assume, is some time in 1833, the time of narration. The journal Mintah was writing while on the Zong, intended as a documentation of the 'true' happenings on board the ship, is presented in the court trial by Simon. Sadly, it does not change the insurers' nor the claimants' opinions, and it also does not influence Lord Chief Justice's verdict: no crime was committed on the ship. So what is at stake is, among other things, the reliability of the tellers and their tales, the narrative constructions of their 'realities', the dialectical relationship between experience and narrative, between the narrating self and the narrated self, as well as the opacity, non-transparency, and arbitrariness of language - whether spoken or written - as a medium for remembrance. Hence, it is two 'official' versions opposed to an 'unofficial' version, one 'unofficial' memory contesting two official. In instances such as this it becomes more than apparent that the existing versions (of memories respectively), are "sites of struggle over meaning [...], fields of cultural negotiation [that] vie for a place in history" (Sturken, 1997, p. 46). There is not the one and only truth, but several, as we note, even if we know well enough "who the victims of slavery were [and] what degradation and suffering they endured" (Ledent, 1997, p. 278).

In Part III of the narrative, D'Aguiar grants the readers unrestricted access to Mintah's mind and memories. The intradiegetic level unfolds her inner life, making her her own focalizer, thus foregrounding her "landscape of consciousness" (Bruner, 1987, p. 20). Mintah, both subject and object of memory, the telling and the told, consciously selects from a well of remembrances those moments and experiences she deems worth

telling and sharing. In a large section of Part III she places events in a sequential order with a beginning, a middle and end, for the most part showing continuities among the events depicted. We have the impression that the events themselves are constituted in the light of the overall narrative and that her 'story' tracks real time, as it were. However, the sequential order of her self-narrative which mainly concerns her recollections of her happy early childhood in Africa, her time as a girl before the Danish missionaries spread the word of God, and her later enslavement and eventual transportation to the Americas on the slaver, is constantly and repetitively interrupted by memories of trauma, i.e. her traumatic experiences on the Zong.

Unsurprisingly enough, like in other slave narratives, take Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988) for instance, Mintah's acts of memory are also to a considerable extent related to her body, a body that is literally and discursively scarred, ripped and mutilated. The marks on Mintah's body are not just representational or metonymical, they are the locus of suffering, the place of its inscription. Bodily parts or marks can almost literally become landmarks of historical memory - the body representing memory, as a map represents the actual land, a guide for a narrative throughout her entire life, a guide for a mutilated, fragmented narrative with a mutilated, fragmented body. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the moments succeeding her fertility dance on deck, which, perversely enough, is meant to entertain the crew, transform her conception of what her body is, and in connection with this, of what the memories of her body - and her embodied memories signify to her. Penetrating her consciousness, we learn that "I do not belong to it [= the body]. The crew know they can do whatever they please with it since it is theirs too before it is mine. My body belongs to everyone but me. I move in it like a thief" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 200). "Who is Mintah without her body?" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 201). The alternation between third- and first-person pronoun, the oscillation between "indirect interior monologue" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p. 115) and "first-person interior monologue" (Rimmon-Kenan, 2002, p. 111) forcefully renders Emily's troubled state of mind. On board the ship, her body does not want to have anything to do with Mintah, just as Mintah does not want to have anything to do with her body (cf. D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 201). The American literary critic Lawrence Langer, to whom we owe a number of important books on Holocaust trauma,

would possibly classify Mintah's memories of her body as "unheroic" (1991, p. 37)³⁶ since Mintah has lost control over her environment; she is traumatized.

In *Feeding the Ghosts* it is not only the body that suffers. Mintah's body, the locus of physical wounds, is inextricably linked to her mind, the locus of psychic wounds. The psychic wounds inflicted by the physical abuse result from experiences the intensity of which exceeds the capacity for cognitive and emotional integration. Mintah, "the moral witness" (Margalit, 2002, p. 34), is traumatized from the torture she suffers at the hands of Kelsal and astonishingly enough, unable to "fully witness the event as it occurs [...]" (Caruth, 1995, p. 7) (cf. D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 30-31). In her landmark publication *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth defines trauma as follows:

The pathology consists [...] solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event (1995, p. 4-5).

Hence, trauma "emerges as that which, at the very moment of its reception, registers a non-experience, causing conventional epistemologies to falter" (Whitehead, 2004, p. 5). What happens is that Mintah cannot suppress the "affect-memories" (Assmann, 2003, p. 29) that ensue. Affect works as a magnifier of perception, retaining vivid scenes and acute images. Her vivid, somatic and preverbal memories store this isolated scene of being lashed and abused without a before or after, it is an image without a context, a picture without a narrative. Since the experience of trauma, the traumatic experiences cannot be assimilated by Mintah, trauma cannot be possessed in the forms of memory and narrative; it is rather that Mintah is possessed. She desperately yearns to forget her (repudiated) experiences of the suffering and pain (cf. D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 119), - "not to remember that name, nor be associated with it, nor see a body that fits it, nor a past to belong to it" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 214) -, but does not dispose of the adequate means to do so. Not to remember would require a sympathetic milieu, a frame of communication in which the relating of the traumatic experiences would meet with willing listeners who will corroborate or share the experience and become co-owners of the

trauma. However, this sympathetic environment is denied her. Mintah never (verbally) communicates her pain to others, since "it could not be told" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 223); 'it' defies representability, 'it' remains a sharing in silence (cf. D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 120). As long as Mintah cannot put her pain in words, i.e. narrativize it, she is driven downward a spiral of continuous re-remembering that dramatises "rememory" (1988, p. 36) - and here I am referring to Toni Morrison's concept. Rememory is a constant reminder that there is something she should or wishes to forget³⁷. However, recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event including images and thoughts that take the forms of memories, dreams, daydreams, flashbacks and hallucinations, keep coming back, and in their insistent returns remain "true to the event" (Caruth, 1995, p. 5). It is exactly the "literality and nonsymbolic nature of traumatic dreams and flashbacks [...] that forms the centre of [trauma's] pathology or symptoms" (Caruth, 1995, p. 5). What is more, even if the recurrent images remain true to the event, they may well produce a "deep uncertainty as to [their] very truth" (Caruth, 1995, p. 6). At one point in the narrative, Mintah keeps repeating the totally troubling questions: "Am I living or dead?" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 196) [...] "Where is Mintah? She is somewhere on the sea? Where is Mintah? In a ship on the sea. Where is Mintah? [...] She is landless. I am at sea. I have no land" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 20). A period of "latency" (Freud, 1939, p. 84), a period during which the effects of the experience are not apparent, follows. The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would therefore consist not in a forgetting of a reality that can thus never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself. Paradoxically enough, the latency of the event explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of the historical experience: the traumatic incident is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time, it is evident 'nachträglich'³⁸. For Freud, "the concept [of *Nachträglichkeit*] refers to the ways in which

³⁶ Langer relates the unheroic memory to a diminished self, a being which has painfully experienced a complete loss of control over his or her environment, and whose discourse has therefore been vacated of all connotations of agency. Terms such as the diminished self and unheroic memory are indissociably related to traumatic experiences that cannot be transformed into redemptive symbols.

³⁷ The slaves do not forget or repress their memories, they dis-remember: a dis-membering/dis-memberment of the consciousness in which the (repressed) memories are never erased, just dis-remembered, but still present in fragments, 'dis-' expressing the violence of the fragmentation process. The dis-memberment begins with the slave's body, literally detailed and retailed. Conversely, rememory expresses the deliberate effort and the pain in the process of reappropriating what is still there because it has never been forgotten, but just dis-remembered. Remembering then means piecing together the fragments violently severed - literally a re-rememberment.

³⁸ Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, which has been translated as "deferred action" or "afterwardsness", describes the complex and equivocal temporal structure and has proved to be a useful model for those - like Cathy Caruth - who attempt to reconceptualise the relation between memory and trauma and to construct models of historical temporality which depart from the linear. Caruth reworks "deferred action" as belatedness and remodels it on Freud's conception of the non-linear temporal relation to the past.

certain experiences, impressions and memory traces are revised at a later date to fit in with fresh experiences or with the attainment of a new stage of development" (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988, p. 111). Accordingly, the traumatic incident only becomes an event at some later point of intense emotional crisis. The impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place and time. Mintah only succeeds in locating the traumatic incident, which implies transforming the traumatic incident into a traumatic event, and transforming 'rememory' into remembering belatedly, not on deck – but below deck and in a state of intense emotional crisis, when she observes those dragged on deck to be either tortured or flung into the sea embrace. This the moment she resolves "to write everything that happens to me and everyone around me" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 191), "to get what I see on this ship out of me" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 191), – in a word – to "forget on paper" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 196). She is ready to fling her pain "into a sea of forgetting" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 196) – note the classic trope of the Lethean stream. Mintah confides her views of the happenings on the *Zong* to her diary, which is based on acts of memory, acts of confession and acts of accusations. Her diary is a counterhegemonic chronicle, since it tells otherwise. In telling otherwise, her traumatic experiences are subsumed in the history of her life, even if only partly. Telling the right story about her traumatizing past, in the end, effects a reconciliation between her traumatic experiences and her identity; the unspeakable and the unrepresentable are eventually narrativized, and her story is eventually externalized, and at the same time immortalized. Mintah, intent to "make sure people heard about what had happened on the *Zong* [...] that the book contained everything they needed to know" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 152), urges Simon to disseminate the contents of her diary, which he does at court, however to no avail.

In D'Aguiar's text, memories are not only traumatic. Having alleviated the suffering and worked through her traumatic experiences (cf. D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 219), Mintha's acts of memory much more frequently and forcefully "reach beyond [her] skin" (Wertsch, 2002, p. 22) to emotionally and imaginatively attach her to her family, her community, her home, her land, her soil, to woodwork and wood. Wood and woodwork, besides the sea, are leitmotifs, and they trigger childhood memories in Mintah, underlining her strong,

unfailing emotional tie to her father, "a carpenter, wood-carver, wood-graver" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 52). From wood Mintha spins her webs of memories to mud, land and earth. Mud, earth, land, wood, soil, and her family signify depth, roots, rootedness, embodied and bodily memories. Land, and wood pop up unconsciously in daydreams, or nightmares, or are consciously recovered in acts of memory. This allows her to recall affirmation and advice from elders. They nourish and sustain her hunger for resistance. It is in acts such as this that she places herself into and, at the same time, is embedded in a community of people with common goals and visions, and with a common African past. And yet, she is the one to carry this past into the future. "Africa is in our bodies, all our gods and ancestors too [...]" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 203) – she says at one point. Africa, her ancestors, and her family are the social frameworks, – or *cadres sociaux* in Maurice Halbwachs's terms –, that "provide her with an account of her origin, [...] development" (Coser, 1992, p. 86) and attachment, however tenuous.

First she wanted to feel soil, mud, stone, rock, clay, sand, loam, pebbles, boulders, grass. Then wood. [...] There would be a path she could take and footsteps she would be able to retrace. [...] She moved underground like a root feeling its way along, but with more speed [...] (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 116). [...] Imagine return until a taste of soil springs up on the tongue and its perfume haunts the nose (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 117).

D'Aguiar depicts the memory of previous cultural and familial connections as a bodily memory which surfaces as the symptoms of past life. The African land has a fixed geography, and preserves the traces of bodily presence. The land remembers, just as wood remembers, its memory embedded in knots and grains unlike the sea which is ever-changing and "endless" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 112); "the sea is slavery" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 3) – as the anonymous narrator opens the prologue of the novel. The sea stands for death, the barbarous severing of kinship ties and the resulting tear in the social and cultural fabric; the sea is "the present" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 112), it is a present, an "in-between life" where "time runs on the spot, neither backwards nor forwards" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 199) since the sea houses the cultural trauma (cf. Eyerman, 2001). "[...] there was no future" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 112). "The sea has no memory" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 3) even if bodies are transformed into coral and salt. The memory of the souls belong

to the living. The task is undertaken by the survivors and their offspring, memories of slavery and the Middle Passage are constructed and reconstructed just as Mintah shapes and reshapes wood. Wood "harbours the past [...] the many secrets of the earth are delivered up in it" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 208).

Even as a free woman, wood remains central in her life and in her memories. She buys land to build a hut and plants trees for every single fellow sufferer. "After I built a hut, I planted. A coconut grove. One tree for each soul lost on the Zong" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 208). Not only does she plant trees, she also starts to carve 131 wooden sculptures to commemorate the slaves that were thrown overboard the Zong. These 131 wooden carvings "fill the eyes with unease" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 208), but they live with her, "like guests who will not leave and whom [...] she eventually cannot bear to part with" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 208). In recounting the present, in remembering the present there are vivid analeptic flashbacks, a going back and forth between what is happening and what she feels, thinks and believes. For instance, then, as it turns out in the narrative present, the faces of the 131 figures she had carved were "scared" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 218), now they "were dancing, not struggling. Ecstatic not terrified" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 218). She has helped to shape the meaning. They are her "progeny" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 209), they spring from her. Mintah does not and cannot forget the 131 fellow sufferers – but she is no longer "possessed [and] haunted" (King, 2000, p. 159) – neither by the experiences of her own ordeal, by the slaves', their screams, their pain, the sea (cf. D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 224), nor by the 131 figures. "Ghosts needed to be fed" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 222), as we learn, and Mintah does so in and through acts of imagination – perhaps; they are figures of the past, they interrupt, and disturb the flow of time in the present, but they also disappear (from her memory) again.

Mintah, in her acts of memory, effectuates "remembering" (Bellah, 1985, p. 6). It is not just that Mintah remembers as a member of her community but that, in a way, she constitutes this transatlantic, transhistorical community and their members simultaneously in the act of remembering, thus remembering. Even if the heterodiegetic narrator informs us that "no one knew her story, because she had not bothered to tell it"³⁹ (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 222), Mintah's story and her memories (cf. D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 217) have migrated, been passed on, and have been kept alive in the memories of others – in me, in you, in D'Aguiar, in others reading his text, in other places,

in other times, transgenerationally. Arguing with Gilroy we can safely infer that her story as a "narrative of loss, exile and journeying" serves as "mnemonic function" (1993, p. 198) that directs one to a common collective⁴⁰ and cultural memory – a diaspora of connectedness via the pain of loss –, that is valuable and valid for the present. This is illustrated in the brief prologue of the narrative, which is a metafictional comment on the relation between historical events and their re-construction by authors and readers. For the first time, we encounter the heterodiegetic narrator who directly addresses his/her narratee:

I am in your community, in a cottage, or apartment or cardboard box, tucked away in a quiet corner, ruminating over these very things. The Zong is on the high seas. Men, women and children are thrown overboard by the captain and his crew. One of them is me. One of them is you. One of them is doing the throwing, the other is being thrown. I'm not sure who is who, you or I (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 229-230).

Conclusion.

Fred D'Aguiar's revisionist historical novel cannot change history's course, "[t]he deaths [...] cannot be undone" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 230). However, what it can do, and succeeds in doing, is to lay open the wounds in black history and in Western cultural memory. This entails, among other things, to "break the anonymity of the slave ancestors" (Froude-Durix, 1998, p. 47), to unearth counter-memories, to recover voices, and to reveal truths which have been denied for centuries; these are truths which hurt – possibly now more than ever before, these are truths we wish were not true since they are too unreal – surreal –, to be real. Luring us into the wounds and the pain of history, making us experience directly with his female protagonist Mintah a certain aspect of slavery as we read the novel, D'Aguiar invites us to witness the unwitnessable. The unwitnessable makes its incognisable mark on Mintah's mind as traumatic memory, and in her body, as embodied memory, leaving traces that can only be read (if at all) through belated witnessings. She manages to do so – she manages to work through.

Rather than the past being "laid to rest when it is told" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 230), each imagining "feeds

³⁹ Immersed in one of her dreams, we learn that Mintah's tale "is known to everyone" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 217).

⁴⁰ James Young distinguishes between a memory of an experience which is shared by all who participated, with the meaning negotiated afterwards; and a memory of an event which has affected only some members, but comes to represent the traumatic experience of the whole (cf. 1993, p. xii). Thus the experience of Mintah comes to stand in for the traumatic experience of everyone going through this peculiar institution and arguably by association for those who identify with them. The question of where to draw the line is not a straightforward one.

the need for a further act of retrieval. In fiction as in song, the story continues both to bring to life a past that might otherwise remain lost or distorted into shame, and to convert past from pain to cure" (D'Aguiar, 1997, p. 138). *Feeding the Ghosts* documents the past, it analyzes the past, it even opens up the possibility of working through the past, which is not a repression or forgetting of the past, but rather a re-enactment of the past. D'Aguiar's text draws out the exemplary significance of past events (cf. Ricoeur, 1999, p. 6), of individual and cultural traumas, of "loss" and "absence" (LaCapra, 1999, p. 696-727). We should be conscious of the fact that "[h]istory, like the trauma, is never simply one's own, [...] history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (1991, p. 192) as Cathy Caruth forcefully reminds us. Hopefully we are interpellated, to use Althusser's term, as human beings with moral responsibility.

References

- ALEXANDER, J.C. *Cultural trauma and collective identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- ALTHUSSER, L. *Lenin and philosophy and other essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001.
- ANTZE, P.; LAMBEK, M. *Tense past*. Cultural essays in trauma and memory. New York and London: Routledge, 1996.
- ASHCROFT, B. et al. *The empire writes back*. London: Routledge, 1989.
- ASSMANN, J. *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1992.
- ASSMANN, J. Collective memory and cultural identity. *New German Critique*, Durham, v. 65, p. 125-133, 1995.
- ASSMANN, A. *Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1999.
- ASSMANN, J. Three stabilizers of memory: affect - symbol - trauma. In: HEBEL, U.J. (Ed.). *Sites of memory in American literatures and cultures*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2003. p. 15-30.
- BAKHTIN, M. Discourse in the Novel. In: HOLQUIST, M. (Ed.) *The dialogic imagination*. Four essays by M.M. Bakhtin. Trans. Emerson, C.; Holquist, M. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000. p. 259-422.
- BAL, M. Introduction. In: BAL, M. et al. (Ed.). *Acts of memory: cultural recall in the present*. Hanover and London: University of New England Press, 1999. p. vii-xvii.
- BARDENSTEIN, C.B. Trees, Forests, and the Shaping of Palestinian and Israeli Collective Memory. In: BAL, M. et al. (Ed.). *Acts of memory: cultural recall in the present*. Hanover and London: University of New England Press, 1999. p. 148-168.
- BARTLETT, F. *Remembering: a study in experimental and social psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- BELLAH, R. et al. (Ed.). *Habits of the heart: individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- BENJAMIN, W. *Illuminations. 1892-1940*. ARENDT, H. (Ed.); Trans. ZOHAN, H., London: Fontana, 1973.
- BENSCH, K. The pitfalls of memory: cross-cultural discourse and autobiographical form in Olaudah Equiano's interesting narrative. In: HEBEL, U.J. (Ed.). *Sites of memory in American literatures and cultures*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2003. p. 31-42.
- BIRBALSINGH, F. An interview with Fred D'Aguiar. *Rev. Int. English Lit.*, Calgary, v. 24, n. 1, p. 133-145, 1993.
- BROCKMEIER, J. Introduction: searching for cultural memory. *Cult. Psychol.*, Thousand Oaks, v. 8, n. 1, p. 5-14, 2002.
- BRÖCK, S. *White Amnesia – black memory? American women's writing and history*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994.
- BRUNER, J. Life as narrative. *Soc. Res.*, New York, v. 54, n. 1, p. 11-32, 1987.
- BURKE, P. History as social memory. In: BUTLER, T. (Ed.). *History, culture and the mind*. New York: Blackwell, 1989. p. 97-113.
- BURKE, P. *The fabrication of Louis XIV*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- CARABI, A. Conversation with Toni Morrison. *Belles Lettres*, Paris, v. 9, n. 4, p. 38-39, 1994.
- CARUTH, C. Unclaimed experience: trauma and the possibility of history. *Yale French Studies*, New Haven, n. 79, p. 181-192, 1991.
- CARUTH, C. Introduction. In: CARUTH, C. (Ed.). *Trauma: explorations in memory*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. p. 3-12.
- CONFINO, A. Collective memory and cultural history: problems of method. *Am. Hist. Rev.*, Washington, D.C., v. 102, n. 5, p. 1386-1403, 1997.
- COSER, L.A. *Maurice Halbwachs*. on collective memory. Intro. and Trans. COSER, L.A. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- D'AGUIAR, F. *Feeding the Ghosts*. London: Vintage, 1997.
- D'AGUIAR, F. The last essay about slavery. In: DUNANT, S.; PORTER, R. (Ed.). *The age of anxiety*. London: Virago, 1997. p. 125-139.
- DAVIES, C.B. Writing off marginality, minoring, and effacement. *Women's Studies. International Forum*, Berkeley, v. 14, n. 4, p. 249-263, 1991.
- DONALD, M. *Origins of the modern mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- ELLISON, R. *Invisible man*. New York: Random House, 1952.
- ERLL, A. *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*. Stuttgart and Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler, 2005.
- EYERMAN, R. *Cultural trauma*. Slavery and the formation of African American identity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- FELMAN, S.; LAUB, D. *Testimony: crises of witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York and

- London: Routledge, 1992.
- FOUCAULT, M. *Language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*. In: BOUCHARD, D.F. (Ed.). Trans. BOUCHARD, D.F.; SIMON, S. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- FREUD, S. Moses and Monotheism. In: RICHARDS, A. (Ed.). *The origins of religion*. Penguin Freud Library XIII, Trans. STRACHEY, J. London and New York: Penguin, [1939] 1990. p. 237-386.
- FRIEDLÄNDER, S. *Probing the limits of representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution."* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- FROUDE-DURIX, C. Anonymity, naming and memory in Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts*: Islands of Fiction in a Sea of History. *Commonwealth: Essays and Studies*, Dijon, v. 21, n. 1, p. 47-54, 1998.
- FUKUYAMA, F. *The end of history and the last man*. 3rd rev. ed. New York: Perennial, 2002.
- GILLIS, J.R. Memory and identity: the history of a relationship. In: GILLIS, J. R. (Ed.). *Commemorations. The Politics of National Memory*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. p. 3-24.
- GILROY, P. *The Black Atlantic. modernity and double consciousness*. London: Verso, 1993.
- HAMILTON, P. The knife edge: Debates about Memory and History. In: DARIAN-SMITH, K.; HAMILTON, P. (Ed.). *Memory and history in 20th century Australia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. p. 25-37.
- HENKE, CH. Remembering selves, constructing selves. memory and identity in contemporary British fiction. *J. Study Brit. Cult.*, Tübingen, v. 10, n. 1, p. 77-100, 2003.
- HODGKIN, K.; RADSTONE, S. *Contested pasts: the politics of memory*. London and New York: Routledge, 2003.
- HUTTON, P.H. *History as an art of memory*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1993.
- HUYSEN, A. *Twilight memories. Making time in a culture of amnesia*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- IRWIN-ZARECK, I. *Frames of remembrance. The dynamics of collective memory*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994.
- JENKINS, K. *Re-thinking history*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- KARDUX, J. Witnessing the middle passage: trauma and memory in the narratives of Olaudah Equiano and Venture Smith and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. In: DIETRICH, M. et al. (Ed.). *Mapping African America: history, narrative formation, and production of knowledge*. Hamburg: LIT, 1999. p. 147-162.
- KING, N. *Memory, narrative identity. Remembering the self*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.
- KLEIN, K.L. On the emergence of memory in historical discourse. *Representations*, Berkeley, v. 69, p. 127-150, 2000.
- LaCAPRA, D. Trauma, absence, loss. *Critical Inquiry*, Chicago, v. 25, n. 4, p. 696-727, 1999.
- LAPLANCHE, J.; PONTALIS, J.B. *The language of Psychoanalysis*. London: Karmac Books, 1988.
- LANGER, L. *Holocaust testimonies. The ruins of memory*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.
- LAUB, D. Truth and testimony: the process and the struggle. In: CARUTH, C. (Ed.). *Trauma: explorations in memory*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. p. 61-75.
- LEDENT, B. Remembering slavery: history as roots in the fiction of Caryl Phillips and Fred D'Aguiar. In: DELREZ, M.; LEDENT, B. (Ed.). *The context and the culmination. Essays in honour of Hena Maes-Jelinek*. Liège: L3-Liège Language and Literature, 1997. p. 271-280.
- MANTEL, H. Black is not Jewish. *Lit. Rev.*, London, p. 39-40, 1997.
- MARGALIT, A. *The ethics of memory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- McGAUGH, J.L. Emotional activation, neuromodulatory systems, and memory. In: SCHACTER, D.L. (Ed.). *Memory distortion. How minds, brains, and societies reconstruct the past*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. p. 255-273.
- MEGILL, A. History, memory, and identity. *Hist. Human Sci.*, London, v. 11, n. 3, p. 37-62, 1998.
- MIDDLETON, P.; WOODS, T. *Literatures of memory: history, time and space in postwar writing*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- MORRISON, T. *Beloved*. London: Picador, 1988.
- MORRISON, T. The site of memory. In: ZINSSER, W. (Ed.). *The art and craft of memoir*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995. p. 85-102.
- MOSCOVITCH, M. Confabulation. In: SCHACTER, D.L. (Ed.). *Memory distortion. How minds, brains, and societies reconstruct the past*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. p. 197-225.
- NASTA, S. *Home truths. Fictions of the South Asian diaspora in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002.
- NORA, P. Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire. *Representations*, Berkeley, v. 26, p. 7-24, 1989.
- NÜNNING, A. Von historischer fiktion zu historiographischer metafiction. v. 1. *Theorie, typologie und poetik des historischen romans*. Trier: WVT, 1995.
- OLICK, J.K.; ROBBINS, J. Social memory studies: from 'collective memory' to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices. *Ann. Rev. Sociol.*, Palo Alto, v. 24, p. 105-140, 1998.
- O'MEALLY, R.; FABRE, G. Introduction. In: FABRE, G.; O'MEALLY, R. (Ed.). *History and memory in African-American culture*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. p. 3-17.
- PHILLIPS, C. *The European tribe*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.
- PETHES, N.; RUCHATZ, J. (Ed.). *Gedächtnis und erinnerung: ein interdisziplinäres lexikon*. Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2001.
- PLASA, C.; RING, B.J. *The discourse of slavery: Aphra Behn and Toni Morrison*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- RADSTONE, S. *Memory and methodology*. Oxford: Berg, 2000.

- RADSTONE, S.; HODGKIN, K. *Regimes of memory*. London: Routledge, 2003.
- RICOEUR, P. Memory and forgetting. In: KEARNEY, R.; DOOLEY, M. (Ed.). *Questioning ethics*. Contemporary debates in Philosophy. London: Routledge, 1999. p. 5-11.
- RICOEUR, P. *Memory, history, forgetting*. Trans. BLAMEY K.; PELLAUER D. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004. p. 86-92.
- RIMMON-KENAN, S. *Narrative fiction*. Contemporary poetics. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- SCHACTER, D.L. *Memory distortion: how minds, brains, and societies reconstruct the past*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- SCHACTER, D.L. *Searching the past: the brain, the mind and the past*. New York: Basic Books, 1996.
- SCHACTER, D.L. *Memory, brain, and belief*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- SCHUDSON, M. Dynamics of distortion in collective memory. In: SCHACTER, D. (Ed.). *Memory distortion: how minds, brains, and societies remember*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1995. p. 346-364.
- SOLLORS, W. Introduction. In: FABRE, G.; O'MEALLY, R. (Ed.). *History and memory in African-American culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. p. 7-8.
- STURKEN, M. *Tangled memories*. The Vietnam war, the aids epidemic, and the politics of remembering. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- TAYLOR-GUTHRIE, D. *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994.
- TERDIMAN, R. *Present past: modernity and the memory crisis*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- WALVIN, J. *Black ivory: a history of British slavery*. London: Harper Collins, 1993.
- WALVIN, J. The slave trade. *Res. Afr. Lit.*, Austin, v. 29, n. 4, p. 184-186, 1998.
- WERTSCH, J.V. *Voices of collective remembering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- WHITEHEAD, A. *Trauma fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- YATES, F.A. *The art of memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- YOUNG, J. *The texture of memory*. Holocaust memorials and meaning. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.
- ZAMORA, L.P. *The usable past*. The imagination of history in recent fiction of the Americas. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- ZERMON DAVIS, N.; STARN, R. Introduction. *Representations*, Berkeley, v. 26, p. 1-24, 1989.

Received on April 27, 2007.

Accepted on June 11, 2007.