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Resurfacing: The Poetics of Water in African and Caribbean Literature

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Resurfacing: The Poetics of Water in African and Caribbean Literature

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Abstract

Resurfacing: The Poetics of Water in African and Caribbean Literature

by
Bronwyn Averett

This dissertation examines works of literature by African and Caribbean writers through a concept that I term *resurfacing*, which denotes a poetic engagement with bodies of water that recuperates the individual and collective past in the present moment. Drawing from the work of Martinican writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant, I seek to explore the subaquatic connections between Africa and the Caribbean as conceived by creators of fiction and poetry. The element of water is at once life-giving and deathly, and the following study shows that such a paradox evokes the lived experience throughout the black Atlantic. Taking the oral literature of West Africa as my starting point, I move to a discussion of the Atlantic Ocean in contemporary Senegalese literature, in order to pursue a comparative analysis that also examines water as an important element within the conceptions of afterlife in Haitian Vodou. Finally, I explore the intergenerational memory of the Middle Passage as conveyed by Caribbean authors living in Canada. Juxtaposing African and Caribbean texts accomplishes two equally important goals. On the one hand, I am concerned with the sustained relationship between Africa and the Caribbean created by the slave trade and maintained by the deep cultural roots that continue to thrive and to be rearticulated in new forms throughout the Caribbean and the African diaspora more broadly. On the other hand, the discourse surrounding Caribbean cultures brings to the fore the unique position of these islands to cultivate multiplicity, *créolité*, and infinite complexity. This position lends itself to a rhizomatic openness that is productively accommodating of difference. Therefore, this dissertation considers what it would mean to see the weblike structures so readily available to an analysis of Caribbean literature and intellectual history at work in the African context. In essence, *resurfacing* distinguishes a creative process at work wherein the waters of the world symbolically become a vast repository of history, memory, and spiritual and artistic consciousness that is poetically engaged in literature throughout Atlantic spaces.

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Introduction

Is the Sea History?

> *Ce sont des signes de piste sous-marine, de la Côte d'Or aux îles Sous-le-Vent. Ainsi toute navigation sur la splendeur verte d'océan – la mélancolie des traversées en transatlantique, la gloire des régates sportives, la tradition des courses de yoles ou de gommiers – suggère-t-elle, avec une évidence d'algues, ces bas-fonds, ces profonds, ponctués de boulets qui rouillent à peine.*[1]
>
> *Même l'Atlantique ne peut digérer tout ce que la terre vomît.*[2]

Reaching the Surface

In what has become a touchstone of Atlantic thought, Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott declares that "The sea is History."[3] This statement signifies that the vast waters of the world are where history – the events of the past with their relics and residue – may be found. Indeed, according to Walcott, the sea is the "gray vault" keeping the past locked firmly away from the present. It is the space where bones are "soldered by coral to bone," where the dead do not rest in peace but rather become part of a vast underwater aquascape. The sea of this poem refers to the Middle Passage, the journey across the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to the New World, experienced by captive Africans who would be sold into the system of plantation slavery in North and South America and the islands of the Caribbean. Moreover, Walcott connects major Biblical events to the plight of enslaved Africans in a flurry of underwater images that convey a subaquatic

interconnectedness between disparate pasts. In this way, the vast expanses of bygone time are represented by the infinitude of water. However, while it may seem that the past has been washed away into the depths of maritime abyss and oblivion, the following chapters, in closely examining the portrayal of water in African and Caribbean literature, demonstrate that history is not "locked" into the sea, but rather is continually recovered through narrative processes that engage individual and collective memory. In examining the portrayal of interactions between land and water in this body of work, I mean to trouble the notion that "the sea is history," in the more colloquial sense of being finished or forgotten, and instead show that the vast network of earth's waters, and all they contain, are of present and pressing concern.

In reading the work of African and Caribbean writers – ranging from oral stories collected throughout Africa during the early- and mid-twentieth century to contemporary fiction by Caribbean writers living in the United States – I continually encountered representations of a preoccupation with water that convey a process I call *resurfacing*. The basic principle of this concept is that what is thrown into the depths of the water does not remain there. Though the Atlantic is often understood as a vast abyss, taking in everything that the land (and its human communities) rejects, it is possible to see this body of water as a great cyclical system, in which what has been lost – the past in general, forgotten historical events, individual and collective memory – will always come once again to the surface. This way of understanding the workings of time and narrative is inspired in part by the phenomenon of earth's currents and tides that together are responsible for washing the refuse of the ocean – whether man-made or natural – onto the

shores. The following research is also influenced by the water cycle, which encompasses the processes of evaporation, precipitation, and condensation that transforms the world's oceans into clouds, that become rain, that then become rivers, flowing once again back into the oceans. This vast network is the earth's fundamental system of climate control, as well as its method of purification. As such, continual transformation is water's principle function. The premise under examination in this dissertation – that the world's bodies of water symbolically carry with them the residue of earth's human communities – is an appropriate representation, for what I demonstrate is that the past is unceasingly transformed and transported.

Water in African and Caribbean Literature

Bodies of water have featured prominently in the imaginary of African and Caribbean writers throughout a rich history of both oral and written work. A quick survey of *contes* or oral tales from any region in Africa will likely reveal stories that feature a relationship with a water spirit, a temporary sojourn within the waters themselves, or a journey that requires crossing some body of water. As one of the main necessities of human survival, it naturally takes on great importance in the mythology and storytelling of various cultures throughout the world, and certainly throughout the African continent and Caribbean islands. A general sense of water in African oral tales may be found in collections gathered by such influential ethnologists and literary scholars as Gérard Meyer, Lilyan Kesteloot and Ruth Finnegan.[4] Similarly, the work of Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau in his *Creole Folktales* (1994) also reveals the important aspects of

Caribbean storytelling. Though the study of oral literature has fallen somewhat out of fashion in the field of African literature, important works such as literary scholar Harold Scheub's *The Poem in the Story* (2002) and novelist and critic Isidore Okpewho's *African Oral Literature* (1992) continue to resonate, and are of immense importance in understanding the structures of non-written forms of narrative. In any study of water mythology, the figure of Mami Wata comes to the fore, for this aquatic deity plays a significant role throughout Africa and the Caribbean. In this regard, the work of art historian Henry John Drewal, exemplified by both his *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and its Diasporas* (2008) and the collaborative project *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora* (2008), serve as the foundational texts to an understanding of the importance of this worldwide spiritual and artistic touchstone. Such studies in the mythology and spirituality of Africa and the Caribbean are complemented by the examination of Vodou, not only in its current incarnation within Haiti, but also in the African origins of the associated beliefs and practices. With the figures of Lasirèn and Agwe – aquatic deities, or *loas*, who reside in the rivers, lakes, streams and seas – Vodou in Haiti certainly emphasizes bodies of water, and the conception of the afterlife as lying in the depths of the water, or *anba dlo*, also sheds light on the metaphysical resonances of this element. Indeed Vodou is also construed as a strong link between Africa and the Caribbean, for it presents a form of continuity between the two places, while its multiple influences render it a continually developing religious phenomenon. Therefore, folklore, mythology, and spiritual practices, past and present, all serve as part of the foundation of my literary readings throughout

this dissertation.

In general, water paradoxically signifies both death and life, for it is a dangerous element if not correctly navigated but it is also responsible for communal sustenance. This is the theme that my dissertation will predominately focus on, but of course, as Fatou Diome would quickly point out, water is "multiple" in its many meanings.[5] Furthermore, while oral tales collected in rural settings tend to show the human relationship to the environment very explicitly, the significance of water persists in the written literature of contemporary writers living throughout the urban settings of the world. This is to say, water presents continuity through time and space, while also offering new interpretations. The river, for example, while being at once a place of communal gathering, also becomes a borderline between spaces in African literature. Such is the case in texts like Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo's *The River Between* (1965), which explores the division between two villages during the Mau Mau uprising of 1952-1960, and Sony Labou Tansi's s *L'Anté-peuple* (1983), wherein the Congo River presents a devastating crossing between two countries for its main character. Water as both natural element and physical setting maintains a ubiquitous presence in mythologies throughout the world, and so lends itself to intersecting tropes. One instance of this is the prevalence of the Greek myth of Orpheus in the African context.[6] Such a reference comes to the fore in Cameroonian writer and performer Werewere Liking's *Orphée-dafric* (1981), in which the eponymous character must rescue his wife Nyango from the depths of the river, and also in Senegalese author Boris Boubacar Diop's *Le Cavalier et son ombre* (1998) wherein two lovers are separated by an impassable river that also

symbolizes the descent into a deathly madness associated with the total absorption into mythology. Significantly, such tales show instances in which resurfacing is impossible, and provoke speculation about the conditions under which the beloved may not be rescued.

Though I consider all bodies of water and the processes associated with them throughout this dissertation, the focus on the Atlantic Ocean truly stands out in the works that I examine. As I explain below, my focus on the African continent is largely situated in the literature of francophone West Africa, however, there are many literary portrayals of the ocean issuing from other regions. For example, the contemporary Congolese authors Tchicaya U'Tamsi and Jean-Baptiste Tati-Loutard are known for their view toward the Atlantic, with works such as U'Tamsi's *Les Méduses ou les orties de mer* (1981) and Tati-Loutard's collection of poetry *Poèmes de la mer* (1990) grounding the view outward into infinity while evoking the precariousness of the shore line. In the context of North Africa, it is the Mediterranean Sea rather than the Atlantic that takes precedence. Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer* (1962) recounts in a nightmarish tone the violent chaos of the Algerian independence movements that took place from 1954 to 1962, with emphasis on the sea as a carrier of the past. In the more contemporary context, Tahar Ben Jelloun *Partir* (2006) portrays the individual and collective longing to depart from the African coastline and to reach the shores of Europe as an intense desire, incarnated both by the horizon line and the figure of a woman, both also signifying death.

Of course, the Atlantic Ocean is one of the most significant symbolic elements in Caribbean literature, reinforcing the memory of the transatlantic journey of the Middle

Passage as a continued element of the cultural imaginary shaped in part by the slave trade. While I discuss this memory in detail throughout this dissertation, the reverse of this voyage has also been meaningfully portrayed. Two works that invoke similar stories of female protagonists who cross across the great divide in order to regain an African homeland are Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane* (1982) and Maryse Condé's *En attendant le bonheur: hérémakhonnon* (1976). Both from Guadeloupe, these novelists portray semi-autobiographical characters who do not find the Africa they sought, and whose disillusionment inspires them to posit that perhaps the abysmal waters of the Atlantic truly do separate these spaces, and that any significant return remains impossible. Yet the Atlantic is not the only body of water that is traversed in the literature of the Caribbean. An alternative to this re-crossing of the Atlantic is the journey north toward the United States which both echoes the Middle Passage while also changing its itinerary entirely. Portraying the journey of Haitians in their attempt to reach Miami, Haitian writer Emile Ollivier's *Passages* (1991) is a key example of this contemporary form of crossing the water, a journey taken by many Caribbeans fleeing perilous circumstances. Otherwise, some portrayals of the sea in Caribbean literature have shown a tendency to focus on the shore line. For example, Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (1992) depicts the establishment of a thriving community of marginalized individuals along the edge of the water, a process which must continually be repeated as they rebuild their homes and their lives. The Trinidadian writer and documentarian Dionne Brand follows a similar story of tenacity in the face of immense challenges in her novel *At the Full and Change of the Moon* (1999) with the character of Bola, whose family populates the desolate Culebra Bay while she

integrates herself into the very workings of the water. Of course, the ocean and the sea are not the only important aquatic elements in Caribbean literature. Condé has emphasized water throughout her writing, most strikingly in *Traversée de la mangrove* (1985), in which the ravine takes on the characterization of a sexualized and feminine space. Indeed the novel is also in dialogue with Haitian writer and politician Jacques Roumain's classic work *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1944), wherein the search for water is portrayed as a deeply communal and also political venture, meant to bring peace and productivity to a small Haitian village after a devastating drought.

Given this very brief synopsis of significant examples from African and Caribbean literature, it should be evident that there is much material to choose from for the purposes of this project. Indeed, the ubiquitous nature of water makes it such that narrowing down a particular line of inquiry proves difficult. In this study, I have chosen to concentrate specifically on the aspects of water that serve to show a creative process at work within the writing of African and Caribbean authors. Resurfacing, as a defining structure of narrative undertaking, allows a consideration of the connectedness between disparate times and spaces. Furthermore, it lends a metaphoric materiality to the phenomenon of story, and the portrayal of narrative as part of the physical world shows that the stories and histories of a society are conceived of as weighty cultural products by their authors. While researching this project in African and Caribbean literature, I became intrigued by textual instances in which bodies of water signify a literary process at work. It is certain that the Atlantic contains the remnants of deeply complex intertwining histories spanning vast reaches of time and space, and the works of fiction I explore show

the ways in which these pasts are continually drawn back into present consciousness. This is to be metaphorically understood as the ocean's ebb and flow, but writers themselves, as actors in this history, also pull from the depths in order to narrate what has been forgotten.

Around the Atlantic

This dissertation begins with works of West African oral literature and mythology that issue from the intriguing intersection of ethnographic and fictional writing. These are Marcel Griaule's recounting of the *Nummo* myth, four tales from Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié's famous collections, and Abdoulaye Sadji's lesser known but powerful retelling of a Lébou legend. I then move forward in time to the works of contemporary Senegalese writer Fatou Diome. My analysis closely reads her portrayal of the Atlantic Ocean in comparison with that of Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat. Finally, I examine two texts by Marie-Célie Agnant and M. NourbeSe Philip, both Caribbean writers now living in Canada, that deal more directly with the memory of the slave trade and its continued resonance in the present day. It would be possible to surmise from the given geography that this dissertation is largely composed of a transatlantic conversation between West Africa and the Caribbean – more specifically between Senegal and Haiti. This is only partially true, but as such, I should briefly explain why I choose to focus on these spaces and the connection between them, when there are so many fascinating literary instances of water throughout Africa and the Caribbean.

Rather than attempt to encompass all of African mythology and literature in which

water could be found as one of the principle symbolic elements – a feat that would require its own volume7 – I find it enlightening to focus primarily on Senegalese literature at different points in time. Moving from Abdoulaye Sadji, who wrote during the end of the French colonial period, to Fatou Diome, whose latest book came out in 2013, I show that the Atlantic Ocean and its surrounding mythology has maintained an important and stable role in the literary imaginary of coastal Senegal. Furthermore, I highlight these examples by also delving into the oral literature of West Africa more generally. Such a choice of texts shows the resonance of water through different mythologies that lie in geographic proximity to one another – for example, the *Nummo* myth from the Dogon people of present day Mali, and the legends of the Lébou, a culture of fishers living on the beaches of Senegal. It also provides a scant but intriguing base of examples issuing from populations that were greatly affected by the transatlantic slave trade, thus further establishing the similarities between creative representations of water in Africa and the Caribbean.[8] Similarly, my research does not aim to present an exhaustive and comparative study of bodies of water in Caribbean literature, as fascinating as such a project would be. My reason for privileging Haiti above other Caribbean spaces has much to do with an impassioned claim made by the novelist and poet Marie-Célie Agnant, that the history of slavery within Haiti has been largely forgotten, a gap in memory that she sought to rectify in her novel *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001).[9] With few exceptions,[10] I find that the author is correct in her assessment. Yet, however great her dismay, Agnant's commitment to highlighting the memory of the transatlantic slave trade in the contemporary moment also shows an instance of the literary resurfacing of a traumatic

past. This example leads to an exploration of Haitian Vodou, in which a basic structure of resurfacing – the cyclical journey between life and death, above and below the water – provides the most basic metaphysical framework. Privileging Haiti in my dissertation thus allows me to combine spiritual belief and literary praxis. Finally, concentrating on the Atlantic Ocean in both Africa and the Caribbean demonstrates that, while the ocean certainly occupies significant space in the Caribbean imaginary, this is not solely because of the experience of the Middle Passage and the ways that this traumatic experience have been passed through the collective memory of generations. The vast waters that were crossed between Africa and the New World do not only constitute a break, but also signify continuity.

While the concept of resurfacing did, in many ways, come about through a comparison of works by Fatou Diome and Edwidge Danticat – as is evidenced by the centrality of their texts in my dissertation – such a conversation is only part of the interconnected web that runs across and through bodies of water. Each text that comes into focus, as I trace the theme of resurfacing and its various literary incarnations, presents a confluence of sources from around the globe. Abdoulaye Sadji was deeply influenced by German culture, and – like many African writers of his time who were educated in European institutions – he was a dedicated reader of the ethnologist Leo Frobenius.[11] His attention to African traditions of storytelling in *Tounka* (1952) certainly demonstrates the intellectual impact of German ethnography as exemplified by this influential figure. Edwidge Danticat's invested portrayal of Haitian Vodou's fundamental principles in *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013) is openly inclusive of folkloric sources as

varied as the fables of LaFontaine and Grimm's fairytales. M. NourbeSe Philip in her book-length poem, *Zong!*, incorporates many voices in her work, evidenced by the various African and European languages that fully convey the cacophony of words that would have been heard aboard the slave ship; the technique also emphasizes the complex network of cultures that have shaped the Caribbean. This dissertation is therefore less interested in tracing the defining characteristics of single cultures, than it is dedicated to exploring literary instances of cultural multiplicity, continuity, and convergence.

Water in Relation

Conceiving of the Atlantic Ocean as a vast realm of encounter is an important starting point for this project, and my understanding of the connections formed throughout Atlantic spaces is influenced by work of scholars such as the English literary theorist and cultural historian Paul Gilroy and Martinican writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant. The concept of the "black Atlantic" came to prominence with Gilroy's work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). The term as employed by Gilroy means to both encompass the geographic spaces surrounding the Atlantic Ocean that were most directly affected by the transatlantic slave trade, and to denote the special connections that these areas of the world still share. However, while it is meant to signify Europe, Africa, and the Americas as a whole, references to the black Atlantic in current scholarship often point solely to spaces within the "New World" or the Caribbean islands, with the intention of addressing the cultural and economic influences of Africa and Europe upon them. This is largely due to the fact that the Atlantic Ocean itself, as Gilroy

maintains, holds a key position in the cultural imaginary of descendants of Africans within the Americas and the Caribbean. Indeed, as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, the Atlantic certainly signifies the vast abyss crossed during the Middle Passage during the journey from Africa to the "New World" and from a cohesive past to a fractured future. Yet, however important the memory of the Middle Passage is to those living in former spaces of slavery – and the intergenerational transmission of this traumatic break comes to the fore in this dissertation – I show that the Atlantic Ocean also features prominently in the imaginary of African peoples, particularly those living in coastal regions. As such, I emphasize Africa as an inherent and important part of the black Atlantic, not only a starting point in a vast triangular journey.[12]

The Middle Passage is rightly understood as a break, yet water also maintains continuity, not only between the African homeland and the American New World, but also between the past and the present. As Glissant points out in the passage that provides an epigraph for this introduction, taken from his essay "La Barque Ouverte" found in *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), the *boulets verdis* of drowned captives dot the ocean floor, forging a connection between Africa and the Caribbean. But while the currents move in a westward direction, as time moves from past to present, these remnants of the slave trade are not strictly linear. They subvert the flows of water and of time, assuring multiple directions of transatlantic connection. As such, the intergenerational memory of those who experienced the slave trade is not only to be defined by a traumatic break, but also to be understood as the issue of Relation, as conceived in the great oceanic womb of the Atlantic. Most fully elaborated in the above cited work, Glissant's concept of Relation

may be generally defined as a form of cultural openness, but is more specifically a way of expressing both the unity and the otherness that exists between individuals and collectives, replacing hierarchical with non-hierarchical forms of encounter. Furthermore, by the logic of Relation, it is possible to maintain a rootedness that is neither singular nor totalizing, but rather infinitely and rhizomatically connected throughout the world.[13] While much has been written in contemporary social sciences about the phenomenon of our ever-globalizing, cosmopolitan world, in which individuals are continually in motion, located in small and large diasporic communities that maintain important ties to both their birthplaces and adopted homelands – often construed as an existence that functions without regard to national boundaries – I found Glissant's theory of Relation, particularly as expressed by his idea of the rooted nomad, to be most in line with the goals of this project. On the one hand, his philosophy is shaped by the Caribbean history, environment and collective imaginary, and so aligns with much of the literature I discuss, and on the other hand, he is resolutely attentive to the poetics inherent in cultural production.

Exhaustive examination of water in literature is a project that lends itself naturally to discourses of motion. Indeed, rivers and oceans, lakes and lagoons are the interstitial spaces of the world, the liminal realms that have historically been crossed by those leaving their homelands. The most immediate example that comes to mind is the Middle Passage, but this aquatic separation is echoed in the Caribbean Sea that separates Haiti from Miami, or the Strait of Gibraltar lying between Morocco and Spain. Even if the journey is conducted by airplane, bodies of water evoke the separation between the place of origin and the adopted home but they also suggest connection – for water once was the

only means of travel between landmasses – and subaquatic unity. Many of the authors featured in this study come from formerly colonial spaces and currently reside in European or North American cities that have become sites of diasporic communities; as such, much of their work portrays the complex negotiations of a hybrid, multinational, or simply uprooted identity. Such a theme is very productively taken up by many contemporary cultural theorists such as Homi Bhabha, and later, Arjun Appadurai and James Clifford.[14] Yet, this important body of work has also provoked some debate in terms of the continued importance of recognizing concrete material and political concerns encountered by those who are part of migrant communities, as conveyed in the work of scholars like Simon Gikandi and Pheng Cheah.[15] The concerns and questions encountered in the discourse of cultural identity are not the main focus of the present project, for I am interested above all in the practices of literature and therefore primarily pursue close textual analysis rather than exploring the social, economic or political conditions in and about which authors write. However, my study of the poetics of water, as the element that both separates and joins the earth's landmasses, will certainly add fruitful considerations to this ongoing conversation.

Finally, this project is a timely one in that the exploration of water itself is on the rise in several current intellectual trends. Deep knowledge of the world's environment has traditionally been relegated to scientific exploration, but with the tools now established by the field of ecocriticism, literary projects also take into account the natural world in conjunction with its human inhabitants. The waters of the world certainly are of interest in this discipline, which fuses poetics and science. Even more recent is the trend known

as the “blue humanities” whose goal is to account for the world's aquatic realm as it has been presented in works of fiction and philosophy throughout time and in the current moment. While my own project is not strictly confined to either a blue cultural studies or an ecocritical perspective, this dissertation has much to contribute to these fields, and would also foster productive conversations within other areas of research in African and Caribbean literature.

First of all, an awareness of the human relationship to the environment is evident throughout most of the works I examine in the following chapters. Underlying the concept of resurfacing is the principle that water is a vast conduit for ideas, memories, history and story. As such, it connects disparate times and spaces. Yet this same principle – that what goes into the water must come back again in some form – would provide a very useful basis for more ecocritical angle of study. Ecocriticism itself is defined as the study of the relationship between literature and the environment.[16] Very interesting work is presently being done in this field with a focus on African and Caribbean literatures, and these studies would benefit from the examination of a specific connection between post-slavery or post-colonial memory and the representation of bodies of water. Indeed, the present project would add context to the work of scholars like Elizabeth DeLoughrey, whose volume *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (2005), edited along with Renée K. Gosson and George B. Handley, served as a groundbreaking exploration of the portrayal of the environment in Caribbean literature. In the realm of African-American literature, Anissa Janine Wardi's *Water in African-American Memory: an Ecocritical Perspective* (2011) is particularly helpful to my own

research in that the author draws on the connection between bodies of water and bodies of men and women, rendering the processes of memory – as shown in literature – both physical and narrative. Monique Allewaert has written an intriguing volume on the environment in American plantation systems entitled *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (2013), in which she explores the border spaces between land and water, and destabilizes the separation between the categories of human and environment, working from the deprivation of basic personhood that defines slavery. Recently, work on the environment in Africa has led to studies of literature like Byron Carminero-Santangelo's *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice and Political Ecology* (2014), a volume that explores the "nature of Africa" while successfully demonstrating the appropriateness of environmentalist ideology in a postcolonial context. My own work therefore adds to a chorus of voices who proclaim the importance of examining the human relationship to the environment, while also contributing a specific focus on water and a more nuanced understanding of the cultural and literary import of this ubiquitous symbol of interconnectedness.

The "blue humanities" describes a practice of examining literature that may be attributed to Shakespeare scholar Steve Mentz.[17] In his volume *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (2009), the author explores various activities that humans perform in relation to the seas, and the book ends with a manifesto of sorts, calling for a "blue cultural studies" that would recognize the importance of revisiting the perceptions of the world's ocean's throughout history. Margaret Cohen's book *The Novel and the Sea* (2010)

focuses on the concept of craft in the maritime setting in order to propose that the sea is transformative of the very genre of the novel in the early 18th century. The maritime novel is a genre most commonly associated with canonical English literature, but a poetics of the sea certainly holds a place in the French literary tradition as well, as is evidenced by the exhaustive two-volume collection *La Mer dans la littérature française* (2003), a series of excerpts edited by Simon Leys. Indeed, while the blue humanities seems at this juncture to be a largely English and American endeavor, the task of exploring water's role in the literary imagination may also be attributed to French sources. The famous 19th century historian and scientist of the natural world Jules Michelet's work *La Mer* (1861) presents the sea as the great primordial beginning of all life, in essence, *la mère* as well as *la mer*.[18] The psychoanalyst Gaston Bachelard contends in *L'Eau et les rêves* (1942) that water's material attributes define the most basic structures of the poetic imaginary, and while he privileges the fresh water of streams and brooks over the salt water of the oceans, his basic premise of a link between poetic reverie and the aquatic realm was highly influential to my work in this dissertation. In his article "The Blue Humanities" (2013), historian John R. Gillis describes this recent trend in academic inquiry, and claims that, "The emergence of the blue humanities is a belated recognition of the close relationship between modern western culture and the sea." Indeed, it is clear that studies falling into the category of blue humanities have thus far been a European and North American undertaking, yet I see no reason that this fascinating trend in scholarship should remain so. As such, this dissertation will certainly contribute to the continued exploration of literature that seeks to illuminate the role of water, and will join projects

such as Mentz's to the field of black Atlantic studies.

Resurfacing: a Multiple Concept

In the first chapter, I address the relationship between water and narrative in works by French ethnologist Marcel Griaule as well as West African writers Birago Diop, Bernard Dadié and Abdoulaye Sadji. While their cultural and intellectual backgrounds vary, as do their projects and purposes, each of these authors made significant contributions to an understanding of the deeply complex oral traditions throughout West Africa. Furthermore, the texts under examination here were all published during the period of France's colonial presence within this region. Beginning at this juncture in history allows for an engagement of literature that is based on the encounter of disparate worldviews. These works collectively represent a period of great transition in terms of literary production itself, as the stylings of French poetry were learned by students in African schoolhouses, and as the spoken word ceded to the written. As I demonstrate, the reliance upon the symbolic element of water in these written works helps to articulate the relationship of West African cultures to the oral narrative, and the delicate negotiation of "traditional" modes of telling with novel forms is evident. Griaule's *Dieu d'eau* (1948) records the conversations that he held with Ogotemmêli, an initiate into the sacred wisdom of the Dogon of present-day Mali, in which the latter reveals the cosmogony of this people. Birago Diop's and Bernard Dadié's collections of *contes*, or oral tales, all originally published in the late 1940's and early 1950's, retell in written form the influential and ubiquitous stories of their respective homelands – Senegal and Côte

d'Ivoire respectively. Though the authors claim – either implicitly or explicitly – merely to record these stories, their own creative engagement is evident. Finally, Abdoulaye Sadji's *Tounka* (1952) pulls from the mythology of the Lébou of Senegal to recount the adventures of a fisherman, who weds and then forsakes a goddess of the sea.

Through close examination, I demonstrate that water is not only an element of spiritual import or spatial distinction within these texts, but that it also takes on a metaliterary role. First, Marcel Griaule's portrayal of the *Nummo* as aquatic beings that speak the universe into being through aqueous vapors expresses a deep connection between words and the world. But this world is one of inherent fluidity, and the narratives that describe it are fluid as well, dynamic in nature rather than solid and stagnant. In reading the creation story presented in *Dieu d'eau*, while also taking into account the critical controversy that arose around Griaule's work, I posit that the very fluid nature of the ethnologist's reporting – based on an intersubjective process of storytelling between himself and his informant – belies not simply a fictional account of Dogon beliefs but rather shows an acutely sensitive portrayal of the Dogon universe. Secondly, in closely reading Diop's and Dadié's tales, I focus on bodies of water that are represented as significant to the history of people on the land. In these stories, water becomes both container and conduit for the stories of the past, which influence the workings of the present moment. In Diop's story of "Maman-caïman" particularly, I read the insistence upon the river as a kind of storyteller as an evocative statement about the importance of the oral tradition within West African culture. While the divide between oral and written literature could be construed as resting on the grounds of the former's immateriality as

opposed to the latter's permanence, the insistence upon story's location in the water emphasizes that while the oral story is not static, it is certainly no less powerful a force. Finally, in Abdoulaye Sadji' novella *Tounka*, the Atlantic Ocean is construed as a mythical space, whose attributes become part of legend on land through a process of secrecy and speculation. It is predominantly within this novella that I more fully define a process of resurfacing in narrative. By joining the history of the Lébou – most notably their trek from land to water – to the appearances of a mythological deity, Sadji conveys the inseparability of a people and its stories. If, for the author, legends are the seat of truth, then it is clear that the space of legend itself is the ocean.

An examination of narrative resurfacing continues in the second chapter with a close study of the Atlantic Ocean as it features in the works of Fatou Diome and Edwidge Danticat. While these authors come from opposite shores – Diome grew up in Senegal but lives primarily in Strasbourg, while Danticat spent her childhood in Haiti but now lives in Miami – their respective works demonstrate similar concepts of the ocean as a container and conduit for the past, as well as for individual and collective memory. For Diome, the Atlantic Ocean is compared to both a stomach and a womb, devouring the *déchets* of the land while also giving birth to the stories of those who fall into its depths. She uses the term *eau-gresse* to describe this devouring mother, both nurturing and violent, who represents the water's life-giving and deathly qualities. From her first book of short stories *Préférence Nationale* (2002) to her latest novel *Impossible de grandir* (2013), Diome has continually explored the problematic identity of the immigrant living

in France. Through her fictional alter ego Salie, she probes the prejudices of European society while yet reflecting deeply on her status as a permanent *étrangère*, even in her native island Niodior, off the coast of the Sine-Saloum delta of Senegal. Beginning with her short story "Les Loups de l'Atlantique," my analysis looks closely at Diome's pessimistic portrayal of the tight-knit society that rejects her from birth. I call this rejection a form of "terrestrial monolithicism" that is relevant to understanding the roles of both religion and the nation in her work.

In this early short story, Diome's description of the ocean focuses on its ambivalent relationship to the land. Briefly referring to the transatlantic slave trade, she suggests the water's complicity in this historical tragedy, yet also emphasizes its offer of salvation for all those who do not fit within the various exclusionary monoliths of the land – in Salie's case, the legitimizing family structure of marriage specifically. The ambivalence of the ocean continues to resound in my close study of Diome's novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003), in which I contend that her conception of the water as a vast digestive system conveys a form of narrative resurfacing. On the island of Niodior, the stories of the past are washed up through the ground water or upon the shore, and what is rejected from the land is eventually absorbed back into the communal memory. Essentially, what remains "undigested" or unincorporated upon land – family secrets, spurned lovers, and long-forgotten myths – is rejected into the depths, where it is then processed and brought back Niodior's consciousness. Furthermore, this novel presents an important instance of Diome's own concept of immigration as a form of aquatic errantry. Here, Edouard Glissant's concept of Relation provides the theoretical framework for an

examination of the simultaneously rooted and nomadic status of Diome's Salie. She binds herself to various points of the globe, and proclaims her desire to float as “une algue” (255) in the Atlantic.

Edwidge Danticat's Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea – which I examine through her short story “Children of the Sea” (1996) as well as her recent novel *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013) – is similar to Diome's in that it constitutes a mother figure. However, while Diome's *eau-gresse* is a form of *ventre* – both a womb and a stomach – Danticat's waters are both a womb and a tomb. To illuminate these works, I turn to Haitian Vodou in order to understand the relationship between life and death in her work, relying on the extensive research and personal experience of filmmaker and scholar Maya Deren, from her famous volume *Divine Horsemen* (1953). Any reader of Danticat will be familiar with her frequent juxtaposition of life and death, momentarily and paradoxically residing in the same space. I contend that this juxtaposition is a key feature of the Haitian experience for the author, and while my study begins with her early work, I also turn to some of the essays she wrote in *Create Dangerously* (2010) that specifically recall the tragedy of the January 2010 earthquakes in Haiti. Rather than portray this country as continually rife with disaster, with its people as passive recipients of environmental and political devastation, she situates her reflections within the mythic and metaphysical realms in order to evoke a larger context beyond the physical world that serves as the foundation of a Haitian worldview.

In “Children of the Sea” Danticat relates the memory of the Middle Passage to the plight of refugees fleeing the violent Duvalier regime, hoping to make the journey from

Haiti to the United States in small boat overloaded with people, floating through the Atlantic Ocean. In this text, the memory of the vast rupture created by the removal of Africans to the Caribbean resurfaces in another tragic instance as Haitians were forced to flee from their homes, *en masse*, to recreate their lives in uncertain conditions in the United States. In this story, Danticat brings forth the fluidity between life and death in Haitian Vodou. As the boat slowly sinks, a young man narrates the event in his notebook, but his description emphasizes the theme of birth rather than death, as the boat becomes a womb that opens into the underwater afterlife. This strange collapsing between life and death is a theme that continues in *Claire of the Sea Light*, and in my analysis of this recent novel, I distinguish what I call a "Legba principle" at work. This phrase refers to the deity, or *loa*, of the crossroads, and his presence in Vodou ceremonies indicates an opening between realms of the living and the dead, as well as the past and the present. In reading the mother and daughter Claires in the novel as signifying this Legba principle, I explore Danticat's innovative choice to situate the crossroads within the ocean, and I contend that this is meant to dually evoke the concepts of *lot bo dlo* – the other side of the water, meaning Africa or the Haitian diaspora throughout the world – and *anba dlo* – meaning under the water, the afterlife. Danticat joins the horizontal, geographical plane of the Atlantic Ocean to the vertical, metaphysical plane, in order to show how the ancestors and their memory are continually brought forth into the realm of the living. This is, indeed, a process of resurfacing that Danticat performs in her fiction.

In the third chapter, I turn my attention to two Caribbean authors living in Canada,

who take on the theme of the slave trade and its memory in contemporary contexts. Both M. NourbeSe Philip in her poem *Zong!* (2011) and Marie-Célie Agnant in her novel *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001) demonstrate the ever-present memory of slavery that continues to haunt the contemporary moment. In both of these works, I turn my attention to portrayal of bodies in the water as a signifier of drowned memory that both authors contend with, either directly in the case of Philip's writing about her own poetry, or through a fictional character, as Agnant portrays Emma's profound difficulty to tell her own story. In reading Philip's poetic retelling of the 1787 *Zong* massacre, in which more than 130 African captives were thrown overboard when the slave ship carrying them to Jamaica was lost at sea, I focus on the specificity with which the author insists the story of these victims must be told. In contrast to ideas of the Atlantic Ocean as a vast repository of collective history, infinitely accommodating of the tragic past, Philip's attempt to recover the bones – metaphorically speaking – of these bodies long buried in the depths points toward a concept of water that portrays it not merely as an abyss. The relationship between the absent physical forms of those who perished and the water that became their grave is reinforced by the title of the first section, “Os”, in which the French homonym of *les eaux* and *les os* is heard. In her use of the term “exaqua” (from exhume), I find another creative process that exemplifies the concept of resurfacing. In the author's notes about her experience of writing, she describes her experience of embodiment, through which she takes on both the roles of captain and captive, simultaneously gaining and losing agency in the poetic retelling of this event. While Philip wishes to call forth the memory of those who perish in the water – further emphasizing this specificity by listing fictional

names of the deceased at the bottom of the page, a form of submarine grave site within the text itself – she also resurfaces the very hegemony that defined the slave trade, turning it from a practice of systematic domination to one of open poetic signification.

Marie-Célie Agnant similarly brings the memory of past hegemonic violence into the present in her novel *Le Livre d'Emma*, though in her case it is embodied by the mother-daughter relationship, extending from the period of slavery in the Caribbean into the contemporary relationship of Emma and her mother. In this work, the Atlantic Ocean takes on the character of a violent womb, with the Middle Passage as a traumatic birth upon the shores of the New World. This birth will then be replayed throughout time in the novel, with each generation. As such, the direction of the simile is reversed from that of previous works within this study – rather than the ocean being like a womb, it is the maternal bodies of women descended from slavery that are like the ocean. In this way, the author destabilizes the stereotype of motherhood as nurturing, and evokes the essentially violent nature of reproduction that was an inherent feature of plantation slavery. The novel also differs significantly from other works found herein in that, rather demonstrating a process of resurfacing at work, the eponymous character is portrayed as metaphorically drowning in the past, and incapable of reaching the surface or present. Suffering from the intergenerational trauma of slavery, passed down to her through generations, Emma conceives of herself as existing within an enslaved state, and furthermore, a state of living death.[19] While she attempts to write her history – a history that reaches back long before her own birth – the refusal of her dissertation on slavery by her university professors serves as a catalyst for continued violence. In order to

understand the event of her alleged infanticide evoked in the novel, I turn to Edouard Glissant's concept of a Caribbean *non-histoire* from his *Discours antillais* (1981), which provides context for the chaotic sense of time that plagues Emma. Unable to distinguish between past and present, life and death, Emma eventually drowns herself in the river, a form of following "*la route des grands bateaux*," finding the African homeland in death as she could not in life. Yet I contend that this gesture is not without a quality of redemptive healing. Rather than a living death, Emma achieves a form of metaphysical solace, as she is finally able to narrate her story. In this case, resurfacing is not only a process of cyclical exchange between land and water, past and present, life and death, but rather distinguishes these separate realms.

Finally, my epilogue turns to the essay "Cercueils fluides" (2008) by Italian philosopher and social scientist Alessandro dal Lago in order to connect my reflections on resurfacing in African and Caribbean literature to the contemporary crisis of migration that is currently drawing focus to the Mediterranean Sea. Though the appropriateness of referring to the current wave of migration as a form of slave trade has been debated,[20] I argue, along with dal Lago, that it is imperative to see the current situation in the context of the past history between Europe and Africa. In conclusion, it is of the utmost importance to remember that the drowning bodies of Africans is a horrific phenomenon that is not new. These images bring with them a deep and complex history, and to fully recognize this context is to understand that the history of trauma inflicted upon the African continent – through the transatlantic slave trade and then through colonialism –

demands to be taken into account when considering the current social, economic and political responsibility of European nations.

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Geographically, this study begins in West Africa and makes its way to the Caribbean, following the same direction as the currents of the Atlantic Ocean. Yet each chapter, rather than delimiting a specific spatial boundary, engages the connections around the globe that have fostered the creative processes of African and Caribbean writers. The points upon this map of the Black Atlantic are both separated and joined by bodies of water, and therefore one of the questions guiding this study is: does water present rupture or connection between spaces? The answer will always be both, because the land does not stop at the edge of the shore. Our continents are vast plateaus separated by water and our islands are mountain ranges, but all landmasses of earth, large and small, are continuous pieces of a tectonic puzzle that includes the entire subaquatic realm. As Kamau Brathwaite has so famously said, "The unity is submarine." Yet that unity between spaces, between peoples and between temporalities is hidden by water. Therefore, while water may present an obstacle between terrestrial spaces of the globe, both its surface – stretching between different lands – and its depths – containing their long forgotten histories – are imminently navigable.

Chapter 1

'Où gît la vérité' : Truth, Water and Myth in Diop, Dadié, Griaule and Sadji

Sources

It is amazing what can happen on the way to fetch water. A stream may suddenly take the form of a snake and demand to be hidden from sight.[21] A fish may appear without warning and offer to cure the wounds of a long affliction.[22] A beautiful *djinn* may threaten the life of even the most well-meaning young girl for daring to visit the riverbank after dark.[23] But if this arduous task is one of the most banal, an everyday chore as mundane as it is necessary, why does it lend itself so easily to the interference of extraordinary beings? The journey to gather water may be a short one in spatial terms but it presents a vast distance between wholly different realms. To gather water is to venture outside the known community (the family compound or the village) and to expose oneself to unknown elements. While in reality, the nearby stream is generally populated at certain times of the day with an expansive group of women and children – filling their basins, washing their clothes, scrubbing the dishes, bathing – within its narrated context, the bank remains entirely unpopulated. This empty space is the first sign that a particular instance of gathering water presents an experience both individual and beyond the normal life of domestic activity.

In the context of oral narrative, the audience itself should also experience this transition between realms as a shift from the quotidian experience to that of the mythic. But how is such a shift explained or theorized within the narrative itself, particularly in the live performance context of the oral narrative as opposed to the physical permanence

of written text? In the following tales, taken from the oral literature of West Africa, authors portray the creation and reception of narrative through descriptions of water, lending it a form of fluid materiality. In the first place, words themselves are described as water, as stories flow through the streams and rivers of the land. Secondly, water provides certain structural attributes to narrative, signifying a character's departure from the everyday world into the realm of myth. Finally, bodies of water – the ocean in particular – are construed as precisely this realm of myth from which all stories issue. From these three key roles played by water within oral narrative, I distinguish a process that I call *resurfacing*, whereby water serves as both the location and the conduit of myth within society. The separation of realms – that of the quotidian world from that of the mythic – makes manifest the divide that must be crossed by narrative in order for society, through the storyteller, to access its own rich intellectual history.

Such is the case in the Malinké tale "*Les deux filles à la recherche de l'eau.*"[24] This Cinderella-like tale begins with an unfortunate orphan whose mother has died and left her in the care of a jealous co-wife and this woman's greedy daughter. The poor girl is made to perform all of the household chores, including gathering water from the well. One day, however, her step-mother demands that she gather water from 'Derekesi,' a place far beyond the village. On her way to the river, the young girl encounters strange sights: *calebasses* poised one atop the other, *marmites* bending over and lifting each other up, hyenas carried upon each other's backs (98-99). Each of these asks the girl, "*Fille, y a t-il des choses semblables chez vous?*" to which she responds, "*Il y a beaucoup de choses semblables chez nous!*" They wish her well – "*enfant, que Dieu te fasse rencontrer la*

paix!" – leaving her to continue along her way until she comes to the river, in which she finds an old woman bathing in the waters. The old woman asks the young girl to scratch her back, and she does so politely, even though it causes her fingers to bleed. She is then asked to prepare a meal and to share the night with the old woman, tasks that she performs in a similarly uncomplaining manner. In the morning, she is invited to enter the old woman's stomach, from which she is given three gourds. The old woman tells her to break them at various points along her journey home, and each time she does this, marvels and riches spring forth. Upon returning to the village, she is a wealthy and powerful woman, and no longer required to live with her unkind stepmother and stepsister.

Learning of her step-daughter's adventures and the advantageous reversal of her fate, the wicked co-wife sends her own daughter to gather water in the strange world of Derekesi, hoping for the same outcome. However, when the girl encounters the same objects, who all ask the same question, the second girl replies, "*Non, c'est la première fois que je vois une chose pareille!*" (100) Instead of wishing her well, now these strange objects and animals declare, "*Que Dieu ne te fasse pas revenir dans la paix!*" When she meets the old woman, she scratches her back and is squeamish rather than complimentary. The disobedient girl also refuses the unappetizing meal that is offered to her (101). When the old woman tells the second girl to take white gourds from her stomach, she takes red gourds instead, and it comes as no surprise that, breaking her gourds while returning to the village, this girl does not gain riches but is rather attacked by "*toutes les vilaines choses du monde*" (102). In the end, these unfortunate women will

now serve the orphan girl who was once made to serve them.

This short story, as told by Fanta Damba, is a common one throughout Africa, with similar versions found in many different regions.[25] It shows the trajectory of gathering water by traveling from the known world of the village to the unknown space of Derekesi, as well as the moral and social implications of that journey. The "good girl/bad girl" theme allows the storyteller to recount which behaviors are socially encouraged along with those that are punished; furthermore, as the editor elucidates in commentary following the story:

> *La situation initiale est renversée… Beaucoup de contes malinké contiennent ce motif: ce qui est petit peut devenir grand, celui qui est abaissé finit par être élevé. Ici est affirmé un profond sens de l'humain: l'orgueil et la méchanceté sont les pires des choses, se grandir soi-même est ridicule, l'homme ne devient homme que lorsqu'il accepte la médiation des autres.* (103)

Aside from these more socially salient features, further considering the spatial circumstances of this tale has significant implications for an understanding of myth as it functions in the context of the oral tradition in West Africa.

While the function of spatial dynamics has been explored in the context of oral literature – particularly in the formalist and structuralist traditions – it has also taken on specific importance in the field of African literature.[26] In Karim Traoré's *Le Jeu et le sérieux* (2000), the author takes an approach that is at once literary and anthropological, in order to discuss the intricate details of the hunter's epic prevalent in Mandé societies of

West Africa. While Traoré concentrates on a close reading of narratives, it is essential to keep in mind the premise that the hero's journey through time and space – roaming far away only to later return – is not merely an invention of the storyteller to serve narrative purpose. On the one hand, a solitary voyage into the bush is an essential part of the hunter's initiation, and so these narratives serve as preparatory tales that represent an important experience. On the other hand, the displacement outside of the village also echoes the experience of the audience, who is transported into the realm of myth through the tale itself. Relying on his research conducted in Mandé communities, predominately in Mali and Burkina Faso, as well as a structuralist approach to both society and literature, he claims that space functions as a definitive marker of the hunter's initiation into the knowledge - both functional and supernatural - of his *métier*. The separation between the village and the bush is of the utmost importance as it is in the latter that the hunter finds himself alone, seeking the highly personal understanding that comes within the context of this space. According to Traoré:

> *Sur le plan heuristique et cognitif, le village symbolise les connaissances acquises, les certitudes. La brousse est une métaphore pour les hypothèses et les connaissances dont on rêve. Pour toute personne qui s'y aventure, la brousse est l'espace d'insécurité, de la non-assurance et des doutes...En effet, une seule chose est connue d'avance: c'est dans ce domaine étranger et étrange que gît la vérité, source de la connaissance. Va-t-on la découvrir? Reviendra-t-on de ce voyage? L'issue de l'aventure est incertaine.* (202)

In Traoré's formulation, truth is spatially distinguished, and the mystic ordealf of wandering in a realm apart from the everyday world lies at the heart of the hunter's experience. More than this, truth is not an effect of the known, but of the foreign. While *connaissance* may be found within the village, its sources are located outside, in the space of dreams. As such, truth is not opposed to fiction, but rather found in fiction. In the story of the orphaned girl who goes to fetch water, this principle of truth is clear. While traveling to the river – a *source* in both senses – she encounters foreign beings, yet immediately accepts these into her understanding of the world. Breaking down this barrier between "reality" and whatever its opposite might be – a mental task of which her stepsister is notably incapable – she is able to gain the important truths lying within the mythic realm.[27]

While gathering water does not evoke the same grandeur as the hunter's initiative journey, a similar spatial dynamic is constructed. Furthermore, the same structure of separation implies the same outcome, which consists in the pursuit of knowledge and in a greater understanding of both the supernatural and the functional elements of the world. In fact, Traoré considers the river to be a symbolic border space between the village and the bush: "*Dans les genres profane et spécialisé, le fleuve occupe une fonction symbolique fondamentale. Il organise l'espace de la narration dans la mesure où il sert de frontière entre le village et la brousse, entre le pays et l'étranger…C'est une zone de transition*" (217). In the context of the hunter's epic, the river may be seen as an intersititial space, but in the context of tales dealing more exclusively with water, it may be assumed that the river itself is already within the supernatural realm. That is to say that

the river has marked an entry into a world that is mythical and, as such, narrated. These markers are essential to all literature, but perhaps even more important to the oral text, in which not only context but certain narrative gestures must distinguish between utterance and art.[28] Certain symbols, according to Traoré, serve as "*points fixes*" (51) and are the structuring devices of a narrative process that is largely based on spontaneity and improvisation. These symbols, in turn, are what allow narration to engage the "*Erinnerungsfiguren*" or "*figures de la mémoire*." Here, the author borrows Jan Assmann's term and cites these figures of memory as necessary to the process of an "*éloignement du quotidien*" or a transcendence from everyday life. In short, the narrative must signify that it is moving away from the known world, and taking the audience along. However, while the story moves into the territory of what is superficially distant – due to its pastness or strangeness – it expresses ideas that are an important part of cultural norms.

Careful interpretation of both the narrative shift away from *la vie quotidienne* and the narrative reliance on interchange between fact and fiction are also foundational to Isidore Okpewho's *Myth in Africa* (1983). Whereas Traoré employs Mircea Eliade's classic definition of myth as a genre of origin narrative,[29] Okpewho's own "qualitative approach" defines myth not as a genre associated with certain kinds of content, but rather as a continuum along which the mythical may be situated. In his radical assessment:

> Myth is not really a particular type of tale as against another; it is neither the spoken counterpart of an antecedent ritual, nor is it a tale determined exclusively by a binary scheme of abstract ideas or a sequential order of

> elements. It is simply that quality of fancy which informs the creative or configurative powers of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity. In that sense, we are free to call any narrative of the oral tradition a myth, so long as it gives due emphasis to fanciful play (69).

As such, Okpewho does not necessarily indicate a clear dualism between fact and fiction, but rather concentrates on the interplay between the two that depends upon context. This is the essence of myth in action. The following analysis benefits greatly from such a novel definition because it functions so productively within a literary paradigm. While this study does not entirely neglect considerations of the ritual uses of myth, the primary concern rests with its poetic faculties, produced in oral literature by the intermingling of historically verifiable events with interference from the mythical realm; and it is the fluidity between these realms, the entirely subjective distinction between what may awkwardly be termed "real" and "non-real," that comes to fore in the present study.

While eschewing generic conventions, the author does create a series of categories based on the level of mythical involvement and poetic foray in an oral text; however, these categories remain fluid rather than fixed, and a "historic legend" that recounts verifiable events and purports accuracy may also incorporate mythical elements lending literary quality to the narrative. Indeed, for Okpewho, the category of the least "lifelike" narrative is fable, but the framework of this form – removed from the constraints of time and space – also allows for the most intellectual import as it is grounded in the highest level of abstraction. Therefore, the most mythical is charged with the most poetic and philosophical substance. According to the author, "if such a scheme is accepted, then

clearly the more ‘poetic’ a tale is, the stronger is its cultural or existential (against experiential) issues” (69).

With this in mind, the tale of the two girls could be situated in into the category of “explanatory tale” or “fable” in which mythic elements take precedence. With no temporal markers, this is a timeless tale, expressive of intellectual import that is conveyed in the abstract terms of fictional content, and directly related to the dictates of real life in society. However, examined more closely, the tale is not only endowed with moral and social import but also conveys significant information about the relationship between person and myth as aspects of the participatory process of narrative. The identity of one girl as 'good' and the other as 'bad' is strangely predicated not only on their individual politeness but also on their reception of the fantastic sights they encounter upon leaving the home. The good girl claims of the strange objects that there are many similar things “*chez nous*,” signifying an incorporation of these foreign elements into her comprehension of the everyday world. The bad girl, on the other hand, remarks that she has never seen anything like them, in essence, conveying that she doesn’t “believe her eyes” as common phrasing might have it. While these two girls demonstrate the distinction between politeness and rudeness – especially in their relationship to the old woman they encounter in the river – as well as the consequences of such behaviors, they also present a compelling portrait of how the audience or reader is meant to comply with events in a story. The good behavior of the first girl normalizes the strange, accepting it as part of the necessary path to the water – where water represents an initiation into deeper knowledge – while the second girl is surprised by bizarre elements along the way.

What is construed here as inherent to good social behavior is also the mark of the good listener or reader: acceptance of the fluidity between myth and reality. Gathering water is not only a chore, it is also an initiation into another realm, and one that is represented in the oral text while reenacted in every recitation or reading.

Okpewho's qualitative definition of myth presents a trajectory of the narrative transition from the real and present world into the fictional realm that echoes the process undergone by the hero of the tale, thus joining the narrator or author to their own protagonist. Added to this link between the teller and the told is the active suspension of disbelief and the willing participation of an audience absorbed in the tale. Therefore, as seen in the tale of "*Les deux filles à la recherche de l'eau*," the literature theorizes its own process, equating the journey of the hero with the journey into fiction. But the geography of narrative does not merely give physical dimensions to an intellectual concept within the story itself, for the time and space of myth are not wholly abstract within the oral tradition. The last sentence of this tale as recounted by Fanta Damba invokes the realm of myth with the traditional closing gesture: "*Je remets cela là où je l'avais pris*" (102). The spatial formula is commented on by Karim Traoré as well: "*Une forme de conclusion consacrée dit: […] 'j'ai rapporté le mensonge [la fiction] là où je l'ai trouvé.' Aux audients de répondre […] 'bienvenue' pour saluer le retour du 'voyageur' dans le monde de la réalité*" (134). Figuratively, narrative itself maintains a form of autonomous life, and while created by the oral artist, it merely sojourns in the 'real world' on a temporary basis. The spatial separation between realms must be enacted precisely because it is so fluid, the river serving as the perfect metaphor for a border that is no less consequential

for its lack of material solidity.

The relationship between human beings and water is a common theme throughout the oral literature of Africa, evoking water's physical necessity as well as engaging its spiritual significance. While different tales vary greatly in their representation of water, given the many different geographical and cultural contexts from which they issue, the stream, river, lake and ocean invariably mark a protagonist's journey into the mythical realm. There can be no doubt that the bodies of water found within narrative serve as symbolic representations of the vast importance of this element to human life. However, when closely examined, it becomes clear that the function of water in both the oral and written literature of West Africa is one of specific literary importance. The texts presented throughout this study all in some way explore the close link between water and narrative creation. As seen in the tale of the two girls, water signifies an entry into a world apart, and in the texts that follow, water is variously the marker of different realms, the container of narrative flowing throughout society, and a conduit of historical truth.

Marcel Griaule's famous and controversial *Dieu d'eau* (1948) recounts the author's findings among the Dogon of Mali and demonstrates the overwhelming importance of water to their complex social structures and mythological systems. Yet one facet of Griaule's conversations with his informant Ogotemmêli that has been critically overlooked is the interesting relationship between water and speech inherent in the belief structure of the Dogon as presented by the author.[30] Bodies of water also run through the work of Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié, two West African authors whose well-loved

collections of traditional oral tales written in French were published during the 1950's and warmly received by French and African audiences alike. These authors similarly demonstrate a strong link between water and narrative through their written appropriations from the oral tradition, a facet of these texts that has not received the in-depth critical attention it warrants. Finally, Abdoulaye Sadji's novella *Tounka* (1952) draws on legends of the Lébou of Senegal to tell the tale of an intrepid fisherman and his ill-fated marriage to a goddess of the sea. While there have been no comprehensive, critical studies of this engaging work, it not only displays an intuitive understanding of the ocean as a charged element of spiritual import, but also self-consciously reflects upon the process of myth making itself. In these works, issuing from the mythological traditions of West Africa, water thematically evokes some of the most basic aspects of the human condition, most obviously as related to both life and death. Furthermore, it reflects the creative processes of narrative with a subtlety that appears to have obscured its function as a device of metaliterary import. The following study therefore examines the element of water in its natural and supernatural qualities as a key factor in literary creation that is particularly important to an understanding of the status of oral literature, as water invokes the fluidity of authorship and authenticity against the rigidity of written texts, and lends a physicality to the spoken word that conveys substantive presence without the constraints of fixity.[31]

Fluid Speech: Authenticity and Authorship in Marcel Griaule's *Dieu d'eau*

The well-known myth of the Nummo was recorded by renowned ethnologist

Marcel Griaule, forming the core of his book *Dieu d'eau: Conversations avec Ogotemmêli* (1948). In this work, the author recounts a series of talks he conducted with an initiate into the religious knowledge of the Dogon people of Mali. Over thirty days, Ogotemmêli divulges not only the history of the creation of the world according to this people, but also reveals a complex series of numerological significances present within Dogon mythology and resonant throughout everyday life, influencing everything from marriage to agricultural practices. The book was written in part for a popular audience, and therefore was quite widely read not only as a piece of entertainment, but also throughout circles of Africanists and ethnologists, becoming a fundamental and exemplary case of the complex systems of belief present throughout the continent. After Griaule's death, his students and colleagues continued the work he left behind and these studies continued to be cited as a touchstone in the field, exemplifying both indigenous belief system and anthropological practice.

However, Griaule's published work on the Dogon has come under significant criticism, largely revolving around the accuracy of his portrayals of the Dogon and their complicated mythological structures. Griaule presented the Dogon in his work as an isolated tribe with limited influence from people outside of their own community. Because of this isolation, their oral traditions were seen by Griaule and those influenced by his works as a kind of African prototext. Indeed, Marie Sherod Tollerson, in her book *Mythology and Cosmology in the Narratives of Bernard Dadié and Birago Diop: A Structural Approach* (1984), remarks that "the Ogo, a Dogon people sheltered in their homes by mountainous terrain, were noted for their resistance to all foreign influences.

The system of thought divulged to Griaule represents, therefore, a purity of thought not often found" (4). What is meant by this is of course that there are no perceived Islamic or European influences in the Dogon mythology as collected by Griaule, which is to say that his work presents a system of belief that is allegedly authentically African. In briefly examining some of the issues in the long-standing debate surrounding Marcel Griaule's work with the Dogon, the representation of narrative in the oral context through aquatic elements provides a conducive framework in which to examine notions of authenticity and authorship that are so visible in the context of African literature. In particular, the following review of Griaule's work takes into account Walter E. A. van Beek's 1991 restudy published in *Current Anthropology* which was followed by commentary from his peers in the field, in order to trace some of the problems with *Dieu d'eau*, both practical and theoretical. James Clifford's chapter on Griaule's work as a case study in the style of anthropological discourse that appeared in his groundbreaking collection of essays *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) helps to reframe the discussion in the context of the literary.

Walter E.A. van Beek's restudy of the Dogon contains his own field research conducted throughout the 1970's in comparison with Marcel Griaule's work, taking particular issue with the mythology as recounted in *Dieu d'eau* and *Le Renard Pâle*, and the article itself is followed by commentary from fellow researchers, with a fairly even divide between positive and negative reactions. While van Beek's stated aim is merely to point out the flaws in Griaule's original work (139), he ends by discounting most of his predecessor's scholarship. Van Beek, by his own account, finds nothing similar to

Griaule's original assessment of the Dogon mythological world, and this presents him with a problem that is essentially one of distinguishing between fact and fancy. Failing to find within Dogon society the mythological prototext as supposedly recorded by Griaule, van Beek assumes that this text never existed. Indeed, it is very possible that he is correct in suggesting that Griaule's work was largely a product of invention, and the rhetorical strategies used to implying this are intriguing enough to warrant further study. However, van Beek's own disenchantment, rather than fully discounting the work of Marcel Griaule, offers the opportunity to further explore the essential nature of story as part of an infinitely open system of significations, a vast and fluid oral intertext.

One specific lament of van Beek's restudy is that he found no one who could recount the Dogon creation story, and this has great ramifications for the validity of Griaule's work because, as he explains, "Myths throughout the world are stories told to an audience. Not so here. [*Dieu d'eau*] is a discourse, an interchange, not a mythical creation story… The authors themselves acknowledge the absence of a story line…but do not seem to realize its implications: without a story, there is no myth" (156). This definition certainly fails to account for the complex nature not only of myth but also of its telling. It is furthermore expressive of the belief that a story is a permanently fixed object, a belief that resonates throughout a contemporary culture based on text, but that has very little place when examining the oral tradition. In the instance of telling, stories contain multiple interjections. Moreover, the narrative, while retaining its basic elements, changes with each telling and with each teller. This is not only acceptable but expected. Van Beek further suggests that the myths of the Dogon as collected by Griaule were a

product of 'bricolage'[32] and claims that the single creation 'myth' that may (or may not) have been recounted by Ogotemmêli was a combination of hundreds of smaller stories, formed into a cohesive whole. He continues, saying that in Griaule's later work, various other informants told stories, some of whom had gone far and wide, gathering tales from other cultures (157). This would, of course, frustrate the notion of Dogon narrative purity, but it does nothing to render Griaule's texts – or the stories upon which they are based – inauthentic. The oral tale is one of multiplicitous participation, and certainly the product of changes throughout time, and it does not maintain the pretention to stability that van Beek here implies.

James Clifford's enlightening chapter "Power and Dialogue in Ethnography: Marcel Griaule's Initiation" from *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) takes into account the environment of Griaule's work in order to argue that the nature of the ethnographic encounter is one that is inherently dialogic.[33] Specifically, Clifford contextualizes the ironic tone throughout Griaule's work, which he explains as issuing from the very nature of the colonial encounter wherein a drama ensued in which Griaule had no choice but to act the part of "the European," as he will continually call himself throughout *Dieu d'eau.* Clifford's study and his understanding of the subtle dramatization of the ethnographic encounter allows an opportunity to reframe the debate surrounding Griaule's work in terms that are innately literary. Indeed, stylistically, Griaule's influences are clear, and in her commentary following van Beek's article, Suzanne Preston Blier notes Griaule's indebtedness to the accounts of *les grands explorateurs* and claims that his early book, *Les flambeurs d'hommes* (1934) - "at once travelogue, fantasy, and popular account of a

trip to Ethiopia and winner of the Prix Gringoire, appears to have served as the model for *Dieu d'eau*" (van Beek 158-159).

This stylistic consideration elucidates the principle tension in Griaule's and his follower's work, as well as that of his critics, which may be described as a quest for authenticity and authorship. As Tollerson expresses, the "purity" of the supposedly untouched Dogon mythology is evident in its similarity to other West African belief systems as expressed in other oral texts. (4) This notion is related to the authenticity of Dogon thought, which is precisely the issue at stake throughout van Beek's research, for, in his estimation, the dialectic relationship between Griaule and his informants, as well as the clear influence of other cultural creations upon Griaule's informants renders the mythology as construed by Griaule to be inauthentic. However, for Clifford, the tension between individual authorship and collective understanding is not germane to an understanding of Griaule's work:

> But to pose the issue as a debate between personal originality and cultural typicality…is probably fruitless, given our ignorance about key informants. *This view is based also on a false dichotomy: all authors, whether African or European, are original only within limited resources and in restricted relations of textual production.* (85, emphasis added).

This claim amounts to the assertion that story is always the product of intertextuality. The search for authenticity in Griaule's work was conducted by an examination of Griaule's subject matter in an attempt to uncover the fidelity – or lack thereof – in which this ethnologist portrayed an original Dogon mythology in the form of

an oral prototext. But to use van Beek's own terminology, *Dieu d'eau* is a text that contains an infinitesimal "bricolage" because it is the product of many encounters: between the Dogon and other groups of people – both European and African – between characters within hundreds of stories that are transformed by both Griaule into one myth, between Griaule himself and Ogotemmêli. What Clifford's claim brings to light here is that this system of encounters is the essence, not the exception of 'textual production,' and it does not show a lack of authorship, but rather pushes the boundaries of what authorship can be, rendering it both fluid and collective.

The following section presents an analysis of excerpts from the work of Birago Diop's "Maman-Caïman" and Bernard Dadié's "Le Chasseur et le boa" that relies on the connection in Dogon mythology between water and speech in order to clarify the conception of story in West Africa as one which relies on oral intertexuality represented by bodies of water in the written accounts of these two authors. The connection between water and speech takes on great significance in Griaule's rendering of the Nummo myth as recorded in *Dieu d'eau*, as evidenced by the principle creation myth itself, which is largely based on the story of water spirits known as "Nummo" that were the originary beings on earth and, according to Griaule, continue to function as the principle "essence" acting within the world. Following Griaule's rendering of the myth, Amma – the supreme God who preexisted the Earth – fashioned the world out of a lump of clay, and since this earth was female and Amma had become quite lonely, he decided to engage in sexual intercourse with it. This first union unfortunately produced the Jackal, a singular and imperfect being. However, through subsequent attempts, "Water, which is the divine seed,

was thus able to enter the womb of the earth and the normal reproductive cycle resulted in the birth of twins" (18). These twins were of a particular nature, in that they were made of water. Furthermore, "They were green in colour, half human beings and half serpants. From the head to the loins they were human: below that they were serpants." These were called "Nummo" and their status as both water and the 'essence of God' is described in detail:

> They were made of his seed, which is at once the ground, the form, and the substance of the life-force of the world, from which derives the motion and the persistence of created being. This force is water, and the Pair are present in all water: they *are* water, the water of the seas, of coasts, of torrents, of storms, and of the spoonfuls we drink.
>
> Ogotemmêli used the terms 'Water' and 'Nummo' indiscriminately.
>
> 'The life-force of the earth is water. God moulded earth with water. Blood too he made out of water. Even in a stone there is this force, for there is moisture in everything" (19).

Because the Nummo looked down from their perch in the heavens, and saw that the earth was lying 'naked and speechless, as a consequence no doubt of the original incident in her relations with the God Amma" (19) they decided to fashion her a *pagne*, or cloth, which represents essentially all physical features of the Earth's surface. This was created not only out of plants brought from heaven but also, importantly, from the words of the Nummo: "When a Nummo speaks, what comes from his mouth is a warm vapour which conveys, and itself constitutes, speech. This vapour, like all water, has sound" (20).

Therefore, in the myth of the Nummo as told to Griaule (or as told *by* Griaule, depending on your assessment), Speech takes on a physical quality through the metaphor of water, and has a tangible and visible presence in the world. It is these water-words that serve as the base, and shape the very existence of all things on earth.

The particular description of language as it came to earth in the breath of the Nummo, as they worked to cover the earth with a *pagne* of vegetation is telling, given the circumstances of Griaule's writing as stylistically formed by the colonial encounter:

> Thus clothed, the earth had a language, the first language of this world and the most primitive of all time. Its syntax was elementary, its verbs few, and its vocabulary without elegance. The words were breathed sounds scarcely differentiated from one another, but nevertheless vehicles. Such as it was, this ill-defined speech sufficed for the great works of the beginning of all things. (20)

While this description of language does rely on an essentializing notion of African language as "primitive", it is significant that this passage deals specifically with water, enacting the fluidity that it describes in moving between the style of the European travelogue and the mythology of the Dogon. However, the fact that speech is fluid and shared, passed from one interlocutor to another and submitted to various forms of containers, does not give it less importance but rather more impact. To describe in such detail the basis of water and words, and to conceive so clearly here that speech carries with it a distinct life force – that associated with water – broadens the portrait of Griaule. Within this text, he self-consciously and very carefully participates in a dialogic

interchange with his informant, one that is not based on a fiction of authenticity but rather creates an authentic fiction from this fluid interchange between equal participants.[34] Indeed, as Clifford notes, the question is never whether Griaule tells the truth, but rather which truth he tells: "His writings, and those of his associates, express a Dogon truth - a complex, negotiated, historically contingent truth specific to certain relations of textual production" (60). In *Dieu d'eau*, a groundbreaking and much contested work of undeniably literary character, it is the fluidity and force of narrative that presents itself as the deep structure of truth upon which Griaule's work is based. Much like Karim Traoré's assessment in the hunter's epic, truth does indeed lie in the mythology of this people, but what Clifford's invocation of truth brings to this study is also the premise that it is dialogically negotiated between parties, rendering it neither objective nor subjective, but rather intersubjective.

Water Words: the Aquatic Narratives of Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié

Birago Diop's *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba*, published in 1947, was a great success throughout France and francophone Africa. It is regarded as a masterpiece not only for its beautiful retelling of oral tales gathered throughout West Africa, but also in that it serves as an exemplary text of the shift between the oral and the written, including many elements that are key to the practice of the *griot*, or traditional storyteller, which are rendered into French prose. Much has been written on the oral elements of francophone African literature,[35] but perhaps the most useful introductory remarks about this text are made by Abiola Irele in his *The African Imagination* (2000). According to Irele, although

Diop claims merely to transcribe the stories he came to know during his travels, the work itself demonstrates a masterful example of individual artistry, which is all too appropriate to the practices of story-telling:

> Diop's retelling of these tales conforms to the conventions that originally governed the transmission of the form: each performer in the culture was free to reinterpret the tales and to give new shape, new direction, and even new meaning to what was considered a communal holding, an intertextual resource. (40)

A veterinarian in the French colonial system, Diop left his home in Sénégal to study in France, earning his degree in the early 1930's when he met Léopold Sédar Senghor and became loosely associated with the *négritude* movement. He would travel throughout West Africa, treating livestock and examining agricultural practices for the next two decades, and it is during this time that he gained a literary interest in the stories told in the many villages he visited.

Bernard Dadié is well known both for his literary works and for his political activism against French colonial rule. Serving in the *Rassemblement Démocratique Africaine* along with fellow Ivoirian Félix Houphouët-Boigny, he served a six month prison sentence before Côte d'Ivoire's independence from France. After this, he had a successful career as *inspecteur des affaires culturelles* between 1977-1986, and wrote prolifically during this time, in particular concentrating on plays with political themes. He is perhaps best known for his collection of short stories, *Le Pagne Noir*, published in 1955 and also focusing on the oral literature with which he was familiar. Though he does

not cite a *griot*, or other storyteller, in the same manner as Diop, it may be assumed that he likewise participates in the same complex practices that guide oral literature as well as those that structure the change from an oral to a written form.

In the prologue to *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba*, Birago Diop recalls the *griot* Amadou Koumba as the original narrator of these texts. He also discusses his childhood relationship with stories, often told by his grandmother and other older members of the community. This is construed in terms of fluidity, as the author recalls: "*Je me suis abreuvé, enfant, aux sources, j'ai entendu beaucoup de paroles de sagesse, j'en ai retenu un peu*" (10). This metaphorical thirst, while reinforcing the entertainment value and excitement provoked by the tall tales of his youth, also construes them in terms of both the nourishing and necessary attributes most basic to water. Furthermore, this brief commentary establishes a theory of the transmission and fluidity of stories, which is reinforced by Bernard Dadié's own portrayal of water as a medium of narrative. Found within his collection *Le Pagne Noir*, the story "*Le Chasseur et le boa*" is prefaced by a description of the relationship between the river and the forest:

> *L'eau coulait. Sur la rive, dans les palétuviers, elle contait mille aventures à la terre qui jamais ne bouge, ne parcourt aucune région, tout le temps accroupie là, à mirer dans l'eau, sa tignasse d'arbres et d'herbes dans laquelle pullulait tous les poux du monde, toute la vermine de la création. L'eau en remuant des milliers de brindilles sur la rive, contait ses aventures à la terre attentive, captivée par les nouvelles attrayantes que lui disait l'Eau indiscrète toujours bavarde qui écoutait le dialogue du*

> *Chasseur et du Boa pour aller le conter plus loin, tout au long de son parcours.* (99)

A distinction is made here between movement and stillness, and the talkative river serves as the conduit of stories, relaying them to the attentive earth. However, while the earth may be still, it is her own features that are mirrored in the flowing waters and transported throughout the world. Water is the storyteller here, and its stories are naturally reflections of life on earth. But this description also signifies the ubiquitous character of both water and stories. Furthermore, the negative connotation evoked by the description of lice and vermin running through the grass and trees is perhaps an unflattering statement about the content of the river's information, which it distributes "indiscreetly," but it also calls forth this extraordinary mirror's great accuracy. The vermin of the world are not only unwanted, they are also often unseen, and their very secrecy is reflected in and told by the undiscerning eyes and mouth of the river. Dadié therefore presents a view of story – related here to gossip – that insists upon realism. This is narrative "warts and all" as the expression goes.[36]

The connection between narrative and water is echoed in a story from *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumb*a entitled "Maman-Caïman" in which the venerable mother crocodile, Diassigue, takes on the role of storyteller herself, and gleans information from the aquatic sources she encounters. In this tale, Maman-Caïman finds herself at odds with her children, for while she goes to great lengths to educate them about the fraught history of mankind as it has been passed down to her, the children only want to dream about the glories of their own species and so turn a deaf ear to her rambling tales. This immediate

evocation of the intergenerational tension also indicates the strain between memory and novelty, but though this crocodile matriarch is designated as having "*la mémoire la meilleure de la terre*" (50), it is not only in her ability to retain facts that she is extraordinary, but also in her ability to listen attentively to everything around her, near and far. The reach of her knowledge is extensive, and the role played by water in her information is notable:

> *Elle se contentait de regarder, de son repaire de vase ou de berges ensoleillées du fleuve, les bêtes, les choses et les hommes, recueillant les bruits et les nouvelles que les pagaies confient aux poissons bavards, des montagnes du Fouta-Djallon à la Grande Mer où le soleil se baigne, sa journée terminée. Elle écoutait les papotages des femmes qui lavaient le linge, récuraient les calebasses ou puisaient de l'eau du fleuve. Elle entendait les ânes et les chameaux qui, venus de très loin, du nord au sud, déposaient un instant leur fardeaux de mil et leurs charges de gomme et se désaltéraient longuement.* (50)

These examples begin to evoke the aquatic system through which Maman-Caïman gleans her knowledge of the world. Passing from the paddles of boats to the talkative fish, and from the women by the shore into their laundry and into the stream, she gathers her information from a variety of channels.

But it is not merely in listening and retaining that her memory is used, for the tension in the story arises from her insistence upon the telling: "*Maman-Caïman rassemblait donc ses enfants et leur disait ce qu'elle avait vu, ce que sa mère avait vu et*

lui avait raconté et ce que la mère de sa mère avait raconté à sa mère" (52). Though the children yawn lazily, thinking that "*leur mère radotait parfois un peu trop*" (51), she continues to repeat the dense history of the world of men that she gleaned from her own matrilineal heritage. In fact, the storytelling process here is associated very closely with reproduction and it is specifically feminine and familial. Maman-Caïman is not a *griot*, and that title is given to the monkey, Golo, at the beginning of the story, who while respecting the crocodile's redoubtable memory reinforces her own children's lack of enthusiasm. However, the phrasing of '*ce qu'elle avait vu*' carries with it a specific connotation, for "This is what I saw" is one of the standard formulas which begin oral stories in West Africa, an incantation similar to "Once upon a time." Therefore, Diop situates Maman-Caïman in a specifically literary context, lending her the voice of the oral artist, which she uses to relay the glorious and often bloody history of life along the Fleuve Sénégal. But it is in comparing her own form of listening with that of her children that the full import of the allusion to narrative lineage may be seen. The children of Diassigue also listen, and they collect various narratives from sources that beckon them to the faraway rivers and lakes; but whereas their mother gathers information in order to reproduce it for her children, they use any glimpses of the faraway world to contribute to their growing collection of dreams: "*Quand Diassigue parlait, les petits caïmans bâillaient ou rêvaient d'exploits de caïmans, de rives lointaines d'où le fleuve arrachait des pépites et du sable d'or*" (53). The juxtaposition of these two forms of reproduction of story – that which yields historically and socially resonant narrative, and that which yields personal dreams – reinforces a concept of narrative that is reproductive. Here,

water carries with it a knowledge of the world, but it is also a main element of rebirth in that Maman-Caïman regenerates the narratives at her disposal and resubmits them into the endlessly fluid web of stories. The crocodile is of course closely associated with water and also with magical abilities, serving in many instances as a shape shifter who incarnates the spirits of a body of water. This further reinforces the notion of water as the life-giving element that is also a container of story itself.

With this conceptual framework set, the aspects of the story that are focused more on historical events can be seen in their full significance. Diassigue's tales reach deep into the past, and also into the heart of the West African oral tradition, where fact and fiction are inseparably intertwined. Most importantly, her tales often center on the river, which serves as a narrative conduit. She tells of the traders from Ghana whom her mother saw "*passer et repasser les eaux pour capturer des esclaves et chercher l'or de N'Galam*" (52). She recounts the coming of Islamic conquerors, whose violence turned the river red after they "*avaient appris aux hommes noirs à se prosterner comme eux vers le soleil levant*." She tells of Samba Lame, a Toucouleur warrior who had the distinction of being "*maître du fleuve*" and whose praises are still sung by Toucouleur fisherman. In short, Diassigue attains her narrative from the history of the river itself, whereas her children choose to ignore these stories in favor of their own dreams of water: "*ils rêvaient du Bafing et du Bakoy, du fleuve bleu et du fleuve blanc qui se rejoignaient là-bas, à Bafoulabé, et donnaient le fleuve qu'ils habitaient.*" The color of the water is not merely a poetic device but prefigures the climax of the story, in which Maman-Caïman will warn her children to flee, when she hears of the coming of another Islamic raid on the region

from the emirate of Trarza, an event which brings this tale out of seeming atemporality and situates in the mid-nineteenth century. Diassigue hears the cries of the crows, who call out first that the river is yellow with gold, then it is white with silver, then that it is red with blood. This blood warns of the coming war between Brahim Saloum of Trarza and Yeli, the leader of of the Oualo region surrounding the Senegal River.

Here, the narration breaks away from Maman-Caïman and her children, branching fully into the human realm of objective history, but the significance given to water remains an intrinsic aspect to the story. Crossing over the river, in order to combat their enemies to the North, Yeli learns that the intention of Brahim Saloum is to give chase to the Ouoloff, taking them as far away as possible from this sacred body of water:

> *Yeli devina l'intention de son ennemi: l'éloigner le plus que possible du fleuve. En effet, les Maures, qui étaient venus jusqu'au fleuve lancer défi à ceux du Oualo, semblaient maintenant fuir devant les Ouoloffs. Ils ne voulaient livrer bataille que loin, bien loin au nord, dans les sables, quand les noirs ne verraient plus le fleuve qui les rendait invincibles chaque fois qu'ils s'y trempaient et y buvaient avant les combats.* (56)

The spiritual essence of water is here invoked in the gravest of terms, being that which keeps the Ouoloff (Wolof) from certain defeat. Water provides a twofold continuity to their history here in that it allows them to escape victoriously and to “live to tell the tale” as it were, inasmuch as water carries this history with it, flowing in the collective memory throughout space and time, with Birago Diop’s own narrative interpretation serving this system of aquatic legend.

However, the Ouoloff are able to survive the adverse effects of this distance from the river by filling their containers with water before moving north, and they proceed to win the battle. Yeli recovers the son of Brahim Saloum, wounded and abandoned by his father's army, and he is taken back to the Oualo territory. While all the marabouts and healers attempt to cure his wound, they are unsuccessful until one day, an old woman – whom we may assume to be Maman-Caïman in new form – informs them that the true cure is "*en application, trois fois par jour, sur la plaie, de la cervelle fraîche de jeune caïman*" (57), thus taking her revenge on her inattentive children. This conclusion renders impossible a reading of the crocodiles merely as stand-ins for humans, as is often the presumption of African tales whose characters are animal. They are representative of entirely human disputes between generations and the stories and ideologies that go along with them, but they are more so an embodiment of the water spirit. Reluctant to participate in the cyclical reproductive process of history established by their mother's line, this younger generation will now, quite literally, nourish the history of humanity, much to their own misfortune. Rather than reproducing story, they become part of the story in a way that is visceral and that echoes the very violence they were unwilling to face in their own mother's tales.

Considering these examples in the context of the oral tradition incorporated into written form lends weight to a conception of how narrative functions in predominantly oral societies, highlighting both their fluidity and their materiality. The standard division between the oral and the written, made in anthropological and literary studies alike, counters the fixity of the written word as a tangible product against the intangible

character of the spoken word. Indeed, the spoken narrative is often construed as a performance that is temporary, existing only in the moment.[37] The exception to this is, naturally, those performances recorded in the field or sometimes in a studio, rendering them permanent but often under manufactured auspices. Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié show a concern for the oral tradition, but their written narratives are not only an attempt at fixity. Rather, they participate in the regenerative properties of narrative, not merely recording stories but, as Abiola Irele insists of Diop's famous collection in the passage cited above, retelling them anew and pouring them into new channels. This insistence upon water as a narrative device, spreading throughout society in the ubiquitous manner of aquatic sources, demonstrates that these oral accounts are both culturally nourishing and regenerative. Furthermore, they demonstrate that orality is not merely the process of a fleeting moment. Oral communication and oral narrative in particular is a mode of accessing an omnipresent essence that maintains the substantial nature that characterizes bodies of water. While the written word is fixed in perpetuity by its textual rendering, oral narrative is endlessly changing though no less contained, and no less concrete in its fluidity.

Tounka: The Legend in the Waves

Abdoulaye Sadji, like his contemporaries, Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié, was well versed in the oral traditions of West Africa. A renowned instructor of literature and educational director, Sadji worked for the French colonial school system throughout what would later become the country of Senegal, which afforded him the opportunity to gain

knowledge of the many ethnic groups living in this area. His various appointments sent him from Zinguinchor in the southern Casamance region all the way up to the busy, colonial port of Saint-Louis, but his son and biographer Amadou Sadji notes that the elder Sadji's most productive literary period was during his tenure at the primary school in Louga, a town lying just forty kilometers east of the Atlantic coast. It was here that Sadji drafted the manuscripts for his famous *Nini: la mulâtresse de Saint-Louis* (1953) as well as *Maimouna* (1954), and completed his lesser known novella *Tounka*. Furthermore, it was in Louga that his interest in storytelling blossomed, as he became fascinated by the initiation practices that his young male students were undergoing, whose primary aspects involved recitation of poetry as a form of cultural indoctrination. (Sadji 1997, 114) Though Sadji's father was a devout Muslim, the young Abdoulaye veered away from this religion from an early age, becoming increasingly interested in the pre-Islamic spiritual beliefs and practices that continued to thrive during this period. Curiously, while his father was a marabout in the more traditionally Islamic sense, meaning that he spent much of his life teaching in Koranic schools and studying theology, Sadji's mother was of Lébou descent, and a practitioner of animist spiritual rites. With these distinct parental influences, as well as his travels throughout the region, the author was guided by what the younger Sadji continually refers to as a philosophy of religious tolerance and a spirit of inclusion.

As will become clear in the following study of *Tounka*, Abdoulaye Sadji had a particular interest in the Lébou - an interest clearly stemming from his matrilineal heritage - and the younger Sadji's biography certainly emphasizes both this ethnic

inheritance as well as the animist sensibilities his father, Abdoulaye, gained from his grandmother's side of the family. A maternal uncle is given a particularly evocative description with regard to his role in the family lore, and according to the younger Sadji, this uncle was "*un de ces intrépides pêcheurs lébous qui parvenait contre vents et marées à assurer à leurs familles une vie matérielle décente en arrachant au sein souvent revêche de l'océan Atlantique ses richessse halieutiques*" (28). Indeed, this account could very well refer to the men presented throughout Abdoulaye Sadji's novella *Tounka*, who are renowned not only for their strength, but also for their ability to provide the community with nourishment even under the most difficult conditions. His intellectual interest in the oral history of the Lébou served as the basis for fiction, but his knowledge also contributed to a study of the Lébou conducted by P. Mercier and G. Balandier and published in 1952 under the title *Les pêcheurs Lébou: particularisme et évolution*. According to these authors, many Lébou families cite their ancestors as originally descended from "*les génies de l'eau*," (18) and this genetic relationship to the spirits of the water comprises the plot of a significant number of oral stories, from which Sadji clearly drew in writing *Tounka*.

The geographic origins of the Lébou as a cohesive ethnic group is somewhat mysterious, though many speculative histories exist in their oral tradition. In general, it is presumed that the Lébou were originally comprised of several different ethnicities who had migrated from hotter, dryer inland climes and settled along the coast of Senegal throughout various points in history, principally in the area beginning at what is currently known as Yoff, part of the capital city Dakar, and extending all the way up to Saint-

Louis.[38] The author of *Tounka* certainly had the question of origins in mind – both their geographical and supernatural possibilities – when crafting the novella, and he appropriately frames the principle action of the story within a history that spans throughout time and space, beginning with a group of people who thirst for adventures beyond the horizon and ending with the death of their original leader's direct descendant.

In the previous sections of this chapter, I discussed water in the following terms: life and death, spiritual essence, and narrative import. Building on these three qualities, the analysis of this novella fully explores Abdoulaye Sadji's representation of water as invoking the role of myth in everyday life and asserting the fluidity between fiction and reality. In *Tounka*, Sadji's knowledge of the Lébou oral tradition, as well as his own literary talents, serve to render a fascinating and poetic version of this mythology into French prose. However, he is not only concerned with the retelling of oral tales in written format, for this novella also evokes the complicated channels through which myth functions and its relationship to collective knowledge. The following section therefore constructs a theory of narrative as it operates within the oral tradition, particularly focusing on Sadji's representation of aquatic elements in their capacity to invoke the formative elements of story, represented foremost in the relationship between land and sea. This analysis draws from Isidore Okpewho's ground-breaking reconceptualization of myth in his *Myth in Africa* (1983) and also takes into account the spatial dynamics shown in Karim Traore's *Le jeu et le sérieux* (2000) in order to illuminate the complex workings of legend as conceived by Sadji. Furthermore, my examination of narrative not only looks to the novella itself, but also takes into account the scenes of storytelling as they

appear at key moments throughout the written work, for Sadji's written inclusion of the oral tradition from which he draws shows the fluidity between the mythical realm of the ocean and the everyday life on shore.

Tounka begins far away from where it ends, both spatially and temporally. In the beginning of the novel, water is portrayed in its absolute necessity to human life, but this necessity is joined to the innate human sense of adventure. Deep in the deserts, "*à une date qu'il est impossible de retrouver dans la mémoire si féconde des patriarches*," (11) a "*peuple sans nom*" languishes in the midst of a deathly drought. They set out in the direction of the setting sun, guided by nothing but an "*instinct obscur*" and driven by their own strong will to survive: "*Le goût de l'aventure inné en l'homme, s'ajoutant aux affres de la soif, rendait cet exode nécessaire.*" It is clear that this *instinct obscur* is not only a matter of water, but also a quest to discover the ends of the earth. This journey includes a brief pause along the way from desert to shore, wherein water is discovered in the form of an underground source. Though some choose to stay and found a settlement in this spot, many others move on: "*Parmi eux se trouvaient les chefs de tribus et la plupart des 'initiés' qui voyaient autre chose au-delà de la ligne immobile que le soleil, leur compagnon, incendiait chaque soir avant de disparaître*" (14). The instinct driving this *peuple sans nom* to the ends of the earth is explained logically as that of survival joined with the taste for adventure, but there remains a mystery in it. In essence, this group exodus is pulled to the ocean not only seeking its life giving properties but also for its mythical character. Indeed, the instinct that drives them is a collective representation of the hero's quest.

Sadji begins the novella with an epigraph that both proclaims his loyalty to the oral traditions of the Lébou and provides a significant key to understanding his conceptualization of story: "*Les thèmes de cette nouvelle sont tirés de légendes, où gît la vérité*." The concrete details and major plot points of the novella do indeed echo the legends of the Lébou, as may be seen in the brief account given by Balandier and Mercier. Provided in an appendix, the authors recount three legends, all of which involve the relationship between humans and supernatural underwater beings, as well as the temporary sojourn of a fisherman, or team of fishermen, in the depths of the ocean. Though specific to the Lébou, these should thematically recall both the Nummo myth and some of the tales recounted by Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié. Indeed, they also closely resemble tales about aquatic beings that appear throughout Africa. Sadji clearly draws from the sources of these oral tales in writing *Tounka*. Apart from specific plot points, themes such as the precariousness of life and the difficulty of survival, the complicated workings of romantic relationships, the harshness of immigration and the adjustment to new environments and new ways of being, as well as notions of community building and political strategy are also present throughout this short piece. However, one of Sadji's major thematic innovations highlighted throughout the novella is the prominence of storytelling in society and the ways in which stories themselves arise within a community. In implying that legends are the very seat of truth, Sadji also makes clear that narration, in its many forms, is one of the most basic ways to access truths that remain otherwise shrouded in mystery. This would also mean that the "*instinct obscur*" that leads a group of desert dwellers to the ocean could be construed as a search to find that space

"*où gît la vérité*." Once again, truth is located spatially and is a feature of the unknown world; but for the characters in this tale, it is precisely the interactions with the realm of myth that are portrayed as the grounds upon which a recognition of truth may take shape. As such, it is not simply a matter of reversing the categorical equations which would have nonfiction as true and fiction or myth as false. It is also the intersubjective experience of those characters within *Tounka* – be they from the land or the water, representing the everyday life or the mythical realm – that create the legend where truth lies.

Settling at a safe distance from the threat of the ocean's changing tides, these new arrivals begin to assess their environment. It is here on the shores of the ocean that Sadji's concept of "*vérité*" is evoked by the curious settlers, and this scene not only endows truth with spatial value, but also situates it within the realm the mythical beings living underwater. Debating the strange rise and fall of the sea's groundswells, several of this society's '*initiés*' espouse their own theories of this strange phenomenon:

> *Les uns croyaient voir dans ces bouillonnements l'âme des flots qui s'agitait par périodes; d'autres les attribuaient au passage du roi de la mer; d'autres enfin – et ceux-là étaient dans la vérité – parlèrent des habitants de l'eau qui vivaient dans la mer par légions.* (25)

This abrupt narrative interjection cuts through the scene of speculation in order to confirm the truth of this underwater population. However, this scene contains a double affirmation. On the one hand, the confirmation lends legitimacy to belief in such beings - a belief persisting amongst most communities with regard to nearby bodies of water even today.[39] On the other hand, it also asserts that the very nature of truth is to be found in

this scene. Following Sadji's pronouncement that truth lies in legend, we can ascertain that truth value is not located within the credibility of specific phenomena, but rather within the workings of legend itself. As such, the existence of sea creatures is certainly of cultural import, but this existence is secondary to process of secrecy and speculation that they evoke. In this scene, the men on the shore are said to be "*dans la vérité*," and while this would immediately imply that they are simply correct in their assumptions, the insistence on spatial terminology places truth in the entire scene, and in the relation between land and sea, as evoked on the shore that lies in the liminal space between the two. This moment on the beach conveys Sadji's basic formulation of truth in its relation to narrative. The very beings whom he confirms to be 'true' are hidden in the ocean's depths, revealing while also concealing themselves. It is this significant element of the unknown that leads to speculation and, as will be seen throughout the remaining analysis, to legends. Paradoxically, to have access to truth - to be "*dans la vérité*" - is simultaneously to be faced with something that lies under water and thus out of sight.

The choice of mysterious supernatural beings to convey truth value appears strange when we consider that they are the most obviously fictional characters in the story, endowed with the least realism. Yet truth and fiction are not opposed in Sadji's understanding of legend, and their natural resonance is supported by Isidore Okpewho's categorization of stories based on his qualitative definition of myth. Recalling this description as that of a "quality of fanciful play" (*Myth in Africa* 69), as well as his assertion that the more mythic a text is - which is to say the more removed from the immediately familiar realm of reality - the more capacity for intellectual content it

maintains, supports a reading of the underwater realm present in *Tounka* as that which is most capable of expressing abstract truth. More importantly, for Okpewho, the categorical differentiations between oral texts that focus on historical truths of the real world and those that recount primarily the poetic play of a mythical realm are not distinct but rather highly fluid. An oral text may retain different levels of mythical substance at different points. While it may seem difficult to differentiate between what is "fanciful" and what is not – and, indeed, Okpewho would admit precisely this challenge – he suggests an objective stance toward reality that respectfully incorporates a certain amount of cultural relativism (under which a belief in sea creatures is not thoughtlessly discounted) while asserting a common realism. He states that, "We must, instead, be bold enough to assume an objective distance and, since in our studies we cannot claim absolute acquaintance, recognize an honest line between what is *lifelike* and what is not" (66). *Tounka*, while asserting historical claims about the beginnings of the Lébou settlement along the coastline, is also based upon a marriage between a '*fils des hommes*' and a '*princesse de la mer*' and these two examples shows a varied range along the continuum of "lifelike" occurrences. However, in this novella, they are spatially differentiated by the division between the land – the realm of the real – and the sea – the space of myth.

To further expand upon this spatial differentiation, we should recall Karim Traoré's proposition that the forest is the realm into which the hunter ventures, seeking knowledge in the place "*où gît la vérité*." It is no coincidence that Abdoulaye Sadji begins his novella with a phrase that also has great importance to Traoré's presentation of

spatial dynamics in the hunter's epic. In order to access the realm of myth, a spatial barrier must be crossed, and a separation from the community must be enacted. Indeed, the hunter and the fisher are of a kind, and they fulfill the same role not only in society – for they both embark on dangerous journeys in order to nourish their community – but also in the oral narrative. As such, the ocean may be directly equated with the forest here in that it is the space of myth and appropriately filled with mythical beings.

The scene upon the beach continues with the oceanic inhabitants offering a taste of their bounty, seemingly as a reward for the truthful pronouncement of their existence: "*une lame de fond extraordinaire plus haute et plus fulgurante que les autres jeta sur le rivage une nuée effroyable de petits être frétillants qui sautillaient impuissants et battaient la grève de leur queue fourchue*" (25). Yet again, this indicates that the very beings who are endowed with a truth value by the narrator, are those who simultaneously show themselves while hiding. While this offering is at first terrifying in its strangeness, the group of '*initiés*' shortly discover that this gift from the seas is one that provides nourishment, and it is not long before fishing becomes the very basis of coastal civilization. Drawn in by this initial encounter with the creatures of the sea, "*La première génération de pêcheurs était née*" (27).

Incorporating Okpewho's understanding of myth as that which allows the greatest capacity to abstract thinking and is therefore compatible with truth, rather than opposed to it, I propose that we see the ocean in Sadji's text as both the realm of myth and that of truth. As shown in the interaction between the beings of both sea and land, truth is part of the aquatic realm that shows itself upon the shores only in order to be sought once again.

The legends that are built as part of this process of secrecy and speculation are the material of truth which surfaces and is seen by human eyes, if only temporarily and through disguise. It is therefore of great significance that fishing – the activity of seeking nourishment and truth in this other realm while guiding boats through the waves of myth – becomes the foundation of Lébou civilization, and the most notable figure within this community will of course be the one who has the closest interaction with the underwater realm.

Descended from one of the great patriarchs who brought this *peuple sans nom* to the farthest limits of human habitation, a figure of unprecedented strength and wisdom is born into the community: "*De ce nouveau peuple installé au bord de la mer et qui plus tard prit le nom bien significatif de 'Lébou',*[40] *un type colossal surgit, un homme légendaire qui n'avait rien de commun avec son ancêtre du pays des sables*" (31). On the one hand, this description of N'Galka as "legendary" could simply indicate his status as an extraordinary human. Indeed, as Isidore Okpewho explains in his *The Epic in Africa* (1979), it is important that the hero of a story stand apart from ordinary men and women, but that he yet retain their recognizable features. The hero is the "ordinary man writ large" (134). However, Sadji's particular use of the term 'legend' throughout this novella, beginning with the *avant-propos*, has a dual connotation, both facets of which relate to truth. On the one hand, legend is that which is created by truth concealed in secrecy, about which speculation arises and eventually takes on narrative form; and on the other hand, legend is that which, in some physical incarnation, comes from the space of myth into the human community, and is incorporated into collective understanding as a story.[41]

As such, this hero's legendary status is described, from the beginning, as both a quality inherited from his illustrious ancestors, and as a notable differentiation from this ancestry:

> *Il descendait en droite ligne du patriarche Tyongane, l'un des initiés qui conduisirent le peuple sans nom sur le rivage de la mer. Il en était séparé par cinq générations qui semblaient avoir haussé sa taille, renforcé ses traits, décuplé la force de ses muscles.*

In a sense, he is the distilled essence of this esteemed lineage, but there is also an element to his great talents that comes from some other source, as indicated by his name:

> *Il s'appelait N'Galka, un nom étrange, inconnu au pays des sables. Il était le meilleur cultivateur, le meilleur lutteur, le meilleur pêcheur de toute la côte. Unique survivant d'une lignée de grands cerveaux, il avait la tête pleine et ses yeux voyaient dans l'air et dans la mer des merveilles qui échappaient aux intelligences ordinaires.*

As a fisherman, N'Galka fluctuates between the ocean and the land, and his journey is therefore one that is plagued by the tension between the vast mythical reaches beyond the horizon and village life of which he is an integral part.

As is the case with nearly all heroes, N'Galka is not shy about sharing his great success at sea, nor the marvelous encounters he has with its mythical aquatic beings. This is not merely a scene of bragging, however, but a portrayal of storytelling that gives us a key to further understanding the concept of legend and the ways in which it may or may not function with regard to the necessary secrecy of truth: "*Au 'pintch'*[42] *grands et petits écoutaient respectueusement quand il racontait ses aventures en mer*" (32). N'Galka tells

them of a beautiful woman who walks upon the water while his boat is out at sea, bringing him food and sitting with him before disappearing into the waves. He tells them that he was even transported into an underwater realm, full of marvels, and that he encountered men and women living in a beautiful palace. He concludes these stories by swearing that he will only marry a woman from this place, and never a "*fille des hommes*". Unfortunately, he soon discovers that all of his talking has greatly displeased his former underwater hosts and, hearing a voice one day while at sea, he is told: "*Tu es trop bavard N'Galka, tu es trop bavard. Sache brider ta langue. Ne raconte plus aux hommes ce que tu vois dans ce domaine. Garde tes secrets pour toi*" (34). Again, the warning reinforces the necessary quality of secrecy that this underwater community demands. However, it also portrays an important dictate of legend that must be observed by those who engage in its creation. N'Galka has already been identified as a legendary figure, and by joining his life to the underwater realm, he is given a place in the space of myth. But his position as part of legend itself is predicated upon his silence. It seems that, in this formulation, it is impossible to tell one's own story. He has the choice either to be part of the legend, or to tell the legend, but he cannot do both. In order to become fully part of the mythical, he must keep his silence intact. As a "legendary" figure, his secrecy is a key component to his status as the hero of the tale.

N'Galka is able to hold his tongue, as demanded, and though he loses his audience, he is given a "*princesse de la mer*" in marriage. Upon this occasion, he makes a vow to refrain from speaking of his bride's origins and to disallow any of their future children to marry within the human race, sending them instead back to their mother's

homeland when they reach adulthood. Furthermore, he promises to always grant his wife "*le respect qui est dû à une princesse de la mer*" (38). In exchange, N'Galka is guaranteed continued success as a fisherman, and the ceremony concluded, husband and wife are returned to their boat in order to regain their home in the village. However, it is in the boat, this small island of human invention floating on mythical open waters that their life together sets sail on its unhappy course. While the princess was a much lauded being in the accounts with which N'Galka entertained the other fishermen, and she was similarly charming while still in her underwater kingdom, now removed from the circumstances of myth, adorned with human clothing and given a human name by her husband, she transforms drastically in his eyes: "*Il y avait quelque chose de bestial dans son regard. Son teint était d'un noir absolu à reflets d'ivoire et sa peau trop lisse n'avait pas le velouté de la peau humaine. Son contact dans la barque, donnait à N'Galka une impression de froideur répulsive*" (40). Such is the fate of myth removed from its element. Though he may clothe her and rename her - she becomes, "Goudi" meaning "night" - he can never fully disguise her as human. Furthermore, whereas N'Galka once enjoyed narrating his heroic exploits in the underwater world, he now must guard this relationship in secrecy. Unnarrated, and out of water, Goudi holds very little attraction for him.

Goudi's time in human society presents the most clear example of the workings of myth and legend as understood by Abdoulaye Sadji, and carefully examining the scenes of her exclusion from this community leads to an interpretation of the verbal phenomena that are portrayed throughout the novella as fundamental to narrative construction. Also

essential to the creation of legend from the material of mythical elements is the structure of secrecy and speculation that characterizes Goudi's tenure on shore. Arriving in the village, N'Galka and Goudi are met with the traditional festivities, however the new bride is reluctant to participate, refusing to ride into town on the white horse destined for newlyweds, and locking herself inside of the house throughout the rest of the celebration. Most importantly, she remains silent and invisible. While she slowly learns the language of men, she does not speak, but rather remains behind closed doors and windows, listening to their chatter as they pass. She herself becomes the most popular topic of conversation: "*Au village, on commentait le mystère de cette femme invisible dont on ignorait jusqu'à l'origine. N'Galka fuyait toutes les questions relatives à son épouse*" (43). The birth of their son does not help Goudi's standing, as the young boy displays the same prodigious talents as his father before him, but becomes a suspect figure of the village as much for his "*nature violente et sanguinaire*" as for his performance of "*miracles sur le rivage sous le regard étonné de tous, grands et petits"* (49). Though his powers are kept in check by the cautious Goudi, both she and her son become the subject of wild accounts among the villagers:

> *La beauté extraordinaire, l'allure mystérieuse, l'humeur taciturne de la mère, les prodiges qu'accomplissait le fils à cet âge eurent vite fait de les désigner à la méfiance du peuple tout entier. On prétendait que la mère possédait deux yeux à la base du crâne et dissimulés par sa lourde toison; des yeux qui, la nuit, remplaçaient ses yeux naturels et lui permettaient de faire la chasse à l'homme. On lui attribuait le pouvoir de dérober les âmes*

> *et de provoquer la mort sous des apparences naturelles. Et quant au fils, puisqu'il avait tété le lait de cette créature extraordinare, il possédait les mêmes instincts et devait hériter de la même science.*
> *Ainsi fut échafaudée pour la première fois sur la côte la légende des sorciers qui provoquaient les epidémies, abattaient les hommes en pleine santé, emportaient les mères en pleine grossesse.* (50-51)

In this description, Goudi embodies all of the most terrifying traits of female sea creatures that remain surprisingly similar throughout the world. Indeed, she is beautiful, but she is also monstrous, embodying a form of female identity that is inherently separate from the human.[43] However, more importantly than the unflattering description of this family is the portrayal of the creation of legend. Goudi, like the mythical beings of the waves who previously appeared to newcomers at the edge of the water, reveals her nature while concealing it. Taken from the space of myth and placed upon the surface of everyday human life, Goudi's mystery turns into story. In the blank space of the untold, legend arises, and becomes part of collective lore. However, this is not the end of her story by any means. As is common in oral tales that involve the hidden identity of an aquatic being, eventually the truth also comes to the surface.

Due to his position as a leader in the community, N'Galka is encouraged, and easily persuaded, by the elders of the village to take a second wife from within the Lébou people in order to create a family that is more acceptable to social standards. This he willingly does, and the political venture is also a satisfying personal development in his life, for his new bride Ndiaré is in every way the opposite of Goudi, and brings him great

happiness. The tension that naturally arises between the two wives signifies the tension within N'Galka himself, for on one hand, he is a 'legendary' figure, and is further tied to the realm of myth by his marriage to a mythical being. However, he is also tied to the ordinary existence of the human world, being one of its key leaders and married to one of its members. This signifies a narrative tension as well, for N'Galka is required to keep his silence so long as his existence is implicated in the mythical kingdom as well as the legends surrounding it. Indeed, his happiness with Ndiaré is that which will finally cause N'Galka to betray Goudi's origins, momentarily placing himself within the fully human realm rather than the mythical, and choosing to tell his own story.

While jealous, Goudi does nothing to dissuade this second union except to remind her husband of the promise he once made, telling him not to forget the respect that is her birthright. Unfortunately, so moved is he by this newfound romantic bliss, that N'Galka fatefully reveals his true feelings one day to another fisherman at the 'pintch': "*Ndiaré est ma reine, qu'on le sache bien; l'autre est froide comme un lamentin*" (60). First, this insult will be swiftly repeated throughout the village, displaying another important instance of rumor transformed into legend:

> *Cet homme répéta le propos autour de lui et le propos arriva finalement aux oreilles des femmes qui étaient les ennemis déclarées de [Goudi]. Elles composèrent aussitôt une méchante mélopée où il était dit que la pauvre princesse était froide comme un lamentin.* (60)

This song will spread quickly and eventually reach the ears of Goudi herself, as her enemies sing "*Comme un lamentin qu'on dit/ Et ce 'on' est son mari:/ Elle est froide*

comme un lamentin/ Qu'on a pêché le matin."[44] Secondly, this offensive chant finally discloses the secret of her origins, thinly disguised in simile. The form that these insults take is specifically narrative, and the legend of Goudi's mysterious origins is thus reinforced, inasmuch as the truth of her identity is clarified. With this in mind, the dramatic end to her time on land is of great importance, for within sight of the entire village, she leaves her home and walks straight into the water, allowing herself to be seen and thus for the legend to continue. While this is, according to the onlookers, a scene of death, what they have actually seen is this princess's return home. The incorporation of this scene in legend is further enforced when, upon witnessing her frightful end, "*l'attitude héroique de la princesse Goudi avait surpris N'Galka. Il ne supposait tant d'amour-propre chez son épouse d'habitude si froide et peu passionnée*" (63). No longer on land, he conceives of Goudi as 'heroic' and remembers that she is indeed a 'princess', important details that had been forgotten by him while she remained on land. In essence, the fate of Goudi shows that myth upon the surface is subverted by misconception that reaches for truth but can never attain it.

While Goudi shows the life and death of myth on land, and the workings of legend that accompany her difficult existence, N'Galka is the legendary figure who is pulled between two realms and struggles with inability to tell his own tale. However, their son Tounka further clarifies the role of legend within this novella, and he is significantly not the only Tounka to whom the title refers, for his name is a direct reference to the very beginning of his illustrious paternal line:

Un enfant naquit de cette union hybride. N'Galka lui donna le nom de

> *Tounka en souvenir de l'arrière-grand-aieul de son ancêtre Tyongane. Cet arrière-grand-aieul, disait la légende, était sorti de l'eau douce dans une contrée située au nord-est du pays des sables. Il y avait créé la ligne célèbre dont M'Bar et Tyongane devaient être les plus savants et les plus respectés*. (45)

Not only does this clarify Tounka's legendary nature but it also indicates that he, like his father and like his ancestor Tyongane who led the *peuple sans nom* through the deserts and to the ocean's edge, also has a particular tie to water. These two Tounkas therefore signify two figures who are the framework of a vast legend that stretches throughout time and space, coming from water and returning to the same. Recalling the '*instinct obscur*' that led the original drought stricken migrants from the desert to the shore, it becomes clear that this was not merely a case of thirst combined with the natural taste for adventure, but also portrays a figure from freshwater gravitating naturally toward the horizon in the same manner that all rivers eventually flow into the ocean. Of course this revelation also explains the prodigious qualities of N'Galka as well, and complicates the tension heretofore explained as that of two different realms competing within him, for he was already part of a legend surfacing from aquatic sources and spanning generations, even before he became part of the legend that closely involved him with the kingdom of the seas and its royalty. However, in the strange death of N'Galka that ends the story, and in his relationship to the son who will end this legendary line, the more important tension is shown to be that of telling or not telling his own adventures. In his final days, this heroic fisherman is transformed from a man to a myth, as he is silenced once and for all.

Having revealed his wife's identity and disrespected her royal position in one swift utterance, N'Galka waits for the punishment he knows will eventually be exacted by the gods of the sea. All is quiet while he remains on the shore, but returning to his duties at sea, he is swept into a terrifying display that encompasses the full extent of the wrath of aquatic royalty. Presaged by a dream in which his ancestor Tyongane appears to him and warns him against going out to sea, N'Galka is slowly drawn farther and farther toward the horizon, and for the first time, experiences a deep and powerful fear:

> *À mi-chemin l'homme eut brusquement peur. Le littoral avait disparu derrière lui, l'horizon s'apesantissait devant. Plus aucun lien avec la terre, rompu tout contact avec les hommes. Ce sentiment de peur qui ne visite jamais le cœur des marins et des pêcheurs il l'éprouvait pour la première fois. Où allait-il?* (65)

This description situates N'Galka in a liminal space that is both fully removed from the land while also not yet submerged in the underwater kingdom. Furthermore, this is the beginning of the transformation of N'Galka from a fisherman – a position defined by fearlessness – into another state altogether, and it echoes and reverses the transformation undergone by Goudi that began in the very same boat. As she moved from her mythical home to the realm of human experience, here N'Galka moves from his human state into the realm of myth.

Remaining undeterred by his own fear, N'Galka resolves to throw down his line, anchored "*entre ses cuisses*" for "*Malgré tous ces maléfices qui tentaient de l'intimider, il ne serait pas dit qu'un jour N'Galka était rentré au village sans apporter un seul poisson*

dans sa barque" (68). While expressing concern about his continued abilities as a fisherman, which compose the very core of his identity, it is also important to see this as one last attempt to control the narration of his own legend, with the passive voice of "*il ne serait pas dit*" evoking the existence of his own story outside of himself. However, the rulers of the underwater realm have other plans for N'Galka, and as the line is dragged into the water, he attempts to cut it with his knife in order to break free. But the line holds strong despite his best efforts: "*Il tira son couteau pour couper la ligne à sa naissance, mais elle était devenue plus solide qu'un cable d'acier*" (68). Sadji's precise phrasing here is important, for while the fishing line remains between his thighs and could therefore possibly signal a phallic interpretation, it could also be construed as an umbilical cord, with the ocean pulling him back into a vast womb. While the most obvious reading is that N'Galka here attempts to cut the cord at its base, in order to escape such a frightening fate, allowing for the slightest semantic adjustment, he could also be attempting to cut the cord that links him to his own birth, "*de sa naissance*" rather than "*à sa naissance*." The significance of the fishing line as symbolically representing an umbilical cord that pulls N'Galka back into the womb resonates fully if we consider that after this underwater journey, he is reborn onto land, albeit in a state of living death. Indeed, the womb and the tomb are joined in this transformative space, which becomes apparent when the tormented fisherman regains the surface.

The ocean wreaks havoc on the village for days, and claims many lives before N'Galka finally appears on the horizon. He is greeted by the stirrings of witnesses in a scene that recalls previous instances of speculation: "*Une rumeur s'était élevée sur le*

rivage et qui grandissait, s'amplifiait, devenait un tonnerre de cris, d'exclamations, de pleurs et de soupirs, tandis que la pirogue et l'homme mystérieux étaient charriés pars les lames vers la grève." Breaking through this rumbling, a single cry is heard, calling the name of the figure who has died as a man and been reborn into legend. However, he does not take his place once again as the village hero but, fully succumbing to the madness incited by his journey into the depths, he rages throughout the community, attacking whoever stands in his way, searching for his second wife whom he aims to "*transformer en bouillie et l'offrir en pâture aux dieux et aux naiades*" (77).

Only the sight of his son is able to calm N'Galka's wrath, but it is also Tounka who silences his father. He warns N'Galka : "*Père...ne parle plus de ces mystères. Les gens du pays doivent ignorer ces mystères*" (80). N'Galka, clearly ill-disposed to the idea, and seeking a means to relay, first and foremost, the wrath of the ocean, replies: "*Non, non, mille fois non ! Au contraire il faut qu'ils sachent tout, qu'ils expient le crime. J'irai tout leur dire devant le 'pintch', puis je leur cracherai à la figure*." These are the last words that N'Galka will utter, for after a day spent reliving his aquatic nightmare in vivid detail, he falls finally into sleep, never to wake, and never to speak again. This fate was presaged by the warning given to him in the beginning, that in order to remain in the favor of the seas he must learn to "*brider sa langue.*" However, showing himself finally incapable of this command, his greatest punishment will be the silent sleep into which he slips: "*Sa langue, aux dire des féticheurs, s'était brisée. Par quel phénomène* ?" (80) He remains barely alive, a silent symbol that is now fully part of a story he cannot tell, a fiction being reborn from the space of myth. As if to reinforce his role in the scheme of

legend, Tounka sits by his side, telling stories to calm is father: "[*il*] *voltigeait autour de lui, disait des contes, chantait des mélopées de lutte et de pêche et les refrains qu'entonnaient les laboureurs pour combattre la fatigue*" (80-81). Here, Tounka invokes the realm to which both his mother and now his father belong, the truth of their story shrouded in myth and mystery, while the reality of their life on land is surrounded by legends forged in the imaginations of the village.

Eventually N'Galka loses the struggle for his life, and as the *fêticheur* charged with his care explains, the spirits of the ocean were stronger than the spirits of the land, and the fight that raged between them inside N'Galka himself was such that he was not able to escape with his life. But the notion of death is no simple matter in this text and it is essential to understand that death takes on unexpected forms. First and foremost, Sadji evokes death in the *avant-propos*, in which the dual connotation of the verb *gésir* may be seen. Indeed, legend is where truth lies, but if we also read *où gît* with the common connotation of the tombstone marker indicating "*ci-gît*" we see that legend is also truth's tomb, serving as its memorial. Truth, read in this way would be mortal, whereas legend is timeless and neither lives nor dies. Figuratively, Goudi takes on the role of representing that very space '*où gît la vérité*' and she symbolizes the immortality that N'Galka finally attains in death. The figurative representation of truth in this novella works on several levels. It is spatially construed as existing in the sea; physically incarnated in mythical beings who exist only underwater; and conceptually it is that which rises out of the depths and reveals while concealing in order to form legends that reach far beyond their spatial and temporal inception. This strange death and rebirth is at the core of what I term

resurfacing, for the tale of N'Galka's life – as reflected in the story of his entire lineage – represents the human becoming fiction through an interaction with the depths of myth. If we define myth not as a genre but as a transformative quality that renders history into legend, it is as essential to life as water, memorializing the past on shore while continuing to fluidly recreate an understanding of truth in the depths of the ocean.

Through the work of Karim Traoré and Isidore Okpewho, myth was construed as both a spatial and temporal realm, from which narrative is drawn and rendered into present, everyday reality. In Abdoulaye Sadji's written adaptation of Lébou oral tradition, this realm of myth is specified as the ocean, and as the fishers enter its realm seeking physical nourishment, the Atlantic also becomes the issue of intellectual sustenance. However, the Atlantic Ocean is not the only body of water with mythic import. In Marcel Griaule's version the Dogon creation story, water contains the "Word" and these indistinguishable elements that make up a fluid language are construed as the essence of all life. Similarly, in the work of Bernard Dadié and Birago Diop, water is full of words that narrate events both of everyday life and of human history, passing them on throughout the land. Taken together, these various portrayals of water – as ocean, river, stream, and vapor of life – compose a system whereby the events of the land are recorded in the water and continually brought back to the surface through oral narrative.

Sadji's understanding of the ocean as a womb and a tomb that decides the final fate of the intrepid N'Galka demonstrates the death of a human and the birth of a legend. A similar concept is established in the next chapter, with readings of work by Senegalese

writer Fatou Diome and Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat. Both of these authors convey both the deathly and life-giving properties of the ocean with particular reference to narrative, and to the resurfacing of individual and collective memory that continually washes up on the shores of present consciousness. However, the ocean is not only the issue of life and the abyss of death, but also remains a distinct realm of the mythic, apart from the land – which is to say apart from the everyday world – but continually functioning in relation to it. As this chapter has established the deep and complex relationship between water and words in West African oral literature, the next chapter will continue to explore this relationship in contemporary written works of the Black Atlantic.[45]

Chapter 2

From Womb to Tomb: The Atlantic as a Site of Social Death and Narrative Rebirth in Edwidge Danticat and Fatou Diome

Fatou Diome's novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) is a semi-autobiographical collage of immigration narratives that revolve around the author's own native island, Niodior, off the coast of the Siné-Saloum delta of Senegal. Amidst tales that portray both the intense desire of some to reach European shores, as well as cynicism of others whose time in France left them disillusioned, Diome interweaves accounts of characters who are doubly rejected by both the former *métropole* and the insular society of Niodior with its dogmatic social constraints. One such account is that of Moussa, who goes to France as a footballer and returns home broken by failure. Shamed by the community, he befriends the local schoolmaster, but when this friendship leads to accusations of a romantic connection between the two men, Moussa throws himself into the Atlantic. His body is later discovered by fishers and brough to shore. A strikingly similar scene occurs in Edwidge Danticat's *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013). This novel is also structured as a collection of entwined stories portraying the residents of the small Haitian village called Ville Rose that often serves as Danticat's fictional backdrop. One of the many narrative threads is that of Max Jr., returned to his father's home after many years in Miami with his mother. Originally sent away by his father as a penalty for sexual dalliances with the housemaid, it is rather his relationship with another man that shocks and dismays his

father. Like Moussa, he throws himself into the ocean, and is returned to shore on the waves. Max Jr., however, remains alive.

The strong semblance between these two scenes – immigration and return, sexuality and shaming – and the similar narrative structure employed by their authors invites comparison, yet this one fundamental distinction between life and death demands careful reading of both the mythological and social realms invoked by Diome and Danticat. As stated in the introduction, I contend that the trope of resurfacing indicates a narrative process that is replete with individual and collective history transmitted through water. Death by water in African and Caribbean literature carries with it the horrors of history. It refers to the Middle Passage, which left transatlantic bodies dotting the sea floor – the "*boulets verdis*" or shackles cited by Edouard Glissant.[46] The theme is also one of contemporary resonance, in the context of illegal immigration conducted by water – the *pirogues* full of West Africans seeking their fortune in Europe,[47] or the small fishing boats headed from Haiti to Miami.[48] As portrayed in many works, the history of African and Caribbean diaspora is rife with shipwrecks, and while most bodies remain permanently in the depths, those that wash ashore serve as a grotesque signifier of desperation that meets its end in the seas.

In essence, bodies on the shore tell a story. While the implications of these atrocities, and the texts that invoke them will be further explored in Chapter 3, it is with Diome's Moussa and Danticat's Maxime, that a study of two seemingly disparate authors may begin. These characters, thrown so violently into a narrative only partially of their own making – for they are at once actors in their society and victims of circumstance –

do not merely signify the impasse of marginalized sexuality in the face of heteronormative family structures. It should become clear throughout this study that in my own reading I emphasize considerations of family structure over those of sexuality, under the premise that what so estranges the idea of marginalized sexualities in these particular texts is the disruption of the family line, and the ability or inability of society to incorporate alternate modes of "filiation" in general.[49] Their circumstances also bring about certain key questions that resonate throughout the works of both African and Caribbean writers in general and Fatou Diome and Edwidge Danticat specifically. What is the nature of the divide between life and death? What is the ocean's role in the continual confrontation with history? How are marginalized characters incorporated into or rejected from terrestrial society, and how does the ocean serve as the site of their stories' mythological reification? Both Diome and Danticat live away from their homelands, while retaining connections to their birthplace through literature,[50] and the ocean resounds throughout their work as that great abyss which is continually traversed. Both a site of death and of birth, it takes on the dual role of womb and tomb, simultaneously invoking the precariousness and cyclicality of human life. While the ocean is the realm of death, as in the case of Moussa, it is also the space of rebirth for Maxime, and this dual nature is reflected in the ocean's role as a great narrator, washing the dark and forgotten realms of history to the shores of consciousness.

In the last chapter I focused on the significance of water in West African mythology, not only as one of spiritual import, but also as one of narrative consequence. Through a careful analysis of works from West African writers Bernard Dadié and Birago

Diop, I discovered that in this realm, water serves as the conduit of history and story, both diffusing shared knowledge and giving material presence to narrative within the oral tradition. In engaging with the debate surrounding Marcel Griaule's *Dieu de l'Eau* (1942), I concentrated on the relationship between anthropologist and informant as a fluid process of narrative creation, while relying on the conjunction of water and speech in Griaule's understanding of Dogon belief that renders them both ubiquitous and life-giving. Finally, I read Abdoulaye Sadji's *Tounka* (1952) as a piece of recorded oral literature that theorizes its own process of creation through a water goddess that temporarily resides on shore, becoming a legendary figure throughout the mythology of the Lébou. It is primarily from this example that I conveyed the principles of resurfacing that guide my study as a whole. In the following, I consider what it would mean for literature of Africa and the Caribbean to be defined through this shared narrative processes. Both Diome and Danticat, separated by the Atlantic Ocean, are very much attentive to this body of water itself, as well as the history of multiple diasporas conducted through it that have shaped both Africa and the Caribbean. While their conceptions of the resurfacing of this history upon land differ, they similarly portray the sea as a site of both death and birth, the space of memory and transition.

"L'Eau-gresse": the Atlantic as Cannibal Mother

Fatou Diome, in various works throughout her career, creates a structure of resurfacing whereby collective histories of the community are swallowed into the sea's depths, only to return to shore as shared legends. Diome takes into account both the told

and untold stories of the land, thereby fashioning a theory of storytelling that seeks to incorporate the neglected elements of history. However, Diome is concerned with the process by which narrative resurfaces, as the individual and collective stories of society are taken into the aquatic realm, in order to oppose the monolithic tendencies of insular society and create a conceptual space for multiplicity. Presenting both the nation and religion as exclusionary social structures, Diome invokes the sea as a potential space of conceptual inclusion. Moving from literal exclusion upon land to figurative inclusion in water, the Atlantic as a frequent space of tragic death offers the opportunity for a form of rebirth in narrative. She conflates meanings of *ventre* as both a stomach and a womb, and though violently hungry, the sea as a digestive body indicates a process by which forgotten memories and secret histories are reborn into consciousness. The Atlantic maintains a deeply ambivalent status throughout Diome's work. The site of death and birth, it offers both salvation and betrayal, nurturing and destroying those in its close proximity. In the following analysis of the short story "Les Loups de l'Atlantique" and the novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* I argue that Diome's Atlantic is best read through her neologism of the "eau-gresse". At once mother and monster, the sea reaps from the land while returning unknown tales onto the shore.

Diome's first published essay, "L'Eau multiple" (2000) explores the many realms in which water is both a naturally and culturally significant element. While she speaks about fresh water and its life-giving properties, she also discusses the sea and its destructive qualities. Diome certainly echoes Gaston Bachelard's understanding of the poetics of water in his famous work *L'Eau et les rêves* (1942) wherein he compares the

healthy waters of the stream and pond to the mortal qualities of the sea.[51] In her own essay, Diome reflects, "*Si le clapotis rassurant des eaux heureuses me berce et m'invite à la poésie, le rugissement des eaux malheureuses qui charrient mes angoisses se charge d'interrompre toute rêverie*" (204). Calm waters cradle the writer and beckon her to creative work, but the relationship between water and artistic creation is also linked to the ambivalent maternal relationship. Water's positive and nurturing capacities are always undercut by its pernicious tendencies.

Furthermore, Diome expands the dual identity of the mother by joining the figure of the ogress to the Biblical account of the Flood: "*La même eau qui fit voguer l'arche de Noé ravagea toute vie sur son passage donnant ainsi à la mère nourricière la figure terrifiante de l'ogre. Les inondations représentent ce monstre tentaculaire que devient l'eau pour nous ravir ce qu'elle nous a donné, la vie. Aussi, lorsque j'entends parler d'inondations, de noyades ou d'oeil du cyclone, je me dis que nous ne sommes pas loin de la gueule de l'eau-gresse*" (204).[52] For Diome, the ambivalence of the Flood is profoundly troubling, for the story of Noah is foremost a stark portrayal of the separate fates awaiting those who were chosen to survive and those who were not, a contrast that holds significant interest for the author herself, whose frequent main character Salie was nearly drowned as a child.[53] Furthermore, the ogress is merely the hidden face of the caring mother, and her invention of the term "eau-gresse" identifies this paradoxical identity. She concludes her definition of the Atlantic as the *eau-gresse* with a memory from her childhood that broaches the theme of maternal betrayal, which will take on such significance in her work:

> *La mer garde ses bras ouverts. Petite, elle m'a enlacée, m'incitant à lire dans ses reflets le regard maternel. Puis en jour, en rentrant de la pêche avec mon grand-père, elle me menaça et ballotta sur son lit mobile. [...] Ce jour-là, sur l'Atlantique, je compris que l'eau n'est pas toujours acceuillante et nourricière; elle est aussi cette dévoreuse, la tombe béante de tant d'humains*. (204)

Seeking maternal comfort in the ocean, she is rather bathed by the cold water of the Atlantic. Instead of finding the warm waters of the womb, she is confronted with the cold waters of a tomb. The figure of the sea as an *eau-gresse* interestingly subverts the common conflation of the *mère/mer* in French.[54] Rather than stressing the relationship between the mother and the aquatic realm, Diome chooses to place emphasis rather on the sea as a devouring being, the cannibalistic ogress.

The theme of digestion comes to the fore in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique,* in which the cyclical process of the land's history, as it is incorporated into the sea's depths and brought back in the form of legend supports the concept of resurfacing in the literature of the Atlantic. Focusing on the sea's role in the history of the land provides an opportunity to understand how the unseen, unheard, untold stories of a society are processed and then reborn through narrative. Beginning with an analysis of insular society on land in Diome's work, I explore the themes of nationalism and religious zeal in "Les Loups de l'Atlantique" as part of what I am calling a "terrestrial monolithicism" that is imperative to an understanding of her complicated portrayal of the sea. I argue that the theme of salvation that accompanies the sea's maternal role in the escape from such monolithic

structures also espouses an element of the sea's betrayal. Turning to *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique,* I continue to mobilize the notion of the sea as *eau-gresse* in order to more fully understand the ways in which marginalized characters are both literally and figuratively thrown into the depths, only to have their stories resurface on the shore. Focusing on both Moussa and Diome's frequent first-person narrator Salie, I argue that instances of aquatic death may be construed as a form of what Orlando Patterson calls "social death" and that Diome's references to the enslavement of Africans are a facet of her portrait of the immigrant experience.[55] In conclusion, I offer a reading of Diome's Salie through Edouard Glissant's notion of Relation, specifically as the concept pertains to exile and errantry, in order to convey that Diome's increasing discomfort with the tension between the monolithic structures of land, and the betrayal of the sea, is resolved in a conceptual aquatic multiplicity.

Leviathan: The Terrestrial Monolith and the Aquatic Ogress

In interviews, Fatou Diome has expressed a strong sense of displacement, not only in France but also in her native Senegal. She makes no secret of her troubled relationship to both the land of her birth and to her adopted homeland, and the reasons for this are presented throughout her work under the thinly veiled autobiographical guise of Salie.[56] The sense of alienation that accompanies Salie throughout Diome's work develops into a distinct cynicism toward the concept of the nation itself.[57] Particularly insightful in this regard is *Préférence Nationale* (2002), a collection of loosely joined stories that portray the working life of a woman at various ages, performing menial tasks

for low wages - or no payment at all - in both Senegal and France. The title refers to the practice of offering employment and social services first to those who are citizens of France, and so the phrase functions here as a striking touchstone of the immigrant experience. However, its meaning is multiple, alluding to the narrator's own lack of preference for either nation, and also evoking the preferences held by a nation regarding the character of its citizenry.[58] Each of the works under consideration in this section deals with the character Salie, who is first named in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) and appears again as the narrator of Diome's latest novel *Impossible de grandir* (2013). It is therefore useful, before continuing, to briefly note the circumstances of the character's trajectory from Africa to Europe, which are also the author's.[59] Born outside of the socially sanctioned relationship of marriage, Salie was rejected by her mother and given the surname of her father, who came from another island near Niodior. The name was unknown and unshared by any other members of the small community, and so from birth she was referred to as an *étrangère*. This status becomes one of inescapable shame throughout her childhood and adolescence, and by fictionally interweaving several stories of the enclosed society's *étrangers*, Diome is able to broach the subject of national identity, which problematically projects the status of outsider onto particular members within a community. Significantly, identity – both national and local – is first and foremost tied to land, and as such, the water surrounding the island of Niodior takes on significance as part of an exchange between terrestrial monolithicism that cannot incorporate those aberrants within its own society, and aquatic multiplicity that absorbs and then generates the hidden histories of the land.

What I term “terrestrial monolithicism” is defined by a pervasive form of social exclusivity that denotes a relationship to land. It is in part taken from a description found in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*. Explaining the social standing of Niodior's schoolmaster Ndétare – who was “exiled” from his urban post to the small island in connection with accusations of syndicalist activity – Salie states:

> *Cette société insulaire, même lorsqu'elle se laisse approcher, reste une structure monolithique impénétrable qui ne digère jamais les corps étrangers. Ici, tout le monde se ressemble. Depuis des siècles les mêmes gènes parcourent le village, se retrouvent à chaque union, s'enchaînent pour dessiner le relief de l'île, produisent les différentes générations qui, les unes après les autres, se partagent les mêmes terres selon des règles immuables. La répartition des noms de famille, guère variés, donne à voir la carte précise des quartiers. Voilà ce qui excluait Ndétare, ce Sénégalais de l'extérieur*. (77)

While serving a key function in the village, and in many ways acting as the link between Niodior and the rest of the world, he will yet remain an *étranger*. His case is not unique but rather exemplary, and Diome's principle focus in the works under examination here is upon precisely those excluded from society. Here, the “monolithic structure” is specifically related to the land and its repartition, as well as to exclusive filial alliances that join people to the ground beneath their feet. Indeed, if Salie is continually learning to “*avoir les pieds marins*” it is precisely because, according to the islanders, she is an *étrangère* who has neither family nor land, and therefore no place to stand but the sea.[60] I

return to this passage later, and to the case of Salie as an adult, but for the moment I will expand the idea of terrestrial monolithicism through an analysis of Diome's short story "Les Loups de l'Atlantique" (2002). I contend that the structure of familial exclusivity is inherent not only to the land, but also to the nation of Senegal and its predominant religion, Islam. In the face of violence toward the *étrangers*, the sea provides salvation. However this salvation is also portrayed as a betrayal, and the safety provided by the waters is rife with danger and evocative of the Atlantic's sordid history. Consistent with Diome's concept of the *eau-gresse*, the sea's welcoming arms are both genuine and illusory, expressing the ogress's role of a cannibalistic maternal figure.[61]

Shortly after the publication of "L'Eau multiple" and coinciding with her collection of short stories, *Préférence Nationale*, Diome's *nouvelle* "Les Loups de l'Atlantique" appeared in the collection *Nouvelles voix d'Afrique* edited by Michel LeBris. This story engages water in its dual role as protective mother and devouring *eau-gresse* in relation to oppressive dogmatism of religion, and links this to the nation's monolithic zeal. The thoughts of a young girl narrate a chase scene in which an incensed mob runs after a man the narrator has never seen before, who flees for his life under their threats of a violent death. Listening attentively, she learns that the man's long past crime is to have taken the virginity of a woman in their small island community, leaving her with a "bastard" child. She watches as the man thwarts the angry crowd, and escapes with the help of a waiting boat. The excitement over, she hurries home, while thinking of her own father, whom she has never met. She overhears a pair of gossiping women as they speak in unflattering terms about the narrator herself. Though she smiles, thinking of how

her grandmother would put these women in their place if she heard such things, her happy expression is abruptly interrupted by their revelation that the strange man was none other than her own father, driven off the island before he could visit the girl and her grandparents. Through the dual persecution of the stranger and his daughter, Diome criticizes the monoliths of both the nation and religion, whose narrowness allows society to delegitimize its members.

The story takes its name from the phrase "*homo homini lupus*" or "man is a wolf to man"[62] and Diome refers specifically to one of the most famous uses of this charge, as a preface to Hobbes's *De Cive* (1642). The basic principle is made evident in the description of the stranger as "prey", chased by a pack of angry villagers. Indeed, the reference to Hobbes is not arbitrary, and belies an attention to one of the most basic principles of his philosophy, which is that the natural state of man is one of violent and aggressive behavior toward his fellow man. However, Diome indirectly disputes his claim that the solution to the problem of man's violent nature is submission to the control of a sovereign. As should become clear in my analysis of the story, it is precisely such sovereign institutions that, according to Diome, mobilize tendencies to violent exclusion. She engages a conversation with Hobbes when, after citing the titular phrase she remarks "*Bonjour Hobbes! Pour toi, je dis un amen paien à la métempsychose! Reviens vite en dauphin, tu verras les cadavres de l'amour, les filles mères noyées avec leurs amants et leurs nourrissons dans le ventre de l'Atlantique*" (98). These fathers, mothers and children are echoes of the stranger's plight as well as the narrator's, and their presence in the depths of the sea serves as a reminder of all those who are forcefully rejected from the

insular society without the possibility of salvation. Her direct address to Hobbes challenges his philosophical premise by clarifying the boundaries around which institutions draw their lines, and showing the fate of all who do not fit inside. For them is the violence of the 'leviathan' reserved.[63]

This narrative could easily be read as an invective against Islam.[64] The first indication is during the chase: "*L'homme court. Il n'entend pas les paroles de ses juges enragés; mais le bruit sourd de leur foulée rhythme les battements de son coeur et lui confirme sa* fatwa" (98). The reference to religious persecution confirms that he has not only transgressed the morals of society in general, but that his behavior has also gone against a very specific set of dogma. Furthermore, the geography of this story sets up a diametric opposition between the sea to the West, and the direction of prayer to the East, in this way opposing two different forms of salvation. The man continues to flee and is successful in his unexpected course: "*Le fugitif réussit à ressortir de la concession et oblique l'ouest. Ce n'est pas dans cette direction qu'on effectue sa prière, mais c'est par là qu'il s'en va chercher le salut. Vers la mer*" (99). The sea here replaces prayer as a means of salvation, but this particular method of escape is complicated by the sea's dual role as both life-giving and lethal. Indeed, it is precisely this ambivalence that allows the man to escape, for no one would think of chasing him to the water's edge: "*Les insulaires recherchent toujours les fugitifs sur la terre ferme. Pour eux, la mer est une barrière. Il faut donc être fou pour se jeter contre elle; à moins d'avoir sa propre pirogue, c'est le meilleur moyen de se faire prendre*" (99). Because the hunted stranger chooses to take his chances with the waters instead of the angry mob, he is able to lose them. They follow

their instinct in the opposite direction: "*Manquant de flair, ils perdent le gibier et s'orientent spontanément à l'est. C'est là qu'ils dirigent leurs prières. Peut-être au terme de leur virée trouveront-ils Dieu en train de compter ses morts? Allah Akbar!*" This sardonic portrayal of a group guided geographically and ideologically in the direction of their spiritual practice reinforces the idea of Islam as an institution that is mobilized to violent ends.

In recounting the stranger's narrow escape from the island, Diome joins Islam to the nation by inserting the Senegalese flag into the scene, its pattern rife with symbolic resonance. Arriving at the edge of land, the man jumps aboard a boat pulling away from shore, piloted by an old man. The narrator notes that the boat is covered with the colors of the Senegalese flag: "*vert pour l'Islam, jaune pour l'espoir, rouge pour le sang de nos aieuls qui se sont battus pour notre liberté*" (100). Normally, in the middle of the flag, there would be a green star inside the yellow stripe, but the narrator notes that it is missing from the boat and she launches into a complex account of the star's deleterious effects: "*Mais où est-elle? Sur l'homme, il la porte sur sa poitrine. Elle l'immobilise, lui comprime le coeur. Elle est lourde, très lourde, aussi lourde que les chaînes de l'esclavage. Cette étoile est un crime contre l'humanité! Et les chaînes alors?*" (100).[65] These chains are a clear invocation of both the the transatlantic slave trade, for while they are conflated with the star, whose presence indicates the country's religious predilection to Islam, the location of the scene on board a *pirogue* pointedly references another boat that is symbolic of slavery: the *négrier.*[66] Rather than the collective captivity of human bodies, this scene presents the individual bondage of the human heart, but the crime of

total oppression remains the same. In this scene must be read a pessimistic view of the nation, as a hegemonic system by which the rich control the fates of the lives of the poor using religion as a tool of control.[67]

However that is not the only word on Islam in this story. Striking is the subtlety with which Diome presents her estimation of both the nation and religion, and this ambivalence is fully mirrored in the dual representation of the sea. Safely on board the boat, the man contemplates the motto of his country: "*un peuple, un but, une foi. Son voyage lui laissera une tout autre devise: un peuple, une cible, une fois*" (100). There is a clear distinction made here between the nation itself and the perversion of its aims. Rather than a collectively shared reality of a goal based on faith, he witnesses the violence of a collective body against a single person who committed a "one time" offense. This "*peuple*" is representative of the crowd, which takes on a negative role throughout Diome's work.[68] Furthermore, the cynical condemnation of religion's morality is tempered by an acute attention to the violent and collective actions of men, juxtaposed with the passive role of God. An important distinction is made between God and religion when, preceding the hunted man's westward turn toward the sea, he achieves a narrow victory: "*L'homme escalade une clôture et atterrit dans une cour. La meute l'imite et renverse la clôture. La chute est globale. Dieu barrerait-il le chemin à ce régiment qui dit le servir? […] Le fugitif réussit à ressortir de la concession*" (99). Much as the nation's creed is presented by Diome as remaining distinct from its execution, the God upon which religion is based remains distinct from these instances of persecution. Recalling a previous passage, God is not vengeful but merely "counting his dead."

Furthermore, the old man whose boat rescues the stranger from certain death is proposed as a possible religious figure: "*L'ange Gabriel ? Qui sait ?*" (100). This figure is the messenger of God, and belongs to the three main monotheistic traditions – Christianity, Judaism and Islam. This brief reference seems to further support the notion that religion – like water – is a means of both violence and salvation, and in this scene, it functions along with the sea as a means of protection. Therefore, what immediately appears to be a negative assessment of both the nation and religion is, in fact, a deeply troubled engagement with the difference between the abstract principles of such sociopolitical scaffolding and the debasement they suffer through the corruption of human collectivity. It is clear that, for Diome, Hobbes's project is a failure, for while the philosopher saw the monolithic Leviathan as a solution to divisive individualism, Diome construes this monster as a collective nightmare for those who remain unable to be incorporated within the collective structure.

In the end, the stranger successfully boards the boat and disappears from sight, passing gently over the waves: "*L'onde, mère bienveillante, se retire avec son enfant sur le dos*" (100). While this characterization implies the nurturing qualities of the sea, the scene has already been tampered by both the image of underwater cadavers, and the striking allusion to the transatlantic slave trade. Momentarily overlapping the *pirogue* with the *négrier*, this instance of salvation cannot be read without consideration of the spectral slave ship as part of the marine landscape.[69] It is precisely these "ondes" of the Atlantic that created the triangular trade between Europe, Africa and the Caribbean, and these peaceable waters, now steering the stranger away from certain death, were precisely

those that led millions of Africans across the Atlantic and into slavery. It is clear that, for Diome, the Atlantic is not merely an innocent bystander to the atrocities of history, and while the sea would appear to serve merely as a backdrop to the actions of men on land, she suggests a closer tie between the two. The sea is not simply a refuge for the rejected members of history, but is, in part, a complicit actor. Taking the dual nature of the *eau-gresse* into account, as well as its relationship to what I have been calling the terrestrial monolithicism of Niodior's insular population, the following section expands these ideas in order to argue that the sea and the land are working in a cyclical process whereby the dual nature of history's told and untold stories are brought to the surface in collective narration.

Briefly recalling a previously cited passage, in which Salie distinguishes the status of Ndétare the schoolmaster as that of an *étranger,* she remarks that, due to such a position, it remains impossible for Niodior's population to metaphorically "digest" him, thereby bringing him in as one of their own. While I have already expounded on the theme of the monolith and its exclusivity as connected to land, I will now turn to the other integral part of this assessment, which is the theme of digestion. In *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, the sea – *l'eau-gresse* – maintains its status as both womb and tomb, but Diome also effectively conflates the womb and the stomach in order to convey the process by which Niodior's stories are consciously contained. Surrounding the island, the sea is a hungry mouth, waiting to take in all who cannot survive its assaults: "*Là-bas, depuis des siècles, les hommes sont pendus à un bout de terre, l'île de Niodior. Accrochés*

à la gencive de l'Atlantique, tels des résidus de repas, ils attendent, résignés, que la prochaine vague les emporte ou leur laisse la vie sauve" (12-13). This violent description of the sea as a vast mouth becomes the touchstone for an exploration of both the collective and individual stories of immigration recounted in the novel. Suspended between the island and the abysmal depths, these people are the leftovers of a submarine appetite, and in a place seemingly forgotten by history, their own stories are constantly digested and brought back to shore. Creating a narrative collage that both reflects and contextualizes her own experience of immigration, Salie situates herself within this system of dual digestion, whereby all who are not incorporated on land are taken into the sea and processed through submarine conduits that render them back into terrestrial consciousness.[70] With particular attention paid to legend, Diome situates aquatic death in the mythological realm in order to propose a conceptual rebirth from the ocean's depths in narrative, while also exploring the consequences of immigration upon both individuals and their community. Yet she also proposes alternatives to the "social death" of immigration with her own decision to live in aquatic multiplicity.

Describing the aquatic resources of Niodior, which are indeed vast, Diome's narrator Salie sardonically states that:

> *Sur l'île, rien ne se dit vraiment, on puise les nouvelles avec l'eau du puits et tout le village boit à la même source. Les histoires de famille, même très anciennes, flottent toujours dans les bassines des femmes, qui les mijotent ensuite à leur manière. Surtout, n'allez pas penser que leur cuisine pue ! Ce n'est que l'océan Atlantique qui déverse sa fange sur les bords de l'île!*"

(55)

Though this description may at first be merely attributed to gossip of the small town variety, it provides the foundations of an analysis conveying narrative as a digestive process involving both sea and land. Stories drawn from the well are shared by everyone, and changed or "stirred" in the culinary process, as they are readied for proper ingestion in the community. As such, those "unpalatable" events of the island that remain untold, are yet incorporated in the aquatic realm and then brought back into the community. A distinction is made here between the processed and unprocessed elements of collective history. What the sea cannot digest is the malodorous "*fange*" that washes to the shore, while the waters that become the island's potable groundwater carry those events that the land rejected, but that the sea has taken in, only to render them back to the community. Diome exemplifies this process with a story taken from the mythology of the Saloum Delta, and subsequently with instances in which this mythology is called upon to provide structure to the indigestible stories of its members deaths.

The "ventre" that digests is also the womb and tomb into which the unfortunate fall and in order to provide structure to this concept, Diome recounts a legend that links these functions of the sea, and creates a base upon which to situate several other stories occurring throughout the novel that deal with sexual shame and illegitimate birth.[71] The story that she tells is of Sédar and his wife Soutoura. Shamed by his mother-in-law for sexual impotence,[72] he arrives at the beach and declares: "*Atlantique, emporte-moi, ton ventre amer me sera plus doux que mon lit !*" (111). There is a purposeful confusion here between the *ventre amer* as a site of sexual reproduction and as a stomach that digests.[73]

Having failed in his responsibility to produce children, Sédar leaves his marital bed, along with its corresponding duties, in order to be taken in by the womb of the ocean, which also becomes his tomb. In a gesture that has both sexual and digestive connotations, the waves close in on him. Seen as the act of impregnation, this must also be taken as an act of complete dissolution.[74] Therefore, this mythological event becomes the figure for an aquatic processing of tragedy into the collective history, by joining the figurative digestion of stories to a sexual act that invokes both death and rebirth.

When Sédar's wife Soutoura follows his footprints to the water's edge, she witnesses a dolphin emerge from the water. Though this animal, Sédar in disguise, tells her to find another husband and to have many babies, she chooses rather to throw herself in with him. While the legend ends there - if not 'happily ever after' then at least satisfactorily - its resonance continues, as expressed in subsequent instances of those who call upon the Atlantic's *ventre amer*. Another well known secret on the island is the story Ndétare and his lover, Sankele. Given in marriage to a much older man, this young woman defies her father by beginning an affair with the schoolteacher. She is unable to hide the fact after becoming pregnant, and the child of their relationship is taken by Sankele's father in the middle of the night and thrown into the Atlantic. Diome chooses to situate this in the mythical realm, as Salie claims that, "*La légende dit que Sédar et Soutoura ont maintenant une grande famille : ils transforment les bébés noyés en dauphins et les adoptent*" (134). Not only is this story digested into the seas, only to resurface as common knowledge in the town, it also converts the death of the infant into a story of birth, lending a form of narrative reproduction. As the infant is passed from

human to aquatic womb, this story creates an alternate family structure that is not found on land, but becomes conceptually possible in the underwater realm.

Social Death by Land and Sea

The dream of becoming a football sensation in a French club is presented by Diome as the foremost occupation of the adolescent imaginary on Niodior. When Moussa, a young fisherman and local football hero, is spotted by a recruiter and taken to France in order to train, he realizes the wishes of the whole community. However, thwarted by this corrupt trainer shortly after arriving in France, he is forced to work illegally on the docks, and is subsequently discovered by the immigration authorities. He is then thrown into jail without ever seeing the money for his work. He finds himself deported to Senegal, and a relative funds his passage from Dakar to Niodior. Having failed in all his endeavors, Moussa is shamed by his family and throughout the community, but this shame is further compounded by the resounding suspicion of his relationship with Ndétare. Finding the teacher to be his only friend and source of comfort, Moussa spends most of his time with the older man, and the ensuing gossip throughout Niodior is described as a mounting tide, further enforcing the sea's role in the island's knowledge (110-111). Shame that had been previously situated in the category of financial distress and failed dreams is now situated in the sexual realm. Moussa, recalling the legend of Sédar, throws himself into the Atlantic, echoing the cry of "*emporte-moi.*" However, rather than being taken in completely by the sea, to resurface as part of the island's collective narrative, Moussa's body is found in a fishing net on the shore, with

the accompanying explanation: *"Même l'Atlantique ne peut digérer tout ce que la terre vomit"* (114).

This event marks a significant form of indigestion, for Moussa's body is dually rejected from land and sea, indicating the inability of both terrestrial and aquatic realms to fully incorporate him either bodily or narratively. The question of this character's sexuality remains fully ambiguous, and I contend that it is not so much Moussa's alleged affair with Ndétare that marginalizes him, but rather his status in France that effectively transformed his status at home.[75] Furthermore, I believe that the event of this character's failure in France, compounded by the shaming of his community, is best understood through historical and cultural sociologist Orlando Patterson's concept of "social death," which he conceives as the defining facet of slavery.

As seen in "Les Loups de l'Atlantique", slavery provides one of the conceptual and historical touchstones for Diome. While not prominently referenced in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, slavery is brought to the fore in Moussa's unfortunate situation. Waiting for his chance to be part of a French club team, he reflects on the process of buying and trading players, expressing a deep distaste at the transformation of bodies into a form of corporal merchandise: "*ce procédé ne lui plaisait guère. Mais il n'avait pas le choix, il faisait maintenant partie du bétail sportif à évaluer*" (97). This presents a striking comparison to the scene of the slave market, in which men and women, available for purchase, would be examined by their potential owners.[76] The situation rendered these individuals on the level of animal (*bétail*), and served to cement their lack of agency. The role of Moussa's trainer as a "master" is also significant. Patterson links slavery to death,

in the total control that the master had over the life of the slave:

> The master was essentially a ransomer. What he bought or acquired was the slave's life, and restraints on the master's capacity wantonly to destroy his slave did not undermine that claim on life. Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, he became a social nonperson. (5)

The idea of M. Sauveur as a trader of human lives is accurate in this account. In going to France, two separate fates are possible for Moussa: either he succeeds in gaining a spot on a club team, or he fails, in which case he would owe the trainer all of the funds spent on his plane ticket as well as room and board. Essentially, his life is already in the hands of the trainer, it is simply a question of whether he will win his freedom instantly, or be forced to buy it back. The role of the nation is also related to this gruelling process. Orlando Patterson links the power of potential death and the state of being a "social nonperson" to what he calls "natal alienation" as one of the inherent facets of an enslaved state. (5) It is significant therefore that Moussa's supreme goal is to gain a space on a French team, and that he has already been removed from his homeland. Having undergone such a process of natal alienation, two prospects lay before him: repatriation in the new nation or "deracination" (Patterson, 7) from both host country and homeland.

Unfortunately, M. Sauveur informs Moussa that he has failed in his aim, and so the footballer is now in a state of complete subjection to the trainer, owing him "*environ cent mille balles*" (102). As it would happen, M. Sauveur has "*un pote qui a un bateau*" and he sends Moussa to labor as a docker in order to gain freedom from this unexpected

financial burden. Adding to his status as a "nonperson", M. Sauveur reminds him, "*n'oublie pas que tu n'as pas de papiers*" and as such, his presence in the country is illegal. As might be expected, Moussa is discovered by the authorities, and sent to an immigration detention without seeing any of the money earned on the docks. This again reinforces his state of bondage, for his work - work that was already performed as a form of "ransom" - is stolen.

While the above reading of his experience in France proves that Moussa is in a state of conceptual slavery and therefore undergoes what Patterson terms a state of social death, it is vital to link this experience of illegal immigration to the extreme change of status upon his return to Niodior. Briefly exploring the ramifications of "natal alienation" as defined by Patterson allows me to more clearly explain the "nonperson" status that I contend is at the heart of Moussa's Atlantic suicide. Patterson argues that alienation from the homeland results in "the loss of ties of birth in both ascending and descending generations. It also has the important nuance of a loss of native status, of deracination" (7). Critical to my assessment of Diome's portrayal of the immigrant experience is that such deracination is not only a status experienced in the foreign land, but in fact transfers with the individual back to the homeland. This is nowhere more clear that in the case of Moussa, whose detention and deportation from France is met with complete disdain from his family and the insular society in general. In essence, Moussa - like Salie, like Ndétare - has become *étranger* to the island.

Construed in this way, there is a particular poignancy to his suicide and its mythological echo of Sédar, for as Salie says, "*Petit, Moussa, comme tous les natifs de*

l'île, avait entendu cette légende" (111). The death he seeks, in the arms of the Atlantic, is the natural extension of his conceptual, "social" death, particularly in that it links him to the innumberable bodies drowned during the Atlantic slave trade. But on the other hand, this death simultaneously presents an attempt at the restitution of his native status in the realm of myth. It would seem odd, given my previous analysis, that his body is returned to the shore, undigested by the sea. Yet I contend that this interruption presents another aspect of narrative incorporation. Moussa does not merely wash up on shore, like the previously cited "*fange*" of the sea. Rather, he comes to shore in a fishing net, taking the place of Niodior's most common food source. Symbolically, this resituates him in the realm of the island's "digestible" members. In his actual death, the state of deracinated social death is overshadowed by his status as a native to the island, and here the sea offers his body as a testament to the necessary incorporation of Moussa's story in the collective history of the insular society. The resurfacing of his body is a form of narrative insistence on the part of the sea, rejecting him from its depths in order to render the experience of social death into the conscious realm of Niodior's stories.

From Terrestrial Erreur *to Aquatic* Errante

The remaining analysis of Diome's work focuses on Salie's own experience as one of those whom the island's population cannot digest, which presents the opportunity to fully explicate the author's conceptual resolution of terrestrial monolithicism in aquatic multiplicity.[77] In referring to Martinican writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant's famous notion of Relation, I situate Salie's experience as an *étrangère* within the notions

of exile and errantry that he delineates in *Poétique de la Relation* (2000). It could be said that, in the previously recounted stories, the grim aquatic ends met by both Sankele's baby and Moussa are projections of the fate narrowly escaped by the Diome's narrator Salie. She is born under the same circumstances as the former, and meets with a situation similar to the latter, rejected by her white French husband's family and left in France with no permanent legal status. Yet, with a clear sense of the *eau-gresse*'s destructive embrace, Salie chooses to situate herself not in the mythical realm, but rather to conceive of herself as "*une algue*" floating through the belly of the Atlantic and so surviving the social death of her counterparts, while conceptually remaining in the aquatic depths.

As previously stated, the insularity of Niodior's inhabitants, as portrayed by Diome, is one based on lineage joined to land, whereby the roots of the family tree are what join people to place. However, the description of Salie's birth subverts this close association through a description of roots that are aquatic.

> *L'île s'était glissée dans la toge noire du crépuscule et la pluie tombait dru, lorsque ma grand-mère me plongea dans une bassine de décoction. « Née sous la pluie, avait-elle murmuré, tu n'auras jamais peur d'être mouillée par les salives que répandra ton passage ; mais il te faudra aussi affronter le jour. » Alors que je trônais dans ma cotonnade blanche, mes racines poussaient sur la crasse du monde, à mon insu : diluant le sang de ma mère et le ruisseau de mon bain, l'eau de pluie s'infiltrait dans le sol jusqu'au niveau où l'Atlantique se mue en source vivifiante. Cette nuit là, ma grand-mère veilla sa fille et son enfant illégitime. Impitoyable, le soleil*

> *fit fondre sa couverture nocturne et nous exposa aux yeux de la morale. Trahie par ma grand-mère, la tradition, qui aurait voulu m'étouffer et déclarer un enfant mort-né à la communauté, maria ma mère à un cousin qui la convoitait de longue date...* (73-74)

In this formulation, rain takes the place of roots, pushing into the earth while dissolving the blood of her mother and the waters of her first bath. These fluids are significant, for not only associated with life, they also insist upon Salie's belonging to the place of her birth. While as the *étrangère* she remains outside the root structure of the family tree, it is her maternal line - her mother's blood - that joins her not to the land but to the aquatic realm below it. Pushing through the earth's crust, the rain, blood, and bathwater join the phreatic reservoir in which the potable water of the well are stored. This birth disrupts the cycle by which the land's aberrants, digested in the sea, resurface through the potable water of the town's collective knowledge. Here, by contrast, Salie becomes part of the groundwater while still a living member of the community. If Salie claims that she is rooted to Niodior "*à son insu*," this root is not, figuratively speaking, of a solid nature. But neither is it immaterial. The idea of an aquatic rootedness, that grounds her to a birthplace without solidifying her status as either native or foreigner, allows Diome to explore a form of belonging that does not rely on the dualistic projection of homeland and host country that predominantly guides the immigrant experience.

This aquatic rootedness in view of Salie's status as a permanent *étrangère* is best explained through Glissant's essay "Exil, Errance" from *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), in which he establishes the figure of the rooted exile, a nomadic being who is always

immersed in the twofold process of escape and grounding or *errance enracinée*. Certainly such a deeply nuanced understanding of errantry is expressed through Salie's declaration toward the end of the novel: "*Enracinée partout, exilée tout le temps, je suis chez moi là, où l'Afrique et l'Europe perdent leur orgeuil et se contentent de s'additionner*" (181). Indeed, she is linked not to a single root but, to quote Glissant, to the "*racine démultipliée, étendue en réseaux dans la terre ou dans l'air, sans qu'aucune souche y intervienne en prédateur irrémédiable*" (23). While this rhizomatic network expands through earth and air, in the context of Diome's work, it reaches most notably throughout the water. Indeed, if Diome's Atlantic is the container of individual and collective history, it is also the space of aquatic Relation. Continuing to paraphrase and expand upon the idea of the rhizome as presented by Deleuze and Guattari in their seminal *Mille Plateaux* (1980), Glissant claims that "*La notion du rhizome maintiendrait donc le fait de l'enracinement, mais récuse l'idée d'une racine totalitaire. La pensée du rhizome serait au principe de ce que j'appelle une poétique de la Relation, selon laquelle toute identité s'étend dans un rapport à l'Autre*" (23).

The Atlantic is also the very issue of Relation, and the aquatic root that Diome describes at the occasion Salie's birth recalls an important aspect of her portrayal of water in "L'Eau Multiple". She begins the short essay with an epigraph: "*L'eau est incolore, inodore et sans saveur. Elle prend la forme et la couleur du récipient qui la contient*" (203). She admits, however, that while she retained this scientific definition from her primary school lessons, she refuses a limited understanding of such a complex element. Rather, she claims that, "*L'eau a la couleur de nos humeurs, le parfum de nos émotions et*

goûte toutes les saveurs de l'imaginaire. Chacun de nous a sa façon de voir, de sentir et de goûter l'eau qui lui est aussi propre que sa vie, sa culture." Both materially significant and individually resonant, water functions in relation to those who sense it, infinitely infused with human experience. Diome asserts, beginning with the very title, that water is not *l'eau* but rather *les eaux*, which serve as the conduits of multiple lived realities. Relying on Glissant's formulation elucidates Diome's poetics of aquatic multiplicity. While rhizomatic expansion is infinite, the specific materiality of *les eaux* lends them the capacity to dissolve and incorporate various elements. While Glissant's Relation emphasizes the instance of encounter - the "*rapport à l'Autre*" - Diome's aquatic multiplicity allows for dissolution and incorporation, from which events in collective history may resurface.

Any reader of Caribbean literary theory will have also certainly observed the resonance of Diome's work with Glissant's essay "La Barque Ouverte" from *Poétique de la Relation*. However, it should be clear that Diome's *ventre* is not Glissant's *barque*, and there are significant differences between them, speaking purely in terms of the scaffolding that they serve for the two authors' conceptions of the oceanic abyss. While Glissant's *ventre de la barque* is the violent, deindividualizing experience of the Middle Passage and its historical resonance, Diome's *ventre de l'Atlantique* is conceived of in terms of a specific individual's dissolution into an endlessly reaching collectivity. A significant contrast must be discerned between the collective uprooting of the Middle Passage - which dissolved entire populations only to replace them on the opposite shore of the abyss, leaving a historical void that, according to Glissant in his *Discours antillais*

(222-231) must be constantly filled by collective memory - and the story of multiple displacements that compose the contemporary trajectory between a postcolonial African nation and the former *métropoles* of Europe.

However, it is Glissant's location of the abyss as both inside and outside of itself that most strikingly bears comparison to Diome's novel:

> *L'expérience du gouffre est au gouffre et hors de lui. Tourment de ceux qui ne sont jamais sortis du gouffre: passés directement du ventre du négrier au ventre violet des fonds de mer. Mais leur épreuve ne fut pas morte; elle s'est vivifiée dans ce continu-discontinu*. (19)

While this passage defines the *gouffre* as that realm directly experienced through the transatlantic slave trade, I propose that, in light of Diome's subtle but significant engagement with slavery, we view this singular yet vast rupture as a significant instance in the history of the abyss but not constituent of it. In fact, the abyss as read through Diome's work is continually reconstituted. The lived mythology and communal memory of tragic events, as seen throughout *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, is precisely this abysmal experience, that destroys but also creates a direct connection to history in infinite multiplicity. Diome's narrator becomes the voice for a lived memory of aquatic death that is both digested in the belly of the Atlantic and constantly recovered. The Relation lived by Salie, as an aspect of her aquatic rootedness in multiplicity, is located both inside and outside the abysmal sea. This becomes apparent by the end of the book, as the narrator is convinced not of a successful escape from the grips of the *eau-gresse*, but rather a confident acquiescence to her exiled state within it. By conceiving a marine existence,

she is able to navigate the realms of death, while yet thriving in its depths.

Glissant further clarifies the connection between errantry and the expansive rootedness of the rhizome in this way:

> *L'errance ne procède pas d'un renoncement, ni d'une frustration par rapport à une situation d'origine qui se serait détériorée, (déterritorialisée) - ce n'est pas un acte déterminé de refus, ni une pulsion incontrôlée d'abandon […] La pensée de l'errance est une poétique, et qui sous-entend qu'à un moment elle se dit. Le dit de l'errance est celui de la Relation.* (31)

It would be possible to argue that, in fact, the narrator's errantry is reinforced by precisely the frustration of origins that Glissant dismisses in this passage, a deteriorated and deterritorialized rejection that the exile projects onto the homeland. However, throughout the novel, Salie's birth and initial exile transform into the perception of herself as connected in multiplicity. This slight but important shift is established through the comparison of herself to a seaweed, floating freely through the Atlantic. At birth, her grandmother argues against giving Salie the name of her mother's husband: "*Elle portera le nom de son vrai père, ce n'est pas une algue ramassée à la plage, ce n'est pas de l'eau qu'on trouve dans ces veines mais du sang, et ce sang charrie son propre nom*" (74). However, it is this very status as '*une algue*' that she asserts by the end of the book:

> *Aucun filet ne saura empêcher les algues de l'Atlantique de voguer et de tirer leur saveur des eaux qu'elles traversent […] L'Océan ne berce que ceux qu'il appelle, j'ignore l'amarrage. Le départ est le seul horizon offert*

> *à ceux qui cherchent les mille écrins où le destin cache les solutions de ses mille erreurs.* (255)

In the reconstruction of her experience as an indigestible *étrangère* of the island, Salie conceives of an aquatic multiplicity that answers the terrestrial monolithicism of her insular counterparts, as Diome both echoes and expands Glissant's Relation. By reconceptualizing her exile, Salie accepts her fate as one of the world's many *erreurs*, but becomes, instead, the aquatic *errante*.

If Diome's Atlantic is the violent *eau-gresse* that is survived only by learning to both sink and swim, then the following analysis shows that Edwidge Danticat's Atlantic is both an inevitable tomb and a nurturing womb, in which she joins the conceptual divide between life and death to the liminal space lying between Haiti and its diasporic populations. Danticat's appropriation and innovation of the Haitian Vodou underwater realm also leads to a concept of resurfacing that reinforces the individual and collective memory of all those who perish in the depths. Like Diome, she construes the movements of contemporary migration in mythic terms, while also joining them to past historical realities, most notably the transatlantic slave trade.

Conduit and Continuity: Resurfacing the Past in Edwidge Danticat's "Children of the Sea" and *Claire of the Sea Light*

Edwidge Danticat's collection of essays, *Create Dangerously* (2010) was published less than a year after the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti that took the lives of more than 200,000 people and left the country devastated. While many of the essays were

written prior to the events, several portray the experience of Haitians in the midst of a struggle to survive and to rebuild their communities. Given the circumstances, the subject of death comes to the fore. However, even in her essays about art and immigration, Danticat broaches the multiple facets of death as a conceptual touchstone in Haitian culture that spans time and space. Particularly notable is her engagement with the various notions of death that would seem conflicting, and yet coexist in the spiritual belief system of Vodou and in the mythical narratives of Haiti. In "The Other Side of the Water" Danticat notes, "In Haiti, the same expression, *lot bo dlo*, the other side of the water, can be used to denote the eternal afterlife as well as an émigré's eventual destination" (94). In this way, the spatial circumstances of distance are closely related to those of death, a conflation that deeply enriches the understanding of both. Yet in her essay about the artists Jean-Michel Basquiat and Hector Hyppolite called "Welcoming Ghosts" she claims that, "In Vodou, it is believed that when one dies, one returns to Ginen,[78] the ancestral homeland from which our forebears were taken before being brought to the New World as slaves." (134-135). Again, death is spatially defined in relation to water, more specifically to the Middle Passage. But it is in the postscript to the book, looking toward "a year and a day" after the earthquake, in which she reflects most profoundly on death in Haiti. This brief piece references the belief that the souls of the deceased go into bodies of water, to be recovered through a family commemoration ceremony that generally occurs a year and a day after death.[79] According to the author, the purpose of such an event is to draw a "transcendental continuity" between the present and the ancestors of the past, between the living and the dead. But this continuity is also the work

of narrative, and it presents one of the many ways in which the past is brought to life in the present.

Throughout the last twenty years, beginning with *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) Danticat's fiction has drawn life and death together in harrowing ways that deal both with the various political tragedies and natural disasters of Haiti's history, as well as with everyday sufferings that are secretly endured. In the short story "Children of the Sea," two lovers write letters back and forth, as one sets sail in a small fishing boat loaded with other refugees fleeing the violent Duvalier regime. In the novel *Claire of the Sea Light*, Danticat traces the lives of a fictional village in Haiti,[80] as a group of characters undergo the ebb and flow of joy and sorrow. While their contexts differ, in both of these texts, Danticat juxtaposes life and death, portraying the proximity between them as a distinct feature of the human experience in Haiti. The engagement of these texts with the Atlantic Ocean points to the practices and beliefs of Haitian Vodou,[81] in which the souls of the dead are believed to slip into an aquatic realm below the earth, potentially to resurface and return to the community. As such, bodies of water provide a "thin veil" (177) between life and death, as she writes in *Create Dangerously*, and provide the conduit for a form of rebirth. However, this spiritual resurfacing is also indicative of a narrative process, undergone not only by a community as a means of preserving and sharing collective memory, but also by Danticat herself as she tells the stories of a country fraught with violence and tragedy, as well as unique forms of creation.

In the following analysis, I explore the underwater realm *anba dlo* as conceived in Haitian Vodou and its resonance with the memory of the Middle Passage in "Children of

the Sea". In this text the conflation between Ginen - the conceptual Africa - and the afterlife on the ocean floor reveals an understanding of death that is neither permanent nor absolute, but rather temporally and spatially situated as an extension of life above the water. Examining both the horizontal and vertical axes of crossing the water that Danticat presents in her writing, I then propose that the novel *Claire of the Sea Light* functions along a principle of aquatic crossroads, employing the representational richness of several loas,[82] predominantly Legba and Lasirèn. The liminal space that lies between life above the water and death below the water is both a womb and a tomb. While this interstitial axis is not fundamentally tied to the Atlantic, it is my belief that Danticat situates the principle of the crossroads in the context of this vast body of water in order to connect the juxtaposition of life and death in Haitian belief to the spatial attributes of immigration and return. Furthermore, she places the symbolic value of this principle within a mother-daughter relationship in order to evoke both the reciprocity of life and death as well as the eternal, non-linear progression of maternal filiation.

Retiré d'en bas de l'eau *: Resurfacing the Dead*

The short story "Children of the Sea", from Danticat's collection of short stories *Krik? Krak!* (1996), reaches back into a particularly violent period of Haiti's history. The Duvalier regime – led by François or "Papa Doc" Duvalier and continued by his son Jean-Claude, nicknamed "Bébé Doc" – ran from 1957-1986. The control of Haiti under these men is most notably remembered for their use of *tonton macoutes*, a military force to whom Duvalier senior gave complete freedom in the exercise of systematic physical

violence against Haitians.[83] In this epistolary story, a young woman writes from the land, where she reports the constant hardships and deaths within Port-au-Prince, while a young man who has fled from certain persecution for his political activity writes from a fishing boat filled with others also hoping to reach American shores. While the young woman reflects on the ambiguity of death under the reign of violence, where bodies go missing and the survival of others remains uncertain,[84] the young man experiences the instability of the divide between life and death that he encounters in the open sea. In examining a few passages from the latter's reports of the journey, I am particularly interested in the way that death is conceived of as a spatial relocation, rather than a cessation of being. Through an engagement with the beliefs of Haitian Vodou, Danticat construes the continuity of life, allowing not only for a person's continued existence beyond death, but also for the past's continued existence in the present. Furthermore, through the resurfacing of this tragic tale, Danticat herself participates in the activity of *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* - a communal, spiritual practice designed to pull the dead back into the world of the living - as she transforms aquatic death into living memory.

The story begins at sea, in a realm of "timeless waters, endless seas" (3). Space and time have lost their meaning in this scene of infinity, and the young man conveys this complete uncertainty while describing his experience of the Atlantic: "There are no borderlines at sea. The whole thing looks like one" (6). Furthermore, he claims that "At night, the sea and sky are one." While this may be understood simply as poetic language to describe the indescribable experience of the vast ocean, I believe that the indistinguishable nature of time and space is directly representative of the womb and the

tomb. As such, the story bears recalling once again Edouard Glissant's "La Barque Ouverte" in which the author names the slave ship of the Middle Passage a "gouffre-matrice" and designates it both an abyss, into which the captured slave falls, while also the womb, which is "*Enceinte d'autant de morts que de vivants en sursis*" (18). His well-known explanation of the abyss (*gouffre*) that is thrice linked to the "inconnu" created by the vast rupture of the slave trade construes the sea as the second incarnation of the "gouffre" - preceded by the ship, and followed by the reflection of underwater terror outside of itself. (19) In Glissant's formulation, "*Le gouffre est de vrai une tautologie*" (18), and this tautology makes it such that the abyss is not merely contained in itself, but projected outward:

> *L'expérience du gouffre est au gouffre et hors de lui. Tourment de ceux qui ne sont jamais sortis du gouffre: passés directement du ventre du négrier au ventre violet des fonds de mer. Mais leur épreuve ne fut pas morte, elle s'est vivifiée dans ce continu-discontinu: la panique du pays nouveau, la hantise du pays d'avant, l'alliance enfin avec la terre imposée, soufferte, rédimée. La mémoire non sue de l'abîme a servi de limon pour ces métamorphoses.* (19)

As such, it is the terror of the abyss itself that gives birth to the enslaved Africans' encounter of the New World and structures their continued existence within it.

For Glissant, the connection between the land and the sea is one of discontinuous continuity. It is projection, and it is foremost based on the experience of the "inconnu". While it is clear that Danticat is similarly interested in finding the link between the death

of those unfortunate victims of the *négrier*, in the "*savanes bleues*" (Glissant, 19), she is concerned more so with the connectivity between the African homeland, and the dual terrors of the Atlantic's depths and the New World. While their projects are very resonant, one particular difference stands out, between Glissant's "La Barque Ouverte" and Danticat's "Children of the Sea" and that is the question of the ancestors and the gods of the homeland. Glissant states that "*La première ténèbre fut de l'arrachement au pays quotidien, aux dieux protecteurs, à la communauté tutélaire*" (17) but these *dieux protecteurs* in Danticat's telling have followed through the waters of the Middle Passage, and are still relevant. In the context of Haitian Vodou, it is precisely these elements that were reestablished among both the slave and maroon communities in order to maintain continuity with the African homeland; the gods were able to span the distance.[85] Where Glissant maintains discontinuity that is made continuous through projection, Danticat insists upon continuity, and this is seen in "Children of the Sea" through the presence of the Vodou god Agwé and also through the cohesion she establishes between life and death, above the water and below. These realms do not create a tautology, or neverending projection, but rather slowly blur into one another.

As the overloaded boat travels uncertainly through the sea, waters slowly begin to seep into the vessel. Writing his anxiety, the young mans remarks, "There is a crack at the bottom of the boat that looks as though, if it gets any bigger, it will split the boat in two" (10). It is temporarily repaired with tar, but the water's intrusion continues, causing the passengers to throw their possessions overboard. However, this is not merely a descent into death, for the boat should also be construed as a metaphorical womb, which would

thereby also signify a birth into the aquatic realm for its passengers. This representation is further supported by the presence of a pregnant woman on board, Célianne, who eventually gives birth to a stillborn girl. As the waters in the boat rise, Célianne's water breaks, mingling the waters of life and death together. The deathly splitting of the boat, which will eventually render its passengers into the depths, is a direct reflection of birth. What seems a tautology, wherein Célianne's womb and the womb of the boat are projections of one another, is rather a collapsing of the division between life and death. As the boat takes in water, bringing the passengers closer to the abyss, they begin to discard their possessions. What is inside the boat moves into the water, until finally the passengers themselves are born into the sea, as the separation between the womb of the boat and the tomb of the waters is extinguished.

After several days at sea, the sense of time dissipates as the young man recalls: "Sometimes it feels like we have been at sea longer than the many years that I have been on this earth" (14). If he feels suddenly older than his "many years" it is because the "we" here refers not only to the refugees aboard the boat, but also to a much larger "we" including all those of African descent who have made the treacherous voyage through the Atlantic waters. With further reference to the "African fathers who probably crossed these same seas," continuity is created between the boat's journey to the United States and the passage of slave ships. When the distance becomes seemingly interminable,the young man continues: "I feel like we are sailing for Africa. Maybe we will go to Guinin, to live with the spirits, to be with everyone who has come and has died before us." As previously cited in the introduction, Danticat calls upon the notion of going to Africa as

one expression of death in Haitian belief. While geographically resonant, the meaning of this "Guinin" is more appropriately linked to the afterlife, and the afterlife is predominantly associated with bodies of water. As such, the world across the water (Africa – *lot bo dlo*) and the world under the water (the afterlife – *anba dlo*) are conflated, which is further confirmed when the young man reflects, "At times I wonder if there is really land on the other side of the sea" (15). While this could mean Africa or their destination of the United States, it could also indicate the other side of the sea laterally, meaning across the horizontal, geographical plane.

As Zora Neale Hurston writes in her famous memoir and study of Haitian Vodou *Tell My Horse* (1938), the underwater realm is not necessarily construed as death. She recalls:

> The belief is widespread in Haiti that Agoue' ta-Royo carries off people whom he chooses to a land beneath the waters. One woman told me that she had lived there for seven years. There are thousands to say that they have been there. They say they have no memory of how they got there nor how they left. There is a great belief in a land beneath the waters. Some say it is not beneath the waters, but one must pass through the waters to get there." (233-234)

As the conceptual African "Guinin" and the underwater afterlife are conflated, this passage clarifies that their location is potentially one in the same, in the purely mythological understanding. Furthermore, this world is not defined by death, but is something qualitatively distinct, and in this story, it is associated also with birth. When

tied to Danticat's own insistence upon the continuity between life and death. Hurston's report of this mythical realm sheds light on the ambiguous end of the story:

> I must throw my book out now. It goes down to them, Célianne and her daughter and all those children of the sea who might soon be claiming me. I go to them now as though it was always meant to be, as though the very day that my mother birthed me, she had chosen me to live life eternal, among the children of the deep blue sea, those who have escaped the chains of slavery to form a world beneath the heavens and the blood-drenched earth where you live.
>
> Perhaps I was chosen from the beginning of time to live there with Agwé at the bottom of the sea. Maybe this is why I dreamed of the starfish and the mermaids having the Catholic Mass under the sea. Maybe this was my invitation to go. In any case, I know that my memory of you will live even there as I too become a child of the sea. (27-28)

Once again, death is refigured as birth, for the young man's mother "birthed" him into an "eternal life" as the womb of the boat will now birth him into the depths. In this way, the world below is not an afterlife but another life, and it is one that does not put an end to memory, but rather retains it.

The drowning of both the young man and his notebook appear unquestionable, as the young woman who writes from within the violent events reports seeing a black butterfly bringing news of death, and hears the report of a sunken boat on the radio. Yet this drowning remains ambiguous. To start, the very premise of the epistolary form in

fiction is that a series letters have been found. In this way, there is a tacit assumption that the written records of the young man and young woman have been recovered, though we cannot know how. Secondly, the fate of Célianne reappears in the last story of the book. In "Caroline's Wedding" the narrator joins her devout mother at the church of a Haitian congregation in New York City. After the priest calls the names of a hundred and twenty-nine refugees who drowned at sea during that week,[86] he recalls a woman whose name remains unknown, who gave birth on a boat before jumping into the waters with her stillborn infant. If this is indeed the story of Célianne, it is impossible to divine how this information has come to the priest's knowledge, for the possibility of survivors appears inconceivable. This very ambiguity leads me to consider a form of resurfacing by which collective memory is taken back into the community. While I have already explained that the distinction between life and death is made fluid in Danticat's work, the motion of interchange between the world of the living and the underwater world of the spirits may be construed as a narrative process. The example of Célianne's story returning to the congregation is very usefully examined through the structure of the *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* ceremony as described by the documentary filmmaker and anthropologist Maya Deren in her book *Divine Horsemen* (1970).

According to Haitian Vodou, a person is a divided being, or as Deren explains: "It is as if the life of a person were a period during what the various universal elements contributed to and coalesced in that singular, unique amalgam, a specific person, composed of a body, a *gros-bon-ange*, understood as the spiritual double of the body, and the *ti-bon-ange* or spirit. The rituals of death are designed to restore each successively to

its proper province. It is of particular importance to separate these elements after a person's death, and this process is undergone in the ceremony called *dessounin*. (Deren, 44-46). As the *gros-bon-ange* cannot die, technically speaking, but must share in the fate of the body, it undergoes a symbolic, temporary death or seclusion in the realm of the water, which lasts a year and a day, after which it is pulled from the depths through the ceremony of *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* to once again become part of the community:

> A year and a day following the death of a person, the family undertakes to reclaim his soul from the waters of the abyss below the earth and to lodge it in a govi [designated vessel] where it may henceforth be invoked and consulted in the event of illness or other difficulties and so may participate in all the decisions that normally unite members of the family in counsel. (46)

What is significant about this explanation is that this ceremony and the continued presence of a deceased person is not a matter of bringing the person back to life, for life only occurs when all the requisite parts converge in a human being. What the community seeks, in bringing the soul of the dead back into the world of the living is to cultivate all that he or she left behind in death. As Deren states of the ceremony itself:

> It is not a return to the past; it is the procedure by which the race reincorporates the fruit of previous life-processes into the contemporary moment, and so retains the past as a ground gained, upon and from which it moves forward to the future. The living do not serve the dead; it is the dead who are made to serve the living. (27-28)[87]

In considering the significance of the *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* ceremony, and the continued presence of the dead after their descent into the waters, the ambiguity surrounding Célianne's story dissipates somewhat. The possibility of bringing a person's *gros-bon-ange* back into the present moment is tantamount to rendering their life experiences and their memory back into the communal framework. Not only is Danticat demonstrating this possibility, through the death of Célianne and the mysterious recovery of her story, but she is also engaging the process by pulling the stories of countless deaths at sea into the present through her own writing.[88] In the epilogue to *Krik? Krak!* called simply "Women Like Us", Danticat details the immense terror of becoming a writer: "When you were a little girl, you used to dream that you were lying among the dead and all the spirits were begging you to scream" (223). If this scream is heard in "Children of the Sea" it is certainly at the behest of the many dead, whom Danticat pulls back into collective memory, to remain in the vessel of her work.

Legba and Lasirèn : The Aquatic Crossroads

In the last section, I closely read the story "Children of the Sea" in order to demonstrate the conflation of death and birth in the space of the Atlantic. As this story shows, the underwater realm is construed as a mythical afterlife in order to evoke the continued existence of those who meet their ends in the water. I relied on the concept in Haitian Vodou of *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* – which allows for a rebirth of the deceased member of the community back into the collective knowledge – in order to show the narrative process operating in Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* As the spirit moves into the water

after death, and is eventually pulled back onto land, so Danticat pulls from the aquatic depths in order to render those who have crossed over into the water back into the collective memory through narrative. As such, she both represents the process and performs it through her work. This process is indicative of precisely what I call resurfacing in Atlantic literature, and is also resonant with Fatou Diome's own representation of the sea as a digestive body.

Edwidge Danticat's latest novel *Claire of the Sea Light* recounts several intertwined personal histories of Ville Rose's residents. Though the book begins and ends on the same day, it spans the memory of many years, functioning in the same manner as the "wonn" circle game played by Claire at the end of the book, and evoking a structural cyclicality at work.[89] With the near drowning of Max Jr. that concludes the book, this novel also demonstrates an instance of *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* whereby this character regains his place within the community, though still alive. However, the ambiguity of the "other side of the water" is effectively mobilized in this case, as Max Jr. not only resurfaces from the sea water, but has also returned from his place in the diaspora. His dual trajectory - regaining his home from both across and under the water - demonstrates the fullness of the conceptual *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* and also calls upon the symbolism of the crossroads in Haitian Vodou, which indicates both horizontal crossing in space and vertical crossing between life and death.[90] In examining Max Jr.'s story as well as the mother-daughter relationship of Claire Narcis and Claire Limye Lanme, I contend that Danticat has mobilized the representational faculties of Haitian Vodou in order to join the principle of the crossroads – embodied in the loa Legba – to the signifier of the aquatic

loa Lasirèn, thereby situating the transition between life and death spatially in the Atlantic. This demonstrates an expansion of the traditional understanding of Legba, as he is not typically linked to the aquatic realm, and in broadening the symbolism of these loas, Danticat links immigration and homecoming to death and rebirth. While the analysis that follows will focus on the novel, I also refer to several of the rich essays found in *Create Dangerously* - particularly those dealing with death and diaspora - in order to suggest that her engagement of the crossroads in *Claire of the Sea Light* is a response to the aftermath of the mass death caused by the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

As previously cited, Danticat's essay "The Other Side of the Water" from *Create Dangerously* mentions the dual meaning of *lot bo dlo*. In this essay, the author tells of arranging the transport for the body of her cousin, Marius, back to Haiti after his death in Miami. In recounting a seaside visit and discussion with his mother, the writer's Tante Zi, Danticat brings water to the fore, and also reflects on the ambivalence of her role as the writer in the family. Sitting on the beach, staring at the calm water, her aunt admonishes her for writing the private matters of family life, thus rendering them public. The author's reaction to this criticism is shame: "I wanted to ask her forgiveness for the essay I was already writing in my mind" (95). They sit in silence until Tante Zi renews their conversation:

> 'Some people come back from the other side of the water, don't they?' she said, her eyes still fixed on the water. 'You're proof of that, *non*?'
>
> She raised her hands high in the air, aiming them at the twinkling sea as if to both scold and embrace it. (95)

Considering the dual meaning of *lot bo dlo*, her question takes on multiple dimensions, for while she wonders at the fate of her son who never returned, she also seeks a form of her son's presence that would continue beyond death, and would enforce the continuity between one side of the water and the other. What seems more disturbing to the mother of the deceased is less the insurmountable rupture between life and death, but more so the lack of connection between herself in Haiti and her son in Miami. Discovering that he died of AIDS, Tante Zi refutes this, saying that he always sent money home and never sounded sick. (92) Danticat states that, "This type of thing happened all the time, Mr. Freeman and Delens had each explained to me in his own way: faraway family members realize that they are discovering – or recovering – in death fragments of a life that had swirled in hidden stories" (94). The anxiety of the unknown seems to be the motivating force for Tante Zi's later question of why her son did not return home. (95)

While Danticat's concern toward her role as a writer and the theme of *lot bo dlo* seem distinctly differentiated, when taken together, along with the idea of narrative resurfacing through the *retirer d'en bas de l'eau*, they are inherently connected. In this essay, she reflects on the ambiguity surrounding the lives of those inhabiting the diaspora, with Marius as an example, but it is in the character of Max Jr. that she pulls the memory of her cousin from the depths, for in this fictional incarnation, Max Jr. is not only brought back from the diaspora back to Haiti, but he is also pulled from the water and reborn into the community. As such, Danticat takes the responsibility of providing "transcendental continuity" upon herself.

It is necessary to quickly interject this line of thought before delving into a

reading of *Claire of the Sea Light*, in order to fully explain the particularity of Danticat's reference to the sea as the site of both the transition between life and death, and the transition between the homeland and the diaspora. Because my concentration has thus far been on the Atlantic specifically, it could seem that this body of water is necessarily the locus of the underwater afterlife and, as such, the space in which a person's *gros-bon-ange* waits, before it is called upon to resurface through the *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* ceremony. This, however, is an innovation of Danticat's. Maya Deren, in the section of *Divine Horsemen* dedicated to explaining this ceremony in Haitian Vodou, provides an enlightening footnote. While she does describe this process as the "rebirth of the soul from the abysmal waters" she also clarifies that:

> While a certain confusion with oceanic waters does exist, no Haitian would say that the dead went to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean and when the Haitian is pressed into localizing and locating these waters, he may give any kind of answer that involves water since, indeed, all waters are related. (293)

This clarification renders Danticat's continued setting of the Atlantic all the more purposeful.[91] As a joining of the horizontal dimension to the vertical, it is an innovation specifically designed to meditate upon continuity in both space (diaspora) and time (generations).

Citing Maya Deren once again is by no means a random reference, for it is my contention that *Divine Horsemen* – cited several times throughout *Create Dangerously* and also providing the epigraph to the collection – is fundamental to Danticat's

incorporation of Haitian Vodou in her own work, specifically *Claire of the Sea Light*. Obviously, my aim is not to question the author's own understanding of the subject through personal experience and more general cultural knowledge, but rather to show how Deren's evocative and challenging descriptions of the loas are animated by Danticat in this latest novel.[92] In particular, while both mother and daughter Claires evoke the figure of Lasirèn, they are also indicative of Legba, who serves as the most important structuring element of Vodou ceremonies. In this novel, the guardian of the crossroads, the trickster, the old man whose presence is called upon at both the womb and tomb, serves as the guiding principle through which to understand the role of the sea in Danticat's portrayal of the proximity of birth and death.

It is important to understand the nature of the loa and the relationship of the loa to the Vodou initiate. First of all, the loa are not, according to Deren, deities in the traditional sense. They are, rather, "principles" that demonstrate the functions of the world: "The loa are supernatural in the same sense that a principle is super-natural or abstract" (88). In Deren's telling, the loa were formed – in Africa and then reshaped in the New World – through acute observation of the workings of the universe with regard to man's role in nature. (88-90) Secondly, the loa are inherited through family, and this inheritance is often multiple. On the one hand, a person tends to serve a particular deity with whom they come to identify, as they grow and mature into adulthood; but on the other hand, one may inherit and care for the loas of one's parents, grandparents and so forth. Furthermore, it is possible for the Vodou *serviteur* to be "mounted"[93] by any loa, not only those whom he or she serves. Serving the loas therefore is inherently of an

expansive rather than an exclusive nature. These two considerations are necessary to the following reading in that I will show that the mother and daughter Claires do not simply represent or symbolize Legba, but rather instantiate his guiding principle. Furthermore, they both maintain the representative impact of Lasirèn, which situates the abstract function of the crossroads in the geographical space of the sea. As will become clear, Danticat's portrayal of the mother-daughter pair as part of the deeply complex structure of Haitian Vodou serves as the narrative scaffolding through which to read the story of Max Jr. in his dual rebirth.

The association of both Claire Narcis and her daughter Claire Limye Lanme with the loa Lasirèn is made evident by Danticat through their names and their association with water. Of course the name "Narcis" should immediately call to mind the myth of Narcissus, and the deathly mirror of water, particularly as this character dies while giving birth to a daughter of the same name, who is both a mirror image of herself and a signifier of water. However, more specifically in the context of Vodou, the elder Claire is called Lasirèn by her husband, Nozias, on a night fishing trip soon after she discovers that she is pregnant. Slipping from the boat into the waters, Claire Narcis swims into a school of fish: "Surrounding her was a dazzling glow. It was as though her patch of sea were being lit from below" (33). Nozias further recalls:

> And in that moment she was his Lasirèn, his long-haired, long-bodied brown goddess of the sea. With an angelic face like a bronzed Lady of Charity, Lasirèn was, it was believed, the last thing most fishermen saw before they died at sea, her arms the first thing they slipped into, even

> before their bodies hit the water. (34)

The identification of this deity - the femme fatale, protectress of women and seductress of men, both lover and mother - is not only passed down from mother to daughter, but is also a key component of their relationship, creating the "transcendental continuity" between life and death. Claire Limye Lanme's name serves as a memory of this scene, surrounded by sea light while still in the womb.

While Lasirèn is often associated with both death and birth, a deeper examination of the relationship between the two Claires demonstrates an enactment of the Legba principle. In closely reading Maya Deren's description of this loa, the previous scene of light that emanates from the sea may also be read as Danticat's joining of Legba to Lasirèn. Deren states in her portrayal of this guardian of the crossroads:

> The myths of all men agree that, first, there was light: the birth of the world and the birth of the sun are one. In Dahomey, this fire of life in which divine creative power was first made manifest, was Legba; and today, in Haiti, the ritual bonfires burn for him. As the sun, then, he was the medium through which that primal energy was funneled to the world, the cord which connects the universe eternally with its divine origin. Thus, of all earth's procreation, Legba is both the parent and the patron.
>
> As the principle of life, as the initial procreative whole, Legba was both man and woman and his vever[94] still bears the sign of this totality. As navel of the world, or as its womb, Legba is addressed in prayers at childbirth. (96)

With this description, we may reread the significance of Claire Limye Lanme's name. She is not only a child of the sea, but also a child of light. Claire Narcis embodies the principle of this founding womb. Shining through the sea – a space that the novel continually associates with death – is the light of life. Rather than the earthly bonfire, this sea light emanates from the depths, indicating the life that is contained within the realm of aquatic death. Pregnant, Claire is on the verge of both birth and death, at the juncture of the crossroads that indicates the womb of creation. While Legba is most commonly portrayed as an old man, Deren's description renders him both male and female, and therefore, Danticat's portrayal of Claire Narcis as an instantiation of Legba does not run contrary to but rather supports the deep structure of Legba's guiding principle.

It is also instructive to recall Legba's place in the ceremonies of Haitian Vodou. As Deren notes, "All ceremonials begin with the salute to the guardian of the crossroads, the loa principle of crossing, of communication between the divine world" (37). Therefore, any attempt to call upon a loa or an ancestor will begin with a call to Legba, for the path between life and death must be made communicable through this entity's intervention. Furthermore, Legba is construed as the mirroring between the world of *les Invisibles* and the earthly world:

> The metaphor for the mirror's depth is the cross-roads; the symbol is the cross. For the Haitian this figure is not only symbolic of the totality of the earth's surface as comprehended in the extension of the cardinal points on a horizontal plane. It is, above all, a figure for the intersection of the horizontal plane, which is this mortal world, by the vertical plane, the

> metaphysical axis, which plunges into the mirror. The cross-roads, then, is the point of access to the world of les Invisibles, which is the soul of the cosmos, the source of life force, the cosmic memory, and the cosmic wisdom. (Deren, 35)

With this in mind, the naming of Claire Narcis takes on further significance. While invoking the mythical mirror of Narcissus, she is also the embodiment of the mirror of the cross-roads, and the narrative call to the other realm.

The purpose of reading the mother-daughter Claire as indicative of the Legba principle is not to supplant the connection to Lasirèn, for the latter is the figure that allows Danticat to mobilize the full symbolic impact of water. However, when closely examined, it becomes increasingly evident that Claire Narcis animates the role of Legba. In the first place, the crossroads between life and death is engaged at Claire's birth, which is also the moment of death. The juxtaposition of the two stands at the navel of the intersection, the opening of the divide between realms. Furthermore, Claire Limye Lanme's birthday continues in its link to death. Throughout the novel, several characters meet their end on this day, indicating the further openness of the crossroads. Claire Narcis also serves a more specific purpose in relation to the dead, as she works with Ville Rose's undertaker – Albert Vincent, a clear indication of Baron Samedi, or the guardian of the dead by description (4-5) – to prepare bodies for burial, a duty that was inherited through her family still living in the mountains. Finally, Claire is present at a scene of grieving, in which Madame Gaëlle – the owner of a fabric shop and the eventual adoptive mother of Claire – attends the burial of her husband. Gaëlle, in an event that also links life and

death, delivers her baby, Rose, on the night that she loses her husband, during a fatal shooting at the local radio station. While the baby had been presumed to die of a spinal condition, she is strangely born healthy, in a substitution of one life for another. Claire Narcis had dressed the body of Gaëlle's husband, and at his burial, she recalls seeing Claire, watching the funeral proceedings from under a tree near the cemetery gate:

> That morning, it seemed that Claire Narcis and the weeping willow had become one…Claire's head was topped by the willow's golden crown. Claire Narcis had seemed that morning to be a dazzling mirage, a veil between the dirt being piled on her husband's coffin and the wailing baby waiting at home. (163)

The tree is one of Legba's crossroad symbols, as its roots push into the earth while its branches extend high above the ground, and the association of Claire with the tree is supported by the description of her serving as the veil between life and death. This passage also fully links Claire Narcis to the land, the realm of Legba, and shows that she is not only an aquatic symbol.

While it is clear that Danticat means to invoke both Lasirèn and Legba in the figure of Claire Narcis and her daughter, the purpose behind such a juxtaposition remains to be understood. For this, I come back to the story of Max Jr. After his return to Ville Rose, he relives the painful memory of a rape he committed ten years previous, in an attempt to confound the developing love he felt toward his friend Bernard. The victim, a maid in the Ardin house named Flore, becomes pregnant, and this event catalyzes Max Jr.'s relocation to Miami to live with his mother. During his return home, after realizing

that Max Sr. has learned of his son's homoerotic sexuality, Max Jr. travels to the beach, in order to relive the times he spent by the sea with Bernard. He watches the waves swell and remembers his mother's explanation that the waves were the work of Lasirèn, who "made her presence known by swelling a wave several feet, whenever she craved human company" (198). Going in for a swim, he reflects on the nature of the sea: "People like to say of the sea that lanmè pa kenbe kras, the sea does not hide dirt. It does not keep secrets. The sea was both hostile and docile, the ultimate trickster" (199). This saying recalls Diome's own pronouncement, upon the death of Moussa, that even the ocean cannot take in all that the land rejects. Both authors, in their own way, bring the limitations of the sea to the fore, indicating the water's relationship of exchange with land. The moniker of "trickster" also denotes Legba, and so in this instance, both loas serve as the principles through which the scene unfolds. Max Jr. continues to float in the water, relaxing into the water's fatal pull: "Oddly enough, surrendering at sea felt somewhat like surrendering on land, taking a deep breath and simply letting go. You could just as easily lie down in the sea as you might in the woods, and simply fall asleep" (199).

The scene of this surrender takes place in a very specific set of circumstances, for it is Claire Limya Lanme's birthday, the annual date on which birth and death coincide. Particularly fraught with transition, it is the day that Madame Gaëlle finally comes to adopt Claire from her father. The latter event spurs Claire to run away, and as she hides in the darkness of the Mon Initil,[95] she looks down upon the villagers, shining in their various lights "like beacons calling her home" (232) as they continue to call her name.

She reflects on her own birth:

> She never dreamed of being inside her mother's body, except in that last moment when she had to come out and that last moment always made her think of water.
>
> Sometimes when she was lying on her back in the sea…while she was listening to both the world above and beneath the water, she yearned for the warm salty water to be her mother's body, the waves her mother's heartbeat, the sunlight the tunnel that guided her out the day her mother died. (215)

While Max Jr. surrenders himself to the tomb of the sea, these waters are also construed as a womb, further signified by the description of sailors "strewn in fetal positions" around Nozias while he hunts for Claire, as though they have been born onto the shore. It is out of this great womb of the sea that Max Jr. is reborn, and the book ends with Claire watching as her father and Madame Gaëlle take turns breathing life back into him.

In the character of Max Jr., Danticat demonstrates a dual motion of the *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* – for this character is brought back from the other side of the water geographically and metaphysically. By invoking the figure of the crossroads, through the birth and death of the mother and daughter Claires, and placing this principle within the aquatic territory of Lasirèn, the author shows that the horizontal axis of the earth's surface is joined to the vertical axis of life and death. While this occurs symbolically in the text, Danticat is also engaging the process of calling back the deceased back from their place *anba dlo*. While I have already discussed the story of the author's cousin

Marius, and implied that the trajectory of Max Jr. Is inspired by his own, it is also evident that Danticat is responding to the deaths of other family members, notably her cousin Maxo and his son Nozial, in the 2010 earthquake. She details her experience of these deaths in the essay "Our Guernica" from *Create Dangerously*, and recounts her visit to Maxo's makeshift grave, under the foundations of a church basement:

> Emerging from under the church and into the sunlight, I remember thinking, each time I saw someone rescued from the rubble on television, that it looked a lot like a vaginal birth, the rescue teams nudging, like midwives, a head, then a shoulder, then some arms, and then some legs, out of the expanded earth.
>
> Maxo and Nozial, I thought, were never reborn. (172)

The figure of Max Jr., and the story of his rebirth out of the water is perhaps significant of multiple people who are commemorated in Danticat's fiction, as she pulls them back into life through her stories.[96]

It could seem odd that Danticat's first novel after the earthquake does not make reference to this event, for she certainly has not neglected to recount, in strikingly intimate detail, the tragedies of Haiti's past. Yet a connection between her reflections in *Create Dangerously*, and the themes of *Claire of the Sea Light* does emerge, in considering the novel's hopeful ending, and the figure of a live Max Jr. pulled from the water by a community who rushes to give him new life. As I previously stated, Legba must be evoked in order to instantiate the communicative space between life and death. Indeed, for the *retirer d'en bas de l'eau* ceremony, which I have demonstrated as one of

the significant narrative processes at work in Danticat's fiction, Legba would certainly be the first called upon. Therefore, in beginning the novel and ending the novel with Claire Limye Lanme, Danticat herself is evoking the loa of the crossroads, in order to open the passage whereby she may render the dead back into collective memory in the realm of the living. The final scene of the novel is therefore indicative of what Danticat undergoes as a writer beset by the tragic workings of history. While the residents of Ville Rose call the name of Claire, they are invoking not only a person, but a principle - the light of Legba that shines through the aquatic realm of both birth and death. Through their call, Max Jr. is brought to the surface, and through her call to Legba, Danticat is able to render these lives into narrative form, pulling them from the depths in fiction that they did not escape in life.

In her final reflections on the earthquake, she writes:

> I heard one of the survivors say…that during the earthquake it was as if the earth had become liquid, like water. That's when I began to imagine them, all these thousands and thousands of souls, slipping into the country's rivers and streams, then waiting out their year and a day before reemerging and reclaiming their places among us. And briefly, I was hopeful. (177)

By bringing the terrestrial structure of the crossroads into the sea, Danticat not only joins the horizontal plane of immigration to the vertical plane of death and rebirth, she also substitutes the unforgivably brittle land, that can crack and crush its victims, for the fluidity of sea, whose waters are not only a realm of death but also of continual rebirth. The comparison between death in water and death on land is followed in the next chapter

with two works that seek to recover the memory of the slave trade while addressing the Atlantic Ocean as both a neverending abyss, and a space of a violent birth.

Chapter 3

Bodies in the Water: The Memory of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in M. NourbeSe Philip and Marie-Célie Agnant

> Toutes les arrière-arrière-petites-filles d'esclaves, la majorité des Antillaises d'aujourd'hui, portent en dedans d'elles, dans leurs pensées, leurs paroles et leurs actions, l'héritage de leurs ancêtres.[97]

In his formidable recent work *Specters of the Atlantic* (2005), Ian Baucom declares that Edouard Glissant is "haunted" by the image of dead bodies in the water. In his *Discours antillais*, the Martinican writer and philosopher responds to Edmund Braithwaite's phrase "The unity is submarine" (quoted in Glissant, 230) by saying that this calls to mind the images of "*Africains lestés de boulets et jetés par-dessus bord chaque fois qu'un navire négrier se trouvait poursuivi par des ennemis et s'estimait trop faible pour soutenir le combat*" (230-231). The specter of these bodies in the water may also be seen in abolitionist art and literature from the 19th century. In Auguste Jal's *Le Négrier* (1832), a slave revolt is presaged by the suicide of three women, who jump into the water rather than continue their fate as slaves. One of the women is accompanied by her infant, and when she is recovered from the waters without the child declares that at least, of the two of them, it was saved. The famous 1840 painting *The Slave Ship* by J.M.W. Turner depicts the 1781 massacre of an estimated 133 slaves, who were thrown overboard the slave ship the *Zong* in order to compensat for the inadequate rations provided for the journey. Their chains and arms are seen flailing in a blood red sea. Prosper Mérimée's novella *Tamango* (1829) reverses the situation, when a successful

revolt of Africans aboard a slave ship leads to the death and drowning of all the white personnel. However, unable to steer the ship, the freed slaves leave the main vessel in small boats, which capsize in the harsh waters. The bodies in the water cited by Glissant were certainly present within the European popular imagination during the era in which the economy was largely characterized by the slave trade.

Glissant says in his continued discussion of these bodies thrown into the depths of the Atlantic along the Middle Passage that they are not entirely lost, but rather serve as the connective tissue of Relation – his term for a non-universalizing connectedness between all populations throughout time:

> *Ils semèrent dans les fonds les boulets de l'invisible. C'est ainsi que nous avons appris, non la transcendance ni l'universel sublimé, mais la transversalité. Il nous a fallu bien de temps pour le savoir. Nous sommes les racines de la Relation.*
>
> *Des racines sous-marines : c'est-à-dire dérivées, non implantées d'un seul mât dans un seul limon, mais prolongées dans tous les sens de notre univers par leur réseau de branches.* (231)

Baucom later presents Glissant's representation of these bodies in Relation in the essay "La Barque Ouverte" from his work *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), and mentions that Glissant has at first shown that those who suffered the slave trade were "exceptions" in history, and that in Glissant's work, this "exceptional" status has been rather transformed into a state of cultural connectedness across different time periods. According to Baucom, "Indeed, this passage from exception to relation, this passage from a vision of exceptional

suffering and of those violently excepted from history, to the vision of unity, a solidarity, functions as a shorthand code for, or condensation of, Glissant's entire poetics of relation" (310). Interestingly, "exception" will also come into play when Baucom later refers to Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1940). He cites the philosopher's famous contention that "the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that 'the state of exception' in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history that corresponds to this fact. Then we will have the production of the real state of exception before us as a task" (Quoted in Baucom, 317). While Benjamin is referring specifically to the oppression wrought by fascism in general, and Nazism in particular, I find this quote appropriate to a discussion of the transatlantic slave trade as it resonates in contemporary works. While Glissant has it that these exceptions of history, the bodies in the water, are precisely the basis for a profound interconnectedness, Benjamin contends that the exceptional quality of a violent moment in history should not be seen as discordant with the whole of history. In this chapter, I aim to show that in Caribbean portrayals, the exceptional moment of European and American practices of slavery is not seen as lying outside of history, but rather as inherent to it, and that, while slavery resonates in transgenerational collective memory, the very qualities that constitute its exceptional nature still exist to some extent.

In this chapter, my aim is to study several examples of bodies in the water in view of linking this continually reappearing figure to the Middle Passage and to the institution of slavery more generally. The authors that appear in this study are, to a greater or lesser extent, concerned with showing the resonance that this memory holds for contemporary

realities. In the first section, I explore the strategies employed by the poet M. NourbeSe Philip, originally from Trinidad and Tobago and currently living in Toronto, in her recent work *Zong!* (2011) Here she tells the story "that cannot be told" of the massacre of African slaves aboard the *Zong* ship in 1781. Her method of "exaqua" (coined from the word "exhume"), whereby she attempts to recover the "bones" – signifying the remnants or the memory – of the estimated one hundred and thirty-two bodies thrown overboard, is a clear representation of the authorial process of resurfacing the memory of past atrocities. I follow my reading of Philip's work with a close analysis of Haitian-Canadian writer Marie-Célie Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* (2002). Though bodies in the water do feature significantly toward the end of the novel, I am more interested in exploring what the author presents as a collapsing of the realms separated by water – which is to say life on dry ground, and death in the depths of the ocean. This I construe as a concept of "living underwater" and link this metaphor to the consequences of both individual and collective trauma as presented by Agnant, in order to argue that she is most concerned with showing the continued resonance of the slave trade in contemporary contexts. The texts found within this chapter clearly demonstrate that the memory of the slave trade, and its resonance in the African and Caribbean portrayals of today's very real crises, is seen foremost with reference to the Atlantic, as the abyss that both hides and resurfaces the past.

The Active Past: M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!*

In 1781, Captain Collingwood of the British slave ship *Zong* ordered an estimated

one hundred and fifty African captives to be thrown overboard into the depths of the Atlantic. Having steered the ship off the course from the West African coast to Jamaica, the captain had added months to the voyage, which depleted the available resources such that there was not sufficient water left for the survival of both the ship's crew and the ship's captives (Walvin 1-2). Out of the 400 Africans who were taken aboard, an estimated one hundred of this number had already died for "want of water" or thrown themselves into the sea "through thirst and frenzy"[98] by the time Collingwood ordered the further drowning of so many others. But the reasoning behind this murderous act lay not simply in the riddance of bodies that had become a burden. In the captain's understanding, should these slaves be thrown alive into the sea, their loss would be compensated by the insurers of the voyage, a benefit that the owner of the ship would not enjoy if these unfortunate Africans were to die a "natural" death on board (Walvin 3-4).The decision of the court is outlined in the case report known formally as *Gregson v. Gilbert* (the insurers and owners respectively), and it is exclusively from this document that poet M. NourbeSe Philip pulls the language of her poem *Zong!*.

In the first section titled "Os"[99] Philip writes using only the words found within *Gregson v. Gilbert.* However, in following sections, she chooses to deconstruct and rebuild the original text in order to form new language, in this way destroying the official documentation of the massacre in an attempt to allow the experience of these murdered individuals to resurface. With *Zong!,* Philip aims to commemorate this horrific massacre by allowing the voices of those who perished in the water to speak through her writing. Drawing from her own thoughts about the process of crafting such a unique work of

poetry, the following analysis explores this writer's deep concern with the past's continued existence in the present, taking into account her unique conception of an Atlantic temporality. By engaging in a mode she names “exaqua”, as well as using language to embody the all-encompassing hegemony of captain and captives, Philip shows that the Atlantic Ocean, though the space of death for these victims of the slave trade, did not annihilate their lives entirely, and by probing the silences of history, she seeks to pull their voices from its depths.

In the section called “Notanda”, containing personal reflections on her writing of *Zong!*, Philip expresses both the extraordinary difficulty as well as the dire necessity of writing the events that happened aboard the slave ship *Zong*. The section begins with the seemingly contradictory claim that “There is no telling this story; it must be told” (189). The precise meaning of this proclamation remains ambiguous, but it is often repeated, with slight differentiation, throughout the “Notanda”, insisting upon its own confusing truth. The most obvious interpretation of the statement would replace the semicolon with a conjunction such as “but” or “and yet,” so that it would read “There is no telling this story, and yet it must be told.” Such a proclamation reflects the essential nature of the authorial experience as recounted by the poet herself, guided by the compulsion to both tell and “not-tell” this murderous tale.

Yet this complex assertion begs the question, why is there “no telling this story”? Furthermore, how can such a story eventually be understood, by either the author or the reader? Philip explains herself by evoking the manifest arduousness of dealing in writing with the *Zong* massacre on several counts. First, while the case of *Gregson v. Gilbert*

became a rallying cry for abolitionists of the day,[100] and while the *Zong* left several pieces of documentation in its wake,[101] the atrocity of murder can never be truly accounted for through such official records. She wonders: "What did, in fact, happen on the *Zong*? Can we, some two hundred years later, ever really know? Should we?[102] These are the questions I confront. Although presented with the 'complete' text of the case, the reader does not ever know it, since the complete story does not exist" (196). Indeed the task of filling in the blank spaces of history is compounded by the personal strife that Philip cites as a significant component of the writing process. She mentions the emotional toll that this project had on her, such as her compulsion to weep when she reads the description of a young African girl as "Negroe girl (meagre)" in the ledger of a sales book, or her temporary breakdown after realizing those Africans aboard the ship would likely not have understood the very command to throw themselves overboard. (201) Finally, Philip also goes through great difficulty to interact in any way she can with the ancestors, seeking their "permission" to record this story. She travels to Ghana in 2006 in order to visit the slave ports, and then journeys to the ports of Liverpool, where the journey of the *Zong* would have begun. (202-203)

But the difficulty of producing this manuscript does not outweigh the necessity to "not-tell" the story of the massacre. Philip sees it as an obligation to transform the silences of this history into written words through her work. The silence with which she is most concerned is that found within the text of *Gregson v. Gilbert* itself, and she states her belief "that the story of these African men, women, and children thrown overboard in an attempt to collect insurance monies, the story that can only be told by not telling, is

locked in this text. In the many silences within the Silence of the text" (191). Indeed, this silence must be transformed into speech, for according to Philip, it is the only way to properly locate the memory of these unfortunate individuals, the only marker of their atrocious deaths. To further explain her decision to use the text of *Gregson v. Gilbert* as a word bank she writes: "the case is the tombstone, the one public marker of the murder of those Africans on board the *Zong*, locating it in a specific time and place. It is a public moment, a textual monument marking their murder and their existence, their small histories that ended so tragically" (194). Bringing forward the silent stories of these human beings, who were transformed into property through the slave trade, is therefore to both reveal and expand the narrative held within the two-dimensional marker of their deaths, and to express the fullness of their human lives. As Philip explains: "In *Zong!*, the African, transformed into a thing by the law, is re-transformed, miraculously, back into the human" (196).

The powerful and somewhat ambiguous statement with which Philip begins the "Notanda" – "There is no telling this story; it must be told" – contains further significance, beyond the initial meaning explored above. By taking into account the words "telling" and "told" themselves, a relationship emerges between the active and passive voice that sheds light on the author's process, and the duality that she undergoes in order to "not tell the story that has to be told" (191). That the story must be told is clear, but Philip never indicates her own agency as the teller, and she in fact continually fights her authorial role, struggling to let the story tell itself. She quotes from her own journal: "*have argued that there are always at least 2 poems – the one you want to write*

and the other that must write itself, and this work appears to be the culmination of that because am not even using my own words. Are they ever my own words, though?" (193) This evocative question haunts the text, and guides the active-passive process whereby Philip calls upon the horrors of the past to make themselves present. Employing herself in the role of poet, she embodies the hegemony that is both long past and ever present, and so the very words of the text come from this structure, rather than from herself. Indeed, her language engages the very violence with which the *Zong* massacre was carried out, for the act of writing is here largely one of destruction. Though Philip does not say that she can tell the text, she does write of her active role in the effacement of the original document of *Gregson v. Gilbert*, claiming, "I mutilate the text as the fabric of African life and the lives of these men, women and children were mutilated," and furthermore, "I murder the text, literally cut it into pieces, castrating verbs, suffocating adjectives, murdering nouns, throwing articles, prepositions, conjunctions overboard, jettisoning adverbs" (193). Replaying the violence of the *Zong* massacre in her poetic process, she also combats this violence with passivity:

> I fight the desire to impose meaning on the words – it is so instinctive, this need to impose meaning: this is the generating impulse of, and towards, language, isn't it – to make and, therefore, to communicate, meaning? How did they – the Africans on board the *Zong* – make meaning of what was happening to them? What meaning did they make of it and how did they make it mean? This story that must be told; that can only be told by not telling. (194)

Alternating between the active destruction of the legal case's language, and the passive allowance of new language to emerge, Philip's poetry is also an attempt to efface historical meaning in favor of the meaning that may have been created through the *Zong* massacre – on the ship, in the hold, and in the depths of the sea.

Yet this dual role of the active/passive writer also bears an eerie resemblance to the conditions of the ship itself, and it is clear that Philip echoes the relationship of captain and captive in her not-telling of the *Zong* massacre. First, she conceives of herself as being on a voyage, like that of the slave ship, lost at sea and floating through the experience of writing without the anchoring power of signification to which she is accustomed: "But I am hunting for something – anything – to give me some bearing, since I am, metaphorically speaking, at sea, having cut myself off from the comfort and predictability of my own language – my own meaning" (190). Furthermore, she compares herself both to the captain of the ship, and to those Africans in his possession. She is "steering the ship" of this experience, so to speak, but she is also being led along by it, to an unknown destination. In her journal, she writes of herself in the position of captain: "'Am going to record my thoughts and feelings about this journey...as much a journey as the one Captain Collingwood made; like him I feel time yapping at my heels'" (190). In this way, the journal of her writing *Zong!* becomes a kind of ship's log. Yet due to her own intended process of writing, she also embodies the position of the powerless slave: "My intent is to use the text of the legal decision as a word store; to lock myself into this particular and peculiar discursive landscape...I would lock myself in this text in the same way men, women, and children were locked in the holds of the slave ship *Zong*" (191).

Creating within herself the conditions of this tragic event – lost at sea and taking into account the roles of both the slave and the slave trader – Philip demonstrates the deep resonance through time of these hierarchical structures. In order to call forth the memory of this horrific moment in the slave trade, she engages its most basic structure in the present time. As such, the pain experienced in recalling this event into the present that Philip expresses is somewhat ambivalent, for while she does suffer the brutality of the massacre, she also creates within herself a position to "master" it, as it were, and in allowing herself to "not-tell" the story, to memorialize this moment in time.

The technique of engaging the hegemony that defined the slave ship *Zong* – representative of the system of slavery as a whole – belies a complicated relationship to time that is a key feature of black Atlantic literature. Philip's text demands a nuanced understanding of a complex temporality that emphasizes the ways in which the horrors of the slave trade continue to resonate in the contemporary world despite a notable lack of monuments and memorials. Time itself is under examination in this work, as the author attempts to access the stories of individuals that are not only dislocated temporally in the past, but also spatially in the seas. Such spatial determination of time is evident in Philip's claim that, "our entrance to the past is through memory – either oral or written. And water. In this case salt water. Sea water. And, as the ocean appears to be the same yet is constantly in motion, affected by tidal movements, so too this memory appears stationary yet is shifting always" (201). Following this logic, the past is accessible through memory, which is a product of the present. Yet this past is not achieved in spite of memory's shifting nature, but rather because of it, for the movements of the present are precisely the

means to access the past that is inherently unstable. In this sense, the past is not passive, but remains active. Philip repeats part of this statement later in the text, insisting upon not only the motion of memory, but also on its continually present quality: "Our entrance to the past is through memory. And water. It is happening always – repeating always, the repetition becoming a haunting. Do they, the sounds the cries, the shouts of those thrown overboard from the *Zong* repeat themselves over and over until they rise from the ocean floor to resurface in *Zong!*?" (203) But the latter is not so much a question as an explanation of her work, for she insists it is those who haunt her with their unceasing cries that guide the work of poetry.[103]

In his last chapter of *Specters of the Atlantic*, Baucom refers to Philip's *Zong!* as part of his analysis of temporality in literature of the black Atlantic. Based upon readings of Edouard Glissant's *Poétique de la relation* Baucom posits the time of the Atlantic as accumulative,[104] meaning that, as he says, "Time does not pass, it accumulates, and as it accumulates it deposits an ever greater freight of material within the cargo holds of a present" (325). This perception of time would necessarily evoke the idea of specters – and, indeed, Philip calls her own work one of haunting – but these ghosts should not, according to Baucom, be read simply as mere invocation of the past.[105] Rather than the residue of the past within the present – acquiescing to a linear temporality – portrayals of haunting within this body of literature demonstrate the past's inherent presence as a means of suspending the categorical distinctions between chronological categories. Referring to several significant works of Atlantic literature, with *Zong!* among them, Baucom argues: "To the extent that the past and the present survive as provisionally

operative terms...they do so not because these ghost stories seek to recapture the past *for* the present, but because they demand a thorough reconceptualization of our notion *of* the present" (324). This reconceptualization would take into account not the effects that the memory of the past have upon the present – though such effects may be significant – but rather the present moment as a product of all that has come before, in no way separable from its legacy. Baucom cites the role of the writer and the academic in this accumulative past as such:

> That Fred d'Aguiar has written a historical novel[106] and M. NourbeSe Philip, a collection of poetry, or that I have written a book about the *Zong* massacre are equally insignificant in this regard. That past endures not because a novelist, a poet, or an academic has paid some present attention to it but because the present from which attention is paid has been made, fashioned, designed by it and by everything else that has been. (331)

As such, works that deal with past events do not only bring forth memory, continually recalled lest it be lost in time, but are rather responsible for recognizing the very construction of the present world. If Philip claims that the waters of memory are always changing, this is because the present itself is in continual motion.

Baucom calls upon Saint-Lucian poet and playwright Derek Walcott's "Atlantic now" in order to express this time of continual presence (324).[107] He also cites Philip's declaration in the first few pages of *Zong!* that "This is/not was," (quoted in Baucom 332), referring to the event of the massacre itself. Yet an important question remains:| if the present is a time that has been shaped by the accumulation of the past, and if this

perpetual presence of the past is self-evident to Atlantic writers, why then does Philip so consistently detail in the "Notanda" the exceeding difficulty with which this horrific moment of history is pulled from the depths? To state the question more simply, if the past is so overwhelmingly present, then why does its revival require such orphic feats?[108] How is it that the past is both resoundingly present and absent, and how is it possible to express these contradictory states simultaneously? It is here that the very nature of the Atlantic Ocean takes on its full importance to writers such as Walcott and Philip. While the sea in particular has been the site of both atrocities and transformative acts of history, the specific characteristics of this vast body of water further elucidate its importance.

What the sea comes to signify in this body of black Atlantic literature is a guiding principle of temporality and a spatial representation through which the past's simultaneous presence and absence may be understood. In Philip's *Zong!* it is easy to comprehend the continued resonance of the Atlantic Ocean throughout time, for this is the space of a specific facet of the slave system: the transformative realm between Africa and the New World, the place in which the humanity of the slave was irredeemably lost, and the site of a final journey into a form of living death.[109] Yet the Atlantic is more than its geography, and more than the memory of the events which occurred upon the surface of its waters. The accumulative time that Baucom insists upon reading through many works that deal with the history of slavery finds its portrayal in this body of water not solely because of its historic specificity, but also because of its very nature. Philip begins the section "Os" with an epigraph of Wallace Stevens: "The sea was not a mask."[110] This simple but powerful statement expresses an idea at the very heart of resurfacing – that the

opacity of the ocean's surface is only an illusion. Indeed, the very writing of *Zong!* rests upon the assumption that what is hidden has not disappeared, but remains still very much in existence, though displaced in the depths. So it is with the continued existence of the accumulative past, for all that is hidden in time has not ceased to be, nor even ceased to become, if the sea and the past are both still "shifting" as Philip states. The materiality of the Atlantic therefore stands in for the non-material though deeply consequential aspect of time's accumulative passing.

This concept of the past is perhaps most famously expressed in the beginning lines of Walcott's poem "The Sea is History," in which he cites the ruins of history and their place in the aquatic realm:

> Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
> Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
> in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
> has locked them up. The sea is History.

There have been resonances of precisely these lines throughout Philip's "Notanda", particularly with reference to the text of *Gregson v. Gilbert*, which she claims to be the only "monument" of the tragedy. Further, it is inside this text that she has "locked" herself while writing *Zong!* But where Walcott asserts that the sea is a vast vault into which all monuments are locked, Philip understands the text of the trial itself as a monument in which she herself is captive. It appears fairly clear that Philip implies a relationship to this canonical text of poetry, yet she nowhere quotes Walcott. In fact, her epigraphs to the poem are drawn from the Bible, from Saint-Augustine's *Confessions*,

from Shakespeare and from other poets such as Dylan Thomas and Wallace Stevens, but nowhere does the oft quoted line "The sea is history" feature. While Philip may refrain from citing Walcott due to the criticism his work has drawn for his Hellenic version of Caribbean history[111] – a theme that resonates in this poem – it is possible that her concern is more so with emphasizing the specificity of the *Zong* massacre within a history of slavery. While Walcott portrays the sea as a vault, into which the countless markers of history may be thrown, Philip's shifts this vault into both the text of *Gregson v. Gilbert* and the hold of the slave-ship, insisting not upon the subaquatic unity of historical events, but rather on the specificity of this one instance. In other words, captivity signifies in her work a precise moment in time which she works to recover in poetry, and that it is possible to be held captive by an event that is past yet persists.

Furthermore, like Walcott, who writes of the "Bones, soldered by coral to bones," Philip is concerned with the physical remains of those who were thrown overboard the *Zong*. She cites the anthropologist Clea Koff, who speaks of identifying the bones of the murdered in both Rwanda and Bosnia: "It's important, she says, for bodies to be exhumed – in doing so you return dignity to the dead. What is the word for bringing bodies back from water?" (201) Philip's search for a word reflects her search for a manner in which to bring the deceased back to the surface, and to somehow provide them with an identity. Unable to recover a term for recovering bodies from the water, she wonders: "Does this mean that unlike being interred, once you're underwater there is no retrieval – that you can never be 'exhumed' from water? The gravestone or tombstone marks the spot of interment, whether of ashes or the body. What marks the spot of subaquatic death?" For

Philip, the bones of those who drowned do not become part of an interconnected "mosaic" as Walcott describes. Or, if they do, the existence of this mosaic is not enough to assuage the need to recover physical remnants of the past, for as she insists: "I, too, want the bones." The impossibility of physical remains troubles her, and it is worth noting again that the homonymic resonances between *les os* and *les eaux* in French would be implicit in her understanding of bones. Rather than physical remains, there is only water, as the most solid structures of the human body are dissolved into the fluidity of the sea. Yet it is precisely this dissolution in water – implying a dissolution in the vast history which is the sea, according to Walcott's formulation of the underwater mosaic – that Philip seems to protest in her insistence upon bones. Because the remnants of bodies cannot be made manifest, Philip mobilizes her own physical presence.[112] In her live readings, the poet's own voice is brought into the performative sphere, embodying those voices of the drowned. Particularly in her reading of the first poem of the collection, her stammering words evoke the bubbling up of voices from the depths, as they cry out from the water.[113]

Indeed, Glissant also reads the bones of the Atlantic as a kind of connective tissue, which Baucom proclaims to be the very basis of the philosopher's poetics of Relation. He states: "The *Zong* massacre never enters Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* by name. But there can be little doubt that just "such" an event has been haunting his writing" (311). Yet perhaps it is a problem that these very bodies, which were indeed fundamental to what Glissant calls Relation, are not directly mentioned by him. He claims that, "*Les peuples qui ont fréquenté le gouffre ne se vantent pas d'être élus. Ils ne croient pas enfanter la*

puissance des modernités. Ils vivent la Relation, qu'ils défrichent, à mesure que l'oubli du gouffre leur vient et qu'aussi bien leur mémoire se renforce" (*Poétique de la Relation* 20). For Glissant, there is a dual act of forgetting and remembering that characterizes lived Relation, yet certain specific atrocities of history are also forgotten. By situating her exploration of the *Zong* massacre not only in the language of memory and poetry, but also in the language of the law – law that allowed for the transformation of humans into property for several centuries, of which this case is just one representative – Philip expresses foremost a concern with the ethical consequences of this event. While presenting this case as exemplary of the atrocities of the slave trade, Philip does not yet allow the *Zong* massacre to be subsumed into a general history of slavery. Like Walcott and like Glissant, she does portray temporality as residing in the accumulative space of the Atlantic. Yet she is concerned with bringing the specific conditions of the *Zong* massacre to light, probing the depths of a traumatic human experience that can never fully be accounted for, and her concern should be taken as a serious call not to let the accumulation of the past become an amalgamation of historical realities. Though the claim that the story of the Zong "must be told" implies the passive participation of the writer, the past itself remains active in the present and continually available in time, though spatially removed.

Among the many significant epigraphs throughout, Philip quotes the famous line spoken by Shakespeare's Hamlet: "The time is out of joint" (1.5.191).[114] In the context of Zong!, this line indicates that the presumed linearity of time is troubled, and the poetic

process becomes one of coping with this temporal misalignment. But for Philip, this creation takes on an ethical dimension as well, not only in that she seeks to memorialize the horrors of the past so that they may not be lost in the present, but also in that she insists upon maintaining specificity in memory, rather than letting the atrocities of history simply dissolve into the whole. It is therefore part of her project to follow the rest of Hamlet's famous line and "set right" this temporal interruption. Similarly, Marie-Célie Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* shows this writer's commitment to exploring the most painful elements of the Caribbean past. Like Philip's poetry, Agnant's novel also renders the prevailing notion of aquatic history problematic, for the sea is spatially removed from the land, as the past is temporally removed from the present. In the novel, this author portrays rather a collapsing of time and space, where history is arduously lived in everyday life, and the relative stability of dry land, the present, is submerged into the murky waters. If Philip's notion of "exaqua" echoes the structure of resurfacing, as has so far been conveyed in this study, my analysis of Agnant will ask the question: Is resurfacing possible when the past and present have become indistinguishable?

"Tout ce bleu" : Living Past and Living Underwater in Marie-Célie Agant's *Le Livre d'Emma*

Much like M. NourbeSe Philip's mesmerizing work *Zong!*, Marie-Célie Agnant's novel *Le Livre d'Emma* takes up the harrowing theme of the transatlantic slave trade. Agnant shows the dire consequences that the traumatic aspects of Caribbean history may have upon its descendants when carried through generations of memory without reprieve.

The novel takes place largely within a single room of a mental hospital in Montreal and is narrated by Flore, translator and eventual confidant of Emma, a Caribbean immigrant from the fictional island of Grand-Lagon who stands accused of infanticide and is undergoing psychiatric evaluation and treatment. Tension arises in the relationship between Emma and her caretaker Doctor MacLeod through the patient's refusal to speak French, choosing only to express herself in Créole, and so it is Flore to whom she tells the story of her life. The novel deals in large part with Emma's overwhelming preoccupation with the transatlantic slave trade and its effects upon the women in her family. As Flore becomes more and more implicated in the story of Emma's life, she comes to understand that this particular historic trauma has not disappeared for women like themselves – descendants of the slave system in the Caribbean – but rather continues to resound, even in the present moment.

The book unfolds primarily in the form of Emma's testimony, as recorded by Flore. Her troubled relationship to the past – not only to her own past but also to the collective history of enslaved Africans brought to the Caribbean – is the principle subject matter. Indeed, it is impossible for her to recount her own life without intertwining it with the lives of those who suffered the Middle Passage and then lived through slavery in the New World. While Emma seeks, throughout her life, to tell the history of slavery and to uncover its effects upon women like herself, she is confronted with the impossibility of coherently recounting her findings. In this way, her thwarted attempts to express history's inexpressible aspects may be explained in part by M. NourbeSe Philip's statement about her own poetic recounting of the Zong Massacre: "But this is a story that can only be told

by not telling, and how am I to not tell the story that has to be told" (*Zong!* 191).[115] Indeed, Emma insists that she must tell the history of slavery whose repercussions drastically afflict Grand-Lagon – the fictional Caribbean island of her childhood – but that she cannot find an accepted means of expression.

The difficulty she finds in the telling is surely due in part to the very chaotic nature of history itself in the context of the Caribbean, a theme explored in depth by Edouard Glissant in his epic volume *Discours antillais* (1981). According to his account, the founding moment of Caribbean history is not a singular experience at all, but rather a series of traumatic breaks, foremost among them the Middle Passage, which brought hundreds of thousands of Africans into an entirely unfamiliar world from which they would never return. Glissant states:

> *Les Antilles sont le lieu d'une histore faite de ruptures et dont le commencement est un arrachement brutal, la Traite. Notre conscience historique ne pouvait pas 'sédimenter', si on peut ainsi dire, de manière progressive et continue, comme chez les peuples qui ont engendré une philosophie souvent totalitaire de l'Histoire, les peuples européens, mais s'agrégait sous les auspices du choc, de la contraction, de la négation douloureuse et de l'explosion. Ce discontinu dans le continu, et l'impossibilité pour la conscience collective d'en faire le tour, caracterisent ce que j'appelle une non-histoire.* (223-224)

Paradoxically, while the history of the Caribbean is more properly a *non-histoire* because of the structural discontinuity in which it has been shaped from the very beginning, it is

yet all the more subject to constant probing. Glissant notes that the past, because it is not yet history, is very much living in the present:

> *Le passé, notre passé subi, qui n'est pas encore histoire pour nous, est pourtant là (ici) qui nous lancine. La tâche de l'écrivain est d'explorer ce lancinement, de le 'révéler' de manière continue dans le présent et l'actuel.* (226)

According to his pronouncement, the writer's task is not to portray the events of history as such – for this would be an impossibility – but to continually explore the explosive past and its overwhelming presence in the current moment. Such a task is indeed descriptive of both Agnant's work in this novel, and her portrayal of Emma's lifelong goal to bring her knowledge of the past – gained through both personal and academic exploration – to light.

While Glissant's use of the word “lanciner” alludes to physical pain, it is rather a psychological affliction that he chooses to momentarily consider as a way of describing the peculiar Caribbean sense of history. Furthermore, this term broaches a certain temporal formulation, wherein the injury of the past, psychic or physical, is made forcibly clear in the present through pain. In a short note, the author wonders:

> *Serait-il dérisoire ou odieux de considérer notre histoire subie comme cheminement d'une névrose ? La Traite comme choc traumatique, l'installation (dans un nouveau pays) comme phase de refoulement, la période servile comme latence, la 'libération' de 1848 comme réactivation, les délires coutumiers comme symptômes et jusqu'à la répugnance à*

> *'revenir sur ces choses du passé' qui serait une manifestation du retour du refoulé ? Sans doute n'est-il pas utile et ne deviendrait-il pas probant de fouiller un tel parallèle. Le refoulé historique nous persuade pourtant qu'il y a peut-être là plus qu'un jeu d'esprit. Quel psychiatre saurait problématiser le parallèle ? Aucun. L'histoire a son inexplorable, au bord duquel nous errons éveillés. (229)*

In this formulation, the Middle Passage would be an event both individually and collectively repressed throughout time. However, Glissant's ambivalence to the possibility of such a parallel between the workings of psychological neurosis and the manifestations of the Caribbean past within the present should be fully taken into account.[116] While he asserts that it is not necessarily useful, or even possible, to argue for such a parallel, Glissant does find something compelling in the structure of repression, which would render the idea of a *refoulé historique* more than simply a clever observation and into an idea worth considering.

The comparison drawn between the structure of psychic repression and the workings of Caribbean history also broaches one of the central themes in Agnant's novel, which is the passage of an initial trauma throughout generations in the Caribbean. *Le Livre d'Emma* also presents the figure of the psychiatrist, while portraying him as incapable of understanding the situation of his patient, from the basic aspect of language to the more complicated implications of her particular suffering. Like Glissant, Agnant draws a connection between traumatic history and mental illness,[117] for though Emma's condition remains ambiguous, it is described as a form of devastating *folie*. Furthermore,

Glissant's particular dismissal of a specific structure of psychoanalytic inquiry in the excerpt quoted above is echoed in the novel. According to the philosopher, this seemingly fruitful parallel could never be put into practice, not only because history maintains an element of the *inexplorable*, but also because this very abyss is experienced in a wakened state by the Caribbean. Glissant's figure of the "historically repressed" is in fact wide awake and consciously wandering along the edges of the past. As I will emphasize in the following analysis, Emma is not afflicted by a haunting lack of knowledge, but rather by too clear a view of the traumatic past, and her wounds are not repressed but rather continually apparent.

Glissant's emphasis on the Middle Passage is also key to my analysis of *Le Livre d'Emma*. While the *inexplorable* of history remains abstract, it does take on a spatial characterization, with the prepositional *au bord* indicating the Atlantic Ocean. While Glissant does not mention it specifically, this body of water is surely the abyss that Glissant has in mind, for he proposes that *la Traite* – conducted through the Atlantic – is the initially repressed event in the history of the Caribbean. If we take the Middle Passage and its resonance throughout the Atlantic to be the *inexplorable* of history, it is possible to further understand Glissant's ambivalence toward the intervention of psychoanalytic terminology.[118] In this case, repression would not be an activity of the individual or collective psyche, but would rather be an inherent aspect of Caribbean history itself, dictated by the very medium – the Atlantic – through which it came into being. The Middle Passage is unknown not because it has been repressed, but rather because it is unknowable. In the context of *Le Livre d'Emma*, the Atlantic is similarly construed as the

realm of the *inexplorable*, wherein the trauma of history has been inscribed, but remains unrecovered.

Continuing to describe the relationship of the Caribbean writer to history, Glissant writes that "*Parce que la mémoire historique fut trop souvent raturée, l'écrivain antillais doit 'fouiller' cette mémoire, à partir des traces parfois latentes qu'il a repérées dans le réel*" (227-228). Not only is it Agnant's express purpose to bring these latent traces back to life, but this formulation also describes the tortured process that Emma undergoes, with the assistance of Flore, in order to finally be capable of writing her own book, so to speak. In the novel, it becomes clear that the trauma of the slave trade and its effects upon the collectivity of women who suffered it has been passed on through time, producing profound effects upon contemporary Caribbean women. The case of Emma shows both that history itself is very much alive in the present, and that it is articulated with much difficulty. Indeed, what Agnant strongly suggests throughout the novel is that Emma does not simply wish to recount the evils of slavery, or to commemorate this dark period of history, but rather that she lives it quite viscerally, as a personal affliction that must consciously be accounted for.[119] In portraying the violence of the slave ship, and situating the entry into the New World as a form of horrific birth, Agnant defines the Atlantic as the abyss from which a history of trauma issues. In demonstrating how deeply Emma experiences the past, Agnant does not only propose that this character suffers from the transmission of memory, of which she could have no personal experience, but she also indicates that the social structures upon which slavery was based may indeed continue to exist in contemporary forms.

Tout ce bleu

Introducing Emma to the reader, Flore explains that, "*Pendant longtemps, elle n'avait eu de mots que pour décrire le bleu intense qui enserre en permanence un lambeau de terre abandonnée au milieu de l'océan*" (7). Flore indicates that, in addition to refusing French, Emma's language functions under strict parameters, capable only of evoking the overwhelming and possessive force of the water against the insignificance of the land. According to Dr. MacLeod, who is in charge of Emma's care, this blue is one of the only elements of her long monologues that he has been able to comprehend, for in some moments, Emma "forgets herself" and switches out of Créole and into French. Exasperated, the doctor tells Flore: "*Il n'y est question que du bleu: le bleu du ciel, le bleu de la mer, le bleu des peaux noires, et la folie qui serait venue dans les flancs des bateaux négriers*" (8). This blue, meant to express a form of madness, is also that which links the human, natural and metaphysical realms, tying them together inseparably. While these elements of Emma's speech are linguistically comprehensible to the doctor, they also function as a kind of verbal impediment. The blue in this case seemingly indicates nothing significant to the doctor, nor does the cited madness of the slave ships, and yet her supposedly delirious speech actually refers to a complex symbolic element in the story of the Middle Passage and its trauma that Emma seeks to tell. Indeed, she herself tells the doctor that all this blue is merely a cover: "*L'important est de savoir ce qui se cache derrière le bleu. J'ai passé une grande partie de mon existence à essayer de trouver, à tenter de comprendre*" (19-20). While Emma claims that the blue enveloping

Grand-Lagon presents her with her own interpretive task, it is also the case that her repeated lament of "*tout ce bleu*" is a challenge to the doctor and to Flore, who must divine its meaning. Emma indicates that "*une mélancolie indicible flotte dans tout ce bleu*" (21), and if that is the case, the verbal repetition of the blue serves as a proxy for all that is unable to be said, a signifier of an inexpressible past.

The color blue itself should immediately call to mind the Atlantic Ocean, the vast body of water and medium through which the transatlantic slave trade was conducted. As such, this blue serves as the reminder of a violent history that came into being on the water. Within this study itself, the sea has been interpreted as a site of resurfacing, a realm of both death and rebirth. In contrast to this cyclical process, in Agnant's telling – through the words of Emma – the Atlantic is largely construed as the space of death that threatens to overtake the island and its inhabitants ad the blue is the reflection on land of the traumatic journey suffered at sea. According to Emma, this reflection is a signifier of death that covers the island and its inhabitants throughout their lives, following them into their final moments: "*Ceux qui meurent à Grand-Lagon…s'en vont, les bras tendus vers l'horizon, en un ultime effort pour s'emparer d'un pan de ce bleu qui les enveloppe toute la vie, comme un linceul*" (21). Yet the blue is not death itself, but rather a living reflection of it, and on this miserable island of Emma's birth, life and death are reversed. She claims: "*Tout ce bleu et toute son angoisse sont les seules et unique choses vivantes à Grand-Lagon, où les vivants n'ont seulement que l'apparence de vivants. Je dis bien apparence, parce que, sur les bateaux, déjà, nous étions morts*" (22). In Emma's description, a kind of death has already been suffered as a consequence of the Middle

Passage, though for her the event is not past at all, but very much a condition of the present. Within this morbid portrait lies a concept of living death that defines not only the victims of a collective historic trauma – and those descendants of slaves on the island – but also conveys the precarious existence of Emma herself.

That the New World was overwhelmingly a place of death for enslaved Africans who were brought there by European traders is not a surprising observation. Christopher Miller comments in his book *The French Atlantic Triangle* (2008) that part of the reason such an overwhelming number of Africans were taken to such a geographically small place was that their mortality was counted upon, for their lives were entirely expendable. It was, in fact, cheaper to bring more bodies across the seas than to provide conditions that were healthy enough for reproduction to occur, or for lives to be lived into old age (27). As he observes, "death drove the slave trade and kept it going" (31). Indeed, Orlando Patterson, in his *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) compares the Southern United States to the Caribbean and finds that though the former imported the smallest number of slaves, they had the largest population by 1825, whereas the latter, who imported more than forty percent of the slaves to the New World, had only twenty percent of them by 1825, a discrepancy caused by both higher death rates and lower birth rates in the Caribbean (161-162). The Caribbean islands were quite literally a place ravaged by death, but for Patterson, this extends to the conceptual level, in the form of enslavement as a "social death" indicating the denial of personhood to the enslaved. Commenting generally on the relationship between master and slave, Patterson writes:

> The master was essentially a ransomer. What he bought or acquired was

> the slave's life, and restraints on the master's capacity wantonly to destroy his slave did not undermine his claim on that life. Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his matter, he became a social nonperson. (5)

In the last chapter, I also discussed the concept of social death[120] but return to it here in order to emphasize that Emma's assessment of a state of death within life is very much attuned to the historical consequences of slavery. Those who only appear to be living, by her account, are still enshrouded in this condition, and this present state is collapsed into that of the past. As such, the suffering of Grand-Lagon expands throughout time, with the result that Emma herself is subject to the consequences of enslavement, centuries after it was in effect.

This state of living death may also be construed as an aquatic phenomenon, which would more specifically render it a state of living "underwater," for Emma's repetition of "*tout ce bleu*" invokes the metaphorically sunken state of the island, submerged in a traumatic past. In the last chapter, I showed how Edwidge Danticat's "Children of the Sea" and *Claire of the Sea Light* demonstrate the porous distinction in Haitian Vodou between the realm above the water and the realm below (or *anba dlo*). Located above is the living present and below, the non-living existence of the ancestors. In the story "Children of the Sea" a boat of refugees fleeing Haiti slowly sinks, and this scene may be understood as showing the collapse of the two realms, as they become temporarily indistinguishable. Life and death become confused, and cease to take on their full meaning. In Danticat's text, this slow collapsing demonstrates a belief in death that is not

an ending or disappearance, but rather another realm that has an existence apart from but related to the living present. In a similar way, the island of Emma's birth presents a space wholly situated neither in the present nor in the past. It is caught between the world above and below the water, floating, as Emma says, between sky and sea (19). However, unlike Danticat's more salvational interpretation, the indistinction between life and death in *Le Livre d'Emma* presents a state of unearthly misery. The island is shrouded in the traumatic history of slavery, as embodied in the blue of the Atlantic Ocean, and as such, it is metaphorically underwater. Rather than the stories of the past resurfacing – as was the case in other works throughout this study, and Philip's *Zong!* within this chapter – here the residents of Grand-Lagon are rather drowning in history.

To further elucidate this poetics of submersion, I turn briefly to C.L.R. James's famous work on the Haitian Revolution, *Black Jacobins* (1938) in which the author expounds upon the worldwide significance of the Haitian Revolution of 1803-1804. In speculatively describing the appearance of the Caribbean islands as they became cultivated through slave labor, James writes:

> Field upon field, the light green sugar-cane, low and continually rippled in the breeze, enclosed the factory and the dwelling houses like a sea; a few feet above the cane-stalks waved the five-foot leaves of banana trees; near the dwelling-houses the branches of the palm, crowning a perfectly rounded and leafless column of sixty or seventy feet, gave forth, like huge feathers, a continuous soothing murmur. (22)

In this depiction of the island scenery formed by the slave economy, it is as though the

very qualities of the Atlantic, its rippling and murmuring, have come to define the land itself. Coming after the author's graphic representation of the Middle Passage, I would argue that in James's portrayal of the plantation, we are meant to read the violence of the Middle Passage as an inherent aspect of this bucolic scene. It is the very inescapability of the sea that defines the poetics of the land, and in this way, they become indistinguishable. Similarly, Emma sees the blue of the Atlantic in the very bodies of Grand-Lagon, projecting the color of the Middle Passage upon the island itself, but more particularly upon those descendants who were victims of slavery. When Emma later meets her great-aunt Mattie - a relationship I discuss in further detail - this older woman explains that the waters that bathe Grand-Lagon bring with them the malediction of history:

> *Grand-Lagon, ce bout de terre accroupi au milieu de l'océan, Grand-Lagon, faut pas avoir peur de le dire, c'est une terre de malédiction, Emma. Cette eau qui la baigne depuis le jour de sa naissance, cette eau, dans son bleu si bleu, cache des siècles de sang vomi des cales des négriers, sang de tous ces nègres que l'on jêtait par-dessus bord. C'est ainsi que la malédiction est entrée. Elle s'est infiltrée dans l'eau des rivières, dans celle que nous buvons, elle s'est mêlée à notre sang, l'a corrompu.* (112)

It becomes clear that the Atlantic hides nothing, and that rather than diluting the blood of a traumatic history, it rather serves as a conduit. But Mattie's description evokes the role of water in a way that is structurally quite different than the resurfacing that I have

analyzed in other works so far. Rather than a cyclical process indicating the emergence of the past from the sea onto the present shores, here Agnant describes the infiltration of history into the physical reality of those descended from the slave system, such that the traumatic past is inseparable from the very bodies of those living in the present.

The Middle Passage as Violent Birth

While Emma does suffer the memory of the Middle Passage, as it is passed down through generations of women in her family, it is arguably the conditions of her birth that make her particularly receptive to this history. Speaking of her childhood to Flore, Emma discusses at length the tortured relationship she shared with her mother, Fifie, for as she recalls, "*Elle est incapable du moindre effort d'affection; mais moi, je l'aime d'un amour imuable*" (61). These conditions begin with the circumstances of Emma's birth, which was not birth in the traditional sense, but rather an escape from death. She recalls, "*Nous sommes cinq, d'un seul coup cinq enfants, cinq filles mort-nées*" (52). Nearly thrown away with the others, Emma was narrowly saved by her own "cri perçant" (53): "*Oui Poupette*," she tells Flore, "*j'étais là pour rester, bien décidée à tout savoir et à faire le voyage jusqu'au bout*'" (54). Her life, however, is unwelcome, and she is only adopted by her mother unwillingly: "*Jadis, on les enterrait vivants, tout de suite, le jour même. Mais aujourd'hui, les choses ont changé, semble dire la sage-femme au visage déconfit qui, comme Fifie, aurait préféré nous voir mortes toutes les cinq*" (55). But this rejection by her mother from the day of her birth is caused at least in part by superstition, for she was born with hair already on her head, a sure sign of malediction:"*Un enfant né coiffé, ce*

n'est pas acceptable, mais un têtard qui, dans le ventre de sa mère déjà s'approprie ce qui ne lui appartient pas, c'est le malheur assuré." Emma, however, changes the meaning of this sign, and rather interprets it as both the source of her knowledge of her own birth, as well as the indication of her increased understanding of a world destroyed by a traumatic past:

> *Et, moi, malgré mon apparence de têtard crevé -c'est ainsi qu'on me décrit -, je sais déjà tout cela, car je suis venue au monde portant sur mon crâne mou cinq coiffes, la mienne plus celle de mes quatre soeurs. Je jouis donc de la chance extraordinaire de tout comprendre, de comprendre pour cinq. Bref, cela, surtout, faisait peur à Fifie.* (55)

Indeed, this connection with her sisters, who did not survive, is also indicated by Tante Grazie in her callously gruesome description of the birth:

> *On aurait dit un amas de crapauds crevés, racontait toujours tante Grazie, frémissante d'horreur. 'Celle-là, disait-elle, en faisant référence à moi bien entendu, criait pour toutes les autres dont on n'a jamais entendu la voix. Pauvre Fifie, elle en était tellement effrayée que je devais parfois bâillonner cette chose affreuse qui hurlait nuit et jour.* (54)

The description of Emma and her sisters as *têtards* and *crapauds* alludes once again to water as the fluid division between life and death. These amphibious creatures are neither fully aquatic nor fully terrestrial, their liminality further evoking the existence of those, such as Emma, who bridge the realms of life and death.[121] Furthermore, she carries the visible reminder of the sisters who died, meaning that, though a survivor of this traumatic

event, she is corporeally joined to their death. Finally, she indicates that their loss makes her aware of circumstances that she could not otherwise understand. In this way, it is the presence of a collective that allows Emma an immediate and unmitigated experience of the traumatic event.

I propose to extend this notion of collectivity by demonstrating the link Agnant makes between Emma's own journey through the womb and the Middle Passage, for this traumatic birth is meant to serve as a metaphor for the traumatic journey to the New World undergone by enslaved Africans. As quoted above, Emma declares that she intends to see this "voyage" that began with her birth to the end. Furthermore, she links this event to the collective history of the descendants of enslaved Africans: "*Je fais partie de l'immense cohorte d'avortons et de têtards, ceux dont l'existence n'est que simple apparence, mais qui, paradoxalement, s'y agrippent avec la force du désespoir*" (60). This exaggerated description belies a notion of the juxtaposition of life and death that is an attribute of the collective survival of the slave trade. It is significant that Emma does not portray her fate as singular but rather as an effect of a phenomenon extending throughout time into the present. As previously suggested, the blue that Emma mentions throughout her account signifies the blue of the Atlantic as experienced during the Middle Passage, and this blue is also present the day of her birth. She recalls that "*Le matin où mes soeurs et moi nous sommes libérées de l'utérus de Fifie, cette même aube bleuâtre s'étend sur les montagnes qui enserrent Grand-Lagon.*" She continues, again referring to her knowledge of the event itself: "*Tout ce que je sais, c'est le bleu*" (52). This assertion certainly recalls Glissant's formulation of the *inexplorable*, which cannot be fully known,

but which is located within the purview of the wanderer. Emma's overwhelming awareness of her present life and the past she has inherited are contained in this blue of the Atlantic, which conveys a paradoxical knowledge. In previous chapters, I examined representations of the sea that construe this vast abyss as both a womb and a tomb which takes in the various members of a community while rendering their stories, memories and myths back to land. Indeed, this dual role is at the very heart of resurfacing. However, Agnant modifies this metaphor such that the actual womb – which in this case becomes also a tomb – symbolizes the voyage across the sea. It is clear in this text that the violence of the Middle Passage is replayed in the trauma that is an essential feature of Emma's coming into the world. Her arrival in Grand-Lagon through her mother's womb thus echoes the arrival of the many thousands of Africans brought to the Caribbean as slaves.

Silent Memories: Trauma through Time

As the blue that plagues Emma's perception of the island thwarts immediate comprehension and so serves as a call to interpretation, a general line of inquiry is also opened up within the first few pages of the book, regarding Emma's infanticide. This tragic crime was allegedly committed by Emma not long after her academic thesis - with the history of the transatlantic slave trade as its subject - was rejected a second time by her academic committee in Montreal. This document had also been refused by a committee in Bordeaux, where Emma initially began writing, and the significance of Bordeaux as a main port in the triangular trade should certainly be taken into account.

Meeting with Emma's social worker, Flore learns about the academic thesis, but it also becomes apparent to her that a connection lies between the two events, as the social worker asks: "*Et puis, comment établir une relation de cause à effet entre sa thèse et le meutre de son enfant?*" (15) This connection assumes much, for it posits a causal relation between the rejection of the thesis and the infanticide, but also seems to indicate the impossibility of establishing the grounds for such a relation.[122] Later, Doctor McLeod will repeat the same question to Flore: "'*Le jury a rejeté la thèse d'Emma à cause d'un manque de cohérence...Elle était incapable de démontrer certains faits qu'elle avançait. Peut-on utiliser ce rejet pour expliquer son acte?' plaide le docteur MacLeod, sans se rendre compte qu'il touche là à l'essence même du drame vécu par Emma*" (65). It is precisely an effect of what Glissant calls *non-histoire* (Discours antillais 224) that Emma's intellectual work would remain incapable of clearly demonstrating or (chrono-)logically situating the details of the deeply ruptured Caribbean past. The rejection of her thesis is, of course, meant to be seen as a failure on the part of this academic (and distinctly colonial) apparatus to access the complex workings of a non-linear temporality that characterizes such a history. However, the question of course remains: what is this "essence" of the drama - or the trauma - undergone by Emma that would lead to such extreme measures?

In the connection between Emma's foiled attempt to revise history and the extreme measures she subsequently takes, it is possible to unravel the nature of the traumatic past's effect upon her. On the one hand, her obsession with rewriting the history of the slave trade, and the privileged collective knowledge that she cites as a form of

birthright, may be see as the effect of a memory that has been passed on to her through generations. On the other hand, if this infanticide indicates her total submersion in a past from which she cannot resurface, then her *folie* is not a consequence of memory alone, but rather a recognition of the contemporary reality that women descended from enslaved Africans still suffer throughout the world. What remains to be understood is the mechanism of memory throughout time, and the ways in which Agnant's character comes to embody its transmission. Though Emma herself expresses a visceral knowledge of trauma from the moment of her birth, she is surrounded by the silences of others. A common theme in Agnant's work,[123] silence in this novel signifies the *inexplorable*, or the ever present but unknown facets of collective memory. Not only is silence the foundation of Emma's relationship to Fifie, it is also inscribed in the very name of her surroundings, the island of Grand-Lagon. But these fictional silences reflect Agnant's declared project to vocalize the silences of Haiti's history. As Emma comes into life, crying out against the muteness of both her mother and her motherland, Agnant herself writes this work under the pretext of bringing the traumatic aspects of the Haitian past into contemporary recognition.

In the course of describing her mother, Emma claims that, "*il m'arrive souvent de croire que je porte au fond de moi les silences de Fifie...Comme Fifie nous a portées dans son utérus, moi, je porte les silences de Fifie*" (57). It is clear that the roles of mother and daughter are somewhat reversed, also signified in the name "Fifie", which indicates a diminutive girlishness and certainly reinforces the reversal of maternal character for spite. Furthermore, recalling that Fifie's womb provides a metaphor for the Middle Passage, it

would seem that these silences Emma is forced to carry are precisely the absence of acknowledgement of this vast trauma in her immediate community. But this passage of silence from mother to daughter also signals the way in which the hushed memory of trauma movies through time, affecting generation after generation. Later in the novel, Emma describes her time with Mattie, a cousin of her grandmother Rosa, who is largely responsible for breaking the silences that shrouded her childhood with Fifie. At school, Emma attempts to write about the slave trade in an academic composition, presumably drawing from what she learns in the oral history provided by Mattie. A precursor to the later rejection of her thesis, the composition turns her into the object of public scorn. Assuring Mattie that "*Moi, je connais la vraie raison des silences*," Emma explains that "*nous préférons les silences pour faire semblant d'oublier. Lorsqu'on découvre ce secret, on est affolé*" (155).

The beginning of Emma's life is spent surrounded by absence. Not only is she confronted with *tout ce bleu* – a moniker of the Atlantic Ocean that also indicates the realm of history's *inexplorable* – but the very island of her birth is also named for a blank space. Grand-Lagon of course simply indicates a physical feature, but it must also be read as pointing to a basic psychological feature of this place. *Lagon*, or in English "lagoon", is a shallow body of water that is separated from a larger body of water by a mass such as a barrier reef. Etymologically, the word stems from the Latin *lacuna*, meaning an absence. This naming employed by Agnant to describe the world where "*tout ce bleu*" reigns therefore signifies a vast blank space. The name also recalls Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, particularly a passage toward the end of the poem that speaks

of memory in terms of the lagoon:

> *Que de sang dans ma mémoire! Dans ma mémoire sont des lagunes. Elles sont couvertes de têtes de morts. Elles ne sont pas couvertes de nénuphars. Dans ma mémoire sont des lagunes. Sur leurs rives ne sont pas étendus des pagnes de femmes. Ma mémoire est entourée de sang. Ma mémoire a sa ceinture de cadavres.* (35)

The dual meaning of *lagune* signifies both the body of water itself, which the author remembers, and the absences of memory that cannot be recovered. However, what is most compelling in this passage - and most resonant with Agnant's portrayal of Emma's memory - is that the *lagune* is both an absence and a presence, for what may be read literally as bodies of water, and figuratively as gaps in memory, are covered with the heads of the dead, and surrounded by blood. It would seem that, in this portrayal, where the absence of memory lies, the horror of history will arise in its place. Furthermore, the insistence upon an aquatic body is significant, for this dissertation has so far examined the tension between water's capacity to hide, as well as its tendency to reveal. All those living in Grand-Lagon are, according to Emma, both burdened by the weight of a history that is impossible to fully understand, yet also unaware that this history enshrouds their everyday existence.

Agnant herself laments the absence of the slave trade in memory, and states in a 2005 interview with Florence Raymond Jurney that this blank space is precisely what her novel works against:

> *Je crois que la période de l'esclavage dans les romans haïtiens –*

> *contrairement aux Antilles françaises – est tout à fait absente, sinon refoulée. C'est une période tabou. Au fait, on peut toujours prétendre que Haïti a tant d'autres problemes immédiats, urgents. La littérature se cantonne sans doute plus dans le ludique ou dans l'urgent, dans le politiquement immédiat, le quotidien. Du reste, quand ce livre a paru, certaines gens se sont montrés étonnés, comme si, jusqu'à un certain point ils se demandaient: quel est le rapport entre Haïti et l'esclavage? Vous voyez? … Je trouve cela dramatique par contre que l'on perde ou occulte certains pans de la memoire collective. C'est aussi une manière de mesurer les dégâts de l'aliénation. Pour moi, il est important non pas de cultiver cette mémoire, mais d'utiliser l'éclairage qu'elle nous transmet.* (388)

The fact that this memory of slavery is considered collective by Agnant is intriguing, for she creates in Emma a character who remains entirely solitary. Yet the solitary state which leads memory to become *folie* would seem to imply the vast importance of collective memory, privileging it over the individual experience. Notably, Agnant's solution to the problem of silence is not merely to commemorate the past. As she says, cultivating memory is less important in her work than using the memory of the past to clarify the present, and the attention that Agnant gives to the current moment extends to the present analysis of *Le Livre d'Emma*, for the infanticide which becomes the key point of inquiry around which Emma's life story revolves, is not brought on by the past existence of slavery – or not only – but rather by its continued existence in contemporary forms.

Women and Water

One key feature of Emma's journey, which begins with the knowledge of her traumatic birth and extends through her obsessive quest for an understanding of the past, is the time spent with Mattie, who will not only endow Emma with the history of the women in her family, going back to the original African ancestor Malaiyka, but will also begin to acquaint her with the horrors suffered aboard the slave ships. It is here that the silences Emma has carried become voiced. As Emma tells Flore: "*C'est avec Mattie que j'ai commencé à comprendre notre histoire et ce qui s'était passé au bord des négriers*" (117). Emma comes to Mattie after an episode that finally causes her to flee the grips of Fifie and Grazie. Fifie takes the young Emma to a "sorcière" named Azwélia, charged with performing magic that will endow the young girl with "*une charme impeccable*" (90). However, these operations have the effect of also removing Emma's memory. To Flore, she recalls: "*C'est au cours de ces cérémonies étranges, auxquelles je prends part malgré moi, durant ces trois jours chez Azwélia, que bon nombre de mes souvenirs m'ont été enlevés. Ablation, extraction, excision…*" (91). That the removal of memories is the goal of this ceremony, meant to endow the young girl with an innate attractive quality, posits a relationship between social viability and forgetting. The frightening implication here is that one must forget precisely to be part of the collective, an idea the young girl certainly refutes in running away. Managing to escape this place, she runs to Mattie, who takes on the task of refurbishing Emma's memory and instilling in her the drive to probe the past.

Mattie herself maintains a philosophy of memory that she espouses to Emma and that is meant to help in coping with the unbearable yet unavoidable nature of the past as recollected in the present. The fine line between knowing and unknowing that the descendants of trauma walk is contained in this advice: "*La mémoire est parfois bourrasque, ressac, sable qui nous engloutit. Mais elle est aussi cette branche à laquelle s'accrocher quand les marées sont trop fortes*" (119). If the past functions as a relentless flood, threatening to overtake the present, then memory can either serve to bury its victims or may become a buoyant means of rescue. This split in the purpose of memory is embodied in the divisive fates of two women from Emma's family, her grandmother Rosa, and Kilima, the first African slave taken to the New World. These women both suffer the trauma of the slave trade, and both turn to the water for salvation, but while one will be reborn into life, the other will be carried away in the waters. These two separate endings - one moving toward life and the other toward death - shadow the constant tension of Emma's life as well. Enshrouded in a past that takes its form as "*tout ce bleu*", she is neither on one side nor the other, and exists in a state of living death from which she is unable to emerge, but the stories of Rosa and Kilima provide Emma with two examples of escape from this stagnant state.

Mattie describes the happy marriage between Rosa and Baptiste, which is envied by the women of the community and scorned when it produces two light-skinned children, Fifie and Grazie. Baptiste, failing to recognize himself in them because of their light skin, eventually leaves, with the rumors of the town in his wake. Rosa is devastated, and only more so by the continued hatred of her twin daughters, who despise her dark

skin. Fifie and Grazie eventually leave, for, according to Mattie: "*Elles n'étaient rivées à aucune perche, elles flottaient, n'étaient arrimées à aucun quai*" (122). With the intercession of the ghosts of deceased women in her family, Rosa is able to cope with the shame of these losses. She undergoes a form of baptism in the ocean, with each of these women throwing water upon her and calling for her to emerge from the water, under the name Rosa Guinée (the latter monicker signifying the African homeland). Rising under the watchful spirits of these women, she is reborn, and as Mattie describes: "*C'est donc à partir de ce songe que Rosa mit fin à sa dérive. À l'océan…Rosa fit don de cette immense détresse qu'elle traînait partout. Plus question de vouloir mourir. Elle se tenait debout dans la vie*" (125). This scene describes the redemptive quality of memory as shown in Rosa's bathing in the ocean with its capacity to take in the suffering of trauma. However, as Emma learns through the story of Kilima, the water is also a place of death.

The mystery of skin color that afflicts Rosa's twin daughters is not a fluke but rather the living sign of a traumatic heritage of rape, whose quality of secrecy renders it impossible for Rosa to clarify. In learning the story of Kilima, Emma begins to understand the violence that infiltrates her own mother's birth, and the corruption of the relationships between women that affect herself and Fifie. Mattie recounts the voyage of Kilima across the Atlantic:

> *La traversée, impitoyable, sur ce négrier n'était qu'une clameur continue, un mugissmement horrible qui montait de l'antre du navire, et que seul l'océan recueillait. Accroupie dans un coin de la cale, Kilima se laissait bercer par le clapotis de l'eau tandis que cette voix qu'elle n'en était*

qu'au premier de ces longs voyages de misère (133).

With the verb "bercer" this voyage once again refers to the mothering of the Middle Passage, both violent and serene, in which the ocean provides the route through the womb of the slave ship. When she is "born" into the New World, she is immediately baptized by her owner, also under the name Rosa, initiating her into the life of a slave (133). Mattie continues to tell Emma the story of Kilima's adopted mother Cécile whose attempts to protect the young woman from the men of the plantation, most notably their master Canot, are one day thwarted when he and several others enter her rooms and attack both the women. Cécile has her hands and feet cut after killing Canot with a cutlass, and Kilima is raped by the other men (156). After this violence, Kilima burns the plantation to the ground, and both she and Cécile flee to the mountains. However, Kilima is able neither to fully stay in the life of the *marronne,* an escaped slave, nor to survive her trauma: "*Plus tard, Kilima donna naissance à une fille qu'elle tenta de noyer, puis elle perdit la raison. Un jour, tout de blanc vêtue*[124]*, elle entra dans l'océan et ne revint plus jamais. Elle avait repris le chemin des grands bateaux*" (156). In this scene, the shroud of blue is replaced by that of white, which seems to lend it a resonance beyond the immediate context, for white is the color most often worn during Vodou ceremonial practices. In this way, the death of Kilima seems to refer not only to death – specifically that of suicide – but also to regenerating spiritual practices in general. This is the fate that Mattie predicts for Emma, telling her that Kilima's death will be her own: "*Comme dans un songe très ancien, tu répéteras les gestes des femmes du clan. Ces gestes qu'elles faisaient pour mettre leusr enfants à l'abris des garrots qui les étouffaient dans les cales*

des négriers et dans les champs de canne" (157). This statement contextualizes the act of infanticide that Emma will commit, as not only belonging to the effects of trauma suffered by women in her own family, but as a collective effect of slavery. The rape of Kilima, which is expressed through the skin color of Fifie and Grazie, is the predominant example of intergenerational trauma at the heart of this novel, and cited by Mattie in her explanation to Emma that Fifie's cruelty comes from a context of violence. She says, "*Le mal dont souffre ta mère vient de loin. Il coule dans nos veines, nous l'ingurgitons dès la première gorgée du lait maternel*" (108).[125] Though the water provides Rosa with a form of rebirth, and Kilima with her death, their fates help to clarify the violence that began in the hold of the slave ship and that infiltrates the relationships between mother and daughter in this work. In the context of the Middle Passage, the sea is construed as the first violent mother, which gives birth to the undercurrent of double animosity that is passed through this family line through the mother-daughter bond.

Throughout the novel, Agnant has portrayed Emma's deep knowledge not only of a traumatic past, but also of a traumatic present, and the contemporaneity of the effects and practices of slavery are demonstrated, while the signifying weight of the repeated phrase "*tout ce bleu*" poetically expresses the reality of a present submerged in the past. First, the title of the novel points toward the source of Emma's encounter with a present state of conceptual enslavement, for the "book" that she continually tries to author becomes ever an impossibility. While very little detail is provided about the thesis that is rejected, it may be presumed that Emma was attempting to capture the neglected elements of the history of the slave trade, such as the rich oral history which had been

passed down to her from Mattie. She refers to these lessons of her older relative as a form of book itself, as she tells Flore: "*Vivre avec Mattie, c'était comme vivre dans un grand livre, un livre qu'elle construisait chaque jour, page après page, et dans lequel je découvrais les arabesques et les méandres de l'âme des humains*" (109). We may assume that in her academic work, Emma was trying to capture the blank spaces that are left out of the written books of history, in the attempt to bring this *non-histoire* into being. While she tells Flore that with Mattie her understanding of history grew, she also recalls that the wisdom of this woman was only the beginning of her intellectual quest:

> *Mais après avoir quitté Mattie, ma soif de comprendre est devenue encore plus forte. J'ai fouillé dans les grands livres. J'ai tant cherché, Flore, si tu savais tout ce que j'ai pu lire. Des années entières j'ai cherché, pour découvrir la source de l'horreur et de cette haine. Les livres me rendaient folle, crois-moi.* (117)

This long search, which is never satisfied, provides the impetus for Emma's thesis, in which we may assume that she seeks to correct a written history that does not account for the source of its own circumstances nor its effects in the present. In a sense, Emma is attempting to perform a historiography on the *non-histoire* that cannot be fully written, for she insists that the reality of the slave trade itself is only recorded in the waters of the Atlantic:

> *C'est dans leurs cales que tout s'est écrit, dans les plies de la mer, dans le vent gorgé de sel et dans cette odeur de sang. Une odeur immonde, partout présente mais que l'on fait mine de ne plus reconnaître, enveloppe toujours*

> *l'île. Trop de sang, tant de sang...[c]oulées de sang, trainées de sang, rivières et océans de sang. Notre histoire est écrite avec du sang, et pour l'éternité nous pataugerons dans le sang (118).*

This passage recalls again Césaire's *lagune*, for the blank spaces of the past that Emma seeks to fill are not empty, but rather written in a medium that cannot be accounted for. Even while held in the mental hospital, Emma continues to write, attempting to bring this bloody memory into being. As Flore recounts: "*Parfois, elle lit un poème qu'elle a écrit au cours de la nuit. De long textes, pleins de hurlements, cris et corps d'enfants, de sirènes, de navires en partance, des corps d'ébène meurtris et déchirés*" (137). Clearly, these images recall the violence of both the slave trade and slavery more generally as practiced in the Caribbean. In her poetry, she attempts to find a new means to tell a history that lies beyond the grasp of a strictly academic account.

If I focus on the writing of Emma it is because the historic context in which the rejection of her thesis may be viewed is of the utmost importance to understanding her conception of herself as existing in a state of enslavement, which would lead to her act of infanticide. As Jean Fouchard writes in his *Les Marrons du syllabaire* (1953) literacy was forbidden to slaves throughout the francophone Caribbean. Although he does point out several instances of literacy among escaped slaves, it is clear – particularly if we look to the lack of slave narratives from the Caribbean – that slaves on the whole could not read and write, and were thus deprived of any formal way of telling their own history (Miller 35-36). Given this context, the rejection of Emma's thesis recalls this denial of literacy whose root was the very denial of humanity of Africans enslaved in the Caribbean.

The second factor that demonstrates the overwhelming presence of the structures instituted during the period of slavery more specifically relates to the infanticide. Throughout the entire novel, Emma is proven neither innocent nor guilty, and in only one instance does she comment on the murder of her daughter Lola, wherein she draws a direct link between the act and the slave trade:

> *Cette malédiction venue des cales des négriers est telle que le ventre même qui nous a porté peut nous écraser. Et la chair de ta propre chair se transforme en bête à crocs et, de l'intérieur, déjà te mange. Pour cela Lola devait mourir. Quelle importance, maintenant ou après, quelle importance? Comme moi, Lola était condamnée.* (162)

In this novel, the womb functions as a metaphor for the Middle Passage, with the arrival in the New World a violent birth which many did not survive. In this instance, Emma proposes that she herself also incarnates this principle, and that the violence of the womb from which she was born becomes her own. Yet in her account, the violence of the womb is met with the violence of the unborn child. This passage recalls Paul Gilroy's reading of the Hegelian dialectic between lord and bondsman in the former's analysis of the narrative of Frederick Douglass. According to Gilroy, the master and the slave are locked in an impasse of power whose position can only change with an act of violence.[126] Thus, not only does the womb come to symbolize the Middle Passage, but it also takes on the character of the fundamental relationship upon which the entire system of slavery rests. Therefore, I propose that we read Emma's description of the violent womb as Agnant's own contention that the relationship between the master and the slave has subverted the

intimacy of motherhood. In Emma's mind, she herself, in her position as a mother, has become a synecdoche of the violent impasse in which the master and slave are joined.

While the intense and present reality of slavery in the contemporary world explains Emma's infanticide, it also clarifies her suicide at the end of the novel. I have stipulated that the invocation of "tout ce bleu" indicates not only the overwhelming presence of the past, but also a collapsing of the divide between life and death, as represented by the influx of water on land. The trauma that Emma suffers renders life and death indistinguishable and situates her within a state of living death. That she eventually drowns herself in the Fleuve Saint-Laurent – which has occupied her gaze throughout her time in the hospital, during her long monologues to Flore – may be construed as the final consequence of her metaphorical drowning in past trauma throughout her life. However, Agnant specifically situates this death not in the context of submission, but rather as a final vanquishing of her state of subjection. Her supposed death (for a body is never found, though her white clothing is discovered on the banks of the river) remains mysterious, for her room was locked while her window was bolted, with no sign of an exit. Thus, this suicide presents a final escape not only from the state of confinement which, as a resonance of slavery, she suffers from the day of her birth, but also from the impasse of a living death.

I have demonstrated extensively, throughout this study, that the ocean is construed as both a womb and a tomb. Here, however, Agnant has Emma's death in the realm of the river, a body of water associated more with the liminality of the border and the linear movement through space and time. On the one hand, we may recall that in Haitian belief,

death – the realm of *anba dlo* – is not specifically associated with the ocean at all, but with any body of water, or any death. A person who is buried in the ground, for example, will still go *anba dlo*, to the world of the ancestors. As such, there is not necessarily a qualitative difference between the ocean and the river; indeed, Emma mentions that she has kept her eyes of the Fleuve Saint-Laurent, waiting for a signal from her women ancestors, though they were previously associated with the ocean. Water is interchangeable in this way. Furthermore, the motion of the river reinforces Emma's statement that she wanted to follow "*la route des grands bateaux*" (163), as Flore recalls upon learning of her death. In essence, she intends for her spirit to return to an African homeland, at least conceptually – another form of the afterlife in Haitian belief, as I pointed out in the last chapter. More than distinguishing between different bodies of water, Emma's death joins all waters, not only those of the river, the *lagune*, and the ocean, but also those waters of life and death. This is particularly significant given the diasporic context of the novel. Not only does Emma consider her entire lineage displaced by the transatlantic slave trade, but she herself has been further relocated to North America, and thus doubly removed from Africa.

In analyzing Emma's description of Grand-Lagon, I pointed out that in the context of this collapsing of life and death, resurfacing, as I have previously explored it in this project, is rendered impossible. The memory of the past cannot be pulled into the context of the present if the lived present is already submerged in this realm of the past. Again, if water provides a division between life and death, and Grand-Lagon is described by Emma as sinking in "tout ce bleu" – much like C.L.R. James's description of the island

plantation – then life and death have become indistinguishable. However, as Emma is finally able to narrate the individual and collective trauma her life to someone who is uniquely situated to understand it (for it is to Flore, who speaks her native language and carries her same cultural and racial background, that she tells her story, rather than Doctor MacLeod, who has does not share in the context of her suffering) the divide between life and death is finally instantiated. In this context, the narration that I have previously defined as a form of resurfacing does not join the past and present but rather is capable of constructively separating them, such that the cyclical death and rebirth of the past is able once again to take shape.

In the work of both M. NourbeSe Philip and Marie-Célie Agnant, bodies in the water have signified a collapsing of the division between temporal realms. In Philip's case, this is because water is the entryway into memory, and so it is to water that she turns in order to draw out the story of the *Zong* massacre. Her process is one of both passive and active participant, for as she allows the voices of those thrown into the depths to speak their own story, she also actively desecrates the only textual documentation of the event itself. In this way, she articulates the process of resurfacing through a reconception of the limits of knowledge that surround the *Zong* massacre itself and its role in the history of the slave trade, giving voice to those who have remained voiceless. Agnant, on the other hand, poses a significant problem to the concept of the resurfacing of memory in narrative form by demonstrating the inseparability of the past and present. If resurfacing has so far been employed in this study to define instances in which the

author, like Philip, pulls historical reality from the depths in order to both mobilize its material in the present and demonstrate the importance of past events to that present, then Agnant shows that significant limitations to this process may be posed when the trauma of the past has posed a form of temporal impasse. In this latter case, narrative is not a process of resurfacing, but rather becomes a means of distinguishing between past and present, such that the underwater realm does not threaten to overtake the land – thus submerging the living in the realm of the dead. Both authors thus stress the importance of bearing witness to the horrors of the slave system, and conceive this process as a form of "not-telling," in which the blank spaces of history must be fostered in order to allow for the traumas of Caribbean history to emerge.

Epilogue

Cercueils fluides, cimetières marins[127]

At its most narrow, the Mediterranean Sea stretches only nine miles wide. This is the Strait of Gibraltar, the entryway leading from the vast expanse of the Atlantic Ocean to the warm basin of the Mediterranean Sea. On the northern shore lies the Spanish city of Tarifa, and from this, the southernmost point of the European continent, one can easily see the shores of Africa across the water, a stretch of coastline that lies between the Moroccan cities of Tangier and Ceuta. Though the divide between these continents is comparatively slim at this point, the waters are treacherous. Tarifa is a city frequented by windsurfers for its famously challenging combination of currents and high winds. But it is not only European tourists who come from long distances to fight the elements in the Strait of Gibraltar, for this nine mile stretch of water has become the last hurdle between Africa and Europe for increasing numbers of migrants and refugees fleeing the grips of poverty and war in their homelands and hoping to find what little security they may in Spain, Italy, France, England, and other European host countries. But the passage is insecure in these overloaded vessels of dubious seaworthiness, which are operated by smugglers who aim to turn a tidy profit from the payments they extract from this desperate population. Many ventures fail, and the panicked cries of those in danger of sinking daily reach the radios of the Spanish coastguard.[128] Above the surface, this nine mile stretch of water is populated with large vessels entering the Mediterranean Sea and with tourists pursuing aquatic sports, but below the surface, it has become an underwater

graveyard for those who have not successfully made the crossing. Glissant evokes this disparity between the realms above and below the water in the essay “La Barque Ouverte,” particularly in the passage from which I draw the epigraph to this section.

Tarifa is of course not the only place where people brave the waters separating Africa from Europe. Many attempt to cross from points along the Libyan or Tunisian coastline, where a series of temporary dwellings have arisen to accommodate the influx of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa with the goal of reaching Italy. Another common route of immigration forgoes the Mediterranean Sea altogether, and instead begins on the western shores of Africa in order to reach Spain's Canary Islands, located just 60 miles (around 100k) west of Morocco's southern border. It should be clear that the risk of death in these crossings is tremendous. Even during the summer and spring, currents are unpredictable and storms may arise suddenly, capsizing or wrecking the packed vessels, which are often merely small fishing boats. In fact, the hope of these poorly conceived missions is generally not to reach shore, but rather to be rescued by the Italian or Spanish coastguard or Red Cross – and hopefully not the police – before it is too late.[129]

Besides the risk of death, the financial burden encumbered by those who choose to make the journey is immense. Though it is often an impossible prospect for a family to pay for the clandestine passage to Europe, many will scrounge and save to come up with the funds for a single member of the family. As the editors of the volume *Migrations des jeunes d'Afrique subsaharienne* (2011) claim: “*L'émigration représente en fait une forme d'assurance sociale dans les pays où la protection sociale est peu développée. La famille va décider collectivement d'envoyer l'un de ses membres à l'étranger, pour que cette*

personne soutienne les membres de la famille restés au pays" (21). The fact that so many continue to make this voyage, well aware of the risks and consequences, is a testament to the desperate circumstances in which their homelands are embroiled.

To give an idea of the scale of this wave of immigration, the *Guardian* reported that as of Sunday, June 7, 2015, over 50,000 migrants had entered Italy; 6000 had been rescued by the coastguard during that weekend alone; and an estimated 1800 had died so far this season.[130] This is a dramatic increase in numbers from 2014, which itself was a record year.[131] The almost daily reports of mass drowning come with estimates of the number rescued, the number of bodies recovered and the number believed to have perished in the waters, but these figures are difficult to decipher. On April 12, 2015, a capsized ship on its way to Italy left an estimated 400 disappeared into the waters.[132] Less than a week later, off the coast of Libya, another wreck left an estimated 700 dead.[133] But carefully reading the news coverage reveals just how uncertain the numbers can be, with reports relying on the best guesses of survivors or the images from helicopters circling overhead. This uncertainty reveals one of the key characteristics of water: it would seem to hide the dead.

Yet water is not a stable burial ground, and its contents remain ever susceptible to recovery. Such is the case in the recent recovery of an 18th century Portuguese slaving vessel off the coast of South Africa.[134] Just as divers were able to pull centuries-old bars of iron ballast – "the currency of the slave trade" – from the depths, the traces of history's most tragic events do eventually resurface. Water's paradoxical nature, which has been at the center of the preceeding chapters in this dissertation, comes to the fore here: while it

would seem to hide the dead and cover the past, water cannot reliably contain either those who have perished or their memory. This idea is reflected in Glissant's contention that "[L]'*expérience du gouffre est au gouffre et hors de lui*" (*Poétique de la Relation* 19). He explains that the horrifying death of those who perished during the slave trade is inherently connected to the fates of those who survived, who lived through slavery, and whose descendants now inhabit the globe. The *tautologie* by which he defines the Atlantic Ocean means that the lived experience of the shore consists, in part, of a reflection of the depths into which captive Africans were cast away along the Middle Passage (Ibid. 18). While, for Glissant, this tautology is a meagre repetition of the lived experience of the abyss on land, the concept of resurfacing takes this repetition and enriches its significance – not a logic of sameness in which meaning is lost, but rather a logic of continuity above and below the water's vast surfaces. As such, the experience of African descendants throughout the globe are interconnected, and the rupture of the journey across the Atlantic is also the occasion for interweaving the histories of populations throughout the world.

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In reference to a *campement* near the LaChapelle metro stop in Paris that was recently removed, journalist Maryline Baumard writes: "*C'est le paradoxe des migrants. On commence à les voir quand ils ont disparu. C'est vrai pour les morts de la Méditerranée. C'est aussi vrai au cœur de Paris.*"[135] Indeed, stories of the current crisis of migration, characterized by waves of both economic migrants fleeing poverty as well as refugees fleeing the violence of their war-torn countries, currently haunt the news.

Reports of capsized ships that leave North African shores with far too many passengers are a daily occurrence. Yet, as Baumard implies, what renders the stories of these migrants so visible is not only the scale of the crisis – set to be the largest wave of migration to Europe since the Second World War[136] – but also the horror of death by water, a form of disappearance.[137] This is the paradox: the current influx of migrants into Europe is so visible precisely because of the terrifying invisibility of the accompanying death. Of course, many photos appear in which bodies recovered by marine search and rescue missions have been placed upon the shore, but these also serve as reminders of the bodies that will never be recovered, that will be lost forever in the depths of the sea. It is difficult to imagine, yet according to Italian sociologist Alessandro dal Lago in his 2008 essay "Cercueil Fluides," it is imperative that the imagination compensate for a reality that cannot be fully known. In his provocative piece – at once journalism, historical account, literary theory and poetry – the author challenges the limitations of the imagination, and demands that we account for these tragic losses, at least by creating a mental space for the unthinkable event of drowning.

Dal Lago's essay begins with an article from the Associated Press detailing the discovery of a boat with eleven "practically mummified" bodies on the island of Barbados.[138] Having traveled 2000 miles across the Atlantic, this Senegalese fishing boat or *pirogue* lost its motor and was set adrift, far from the Canary Islands that its reported original 52 passengers had hoped to reach. Both lamenting their fate – as well as the fate of others who have died in similar circumstances – and exhorting the reader to imagine the gruesome details of such a tragic voyage, the author reflects on the status of such loss

of life It would seem that, for dal Lago, it is precisely because the final resting place is "fluid" that death in water is qualitatively different than death on land. The paradox of water is that what disappears into the depths is invisible, but only from the surface. In fact, everything in the water remains visible if one only has the capacity to see into the sub-marine. This condition of simultaneous visibility and invisibility becomes a powerful metaphor in this piece for the lives of migrants themselves.

That this *pirogue* reaches the shores of Barbados is, according to dal Lago, a mere coincidence, and he is haunted by alternate possibilities. He details the slow sinking of the boat that would have come to pass as the sun and water perform their natural functions, disintegrating the material of the vessel, and concludes: "*Et donc les Sénégalais ne seraient même pas restés l'ombre d'une hypothèse*" (110). This physical decomposition represents the impossibility of ever truly accounting for the shipwreck – a tragic event that echoes so many others like it. Moussa Touré, in his recent film *La Pirogue* (2012) forcefully portrays the voyage of a small fishing vessel that comes into similar circumstances. Filled with hopeful migrants, it leaves the coast of Senegal at night, with a captain wielding a GPS device, and just enough food and water to supply the passengers with several days of nourishment, by which time the entire outfit should reach the Canary Islands. However, the plan goes awry when a powerful storm disables their motor, pitches away much of their food, and results in the loss of one of their members. The rest of the film unfolds as a meditation on the hopelessness of their situation. Deprived of food and water, they die one by one until only several remain, and the small boat becomes a place of successive funerals as one after another find their final

resting place in the sea. Eventually, the survivors are rescued by the Spanish Red Cross, taken into custody, then finally returned to their respective homes, ending up right where they began the ill-fated journey. Through this slow and detailed portrayal, Touré envisions the tortured days spent waiting for death or for rescue that is the reality of many potential migrants making the trip from Africa to Europe. In this way, he incites the viewer to experience a scene that is otherwise impossible to imagine, employing his creative capacity to a devastating emotional effect.

Dal Lago similarly attempts to fill in the blank spaces of this transatlantic trip, accounting for details such as the lack of a motor and the significant difference between the reported number of original passengers and the number of bodies found in the boat. Here, the work of the imaginary takes the place of the known, and for the author, this report is a hypothesis, a speculation, an imagining, which are all part of a moral responsibility. In essence, visualizing the invisible becomes a vital component of present and future justice. He commands the reader to see the invisible occurrences along this oceanic journey, repeating the phrase "*Ouvrez les yeux et vous verrez*," or simply "*Voyez*," throughout, insisting not only upon our capacity, but also upon our responsibility to see the horrific end of these unfortunate migrants.[139] It is not only disappearance into the water, but also disappearance upon the vast and unaccountable waves of the Atlantic that renders their story invisible, and so dal Lago insists upon the language of vision. In one particularly gruesome description he writes: "*Vous les voyez mourir heure après heure, jour après jour, de soif et de faim, déshydratés, brûlants, congelés, incapable même de se disputer les dernières gouttes d'eau. Une semaine après,*

ils seront tous morts" (113). Yet with such images, and with his insistence upon the process of visualizing suffering and death that would otherwise remain invisible, dal Lago calls upon us not only to remember the dead, but also to see the invisible lives on land. In short, the fate of those who drown in their crossing to Europe is but the reflection of injustice faced by precarious populations.

Once again, he implores the imagination: "*Réfléchissez, voyez comment l'injustice les poursuit après la mort. Ils ne sont plus vivant mais pas morts non plus, étrangers même à cette mince couche de terre qui sépare l'existence et l'inexistence*" (115). In this instance, even final repose is a privilege that may be denied. But here, dal Lago maintains that those who die in invisibility also haunt the spaces of the living, and that it is our task to bring them into the imagination. As he claims: "*Le cerveau humain s'essouffle depuis toujours autour de la connaissance de l'invisible, en vain. Je ne doute pas, cependant, qu'il soit bénéfique de contempler, à l'aide de l'imagination, la possibilité d'un monde plus grand où les êtres invisibles entourent les êtres visibles*" (118). Indeed, the very fluid nature of those who drown, lacking the stability of the *cimetière marin*,[140] is what contributes to the instability of their location, for their fate is not only one of decomposition but also of transformation, into the very flora and fauna of the sea (115, 117). As such, the waters of the world may seem a vast container, but if the imagination is willing to bring the invisible into the visible sphere, the spirits of those disappeared at sea are able to resurface upon the land. Dal Lago writes of this particular haunting that, "*Ils glisseront à côté de vous par milliers, voiles impalpables, à peine sortis du ressac. Ils passeront à travers vos corps, parce que leur nature est incorporelle*" (118). Yet these

invisible beings who haunt the land start to resemble those who did make the successful crossing to Europe, and it becomes clear that imagining death might in fact be a way of imagining invisible lives of migrants. The author repeats once again his command:

> *Ouvrez les yeux et vous verrez. Ils glissent parmi nous, fuyant les lumières des réverbères. Ils se pressent autour des biens qu'une nature incorporelle ne peut consommer, et leur reflet danse sur les vitrines. Méditez sur la portée de leurs buts quand ils étaient grands et beaux comme nous et qu'ils ne présageaient pas un destin incorporel. Ce qui est pour nous démesure et que nous abandonnons à la putréfaction, était pour eux nécessité et mesure. Ce qui pour nous disparaît en fluctuations était pour eux nourriture, sommeil et tranquillité. Mais réfléchissez-y, si votre intellect ne fait pas naufrage dans les futilités, comment leurs buts, qui vous apparaissent comme indignes de votre opulence, et obéirent à des raisons trop inaccessibles pour être visibles.* (120)

Here, the ghosts who have emerged from the depths of the water, uncontained by their *cercueils fluides*, are in fact fused with the lives of migrants in Europe. It is not only spirits that are invisible, but also the marginalized populations, whose lives function according to an unseen – and thus rarely understood – logic.

As the author recalls, this daily report of migrants arriving on European shores – or capsizing before they have a chance – is not an entirely contemporary phenomenon. On the one hand, there have been many "boat people" throughout the globe and throughout time, fleeing their homelands for similar reasons. On the other hand, the

particular circumstances of this African and Middle Eastern population– who travel through deserts, stay temporarily in debilitating conditions awaiting passage to Europe, and eventually take to the water in order to reach a foreign shore – echoes the experience of the transatlantic slave trade.[141] While the boat with which the author begins his essay was heading for the Canary Islands, it reached the Caribbean islands instead, guided by the same currents that once transported millions of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean. He writes: *"Réfléchissez au fait que les momifiés à la Barbade furent guidés par les sillages des bateaux négriers. Portugais, Espagnols, Français et Anglais exploitaient les mêmes courants, le grand ruban transporteur d'eau chaude où les tourbillons du Pacifique et ceux des courants du Golfe se fondent*" (120). As if carried along by a vast oceanic memory, the very descendants of those African families who were torn apart by the transatlantic slave trade now drift along the same routes. This trajectory was therefore not only one of human ambition but also the product of a current that continues to sweep across the Atlantic today, and the timelessness of water's movement joins the tragic displacement of Africans, past and present.

Throughout this essay, Dal Lago commands the reader to utilize the faculty of imagination in order to bring the invisible into a visible reality. To recall a previous quote, the paradox of migrants in Europe is that they are visible only when they disappear. With the idea of the *cercueil fluide*, that paradox is represented by the very nature of water, with its ability to hide people and their lives in its depths, but never to truly bury the dead. The author's insistence upon imagination, and his recuperation of stories that can never be fully known, is representative of precisely what I have termed *resurfacing*

throughout this dissertation. My contention has been that what is seemingly lost in the depths never truly disappears, but is imminently capable of being recovered. Though vast bodies of water like the Atlantic Ocean are thought to be part of an aquatic abyss that can take in all that the land rejects – its people, its trash, its histories – it is necessary to see the Earth's aqueous covering as part of a vast circulatory system that is dynamic and not static. If we consider the fluid workings of the world, we may begin to see, along with dal Lago, that those who are lost, along with their stories, will be brought back to the surface. As such, resurfacing is both a creative project and a collective responsibility. Seeing what has been lost to the waters of the past in order to bring this flotsam and jetsam into the present context is a form of imagination that has been modeled by the works closely analyzed within this study. But it is not only the work of fiction. The visualization called for by dal Lago is also a call to action beyond the text, for it is in seeing the invisible realms of the world – the underwater graveyard that is reflected in the lived reality of marginalized populations – that a better future may come from the tragedies of the past. Therefore, while I have conveyed the creative element of resurfacing in literature, the concept could also be construed as a social, economic, and political awareness that takes account of a historical context working within the contemporary moment.

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The trend of what is termed *economic migration* [142] from Africa to Europe is a long-standing phenomenon, but it has developed into a full-blown crisis during the period in which I have been researching and writing this dissertation. Therefore, while this project was conceived of as a literary examination of individual and collective memory as

represented through bodies of water in fiction, it has taken on greater timely significance. Resurfacing is not only a recognition of the forgotten past that washes up on the shores of the conscious present. It is also an insistence upon historical context that guides understanding of the contemporary moment. Not only does the memory of the past resurface, but it seems that historical events themselves tend to return.

As I write this epilogue, a harrowing deadline has passed for the more than 500,000 Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, who stand to be deported if they cannot prove the necessary requirements of documentation. It is impossible to hear about this threat of military action without being reminded of the tragic 1937 massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic that is detailed in Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998). The bodies of these victims, slaughtered by the Dominican military under the direction of Gen. Rafael Trujillo, were thrown into the river that divides the two countries, and many others drowned while attempting to cross. Massacre River, as it is eerily called, got its name not from this event but from a colonial territorial dispute between the French and the Spaniards. But this body of water is as much a graveyard as it is part of daily life on both shores. In the appended version of the novel, Danticat reflects on her own experience of encountering Massacre River for the first time. She writes:

> Sitting by the side of the river and chatting with the children bathing in it, and the men watching the animals drink in it, and the women washing their clothes in it, I wrote in my notebook, 'nature has no memory.'
>
> I was expecting to see a river full of blood, but what I saw instead were people living, even with a painful past trailing them...This did not mean

> though that they had forgotten. Many had inherited their parents' and grandparents' mythic stories of the screams that filled the nights for days, of the river risen to new heights on blood alone. (317)

On the one hand, she asserts that nature itself has no ability to hold the remnants of past events, yet on the other hand, she claims that those living along the river's banks are certainly the inheritors of this tragedy.

As the threat of deportation continues to loom large over the heads of Haitians in the Dominican Republic – some of whom have never seen Haiti, or learned to speak Créole – I wonder what role memory may have in the unfolding relations between the two countries. The waters of Massacre River run clear, but is it not also possible to see within them the traumatic events of the past, and to somehow understand the ways in which the future may be created peacefully? Likewise, in reading the British writer Musa Okwonga's devastating poem "Hundreds of Cockroaches Died Today"[143] – dedicated to the many migrants whose vessels have capsized in the Mediterranean Sea – is it not also possible to remember the horror of the *Zong* massacre as captured by J.M.W. Turner's 1840 painting *The Slave Ship*? Once again, echoing the poem with which I began this dissertation, I ask, is the sea history? Water both does and does not hide the dead, for while rivers run clear, and the sea is boundlessly deep, they also reflect the present moment with all the flotsam and jetsam of history within them. Therefore, the resurfacing of such history in literature is not only an act of remembrance, but also a call to recognize the ways in which the past shapes the present moment in order to move into a more peaceful future.

Notes:

[1] From Martinican writer and philosopher Edouard Glissant's essay "La Barque Ouverte" found in *Poétique de la Relation*. Pg. 18.

[2] This line is from Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003). I discuss this passage in the second chapter of this dissertation.

[3] This is found in the fourth line of the poem "The Sea is History," which appeared originally in Walcott's collection *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (1979).

[4] These authors in particular focus on West Africa and represent a period of prolific writing about the oral literature of this region, which occurred primarily in the 1960's-70's.

[5] I refer to Diome's 2000 essay "L'Eau multiple", which I discuss at length in the second chapter of this dissertation.

[6] See "Echoes of Orpheus in Werewere Liking's 'Orphée-Dafric' and Wole Soyinka's 'Season of Anomy'" (1994) by Irène Assiba d'Almeida.

[7] For a comparative analysis of water deities, the work of art historian Henry John Drewal, renowned expert in the water goddess known most famously as Mami Wata, would be most helpful. See *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora* (2008). Another particularly useful work in this regard is the special issue of *Présence Africaine* titled simply *L'Eau/Water* (2000), which includes articles on everything from an African poetics of water to the fight for better sources of drinking water within the African continent.

[8] I should also note that the shift from Abdoulaye Sadji to Fatou Diome – who are the bridge between the first and second chapters – is also a shift in gender. While the dissertation begins with a group of male writers, the second and third chapters will focus on women authors. I consider this primarily circumstantial in that, during the first half of the 20th century, the spaces of literature, politics, and higher education in general would have been predominantly male, not only in colonial Africa but also in the *métropole*, though to a lesser extent. Given this, it is unsurprising that literary examples taken from this time would be comprised of male voices. It might be surmised that I examine texts written by women throughout most of this dissertation because they would be particularly attentive to the symbolism of water as a womb or a mother figure (even if sometimes a violent mother rather than a nurturing one). However, such a representation was already present in Abdoulaye Sadji's *Tounka*, which is, in many ways, the key text from which I construct the concept of resurfacing. Furthermore, water in Africa and the Caribbean is not strictly associated with gender, male or female, and may be incarnated in mythology by both men and women, or androgynous figures. This topic is addressed in many of the essays found within *Sacred Waters*. In essence, the shift from men to women writers is not intentional on my part, but rather a testament to the fact that there are many compelling women's voices in contemporary African and Caribbean literature. Resurfacing, while it often explores the ambivalent role of the ocean as a womb and a tomb, is not to be taken as a gendered creative process.

[9] See Florence Raymond Jurney's "Entretien avec Marie-Célie Agnant" (2005), pg. 388. I also discuss this quote at length in Chapter 3.

[10] One of the most interesting portrayals of the slave trade in Haitian memory is the short story "Children of the Sea" by Danticat from her *Krik? Krak!* (1996), a text that I analyze at length in Chapter 2. Another example is Evelyne Trouillot's *Rosalie l'infame* (2003), which, like Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma*, deals with infanticide. From an earlier generation of writers there is also Marie Vieux-Chauvet's *La Danse sur le volcan* (1957), which tells the story of slavery and revolt through the perspective of a young *métisse*.

[11] In this, Sadji was very much in touch with the intellectuals of his time. Indeed, the négritude movement was very much influenced by the writings of Leo Frobenius, as Aimé Césaire recounts in his interview with Euzhan Palcy in the second volume of her three-part documentary video of the Martinican writer. Césaire remarks that Frobenius showed great intellectual courage for his day in proclaiming the African

civilization – two words that had previously been antonyms.

[12] Indeed, in bringing Africa to the fore through a discussion of the conceptual black Atlantic, I join my own opinion to that of Gilroy's critics. In her article "Journeying to Death: A critique of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*" (1997), Laura Chrisman argues that the dismissal of afrocentrism in African-American intellectuals also serves to erase the importance of Africa with the idea of the Atlantic, and also fails to take the European colonial project in Africa into consideration. The criticism is continued in Christine Chivallon's "Beyond Gilroy's Black Atlantic: the Experience of the African Diaspora" (2002) in which the author argues that the notion of diaspora itself must be taken in context, and that Gilroy's limited use of it does not incorporate the full experience of the African diaspora. While these scholars and others criticize Gilroy's interpretation of afrocentrism as an essentialist notion, I am more concerned with his oversight of contemporary Africa itself as part of the black Atlantic.

[13] In his essay "Errance, Exil" from *Poétique de la Relation*, Glissant refers to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the rhizome from their *Mille Plateaux* (1980). They oppose the multiple, non-hierarchical rhizome to the linear, vertical root.

[14] See Bhabha's seminal text *The Location of Culture* (1994), Appadurai's *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), and Clifford's *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) and *Routes: Travel and and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (1997). These authors are in various ways interested in the nuanced portrayal and theorization of the workings of culture shaped by the convergence of multiple identities, particularly in ways that move beyond boundaries of national identification.

[15] In particular, Simon Gikandi's article "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality" (2001) and Pheng Cheah's book *Spectral Nationality* (2003) question the claims of cosmopolitanism and globalization, in that both authors argue that the nation, while no longer tied incontrovertibly to culture, is still an important operative concept in the understanding of a postcolonial framework.

[16] Here I will default to Cheryl Glotfelty's definition in her very useful introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996). Simply put, it is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii). See pgs. xviii-xx.

[17] According to the author, his article "Toward a Blue Cultural Studies: the Sea, Maritime Culture, and Early Modern English Literature" (2008) is the place where the term "blue cultural studies" or "blue humanities" was coined. See Steve Mentz's webpage: http://stevementz.com/?s=blue+humanities.

[18] Michel Serres presents a wonderful analysis of this volume in his essay "Michelet, la soupe" (1974).

[19] In writing this chapter, I am influenced by thinkers of trauma such as Cathy Caruth and Marianne Hirsch, who are commonly grouped along with others like Shoshana Felman, under the heading "trauma theory" or "trauma studies". Of particular importance to me are Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) and Hirsh's *The Generation of Post-Memory* (2012). However, I find that significant differences exist between, on the one hand, the guiding principles of a theory of trauma that comes primarily from the study of the Holocaust, and, on the other hand, the traumatic experience expressed by Agnant's portrayal of the memory of the slave trade. The main distinction is that while trauma in the former is understood as a non-experience of the traumatic event at the exact moment of its occurrence – which will then become a continual reliving of this experience – in the latter, the traumatic event is too well known at the time of its happening to be forgotten. In the chapter itself, I rely on Glissant's ambivalent engagement of trauma in the Caribbean from his *Discours antillais* (1981), in a telling passage which is also explored by Jeannie Suk in her book *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing: Cesaire, Glissant, Conde* (2001).

[20] See: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/17/mediterranean-migrants-slaves-history-military-action-eu-leaders-libya.

[21] "Le Lac de Kabulo" found in Olivier de Bouveigne's *Contes d'Afrique* (1927).

[22] "Le Poisson Guérisseur" from *Récit des chasseurs du Mali* (1985) by Jinba Jakité.

[23] "Nagnouma et le djinn" by Doumbi-Fakoly in *Une Veillée au village : contes du Mali* (2004).

[24] From Gerard Meyer's *Contes du pays malinké* (1987).

[25] See *Cinderella: A Casebook* by Alan Dundes (1982), especially the chapter "Cinderella in Africa" by William Bascom.

[26] Okpewho provides a history of the study of oral literature, as related to Africa specifically, in the first chapter of his *Myth in Africa* (1983). Here he usefully delineates the formalism of Vladimir Propp and the structuralism of Claude Lévis-Strauss while showing the genealogy of studies of myth as they came from studies in linguistics. For further reading, see Propp's famous *Morphology of the Folktale.* Published in 1928, this work outlines Propp's famous 31 "functions" of myth, or episodic events supposedly common to all tales. See also the essay "The Structural Study of Myth" by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

[27] This conception of truth lying within a spatial realm, which is also that of myth, will take on further importance in the later section of this chapter dealing with Abdoulaye Sadji's *Tounka* (1952).

[28] For more on this subject, please see Leif Lorentzon's article "Is African Oral Literature Literature?" in which he focuses on the work of Karin Barber and her studies of Yoruba oriki poetry in order to emphasize the literariness of the oral text, as opposed to the performative context in which it is most often examined by specialists of oral literature.

[29] Eliade begins the essay "The Prestige of the Cosmogonic Myth" by stating simply that "A myth relates a sacred story, that is to say, it recounts a primordial event that occurred at the beginning of time" (1). This premise is expanded in the famous work *Myth and Reality* (1963).

[30] Griaule's work was the subject of a famous controversy, led principally by Walter E. A. van Beek, which questioned the authenticity of the ethnographer's account. The present study will take this contentious debate fully into account, while citing James Clifford's interpretation of both the text and debate in his work on Griaule, in order to show the necessary fluidity of authorship and exchange in the context of oral narrative.

[31] It should be clear that I am taking for granted in this study the relationship between literature and anthropology in those works written about Africa and by Africans during the first half of the twentieth century. To distinguish these genres based upon their claims to truth or fiction would frankly be impossible. In the case of Griaule, the deep and complex fictional qualities of his work will come to the fore, as I argue that the fluidity between narrative and scientific study is, in fact, one of the markers of his deep understanding of the Dogon people. In the case of the fiction writers presented in this chapter, the influence of European anthropology is evident in their work, for the writing of folktales, while of course a literary project, was also very much a way of expressing the cultural realities of their homelands. This generation of African writers educated in Paris in the 1930's came under the influence of German anthropologist Leo Frobenius's *Kulturgeschicte Afrikas* (1933), which was translated into French while Léopold Sedar Senghor lived in Paris and had a great influence on Senghor specifically and the Négritude movement in general. For more on this, see Albert S. Gérard's "The Western Mood" from *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1986). Indeed, Sadji himself was very much influenced by Frobenius's work, as mentioned by his son in the writer's biography. In fact, the elder Sadji insisted upon his children being educated in Germany, rather than France, partially due to his love of German music, and partially because of the influence of Frobenius and the newly forming ideas of culture that he represented. See Sadji 1997, pgs. 30-31, 59-61.

[32] Van Beek's use of the term "bricolage" significantly departs from the definition famously given by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *La Pensée Sauvage* (1962). For Levi-Strauss, 'bricolage' signifies a process of divining the workings of the natural world through experience. As such, it is a form of science that is not 'primitive' necessarily, but rather something that is continually in practice today. "Bricolage" is not, as van Beek uses the term, merely a matter of throwing different pieces of different stories together in order to construct a cohesive myth. Levi-Strauss's definition of "bricolage"is in fact quite close to a process I will discuss in further detail, within the context of Abdoulaye Sadji's *Tounka*, which is that of speculation leading to mythology. As such, the work of the "bricoleur", whom Lévi-Strauss opposes to the engineer, constitutes a distinct and important form of knowledge. See pg. 16-26 in "The Science of the Concrete" from *The Savage Mind* (1966).

[33] Van Beek also cites Clifford's original piece of the same name, published in the book *Observers Observed* edited by George W. Stocking Jr. (1983).

[34] It is also useful to consider Griaule's work within the context of the strong relationship between fiction and scientific account – two genres in which the ethnographer simultaneously recorded his research and

experience. The complex intertwining of literature and French anthropology of the 1920's-30's is explored in Vincent Debaene and Justin Izzo's *Far Afield: French Anthropology between Science and Literature* (2014). Debaene argues that this specific group of anthropologists, of which Griaule was a key figure, were forced to write two separate accounts of their fieldwork – one encompassing the scientific observations and one telling the tale of their personal experience. These books, he claims, should not be seen as separate entities, but rather inherently important to one another, though one is more 'literary' in its style (3-12). In his chapter dedicated to Griaule's famous *Flambeurs d'hommes* (1934), he asserts the fictive nature of parts of Griaule's account – simply taking these for granted rather than challenging them – but also affirms Griaule's deep commitment to the accuracy of the ethnographic document by reinforcing the experiential and "evocative" elements of his story.

[35] See Eileen Julien's *African Novels and the Question of Orality* (1992).

[36] It is also possible to read in this brief excerpt a subtle but powerful critique of the colonial project, for the unmoving earth is here overrun with creatures that are not only unwelcome but also parasitic. As noted above, Dadié was well known for his political activism in Côte d'Ivoire in the years of French colonial power. While his *contes* are not generally regarded as politically motivated, he did conceive of stories in generally as being an important facet of cultural unity. For more on this subject, see Nicole Vincileoni's *Comprendre l'oeuvre de Bernard B. Dadié* (1986).

[37] In Ruth Finnegan's fascinating lecture "Short Time to Stay," the author debunks many of the conceptions established by early ethnographers of Africa, with regard to perceptions of temporality in the oral narrative.

[38] See the chapter "Histoire et Traditions" from *Les pêcheurs Lebou du Sénégal: particularisme et évolution*.

[39] Comprehensive work on the ubiquitous figure of Mami Wata has been compiled in Henry Drewal's *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora* (2008). For an interesting general study see Diadji 2003.

[40] Although Sadji leaves ambiguous his own insistence upon the "*significatif*" properties of the name 'Lébou' within the text of *Tounka*, it is possible to gain great insight from Mercier and Balandier's book. Indeed, the authors thank Sadji himself for his help in their research. Regarding the name of this people, they write:

> *Deux hypothèses sont mises en avant, quant à l'origine du mot Lebou. L'une le rattache à* lébé, *qui signifie conter, dire une fable. Les Lebou, ainsi seraient ceux qui ont la réputation de dire des fables, de dissimuler leur pensée, de ruser. Caractère ambigu, qu'on peut prendre aussi bien sous un aspect péjoratif que dans un sens élogieux. Aussi les Lebou ne rejettent-ils pas cette étymologie. Une seconde est proposée :* lébu *aurait signifié défi, guerrier ou autre. Les Lebou ont toujours été impatients de toute domination ; leurs déplacements incessants l'attestent, et surtout la grande révolte de la fin du XVIII*^{e} *siècle qui aboutit à la fondation de la « République Lebou ». Bien entendu, elle n'offre pas plus de garanties d'exactitude. (17)*

Both of these definitions are deeply resonant with the character N'Galka himself, for as my textual analysis will show, the principle tension surrounding his fate is the choice between being the hero of the story, or narrating it, a tension found within the name "Lébou" as well.

[41] This is to say nothing of the etymology of *legend*, from the Latin *legenda* meaning simply "that which is read." Obviously Sadji's use of the term complicates an analysis of the roots of *Tounka*, these being the oral tales of the Lébou, which were most certainly not read but *heard*. However, the choice of this term, as opposed to *conte* or *fable*, indicates a conscious acknowledgment of his medium, as well as Sadji's own authorship.

[42] Sadji's footnote to this word reads: "*Pintch : lieu de réunion, au bord de la mer*" (32).

[43] See Henry Drewal's article "Beauteous Beast: the Water Deity Mami Wata in Africa" from *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and the Monstrous* (2012).

[44] While this chant reinforces Goudi's non-human, "bestial" or "monstrous" qualities – here portraying her as an animal – it is also curious that manatees were also famously mistaken for mermaids by Columbus in his account of the ocean voyage to the New World. Three of them were spotted off the coast of Haiti

in January 1493. See the National Geographic article "From Mermaid to Manatee." Senegal does currently have one species of manatee that is severely endangered and that also certainly could have been construed as a female sea creature. See the following information from Sirenian International's website: http://www.sirenian.org/westafrican.html.

[45] I of course refer to Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) which will be explored in depth in the third chapter.

[46] These were the shackles of the slaves thrown overboard, as the captains of *négriers* sought to pick up speed on their transatlantic voyage. See the essay "La Barque Ouverte" from *Poétique de la Relation* (2000).

[47] Such is the case in films such as Moussa Touré's recent film *La Pirogue* (2012) and Mostéfa Djadjam's *Frontières* (2001).

[48] This theme will be explored in the context of Danticat's "Children of the Sea" from *Krik? Krak!*, but it is also powerfully thematized in Emile Ollivier's *Passages* (1991).

[49] I am specifically referring to Glissant's proposal in the essay "L'étendue et la filiation" from *Poétique de la Relation* (2000) that Caribbean tragedy is not, like Western tragedy, based on the disruption of a family line that will eventually be restored, as in the examples of *Oedipus Rex* or *Hamlet*. Though I am not commenting specifically on the sexuality of these characters in the context of this study, it would be helpful, particularly in further exploring the case of Max Jr., to refer to Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic" (2008), in which the author puts forth the provocative argument that "The black Atlantic has always been the queer Atlantic" (191). She proposes this innately queer Atlantic as a key example of the fluid identities and marginalized populations that have always occupied this space. On the historic and contemporary difficulties encountered by gay and lesbian writers of the Caribbean, see Thomas Glave's introduction to the anthology *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* (2008). He cites the extreme conditions of "racism, xenophobia, sexual and gender violence, economic stresses, the need for voluntary or forced migration (as in the case of political asylum seekers), the erasing or silencing of ourselves (and, in some cases, the murdering of ourselves) because of our sexualities, and more" (5) as some of the major challenges faced by women-loving women and men-loving men in the Caribbean.

[50] Both authors remain very much connected to their respective homelands through the subject matter of their work. But this certainly does not imply that their connection is only relegated to the realm of literature. Diome goes back to Senegal frequently, though the reasons for her troubled relationship to this country will become clear in this reading of her work. Danticat discusses her relationship to Haiti in view of her permanent residence in the United States very compellingly throughout her collection of essays *Create Dangerously*, and specifically addresses the difficulty of living away from her native country in the context of the 2011 earthquake in Haiti in the essay "Our Guernica".

[51] According to Bachelard, the very materiality of water has a particular call to the reverie of a poet (15). Like Diome, he contends that there is a difference between the waters of life and of death, but for Bachelard, these are associated with particular bodies of water. He admits to his own favoring of the springs and brooks of his childhood in Champagne and notes that, of the sea, he knows very little (7-8). Indeed, the title of the book's seventh chapter "The Supremacy of Fresh Water" says it all, and he argues that "fresh water is the true mythical water" (152). Indeed, "Water from the sky, fine rain, the friendly and salutary spring give more direct hunts than all the water in the sea. It is a perversion that has put salt in the sea. Salt hampers the reverie of sweetness, one of the most material and most natural reveries existing" (155-156). He furthermore relegates the sea to that of "violent water" in the eighth and last chapters. While the distinction between these waters is significant, the difference in particular bodies of water is less so for Diome. For the latter, waters are "heureuses" or "malheureuses" but these qualities are not divided by salt content or even by intensity of motion – the falling of the rain or the breaking of the surf.

[52] The "ogre" Diome cites is clearly the Biblical Leviathan, described in Job 41: 1-34. In indirectly referencing the Leviathan, she is also beginning a conversation with the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, as will be discussed in more detail with regard to her short story "Les Loups de l'Atlantique" (2002).

[53] For an interesting discussion of Noah's ark, see J.J. Cohen's blogpost titled "Intercatastrophe:

Overwhelmed Outside Noah's Ark" (2013) from the website *In the Middle*, in which he discusses a 15th century illustration of the Flood. In this brief piece, he distinguishes an ambivalence present in the depiction, noting that, though the Flood was sent to exterminate an unholy society, it also took its share of innocents: "Oh yes, the dead and drowning were sinners and they deserved their watery suffocation. Genesis is clear. But why is that cradle floating so close to the ark, so like the wooden boat in material and shape, yet empty of its tiny occupant?" Such a pointed reference to the death of innocent victims suggests for him a questioning of faith on the part of the illustrator. http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2013/05/intercatastrophe-overwhelmed-outside.html#sthash.E5lDORNt.dpuf

This particular element – the empty craddle near the boat full of the saved – is even more salient to Diome's reference to the story of Noah's ark, for – as mentioned above and as will come under further discussion – her fictional alter ego Salie was nearly drowned at birth, as her parents were unmarried.

[54] Because of this juxtaposition of the mother and the sea, symbolically and linguistically, Fatou Diome most frequently uses the feminine word "la mer" to refer to the Atlantic Ocean. However, she does sometimes chooses the masculine term "océan", particularly when emphasizing the proper name of this specific body of water, l'Océan Atlantique.

[55] See pages 100-104 of this dissertation for a more full explanation of Patterson's work.

[56] In an interview with Claire Renée Mendy in the online magazine Amina (June 2013) Diome openly discusses her relationship to Salie, and specifically states that her own story of a *naissance illégitime* serves as the main subject matter for her fictional portrayals. She notes that she kept this identification somewhat vague in her earlier works, such as *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, but with the passing of her grandparents now more forthrightly portrays her own experience in her work, as is certainly the case with *Impossible de grandir* (2013). http://aflit.arts.uwa.edu.au/AMINAdiome2013.html

[57] Ayo Coly has written compellingly about a literary tendency toward nation-building in Diome's work in her 2010 book *The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood*. Coly claims that, "Having established the embattled sovereignty of the postcolonial African nation and the ensuing vulnerability of African bodies under globalization, the resulting situatedness of Fatou Diome in an anticolonial and nationalist narrative of home is a political and ideological inexorability" (105). I find this assessment problematic, however. Diome's relationship to Senegal is ambivalent at best, and while Salie does indeed, as Coly asserts, continually encourage her brother and other young people to stay in Niodior and to contribute to the local economy in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, I contend that this is expressive of her belief in the small, local micro-economy of the island rather than the project of the nation. While these two may indeed be joined, I believe that my reading makes clear that Diome's position is one of extreme pessimism regarding the nation as a whole. It is strange that Coly does not refer to a key statement in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* that shows Diome's negative assessment of the relationship between Senegal and Niodior, and one that – appropriately – is specifically situated around aquatic resources:

> *Nichée au cœur de l'océan Atlantique, l'île de Niodior dispose d'une nappe phréatique qui semble inépuisable ; un petit nombre de puis alimente tout le village. Il suffit de creuser quatre à cinq mètres pour voir jaillir une eau de source, fraîche et limpide, filtrée par le grain fin du sable...Ils auraient pu, s'ils avaient voulu, ériger leur mini-république au sein de la République Sénégalaise, et le gouvernement ne se serait rendu compte de rien avant de nombreuses années, au moment des élections* (51).

[58] In the title story from *Préférence Nationale*, Diome's narrator answers an ad for a bakery, specifying, "Dialect Souhaité," which refers to the Alsacian dialect. She notes that, unfortunately, she arrived with her Senegalese dialect, rather than the baker's. This passage beautifully expresses the point that preference is not directly related to citizenship. Furthermore, in the story "La Mendiante et l'écolière" the narrator is a poor girl sent from an island (presumably Niodior) off the Saloum Delta to work as servant in the house of a wealthy urban family, still within Senegal. She is abused and berated by her hosts, who take advantage of her utter misery. This further supports Diome's argument that preference is not merely a matter of nationality. To add one last reference in support of the many aspects of 'préférence nationale,' I would like to quote from an Africultures interview with Taina Tervonent from October 2003:

> *J'aime bien rectifier les a priori. Les gens pensent que quand on est Africain et qu'on se sent rejeté, c'est parce qu'on est en Europe. C'est faux. L'exclusion n'est pas une denrée rare européenne, la bêtise est une des choses les mieux partagées dans le monde. Les Africains sont tout à fait capables de cette même tare. Ce personnage regarde le racisme dans le prisme de son rejet antérieur. Elle découvre simplement qu'on peut être rejeté pour d'autres choses, comme la couleur de la peau. Cela lui permet aussi de relativiser, de faire la même critique aux deux sociétés, sans a priori.*
>
> Found on the Africultures website: http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=3227

[59] Ibid. When asked why the story of the young woman in Préférence Nationale resembles not only Salie from *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, but also the novelist herself, Diome responds: "*Salie, c'est moi. Il n'y a pas de mystère là-dessus. Ce personnage s'est forgé à travers mon chemin à moi.*" Yet, in a later and more extensive interview with Mbaye Diouf, conducted at the Salon du Livre de Québec in April 2008, she eschews the generic classifiation of autobiography: "*Alors je n'aime pas fondamentalement l'autobiographie. . Je pense qu'aucune vie n'est si intéressante pour faire un roman en entier. Je dis toujours que je ne fais pas d'autobiographie. Je prends juste quelques petits morceaux de vécu, d'expériences que j'insère dans le livre pour le côté exemple, pour renforcer une intrigue, et après, l'histoire se tisse autour pour s'ouvrir aux autres.*" It is certainly fruitful to consider this paradoxical position in the context of her polyvocal account in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* as opposed to her deeply personal narrative in *Impossible de grandir* (2013). It should be clear, however, that my present study is not meant to take into account the autobiographical tendencies of the author, notable and interesting though they are, and that I will limit myself to understanding Salie in her fictional existence.

[60] I am referring here specifically to *Impossible de grandir*, in which the act of walking on land takes on vast significance. The musical refrain of the novel is the song "*Yo solo quiero caminar*" or "I only want to walk" by Paco de Lucia, and she often refers to the necessity of learning to "*avoir les pieds marins*," the importance of which she learned as a small child on the fishing boat of her grandfather. In both cases, she is striving for a firm foothold on her life, even if it means suffering the impossible task of standing steady in the middle of the sea.

[61] For an interesting exploration of the ogre's female counterpart, see "The Dark Side of Aphrodite: The Ogre" from Jonathan Krell's *The Ogre's Progress* (2009). Also see Eloïse Brière's fascinating article "Le Retour des mères dévorantes" (1994) in which she discusses the phenomenon of the *mère dévorante* in African oral tales, and applies several principles found therein to contemporary practices of reproduction.

[62] There is also the connotation of *loup de mer* meaning an experienced fisherman, which would also apply to the members of the fishing community of Niodior.

[63] Hobbes's vision in *Leviathan* (1651) is one of a cohesive society, with the monstrous Leviathan representing the collectivity. But to engender that cohesion, man must become subject to a sovereign. This premise is the beginning of what becomes known as "social contract theory." But the sovereign is, of course, also a dangerous monster. It is worth noting that the passage of Job in which the Leviathan is described (Job 41: 1-34) defines more so the monster's power than its danger. We may contrast this to the Behemoth, which is Hobbes's visual symbol of civil war, a definitively violent activity. It would seem then that the shift from social cohesion, which is powerful and threatening, into a form of social violence is Diome's specific commentary on Hobbes's idea of the social contract.

[64] This study makes clear that Diome associates both a stifling and exclusive family structure (part of what I term "terrestrial monolithicism" that goes hand in hand with ideas of nationhood) and a history of slavery in Senegal with Islam. As for the latter, the Islamicization of West Africa in the pre-colonial era did instigate novel practices of enslavement, particularly as the Islamic rule expanded agricultral practices throughout the region. Claude Meillassoux has written extensively about this in his *L'Anthropologie de l'esclavage* (1987), which examined all practices of slavery in West Africa, from that resulting from victory among warring factions to that resulting from Islamic *jihad*. Another scholar of Islam in West Africa who has paid particular attention to practices of slavery is Martin Klein. See *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal: Sine Saloum 1847-1914* (1968) and *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (1998). A helpful introduction to his significant body of work is found in E. Ann

McDougall's article “The Quest for Honour” (2000).

[65] The description of the Senegalese flag and its significance may be found on the website of the Présidence du Sénégal, http://www.presidence.sn/content/le-drapeau-s%C3%A9n%C3%A9galais Though the description does not specifically state that the green star indicates Islam, it does explain that the green stripe in the flag represents both the religions of Islam – it is the color of the prophet – and Christianity – the color of hope. The star is meant to represent the “celestial” values of the country as a whole, meaning that it is spiritually attuned, and it is green to signify the hope of independence. I am therefore reading into the colors, but certainly within the bounds of Diome's own interpretation of the flag.

[66] In “L'Eau Multiple” Diome claims that one of water's protective capacities was the protection from slavery, for she claims that the islands off the Sine-Saloum Delta were unaffected since they were unnavigable. However, I would propose that this claim refers primarily to the Arab slave trade in West Africa, which was land-based, for certainly the proposition of an island being protected from the transatlantic slave trade is counterintuitive. One has merely to think of l'Ile de Gorée, located fairly near Niodior.

[67] The image of a star upon the body of a persecuted man would of course also recall the yellow Star of David that was forced upon the Jewish people of various nations under Nazi control. The joining of a symbol of Jewish persecution to the history of the transatlantic slave trade would be an interesting and productive instance to explore further. To that end, Michael Rothberg has written a fascinating work about the joining of the history of the transatlantic slave trade to that of the Holocaust in his *Multidirectional Memory* (2009).

[68] See pgs. 15-17, 26 in Christian Schoeners's *Ecriture et quête de soi chez Fatou Diome, Aissatou Diamanka-Besland, Aminata Zaaria : Départ et dispersion identitaire* (2011).

[69] The next chapter will deal in more detail with the ghostly image of the slave ship, specifically citing the work of Ian Baucom in his *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery and the Philosophy of History* (2005).

[70] Collage is, of course, the primarily visual artistic technique of using pieces of different forms in order to create one whole work. I use the term “collage” to denote both the partial nature of these stories, as well as their intertwining qualities. Diome's characters and their experiences are greater, within the novel, than the sum of their parts, but she gives careful attention to their individual stories, forming a cohesive tale of the island of Niodior itself.

[71] This theme is also predominant in the well-known *conte* “Petit-mari” from Birago Diop's *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba*. In the story, a sister calls her brother “Petit-mari” in front of all his friends, shaming him with this allusion to incest until he drowns himself in the ocean.

[72] Once again, this reinforces my contention that the rumors of Moussa's homosexuality are not so much concerned with the taboo of sexual digression but rather of thwarted filiation. Here, of course, Sédar is simply unable to perform his sexual duties within a heterosexual relationship. As such, the taboo of impotence and that of same sex coupling are placed within the same realm.

[73] This is both the digestive *ventre* of the *eau-gresse* and the womb of the mother, for *ventre amer* is also *ventre à mère*.

[74] I am convinced that Diome is inspired in her use of this legend by the famous sonnet “A Phillis” of Pierre de Marbeuf, which she cites in her essay “L'Eau multiple” at length. In this poem, *la mer, la mère, l'amer* as well as *l'amour* and *la mort* all feature prominently. The line “La mère de l'amour eut la mer pour berceau” is of particular resonance.

[75] This concern is also taken up in Diome's later novel *Celles qui attendent* (2010), which focuses on the wives and mothers that wait for the return of the men who immigrate, via *pirogue*, to Europe. The novel deals with the tragedy of clandestine immigration, but also the total social destruction that it can cause the communities left behind.

[76] It is unclear whether Diome is referencing the Arab slave trade or the transatlantic slave trade, but this is of little consequence, for the ambiguity lends a productive openness to the signifier “slavery” and allows it to encompass various situations, as the following analysis will show.

[77] To this end, it is also worth briefly commenting upon the deep complexities contained within the name

"Salie", particularly as it stands in as the alter ego of Diome herself. Of course, the most obvious interpretation would be the connection to the verb *salir* in French. Read in this way, her name would mean "dirty or "soiled", with a sexual connotation. Furthermore, when Salie is born, her grandmother declares: "*Elle portera le nom de son vrai père, ce n'est pas une algue ramassée à la plage, ce n'est pas de l'eau qu'on trouve dans ses veines, mais du sang, et ce sang charrie son propre nom*" (74). As such, her nickname is joined to that of her real father – the same man pursued in the story "Les Loups de l'Atlantique" - and so invokes both his lineage, but also the "soiling" of this blood line. However, in her most recent novel – perhaps the most obviously autobiographical – she comments further on the name Salie, explaining that it was a nickname she gave herself in order to feel connected to her grandfather, Saliou: "*Mais je ne suis pas une femme de marin, ne j'attends pas à quai, ceest pas qui pars et reviens, je suis un marin. Quand nous allions à la pêche, mon grand-père, Saliou, m'appelait toujours mon matelot, mon garçon. Ainsi adoubée, je m'imaginais Salie, miniature de Saliou*" (193).

[78] Of course this is a version of Guinée, and the word has come to signify the whole of the African continent, more so as a abstract concept than as a geographic reality. The expression appears to be somewhat ubiquitous, and illuminates the rather confounding notion of death as a spatial fact rather than a physical state in Haitian belief. Another example of this expression is found in Karen McCarthy Brown's influential book *Mama Lola: a Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (1991) in which she tells the story of a man named Joseph Binbin Mauvant: "Joseph Binbin Mauvant did not die. Not him...no. He simply disappeared. They would be searching for him if he had not come to his wife in a dream. He said to her, 'Don't try to look for me. You are never going to find me. I have gone back to Ginen, to Africa, where I came from.'" (22)

[79] I discuss this at length in the next section.

[80] Ville Rose is described in detail in this novel, but this fictional town has also featured in many of her other works.

[81] I use Danticat's spelling of the word.

[82] Roughly explained, we might call these spirits or deities, however I will situate their status in the everyday life of the believers and practitioners of Haitian Vodou shortly, when I examine *Claire of the Sea Light* through the work of Maya Deren.

[83] For more on the rise of François Duvalier or "Papa Doc" and the use of violent, armed force, see "The Second Revolution" from historian Laurent DuBois' groundbreaking study *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (2012).

[84] The story of Madan Roger demonstrates the characteristic lack of clarity surrounding death that was experienced during the Duvalier regime, under the violent control of the *tonton macoutes*. After her son goes missing, along with the other youth activities from the radio, this woman goes to the morgue, where she collects the head of her dead son. (7) However, the soldiers go to her house, demanding to take her son, who is already dead: "madan roger was screaming, you killed him already. we buried his head. You can't kill him twice" (15). The young woman and her family hide while they hear madan roger being beaten by the soldiers, but never learn if she lives or dies. (17)

[85] There is a brief but informative study of the African origins of Vodou in the sections written by Lilas Desquiron (titled "Les racines africaines du Vaudou" and "Le Panthéon Dahoméen") in the catalogue of an exhibition on art and Vodou that took place at Abbaye Daoulas during the summer of 2004, edited by Michel LeBris. The author concentrates particularly on the intricate combining of gods and modes of worship as a process that had already begun in Africa, long before the many different customs of different peoples were forced to coalesce in Haiti. For another informative resource see "The African Cultural and Religious Roots of Voodoo" in *The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie Laveaux* (2005) by Ina Johanna Fandrich.

[86] The number is close to that of the number of slaves who were killed in the *Zong* massacre of 1787, when the ship carrying around 400 slaves was stalled in the water. Having missed his goal of Jamaica, Captian Collingwood found himself lost and without necessary provisions. He then chose to throw some one hundred and fifty slaves overboard, following the logic that, should they die a 'natural death' aboard the ship, the owners of the vessel would not stand to collect insurance money from their loss.

This event is the subject of M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* (2008) which comes under analysis in the next chapter. In this context, it is another interesting instance of the resurfacing of history in literature.

87 A more concrete exploration of this relationship between the living and the dead is found in Karen McCarthy Brown's essay "Afro-Caribbean Spirituality: A Haitian Case Study" (2006) in which she focuses on the theme of healing in Haiti as a spiritual process that involves a relational web, not only of living family members but also of the ancestors (2-3).

88 A process that is somewhat similar is explained by Colin (Joan) Dayan in her *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (1995), regarding the transformation of Dessalines into a *loa*. Though the status of *loa* is reserved only for special figures of communal importance, the structure of bringing back the memory of someone, and personifying their story in the form of deification is precisely what I claim here is a communal process based on narrative significance.

89 Danticat discusses this in her 2013 interview with the website *Public Libraries Online*. According to her:

> Wonn is a children's game that is a lot like "Ring a Round the Rosie." Kids, often little girls, get together, hold hands, make a circle, and run clockwise, or counter clockwise while singing. One child is in the middle while the others are singing and they switch places during different moments in the song. This game mirrors the structure of the book in that the book moves back and forth through time and circles back to different characters. The main action takes place in one night. I imagine the reader joining that circle, if you will, as he or she tries to understand what is happening in the town at that moment. Though the book is named after Claire, it is really the story of this entire town, Ville Rose, which is a fictional town based on the place where my mother grew up. The structure of the book also mirrors the waves of the sea, pulling back and forth towards the people on the beach, sometimes with tragic circumstances.

90 In this way, Danticat could be said to construct what Karen E. Richman would call a "*pwen* of migration," which she constructs in her 2005 *Migration and Vodou*, taking the concept of *pwen*, which is any symbolic representation meant to incorporate the complexities of a far-reaching situation, and using it to define representations of migration (15-18). In this work, the author examines the complex web of relationships between Haitians and their relatives in the diaspora, as facilitated through spiritual practices. In a similar way, Danticat brings the realm of the sacred squarely into the politics of migration.

91 In her other works, Danticat certainly makes reference to the resurfacing of the *gros-bon-ange* through other bodies of water, most vividly through her portrayal of the significance of Massacre River in the story "1937" from *Krik? Krak!*

92 It could seem strange that Danticat does not refer to any more contemporary Haitian sources of knowledge about Vodou. There are informative studies in the field, such as Karen McCarthy Brown's and Ina Johanna Fandrich's, cited above, as well as Colin (Joan) Dayan's work more generally, that continue to examine the role of Vodou in Haitian life. However, rather than situate Deren's text as a work of anthropology, consulted by the author in order to more fully understand Haitian Vodou, I suggest that the relationship between Danticat's work and Deren's *Divine Horsemen* is one of intertextuality. It is well known that Danticat "converses" with Jacques Roumain in her novel *The Dew Breaker* (2004), and I think that her engaging *Divine Horsemen* in her novel *Claire of the Sea Light* is of the same order of conversation between two artists/creators. It is useful to keep in mind that Maya Deren was, first and foremost, charged with an artistic project when she went to Haiti. That the book became a work of research, guided by none other than Joseph Campbell, was somewhat coincidental, as is described in the introduction to the book. Indeed, the literary nature of *Divine Horsemen*, which was eventually adapted into a film in 1985 (from footage that was shot between 1947 and 1954), is self-evident, and though it is still regarded as a foundational and expert text on the practices of Haitian Vodou, the poetry of Deren's work must also be taken into account. This latter element is, I believe, the means through which Danticat fully engages *Divine Horsemen*.

93 In Haitian Vodou, the *loa* "mounts" a person, in the way that a rider mounts a horse, though the term most often present in the popular imaginary is "possession".

[94] A *vever* is the symbol to invoke a particular *loa*. It is drawn in cornmeal or coffee grounds upon the floor by the practitioner or devotee. While there are certain elements of the symbol that must be in place – for example, the cross of Legba or the heart of Erzulie, the drawing may be embellished according to the individual.

[95] Her presence on the *morne* is also linked to the *marrons*, who fled slavery and inhabited the most uninhabitable parts of the island. Furthermore the name "initil", meaning useless, evokes the fact that this is an outlying space, separated from the community.

[96] The novel began as a short story published in *Haiti Noir* (2011). Notably, in this story, the fisherman, Nozias, was originally named Gaspard. The original name is likely a reference to French poet Aloysius Bertrand's 1842 collection of prose poems *Gaspard de la Nuit*, which also features a significant play between light and darkness. It seems fairly significant, therefore, that Danticat would change the name of this character to Nozias, bringing her relative Nozial's memory into life through her work.

[97] This is from Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham's *Femmes des Antilles : traces et voix* (1998).

[98] I am quoting the original case report, found on pages 210-211 in *Zong!*.

[99] Although I discuss this homonymic resonance more in detail, it is worth noting here that the title "Os" carries with it in the French (of which Philip would certainly be aware) not only *les os* but also *les eaux*. Philip refers to this section as the "skeleton" of the poem, but it also refers to the setting in which her poetry unravels: the waters of the Atlantic Ocean.

[100] Granville Sharpe is the most notable of the these, trying unsuccessfully to have the captain of the *Zong* tried for murder.

[101] At a certain point, Philip wonders if she should delve into other documents that mention the *Zong* massacre: "There is a moment of panic: Should I be looking at all the documents related to the case, such as the trial transcripts or Granville Sharpe's letter to the Court of King's Bench, with a view to using the language there as well?" (194)

[102] Veronica J. Austen 's fascinating article, "Should We? Questioning the Ethical Representation of Trauma," is based on this latter question, and explores the ethical implications of Philip's work and of its reading.

[103] Austen's article mentions the significance of the supplementary byline on the cover of the book: "As told to the author by Seteay Adamu Boateng," noting that this moniker designates those ancestors whose stories were brought to the surface in this work (65).

[104] According to Baucom, this accumulative time is a fundamental distinction between Glissant's and Benjamin's perceptions of history. To quote his analysis: "To the extent that the time of the past survives, nonsynchronously, into the present, for Glissant (and this indeed is his fundamental point of departure from Benjamin) that time survives not as that which flashes up but, rather, as that which accumulates" (319).

[105] He establishes this largely through a criticism of Walter Benn Michaels's article "'You Who Was Never There': Slavery and the New Historicism, Deconstruction and the Holocaust." In a succinct passage that levels his criticism against Benn Michaels, Baucom writes:

> Benn Michaels is an extraordinarily subtle critic, and I find largely convincing the portrait he paints of our ghost-crowded age. Indeed, much of the argument of this book has been that our "moment" can be nothing other than so haunted. But if Benn Michaels is correct in discerning a hauntological impulse in much contemporary writing and thought (and in attributing much of the energy behind this impulse to recent attempts to wrestle with the histories of slavery and the holocaust), he does not, I believe, entirely grasp the import of this ghost-mindedness (certainly not in the case of the slave narratives that provide his critical starting point). And he fails to do so because he demands as the starting postulate of critique the stability of the very categories texts such as Morrison's *Beloved*, Walcott's *Omeros*, or Glissant's *Poetics* exist to complicate or to refuse: the categories of a stable, recognizable, and discrete past and present.

[106] He refers to D'Aguiar's novel *Feeding the Ghosts*, which provides the grounds for questioning temporal assertions that construct historical beginnings and endings in the context of transatlantic slavery. See pgs. 327-333.

[107] Baucom describes this concept in Walcott as"a figure best parsed as one in which 'the Atlantic' functions both as a noun or a proper name and as an adjectival qualifier of 'now.'"

[108] By "orphic" I of course refer to the Ancient myth of Orpheus, in which this musician descends into the underworld in order to retrieve his wife Eurydice, playing music so sweetly that Hades and Persephone agree to let her go back to the world of the living. In a similar way, Philip reaches into the underworld to pull forth the lost voices of the drowned slaves. The term is even more apt due to the relationship between water and the underworld, for in the Greek conception the descent to the underworld after life is signified by the crossing of a river, usually the Styx. Philip similarly delves into the water as a means to retrieve the dead.

[109] This state of living death will be explored further in the next section, but Philip herself refers to such a liminal existence in the "Notanda" when describing her experience of the old port in Liverpool: "Hundreds of slave-ships would have set off from this port what was then known as the Gold Coast of Africa, their holds filled with all manner of things – cloth, guns, beads – to trade. For men, women, and children who would, in turn, be stuffed – things – in the same hold for what would for them be a one way journey to death – living or real" (203).

[110] This line is the first of the poem "The Idea of Order at Key West" found in *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (1954).

[111] In particular, see Natalie Melas's article "Forgettable Vacations and Metaphor in Ruins: Walcott's 'Omeros'" (2005).

[112] Both Philip's text and her readings recall what has been termed "feminist rehearsal" by Tanya Shields in her compelling, recent book *Bodies and Bones: Feminist Rehearsal and Imagining Caribbean Belonging* (2014). While it is a way of reading texts, the idea of rehearsal implies the space of the stage, including repetition, intense examination of past performances, and the presence of the oral and physical body (2). In the second chapter, Shields addresses Philip's work, emphasizing the audience or reader's role in the creation of meaning, for the text of *Zong!* is deeply ambiguous. In order to divine any sense from the text, the reader is forced to reread, a form of rehearsal.

[113] This is particularly prevalent in her reading of Zong #1 with Rachel Zolf at the Friends Meeting House in Toronto ON. Available on the website: http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Philip.php.

[114] This famous line is uttered after Prince Hamlet learns from his father's ghost of the latter man's murder at the hands of his own brother, Hamlet's uncle Claudius, and then swears to the guards Horatio and Marcellus to take his revenge. The full line is: "The time is out of joint. O cursèd spite that ever I was born to set it right!" (1.5.191-93).

[115] As explained in the previous section, Philip's work *Zong!* (2011) takes as its subject the horrific event of the *Zong* massacre of 1787, in which approximately one hundred and thirty slaves were thrown overboard the British vessel by the captain, who cited lack of provisions, hoping to be compensated for their worth by the insurers of the the voyage.

[116] A fairly significant change is made in the English translation by Michael J. Dash, which renders this statement definitive, rather than ambiguous. While Glissant offers the parallel between repression and Caribbean history, then partially retracts his statement, Dash translates the second half of this paragraph in the following way:

> Would it not be useful and revealing to investigate such a parallel? What is repressed in our history persuades us, furthermore, that this is more than an intellectual game. Which psychiatrist could state the problematics of such a parallel? None. History has its dimension of the unexplorable, at the edge of which we wander, our eyes open. (66)

In his translation, it would seem that Glissant is emphatically suggesting the practical examination of Caribbean history through the structure of repression, however this is not the case in the original French. The first two sentences of this excerpt should read rather as: "It would surely be neither useful nor revealing to investigate such a parallel. The repression of history convinces us, however, that this is perhaps more than a mere witticism or intellectual game."

[117] As I have specifically cited Glissant's brief reference to a psychoanalytic framework, while also dealing with a history that could only be described as traumatic, I should clarify that I am certainly influenced by Cathy Caruth's groundbreaking work *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), as well as by the dynamic field

of trauma studies more generally, particularly the work of theorists such as Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman and Shoshanna Felman. However, I refrain from directly basing my analysis of *Le Livre d'Emma* upon the structure of trauma as defined by Caruth and others for one principle aspect of this understanding of trauma – the belatedness of traumatic experience – is entirely missing from Agnant's portrayal of Emma's obsessive engagement with the violent history of the slave trade. As I stated, the author emphasizes Emma's overwhelming knowledge of the collective past, as well as her deep consciousness of own personal trauma. Caruth states in her introduction that, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). It should become clear in my analysis of this novel that such belated experience, or non-experience, does not describe the case of Emma, and, furthermore, that the extreme consciousness of her experience is, for Agnant, the most important aspect of her affliction. Having said this, many of the findings presented throughout various works of trauma theory have been enlightening to my study of this novel in particular, and Caribbean literature in general, and I endeavor to cite them where appropriate.

Again, having said this, there are several examples of contemporary scholars whose work on the effects of trauma in African, Caribbean, and African American literature have been enlightening across fields. See Jeannie Suk's *Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing: Glissant, Césaire, Condé* (2001). Also see Michael Rotheburg's *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decoloniation* (2009). Kathleen Gyssel's article "A Shoah Classic Resurfacing: The Strange Destiny of *The Last of the Just* (André Schwarz-Bart) in the African Diaspora" (2011) explores such connections, as does Dawn Fulton's "A Clear-Sighted Witness: Trauma and Memory in Maryse Condé's Desirada" (2005).

[118] In *Jeannie Suk's Postcolonial Paradoxes in French Caribbean Writing*, the author points out that one of Glissant's main concerns in *Discours antillais* is to broach an alternative to the narrative of a return to origins that was prominent in Caribbean thinking about its own identity in terms of Africa. Rather, he constructs his concept of *créolité* based on notions of *détour*, through which a population in constant change maintains and continually constructs identity (Suk 58). Therefore, for Suk, the relationships between the unconscious – in which the many 'traces' of an African past survive, but which are not consciously part of the Relation, or the *créolité* which lies at the heart of Caribbean cultural survival (59-61).

[119] For a fascinating exploration of the resonances of trauma throughout generations, see Marianne Hirsch's *The Generation of Memory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (2012).

[120] This discussion was with regard to the character of Moussa in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*. I argued that this character's unsuccessful voyage to Europe rendered him an outcast not only within his temporary home in France, but that he also, more devastatingly, became a social "non-person" in his own birthplace, meaning that his immigration and return had the capacity to rob him of his very identity. See pgs. 100-104.

[121] There would appear to be a connection between amphibious creatures and children or unborn children in Danticat's *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013). In the chapter "The Frogs", a heat wave kills all the frogs in Ville Rose. Gaëlle, whose unborn child is expected to die, goes to the stream and eats one of the frogs, and wonders at the strange sensations she describes as a fight between the dead frog and the dying fetus takes place within her womb. (59) Much to everyone's surprise, her daughter Rose lives and is born completely healthy. It is possible to see these dead frogs also in the context of the plague in Exodus 8, in which God sends a second plague – that of frogs – upon Pharoah and his land as divine punishment.

[122] In this line of questioning about the relationship between infanticide and the rejection of Emma's academic work, I am reminded of Elissa Marder's enlightening concept of the "maternal function" in her book *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Psychoanalysis, Photography, Deconstruction* (2012). In the introduction, she states that:

> Unlike the traditional conception of the "Mother" who ostensibly grounds a specifically human separation between nature and culture, the maternal function operates at the very outer limits of the human. It opens up a strange space in which birth and death, *bios* and *techné*, the human and the nonhuman are brought into an intimate and disturbing

proximity with one another. (2).

While I will demonstrate the connection between Emma's thesis and her alleged murderous act as an effect of the overwhelming presence of slavery, the academic work itself may be construed as a technical product that is problematically juxtaposed with the natural product of her own maternal body. As Marder notes, "the maternal function implicitly haunts the figure of work itself" (3) As such, Emma's work becomes a kind of conceptual stillbirth, with the consequence of denying her any maternal identification.

[123] A recent collection of essays dedicated to Agnant's work explores this theme in depth. See *Paroles et Silences chez Marie-Célie Agnant : oublieuse mémoire d'Haïti* (2013).

[124] In this scene, the shroud of blue is replaced by that of white, which seems to lend it a resonances beyond the immediate context, for white is the color most often worn during Vodou ceremonial practices. In this way, the death of Kilima seems to refer not only to death – specifically that of suicide – but also to regenerating spiritual practices in general.

[125] This certainly recalls the first act of French playwright Jean Racine's late 17th century work *Phèdre*, with it eponymous character's declaration of "*Mon mal vient de plus loin*" (1.3.269). In this version, Phèdre lusts after her stepson Hippolyte, while her husband Thésée has disappeared. In this line, she refers to a tortured family history, particularly involving her mother, Pasiphaé. Married to Minos, but jealous of his many infidelities, Pasiphaé is subject to a curse from Poseidon, which causes her to lust after a white bull. Daughter of the sun, this woman is reduced to an animal sexuality. Furthermore, the coupling produces the Minotaure, who is then kept inside a labyrinth, until slayed by Thésée. In Racine's version (following the Ancient versions, particularly that of Seneca), it is made clear that there is a connection between the sexuality of mother and daughter – as Phèdre observes in the lament of her strange fate: "*O haine de Vénus ! O fatale colère ! Dans quels égarements l'amour jeta ma mère*" (249-50). For more on this connection, see Elissa Marder's article "The Mother Tongue in *Phèdre* and *Frankenstein*" (1989).

In the context of this novel, the story of Fifie is similarly fraught with a sexuality that could be conveyed in animal terms, for she replays the coupling that was a feature of the slave system, in which women were forced into sexual relationships with both slaves and masters, sometimes with the goal of procreation. Glissant comments upon this in *Discours antillais* when explaining the idea of an Antillean "anti-famille". See pg. 166.

[126] See "Masters, Mistresses, Slaves, and the Antimonies of Modernity" from *The Black Atlantic*.

[127] This is the title of a Paul Valéry poem about a graveyard by the sea, but it becomes juxtaposed with the idea of the *cercueil fluide* of underwater death in Alessandro dal Lago's piece "Cercueils fluides" (2008) which I will discuss shortly.

[128] These cries are heard in the recent NPR story by Lauren Frayer which can be found at : http://www.npr.org/2015/06/04/411917358/warmer-weather-triggers-more-african-migrants-to-try-to-reach-europe.

[129] To understand the conditions of these migrants upon the open sea, I was greatly aided not only by the daily news reports, particularly those in *The Guardian*, but also by sources such as Serge Daniel's *La Route des clandestins* (2008) and *Migrations des jeunes d'Afrique subsaharienne : quels défis pour l'avenir?* (2011) by Claude Bolzman et al. However, the most helpful sources for understanding the experience of these individuals and their journeys I found in fiction. The novel *Mbëkë mi : à l'assaut des vagues de l'Atlantique* (2008) by Abasse Ndione directly confronts the problems facing youth in Senegal, fueling their choice to leave their homeland shrouded in uncertainty. The novel served as the basis for Moussa Touré's haunting film *La Pirogue* (2012). Mostéfa Djadjam's *Frontières* (2001) is also a compelling representation of the voyages made by clandestine migrants.

[130] See: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/07/mediterranean-migrant-arrivals-italy-passes-50000.

[131] See: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/01/record-number-of-migrants-expected-to-drown-in-mediterranean-this-year.

[132] See: http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2015/04/14/plus-de-morts-ce-week-end-en-mediterranee-que-dans-le-naufrage-de-lampedusa-de-2013_4615897_3210.html.

[133] See: http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/mediterranean-migrants-april-2015-worst-month-loss-life-says-un-1497384.

[134] See http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/01/world/africa/tortuous-history-traced-in-sunken-slave-ship-found-off-south-africa.html?_r=0

[135] See: http://www.lemonde.fr/immigration-et-diversite/article/2015/06/01/dans-nos-societes-pressees-le-migrant-est-transparent_4644385_1654200.html?xtmc=migrants&xtcr=19.

[136] See: http://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2015/jan/03/arab-spring-migrant-wave-instability-war.

[137] Indeed, as scholar of medieval literature and art Jeffrey Jerome Cohen shows in his blogpost titled "Noah's Arkive" drowning holds a powerful place in the imaginary, for it is one of the most common tropes of eschatological anxiety, a visual projection of complete annihilation, and also – with the image of Noah – of safety amid the end of the world.

[138] The original article in English can be found on the Washington Post's website: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/01/AR2006060101777.html.

[139] This repetition of the imperative also recalls Edouard Glissant's "La Barque Ouverte", in which he repeats a command for the reader to see this experience of the Middle Passage:

> *Supposez deux cents personnes entassées dans un espace qui à peine en eût pu contenir le tiers. Supposez le vomi, les chairs à vif, les poux en sarabande, les morts affalés, les agonisants croupis. Supposez, si vous le pouvez, l'ivresse rouge des montées sur le pont, la rampe à gravir, le soleil noir sur l'horizon, le vertige, cet éblouissement du ciel plaqué sur les vagues.* (17)

[140] The opposition between the stability of the grave on land and the fluidity of that non-grave of the sea is largely dal Lago's own reflection. Valéry's poem itself presents a juxtaposition of the sea as a great abyss or *néant* with consciousness, as the speaker, overlooking the waters, contemplates the possibility of pure thought. In the poem, the dead, lying in the graveyard, take on the role of peaceful permanence: "*Les morts cachés sont bien dans cette terre/Qui les réchauffe et sèche leur mystère*." Yet they are also changing form, and becoming once again part of the earth: "*Ils ont fondu dans une absence épaisse,/L'argile rouge a bu la blanche espèce,/Le don de vivre a passé dans les fleurs!*" This form of land transformation within the graveyard is of particular interest to dal Lago in its contrast to the transformation incurred through the aquatic non-graveyard.

[141] See Jenny Sharpe's article "The Middle Passages of Black Migration" (2009), which focuses on migration in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore* (2003) as a portrayal of the link between modern migration and the transatlantic slave trade.

[142] This pointed distinction that has taken on weight in the media indicates a *choice* to relocate, rather than a *need*. It is primarily to be contrasted with refugee status when determining the legitimacy of claims made by those seeking asylum. It is a problematic term, as many people who *choose* to migrate through clandestine channels do so from within situations of economic desperation.

[143] This poem appeared on the writer's website. See: http://www.okwonga.com/hundreds-of-cockroaches-drowned-today/ He wrote it in reference to the April 19 drowning of hundreds of migrants whose boat – carrying an estimated 700 passengers – capsized en route from Africa to Italy. The poem on his website links to the following article: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32371348. Furthermore, the reference to cockroaches is a specific reply to Katie Hopkins of *The Sun* who wrote a much criticized article comparing the economic migrants to cockroaches.

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