

**REMAKING OF THE SELF: A STUDY OF  
GENERATIONAL TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE  
MEMORY IN POST-COLONIAL CARIBBEAN  
FICTION**

**BY**

**HOOR RAHMAN**



**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES**

**ISLAMABAD**

**January, 2024**

**REMAKING OF THE SELF: A STUDY OF GENERATIONAL  
TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN POST-COLONIAL  
CARIBBEAN FICTION**

**BY**

**HOOR RAHMAN**

BS(HONS), National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, 2020

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**In English**

To

FACULTY OF ARTS & HUMANITIES



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES, ISLAMABAD

© Hoor Rahman, 2024



## THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read the following thesis, examined the thesis to the Faculty of Arts & Humanities for acceptance.

**Thesis Title:** Remaking of the Self: A Study of Generational Trauma and Collective Memory in Post-colonial Caribbean Fiction

**Submitted by:** Hoor Rahman **Registration #:** 120-MPhil/Eng.Lit/-S21

Master of Philosophy

Degree name in full

English Literature

Name of Discipline

Dr. Sana Tariq

Name of Research Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Research Supervisor

Dr. M. Safeer Awan

Name of Dean (FAH)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Dean (FAH)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I Hoor Rahman

Daughter of Lutf ur Rahman

Registration # 120-MPhil/Eng.Lit/-S21

Discipline English Literature

Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Remaking of the Self: A Study of Generational Trauma and Collective Memory in Post-colonial Caribbean Fiction** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

---

Signature of Candidate

---

Name of Candidate

---

Date

## ABSTRACT

### **Title: Remaking of the Self: A Study of Generational Trauma and Collective Memory in Post-colonial Caribbean Fiction**

The research study explores the depiction of generational trauma and collective memory in the novels *An Untamed State* by Roxane Gay and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat. The focus of the study is delimited to Haitian fiction that commonly portrays issues of gender abuse and violence. The study investigates how the traumatic events of kidnappings, and rape, in post-colonial Haitian setting, impact female characters over generations. The study utilizes Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger's "Generational Trauma", Maurice Halbwachs' "Collective Memory", and Susan J. Brison's "Remaking of a Self" as a conceptual framework. This research study shows how these female characters, subjected to violence, experience the trauma of sexual and physical abuse and engage with it during different generations of a family. First-generation females experience traumatic events; second-generation (children of trauma survivors) experience trauma either directly or indirectly, but they work to discover who they are while shielding the third generation from the effects of trauma. Brison's concept has been utilized to see how female characters demonstrate incredible courage and perseverance in the face of traumatic events and attain female agency. Mireille, and Sophie as mothers are pivotal in the novels because they hold the family together and fight for the third generation. The second generation shows resistance through the collective memory of a family to stop the transference of generational trauma to the next generation and transform their "Self" to claim their place in society. These female trauma survivors attain agency by redefining who they are as women. The collective memory of the past traumatic events, experienced by the female characters in a family, also provides this fortitude and preparedness for the second generations. Trauma and the collective memory of the family passed down through generations work together to restore the victim's "Self". This newfound agency and sense of self assist women in normalizing their family after generational trauma.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
<b>THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>AUTHOR’S DECLARATION .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>DEDICATION .....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.1 Overview of the study .....	1
1.1.1 Overview of the Selected Novels.....	2
1.1.2 Generational Trauma.....	3
1.1.3 Collective Memory.....	5
1.1.4 Remaking of a Self.....	7
1.2 Thesis Statement.....	7
1.3 Research Questions.....	8
1.4 Significance of the Study .....	8
1.5 Delimitation of the Study .....	9
1.6 Research Plan .....	10
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	11
2.2 Gender Abuse in Haitian Fiction .....	11
2.3 Scholarship on Trauma and Memory.....	14
2.4 Critiques on Novels.....	22
<b>3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>29</b>
3.1 Generational Trauma.....	29
3.1.2 Generational Trauma and Memory.....	31

3.2	Collective Memory of a Family.....	32
3.2.1	The Living Bond of Generations.....	34
3.3	Violence and the Remaking of Self .....	37
<b>4.</b>	<b>TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE CHARACTERS.....</b>	<b>44</b>
4.1	Introduction_ .....	44
4.2	Traumatic Experiences of Female Characters in <i>An Untamed State</i> .....	45
4.3	Traumatic Experiences of Female Characters in <i>Breath, Eyes, Memory</i> .....	63
<b>5.</b>	<b>MEMORY AS A MEDIUM OF TRANSFORMATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS</b> <b>.....</b>	<b>76</b>
5.1	Introduction .....	76
5.2	Aspects of Collective Memory of a Family .....	76
5.3	Memory as a Medium of Transformation of Female Characters in <i>An Untamed State</i> .....	77
5.4	Memory as a Medium of Transformation of Female Characters in <i>Breath, Eyes, Memory</i> .....	89
<b>6.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>93</b>
	<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	<b>100</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful to Allah, without Whose blessing I would not have been able to complete this difficult task

I owe thanks to Prof. Dr Muhammad Safeer Awan, Dean Faculty of Languages, Prof. Dr. Inayatullah Khan, Head Department of English for their cooperation in the entire process.

I would like to express my deepest thanks and love to my father Mr. Lutf ur Rahman who encouraged my pursuit of this degree. I extend my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Sana Tariq, for their unwavering support, insightful feedback, and encouragement throughout every stage of this research endeavor. Their expertise and guidance have been instrumental in shaping this thesis. I would like to extend my appreciation to my colleagues and peers for their camaraderie, support, and stimulating discussions. Their insights and encouragement have been invaluable throughout this journey. Lastly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my family and friends for their unwavering support, understanding, and encouragement throughout this academic pursuit. Their love and encouragement sustained me during challenging times and inspired me to persevere. I am deeply grateful to all those who have supported and guided me on this academic journey. Their contributions have been instrumental in the completion of this thesis.

Thanks to the English Department of NUML for offering me the academic and creative space, to bring this thesis to life.

Thank you all.



## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Mr. Lutf ur Rahman and Mrs. Rukhsana Lutf ur Rahman who rocked my cradle with their endless love.

To Mr. Lutf ur Rahman whose unwavering support, encouragement, and belief in me have been a constant source of inspiration throughout this journey. Your guidance and love have shaped not only this thesis but also my academic and personal growth. Thank you for always being my rock and for believing in my dreams.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The dissertation focuses on the concept of generational trauma in Caribbean fiction. The study is delimited to Haitian literature as post-colonial Haitian fiction commonly highlights female characters experiencing trauma over generations. The experience of generational trauma and collective memory has been analyzed in Roxane Gay's *An Untamed State* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The selected novels present female characters undergoing sexual and physical violence, caused by kidnappings and rape. The study examines how female characters engage with trauma of gender abuse and how collective memory helps overcome their traumatic experiences. Generational trauma and collective memory in the selected novels have been analyzed through the lens of Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger's concept of "Generational Trauma", Maurice Halbwachs' "Collective Memory", and Susan J. Brison's "Remaking of a Self". The study further focuses on analyzing the relationship of generational trauma and collective memory to see the transformed self of the female characters in the selected fiction. The research investigates how collective memory of sexual abuse is utilized by female characters to struggle against gender violence which has permeated the post-colonial Haitian society for generations.

#### 1.1 Overview of the Study

The novels are set in post-colonial Haiti. Haiti was earlier a French colony, regarded as one of the violent American colonies in terms of slavery practices. The colony had high levels of violence and when Haiti gained independence in 1804, the violent attitude of colonizers encroached in post-colonial Haiti. Haiti faced traumatic incidents during the autocratic family dictatorship of the Duvalier father-son duo regime. The political disparity and unlawfulness led to the formation of Mafia groups unleashing excessive atrocities upon

the general public, particularly women. Haitian nation-state failed to meet the basic needs of its people and human rights problems arose; violence against women became a prominent issue during this time. Roxane Gay's *An Untamed State* (2014) and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) portray women in this post-colonial Haitian context and unfold their generational traumatic experiences. The study of female characters in the selected novels gives an insight into the traumatic condition of women who undergo gender abuse at the hands of Mafia groups. The novel *An Untamed State* highlights events of gang rape and physical violence during kidnappings which trigger trauma in the life of female characters and the memories of these traumatic experiences continue to haunt them. As a result of these traumatic events an obsession to test female purity becomes a practice in the second generation, highlighted in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* which transfers trauma to the second generation. The role of the second generation is crucial in stopping this transference further to the third generation. Hence, my study focuses on three generations to analyze the engagement of female characters with trauma and collective memory to understand this process of intergenerational trauma.

### **1.1.1 Overview of the Selected Novels:**

For many years, Haitian society has suffered from corruption, mass killings, and gender abuse, particularly in post-colonial times. This affected many generations of people, mainly women. The novels highlight the creation of mafia gangs in post-colonial times which got involved in kidnappings of females. These kidnappings resulted in physical and sexual abuse if the ransom was not paid on time. These incidents serve as background for the study, resulting in trauma spread over generations.

Roxane Gay and Edwidge Danticat depict the struggle of female characters, under the oppression of ruling elite for several generations. The novels show the spread of unlawful power politics inducing violence in the Haitian social structure. The dictators and the mafia gangs are shown committing crimes against the public, creating trauma and affecting the lives of many generations. In *An Untamed State*, the protagonist Mireille's

life changes within thirteen days of kidnapping, torture, and gang rape, bringing about a lifelong struggle and transformation. Mireille's physical abuse is shown through her deformed and unrecognized body. The sexual abuse led to her inability to give birth to a child. On the other hand, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Danticat shows women, suffering from generational trauma of rape and virginity tests confirming the purity of the younger female generations. Martine and her sister had to undergo virginity tests by their mothers but it stopped when Martine was raped by a Macoute (an unidentified member of a paramilitary group that terrorized the population). Martine became pregnant, she attempted suicide but failed. Martine maintains the legacy of virginity tests by applying it to her daughter Sophie. This is how Martine (mother)'s trauma affecting Sophie (daughter) sets a pattern of generational trauma. It affects the lives of younger generations with the traumatic experiences of their mothers becoming abusive and violent towards their own children. In this scenario, collective memory has a central role to play in the lives of these female characters. The collective memory of trauma passed over generations provides support to the female characters to end its transference and transform their agency. This memory over generations gives them strength and emotional confidence against the oppressive practices.

### **1.1.2 Generational Trauma:**

Vivian M. Rakoff, a Canadian psychiatrist, recorded high levels of psychological distress among children of Holocaust survivors. He provided the concept of generational trauma in 1966 with this study (DeAngelis 36). Generational trauma refers to the transmission of trauma or adverse experiences from one generation to the next. This concept suggests that traumatic experiences, such as war, genocide, oppression, or other forms of violence, can have a lasting impact that affects not only the individuals who directly experience them but also their descendants. Generational trauma can manifest in various ways, and its effects may not always be immediately apparent. It can be silent and covert, influencing individuals' thoughts, behaviors, and emotions without them fully understanding the root cause. These effects can surface throughout a person's life, starting

from an early age and persisting into adulthood. Symptoms of generational trauma can include hypervigilance, a constant state of alertness or vigilance in anticipation of potential threats; a sense of an uncertain future, stemming from a lack of stability or security; mistrust of others or institutions due to past experiences of betrayal or harm; aloofness or difficulty forming close relationships; high levels of anxiety, including generalized anxiety disorder or specific phobias; depression, characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or despair; panic attacks, sudden episodes of intense fear or anxiety; nightmares and insomnia, recurring distressing dreams and difficulty sleeping; and issues with self-esteem and self-confidence, stemming from feelings of worthlessness or inadequacy.

During traumatic incidents, our thought processes are scattered and disorganized and later, the event is no longer remembered as the original event. The dispersed images, fragments of memory, body sensations and words stored in our unconscious are activated later by remote reminiscences of the original event. Once these memories are triggered, they cause the reenactment of the original trauma in day to day lives. The characters in the novels find themselves unconsciously reenacting to certain events, situations and people that resemble their past experience of trauma. In several situations, members of family repeat unconscious patterns until they are given awareness of forming their agency. When a family experiences unbearable trauma, the immediate feelings can be overwhelming and can escalate beyond its resolution. It is human nature that when pain is great, humans try to avoid it. The repressed emotions unknowingly restrict the healing process of the generation that follows. It develops difficult relationship with parent which not only affects physical health, it also forms a template on which later relationship is formed with the following generation. Sometimes relationship of one generation with the parents is strong but they still carry difficult emotions that restrain the bond among generations. However these emotions belong to their family history, they relive fears and feelings that do not belong to them but are the fragments of trauma of the previous generations. Sometimes

children experience their mother emotionally distant when they are physically present. The presence of a mother in the early first years of an infant's life is very crucial because the bond with the mother forms the basis of an infant's well-being. It becomes a driving force and source for the child to grow in a healthy way when the child is affirmed and validated by the mother. But many times the break in the emotional bond between the child and mother creates painful images of childhood experiences that resurface only to traumatize the next generation. They experience this because in their childhood their defense was threatened. As a result, they erect defences which orient thoughts towards difficulties rather than comforting memories. They keep only those memories that support their primitive defense mechanism creating a barricade between the deep desires to be loved by their parents. They unconsciously block comforting memories like the tender touch of their mother, fearful of being hurt by them which will not help them in their healing process (Wolynn 72-77). The second generation has to show resistance and resilience to traumas being transferred from the previous generation for their healing. Thus, second generation relies on collective memory of the family for healing from the traumatic past.

### **1.1.3 Collective Memory:**

Memory studies state that any discourse about the past should also be considered as an expression in the present from where it emerges. "Collective memory" is equivalent to the French phrase "La Memoire Collective" which refers to the shared memories of a social group. Collective memory indeed focuses on a single perspective of a group, nation, or community. It represents past events as associated with the values, narratives, and biases specific to that particular group. Halbwachs presents two societies: one is the present society while the other society is immersed in thought. Present society is the one where people live together while the society immersed in thought means our feelings, emotions and bonds that one has in mind with others. He states that each individual has the power to control their memories and manipulate their societies immersed in thought. Halbwachs believed that collective memory is a social phenomenon that brings together groups of

people who share the same memories demonstrating how memory functions in society. Our memories are very important and interconnected with our personalities as a whole and they allow us to interact and become a part of a group. Halbwachs asserts that Collective memory is inherently selective, meaning that different groups of people can have different interpretations of historical events and experiences. These varying interpretations give rise to different modes of behavior and attitudes within different communities. Collective memories are the shared renderings of the past within a community, and they play a significant role in shaping that community's collective identity. These memories help to define the values, beliefs, and traditions of a community by providing a shared understanding of its history and heritage. Memories of trauma are transferred from one generation to another becoming the collective memory of a family. The memory of female victimhood is portrayed in twofold: as a new perspective on the social understanding of events that occurred during post-colonialism, and as a transformation in the relationship between women and politics that characterizes the social structure.

This study explores how generational trauma and collective memory of a family shape the identity of the victimized female characters over generations in the novels. The study analyzes experiences of trauma in female victims which reshape their self. The remaking of self shows the journey of female characters from trauma to healed body and female self. Women are significant figures of a family in Haitian novels who hold the family together and when they are traumatized the familial bond gets destroyed leading to a shattered family unit. Trauma victims suffer from PTSD with severe symptoms of sleep disorder, vivid flashbacks, nightmares, physical sensations and intrusive thoughts. Females suffering from trauma are physically and psychologically affected by violence. This study deals with generational understanding of trauma and experience of female characters to strive for change through their agency. This study explains how not all female victims of trauma lead a disoriented life or commit suicide, some victims change their traumas into strength by remaking their "self".

### **1.1.4 Remaking of a Self**

Sexual violence can disrupt a victim's sense of self, leading to a loss of control over their life. Rehabilitation can help increase self-assurance, support, and clarity. Victims often face social death and struggle to reconstruct themselves in new environments. Trauma can erase a person's past repertoire, making recovery challenging. Trauma survivors need more control over distressing memories and PTSD symptoms to heal and reconnect with humanity. Self-defense classes and anger towards the assailant can help break the binding force of self-blame and helplessness. Physical remastering of trauma, such as imaginary reenactments, is essential for recovery. It aids in reconstructing the wounded self of trauma survivors.

## **1.2 THESIS STATEMENT**

The study explores how trauma affects the female characters over generations in Roxane Gay's *An Untamed State* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The novels highlight incidents of gender abuse, kidnappings, and rape in Haitian fiction which led to trauma explicitly spread over generations affecting the bond between mothers and their children. When the first generation (mothers) undergo trauma, the second generation is either explicitly or implicitly influenced by trauma. While the third generation is protected as they are kept at par from trauma by the second generation. The study further highlights how collective memory of generational trauma helps females realize the weight of their agency. As the collective memory of a family is filled with trauma over generations, the female victims of second generation fight their trauma by embracing it to transform their "Self". The children of trauma survivors sustain through the collective memory of the family by showing preparedness and stopping the transference of generational trauma to the subsequent generations. Collective memory passed down through generations gives strength and courage to the family members to fight for their agency.



### **1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

This study will answer the following questions:

1. What are various traumatic events that cause generational trauma in post-colonial Haitian fiction?
2. How do female characters engage with generational trauma of gender abuse and violence in the selected texts?
3. How does collective memory reconstruct the female self in *An Untamed State* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*?

### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study explores the portrayal of generational trauma in the Caribbean fiction. It sheds light on the overlooked aspects of gender violence in the Haitian context and its lasting impact over generations. The study foregrounds the unspeakability of these experiences and highlights the transformative power of voicing them. It is particularly poignant, as it reflects individual healing with broader societal reckonings in the aftermath of trauma. The shift from individual to collective memory, especially within politically oppressed societies like Haiti, underscores the interconnectedness of personal and generational experiences of trauma. This interconnectedness highlights how historical and cultural contexts shape the perpetuation of violence and the resilience of those affected, over generations.

This research further highlights how memory functions as a tool for resistance and empowerment. The collective memory of trauma within a family can indeed serve as a powerful catalyst for change, particularly empowering women to advocate for their rights and break the cycle of intergenerational trauma. Along with recognizing the significance of memory in shaping the individual and collective identity of females (victims), this

research contributes to a deeper understanding of the conditions in Caribbean countries, offering valuable insights for combating oppressive practices.

Moreover, by delving into the transformation of female characters owing to traumatic experiences, the complexities of Caribbean societies are revealed through this study. As traumatic experiences pass down the generations, they create a cycle of suffering and silence in generations. However, by acknowledging and confronting these shared experiences, individuals within a family can help reclaim agency and challenge oppressive norms. Women, in particular, often play a central role in this process, drawing strength from their shared history to advocate for themselves and future generations. Through the act of speaking out against injustice and seeking support from within their familial networks, women can disrupt the patterns of trauma transmission. This study actively addresses the root causes of violence and oppression, to pave the way for healing and transformation.

## **1.5 DELIMITATION**

This study is delimited to the two Haitian novels under discussion, *An Untamed State* by Roxane Gay and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat. This study is also delimited to the theoretical lens of Victora Aarons and Alan L. Berger's concept of "Generational Trauma", Maurice Halbwachs' "Collective Memory", Susan J. Brison's "Remaking of a Self" as the primary lens. Furthermore, the scope of this study is restricted to Haitian fiction in Caribbean literature where setting of the novels commonly highlight events of gender abuse and violence which are very relevant for the discussion of this study.

## **1.6 RESEARCH PLAN**

The dissertation is divided into the following seven chapters:

The first chapter introduces the relation between generational trauma and collective memory. The chapter discusses victims of physical abuse to fight their traumas

over generations. It gives us the overview of how the entire research is supposed to be conducted. It also gives us an insight into the political situation of post-colonial Haiti. Furthermore, it shows the struggle of female characters in Caribbean fiction who are instilled with traumas by the corrupt social and political regimes in power in Haiti.

The second chapter is based on literature review which talks about the existing literature and how it provides better understanding of research topic and fills gaps in the field.

The third chapter is about the theories/ critical lens through which the study has been carried out. The theories under discussion are generational trauma, collective memory and remaking of self which help the victim of sexual abuse to move towards life again.

The textual analysis of the novels under study creates the historical background for better understanding as to why these crimes were common and happening in Haiti. It deals with trauma of victims which shifts to generational trauma creating collective memory of the family. The fifth chapter of the data analysis deals with the remaking of female agency and their stand for their own individuality.

The last chapter is of conclusion which sums up the research by proving that female victims nowadays knows how to overcome their trauma negating the traditional beliefs about the fate of trauma victims.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

By examining existing critical scholarship in the areas of generational trauma and collective memory, this chapter aims to contextualize my study within the broader academic discourse of this field. Additionally, this chapter seeks to identify gaps or areas where further investigation is needed, thus offering new insights into the area. The first section of the literature review chapter covers previous researches done on generational trauma, collective memory and remaking of female self, and the second section deals with reviews on the selected novels. I have used different sources that fall into categories of articles, book chapters, and essays.

For the sake of lucidity, I have further structured the literature review into three thematic parts to maintain coherence. I have used different sources that fall into the categories of articles, book chapters, and essays. The thematic division falls under the following categories:

- Gender Abuse in Haitian Fiction
- Scholarship on Trauma and Memory
- Critiques on novels

#### **2.2 Gender Abuse in Haitian Fiction**

Dayanli Flores-Rodriguez's study "Towards a Trans-Caribbean Poetics: A New Aesthetics of Power and Resistance" highlights the central role of post-colonial foreign intervention in the establishment of violent and oppressive administrations which left a discursive legacy in the Caribbean region. This practice eventually led to the misguided

division of power between the establishment and the rebellious mafia gangs in the Caribbean island of Haiti, resulting in widespread gender abuse and violence among the general public (DaynaliFlores-Rodriguez 177-189, my paraphrase). These post-colonial regimes viewed violence as an important tool to control the masses. This legacy shaped Haitian power dynamics and prevented common people from playing an effective role in the society. The emerging Caribbean literature reflects the multifaceted nature of Caribbean societies, addressing themes of power, violence, and oppression while exploring tensions between the individual and the power groups. Caribbean literature functions as a space for liberation from these powerful political groups. This provides me a gap to explore the plight of Caribbean women under these power dynamics which have been prevalent for many generations in Haiti.

Ilsa Lopez-Vales's study on "Slaves to Sex and Violence: A Study of David Dabydeen's Female Characters" shows the transference of culturally defined gender roles to the younger generation portraying the normalization of violence against women even at home. In an interview in 2009, David Dabydeen recognized that violence oriented toward Indo-Caribbean women by their spouses was a normal way of living. It is more painful for children to grow up in such an environment where violence against women is a common act and not a crime, neither considered something bad against the integrity of the women. The status of women in patriarchal societies was that of subordination and disadvantage as they were indeed subjected to various forms of discrimination and inequality compared to men. They were objectified as commodities, property, and possessions of men. According to Manu, a woman has to obey the commandments of all the males in her family: father, brother, husband, and son. She should not complain about their unkindness and cruelty but should forgive and maintain her position as that of the subordinate. The question is why should a woman forget her place if she does so, they would be doomed in this life and the life hereafter. While progress has been made in many parts of the world to address chauvinistic practices and promote gender equality, there is still much work to be done. It requires sustained efforts and commitment from all sectors of society to create a world

where every individual, regardless of gender, can live free from discrimination, violence, and injustice. Historically, the brutality committed by men against women is justified but due to the transformation of time and evolution, it is claimed that women should have fair and legitimate representation in society as well as in the depictions of fictional works (Lopez-Valles 157-230, my paraphrase). The study reveals Caribbean societies' prevalent subjugation of women, leading to the normalization of certain behavioral patterns, resulting in social evils and a significant impact on society. The transference of violence towards women among generations was a common Caribbean norm but my research highlights the gap by showing families who confronted their traumas and stopped its transference.

Raquel Castro Salas study "Female Experience of Trauma and Mourning in Two Post-colonial Novels of El Salvador and Peru: *Roza, tumba, quema* by Claudia Hernández, and *La sangre de la aurora* by Claudia Salazar" shows how Third World literature approaches conflicts and contributes to different aspects of women's experiences illustrating the tragic processes. Claudia Hernandez and Claudia Salazar shed light on how women were before, during, and after the violent conflict. They demonstrate how society and culture influenced women's lives, agencies, and traumas. Women were impacted by the violent conflicts differently because they were more likely to lose in terms of sexual violence, childbearing, widowing, forced displacements, and other traumas due to their sex.

Chandra Mohanty Talpade states that the terms "woman" and "women" have different meanings; woman are actual, tangible subjects of their collective histories who are not equal but have similar conceptions, while women are a cultural and ideological composite other created via a variety of representational speech. Testimonial literature is a genre that surfaced following the wars. There was a need to have a witness in the writing of books that presented fresh interpretations and facets of the suffering that was occurring as a result of diversified traumatic experiences. Truth commission and human rights reports marked legal history which demanded factual truth of the conflicts showing different experiences of the victim (Salas 188-193, my paraphrase). This study deals with women's

representation and their experience. It helps in my research study as it creates the background for Caribbean writers' testimonies showing trauma and power politics in the post-colonial Caribbean context which lead to generational trauma. My research shows the gap by portraying how the collective memory of a family formed through generational trauma helps victims to accept their trauma and heal themselves.

### **2.3 Scholarship on Trauma and Memory**

According to the conventional trauma coping strategy developed by Cathy Caruth, trauma hinders direct language representation and fractures awareness. Trauma is an unprocessed incident that fractures identity, escapes common memory, and is not typically depicted in stories. Caruth argues that traumas' dissociation disrupts the understanding of the traumatic experience. The notion that trauma can only ever be understood as an ongoing absence, points to the dissociative character of trauma as well as its linguistic irregularity. Caruth states that trauma is recognized and cannot be traced back to a single, violent incident in the past, to haunt later on. Caruth explains that trauma shows the inability of an individual's immediate understanding of the experience; it may manifest as tardiness. Because traumatic experiences enter the psyche in a different way than ordinary experiences, they produce aberrant memories that are difficult to depict through storytelling. The notion of the indescribability of trauma suggests a nonchalant attitude towards trauma and dissociation highlighting that traumatic experience is stored differently in the memory and is unavailable for normal narrative recall. Caruth explains that trauma is a shock that functions remarkably similarly to a physical threat, but it is actually a disruption in the mind's perception of time. The traumatic incident has an adverse and often pathological influence on consciousness and memory, making it impossible for the past to be integrated into a story of one's life (Caruth 363–364, my paraphrase). This paradigm places a strong emphasis on the pain brought on by an outside force that alters the psyche inside and permanently alters identity. It paves the way for my research through this paradigm but it does not deal with how trauma is transferred among different generations

through the collective memory of a family. My research shows this gap by highlighting generational trauma and the collective memory of a family. It also shows how this alteration agency due to trauma helps in providing strength to the victims to transform their “Self”.

Soyoung Park’s study “Witnessing the Unspeakable: Sexual Trauma and Erotic Desire in Twentieth-Century American Fiction” portrays female sexuality towards sexual abuse and erotic desire are two opposite extremes but it is very difficult for sexually abused women to accept or have their erotic desire or be indulged in any sexual activity after the abuse. Sexual abuse is the highest-ranked crime against women which deals with a traumatic experience making their life difficult and abnormal with the trauma, abuse, and acceptance. After encountering sexual abuse females are repelled by sexual desires and want to stay at length from it till the time they have not recovered or healed from the trauma. The trauma of sexual violence directly affects a female’s sexuality because some boundaries that are set for the chastity and purity of a woman are violated. Society and culture also play a significant part in such incidents and the process of battered women’s recovery (Park 39-50, my paraphrase). This study highlights the challenges faced by sexually abused women in having erotic desire and coping with trauma. It supports my research study as the female characters under discussion also find it hard to be intimate with their husbands after sexual abuse. It also shows the gap that how sexually abused women heal and cope with the trauma to live a normal marital life.

Jenny Olivia Johnson’s study “The Luminous Noise of the Broken Experience: Synaesthesia, Acoustic Memory and Child Sexual Abuse in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century United States” shows many people who experienced sexual assault as children only have fragmented memories but sometimes they experience physical and mental hallucinations brought on by specific noises and melodies. This experience is known as acoustic synaesthesia. Music triggers sensorial and somatic remembrances and revisits the horrifying experience of trauma and abuse. Memory hallucinations constitute the sole



recollection that the survivors have of their sexual abuse. There are different kinds of survivors' traumatic memories i.e., repressed, fragmented, liminal, and uncertain as these survivors cannot describe and explain what happened or how it led to the abuse, they do not have words to express their emotional and physical pain. Many sexually abused survivors face the difficulty of remembering their traumatic experiences due to neuroscientific and cultural demands. Neuroscience implies that memory in humans is malleable enough to unconsciously forget the painful memories as it brings harm to the individuals' future whereas the cultural perspective suggests that the survivors are socially pressured to either forget and resume their lives as regular people or to keep quiet about the adult sins (Johnson 2-10, my paraphrase). This study explains how traumatic memories can start the reenactment of trauma which prevails in my research study as well where the female victim's trauma is reenacted by acoustic synaesthesia but my research also shows that the collective memory of the family helps support the victim to move towards the healing process rather than to be in trauma life-long.

Maria Mundo's article "Reimagining Returns: the Preservation of Caribbean Identity and Generational Trauma of Exiles through Cultural Memory" claims that *The Dew Breaker*, a Haitian-American novel by Edwidge Danticat, and *Un niño azul para esta sombra*, a Puerto Rican play by René Marqués, both highlight the internal struggles and struggles that come with giving several generations of people different perspectives on the same historical event. When looking for a symbolic return to earlier landscapes, both of these texts are written between cultural barriers, placing the narrative in a translocative and transtemporal state. Danticat's book forbids readers from having any easy access to traumatic experiences, instead placing the burden of piecing together the past and dealing with censorship and erasure on the readers. Marqués's play illustrates how the young protagonist's prospects for the future have been shattered by the weight of upholding the political beliefs and cultural norms of earlier generations, illustrating the effects of trauma on the individual. In these works, children are seen as playing a crucial role in advancing

the narratives of their parents' idealized personal histories and shared national identities. To make peace with the past, they thematically and allegorically weave together trauma on an individual and societal level (Mundo 3-37, my paraphrase). This article focuses on how children reconcile with generational trauma which is similar to my research. The gap is created that generational trauma forms collective memory of a family which helps motivate the second generation of trauma survivors to confront trauma and end its transference to further generations.

The chapter, “(Re)Writing the Black Female Body or Cleansing her Soul: Narratives of Generational Trauma and Healing” revolves around Edwidge Danticat's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, focusing particularly on the women of the Caco family, Martine and Sophie. It explores how traumas experienced by Martine are repeated in Sophie's life, illustrating the intergenerational transmission of pain and resilience within the context of Black womanhood. Using Wright's concept of pedagogy as empowerment, the chapter examines the dynamics between Martine and Sophie. It portrays how Martine's own struggles with societal expectations and trauma influence her relationship with Sophie, echoing broader narratives of Black women reclaiming their bodies and narratives. Danticat's narrative style allows her to (re)write the bodies of her characters as sites of resistance, healing, and empowerment. This is achieved through connecting her characters to their ancestral pasts and imbuing their bodies with spiritual and cultural significance, challenging dominant societal discourses. The chapter showcases how Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* serves as a powerful example of literature that blends personal, historical, and fictional narratives to (re)write the discourses surrounding Black women's bodies. It highlights how trauma and empowerment are passed down through generations, and how literature can be used as a tool for reclaiming identity and challenging societal norms (Jenkins 15, my paraphrase). It sets the path for my study demonstrating signifying how literature, generational trauma and collective memory of a family enable a victim of gender abuse to transform their agency and “Self”.

Christopher R. Barenberg's study "Memory and Representation of World War II in Contemporary British and German Fiction: A Comparative Analysis" depicts that during the previous twenty years, memory fiction varies in the representations of war as it creates a pluralistic approach to collective memory. Kathryn N Jones emphasizes the diversity of perspectives, interpretations, and recollections of events held by individuals, communities, nations, and groups. A variety of memories has replaced monolithic national memory discourses, making the themes of victimhood, trauma, perpetration, and guilt even more pertinent to the made-up representations. Assmann and Conrad in 'Memory in a Golden Age' observe that Certain memories are fixed in national museums and monuments, while others are transported across. As the living memories (first-hand witnesses) gradually disappear the focus of memory fiction shifts to the second-hand memories which are problematic due to the process of transmission of memories, some memories might be lost or misinterpreted. The recent literary fiction now centres on memories rather than history, addressing issues related to individual, cultural, social, and national identity. Birgit Neumann defines 'literary works entwined with cultural notions and the formation of memory and identity is known as fictions of memory'. According to Assmann, loss of memory is due to the absence of first-hand eyewitnesses of memory. Also, described as a growing distance in time from the events and their traumatizing quality, or the unwillingness of the post-war generation to face the past, which causes a feeling of "disruption" in the "communicative memory". Marianne Hirsch describes 'postmemory' as set off from history by a personal connection and from memory by generational distance. Postmemory is not mediated through recollection of the events but an imaginative investment and creation. According to Birchall, "memory fiction" is a genre that originated from the fusion of autobiographical and historical fiction (Barenberg 7-15, my paraphrase). This study deals with multiple perspectives of memory fiction and how memory is perceived through time. It states how memory is lost in transmission whereas my research will close this gap by utilizing generational trauma along with the collective

memory of a family showing that memory is successfully transferred through generations giving them strength to overcome trauma.

Christina E. Stokes in her study “Re-envisioning History: Memory, Myth and Fiction in Literary Representations of the Trujillato” gives Gayle Green’s argument that memory is our means of connecting with the past and present, forming and reconstructing self and versions of experience so that we can live with it. Wiesel states that the appeal of memory and the call to recollection touches us from the very beginning of history, and remembering is essential for transformation. Thus, history and memory have a direct relationship as they form personal and public relations, situations, and events. Greens believe that memory is significant for change because forgetting leads to the repetition of actions that might doom us while memory makes us leave the previous paths followed towards the adaptation of the new paths of life. 1937 Haitian genocide experience as described by the survivors, Wiesel explains that no language could explain the experience thus, a new vocabulary has to be invented for the communication, understanding, and comprehension of the trauma of Haitian genocide (Stokes 9-16, my paraphrase). This study shows how people refused to hear, while those who did hear were unable to believe and those who did believe were unable to understand the trauma because the experience in the camps was beyond comprehension. My research study highlights this gap by showing how the collective memory of a family helps victims to express their traumas in order to heal themselves.

Stephane Martin Demers’ article “Recreating Collective Memories of Africa in the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora: ‘Spiritual Resistance’ in Cuban Santería and Haitian Vodou” eloquently discusses how African-turned-Afro-Caribbean slaves used cultural practices like Cuban Santería and Haitian Vodou to resist European subjugation and maintain their African roots. It emphasizes the importance of these cultural practices in forging solidarity among diverse ethnicities and in challenging the dominant imperial regime. Afro-Caribbean slaves, forced into enslavement, developed a collective image of their African

homeland. This collective memory was crucial in their resistance to European subjugation. The recreated collective memories served as a foundation for resistance. By preserving and adapting their African spiritual and cultural practices, slaves were able to subvert the dominant European culture and resist enslavement. The resilience of Afro-Caribbean slaves in maintaining their cultural identity and resisting oppression through their spiritual practices evolved into potent symbols of resistance and cultural continuity (Demers 90-93, my paraphrase). This article opens the door for my study since it demonstrates how Afro-Caribbean slaves' collective memory gives them power against repressive authorities. My study demonstrates how a family's collective memory prevents the trauma of gender violence from being passed down through generations.

Anthea Josias' article "Toward an understanding of archives as a feature of collective memory" discusses several key themes related to collective memory, archival practices, and their significance in the post-apartheid context of South Africa. It explores the intersection of collective memory and archival practices. It acknowledges that archives play a crucial role in shaping collective memory by preserving and presenting historical records. It encourages a critical examination of collective memory as socially constructed. This perspective challenges the notion of memory as a static or objective entity, emphasizing its dynamic and contested nature. The article contemplates the broader social and political dimensions of archives. It suggests that archival practices are not neutral but are influenced by power dynamics and societal values, which shape what is remembered and how it is remembered. It emphasizes how crucial it is to understand memory as a complex and evolving process shaped by social and political factors, rather than a simple reflection of historical events (Josias 95-112, my paraphrase). This article paves the way for my research by addressing how the collective memory of a family is socially structured through the generational practices of a family. My research creates the gap by showing how collective memory gives power to female characters to fight their traumas and form agency.

Mary R. Harvey's article "In the Aftermath of Sexual Abuse: Making and Remaking Meaning in Narratives of Trauma and Recovery" explores the application of a narrative approach to understanding trauma and the recovery process, focusing specifically on survivors of sexual abuse. The article shows how survivors of sexual abuse construct and reconstruct the meaning of their experiences over time and throughout their recovery journey. This involves analyzing the stories survivors tell about their trauma and how these narratives evolve. The study aims to understand how survivors make sense of their experiences and how this meaning-making process changes across different stages of recovery. This includes examining turning points in their narratives that allow for new understandings and perspectives on past traumas. The transformational aspect of recovery is highlighted, focusing on how survivors replace feelings of powerlessness with agency and reclaim a positive identity from a previously "damaged" self-definition. This process is depicted as challenging yet essential for healing. It signifies the role of survivors' stories in the recovery process. Narratives are seen not only as a means of expressing trauma but also as tools for processing and integrating experiences, facilitating healing and resilience. The article contributes to the understanding of trauma and recovery by highlighting the transformative potential of narrative approaches. By centering survivors' stories and experiences, underscoring the complexities of healing from sexual abuse and advocating for more empathetic and responsive approaches for the remaking. This narrative lens not only enriches scholarly discourse but also informs supportive interventions that respect and empower survivors in their recovery processes (Harvey 291-311, my paraphrase). This article supports my research study by signifying how survivors' narratives help victims to reclaim their agency and self. Although my research study deals with generational trauma highlighting how collective memory of a family gives power to the victims in the remaking of their self.

## 2.4 Critiques of Novels

KS and Karmakar's article "The Violation of the Female Body: Violence, Trauma and Agency in Roxane Gay's *An Untamed State*" utilizes the interdisciplinary approach, drawing on Holocaust studies, PTSD, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction, adds depth to the exploration of trauma in the narrative. The examination of Mireille's experience as that of an "implicated subject" provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding her identity and agency. The incorporation of Catherine Malabou's theory of "destructive plasticity" to argue for the development of a new persona after the traumatic experience is particularly intriguing. It brings attention to the transformative and often destructive nature of trauma, emphasizing its profound impact on an individual's subjectivity. Furthermore, the discussion of passivity as a form of resistance, shielding oneself from the external world to mitigate the negative effects of violence, adds another layer to the analysis. This perspective challenges conventional notions of agency, suggesting that survival itself can be a powerful form of resistance. The examination of the narrative structure as a reflection of Mireille's psyche, with the fairy tale divided into two parts mirroring her psychological states before and after the traumatic event, is a compelling approach. The acknowledgement that these two parts cannot be completely integrated underscores the lasting impact of trauma on an individual's life and narrative. The engagement with Felman and Laub's theories, positing that agency over one's experience can be gained through literature and narratives that bear witness to the trauma, provides a hopeful and empowering perspective. It aligns with the idea that storytelling can be a transformative and therapeutic process, allowing individuals to reclaim their narratives (Karmakar, KS 143-145, my paraphrase). This article paves the way for my research as it displays the trauma of abuse which can be healed through literature and storytelling. The article does not deal with generational trauma and collective memory throughout the traumatized female characters' recovery as a result, it produces disparities in the critical

knowledge sector that currently exist. My study closes this gap. It closely focuses on the traumatic event and how trauma is passed on to other generations.

Roldan-Sevillano's article "Haiti's 'Painful Truths': A Postcolonialised Reading of Trauma in Roxane Gay's *An Untamed State*" discusses the evolution and critique of trauma theory, particularly concerning cultural studies. It describes the original viewpoints of scholars like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman, who viewed trauma as irreversible, unrepresentable, ineffable, and amnesic. These concepts were then used in trauma fiction research as a framework. However, there has been resistance and opposition to these postulations from non-Western and postcolonial criticism starting in the late 2000s. A reformulation and change of the prevalent viewpoints on trauma have been called for by scholars such as Silvia Marta-nez-Falquina, Michael Rothberg, Stef Craps, Irene Visser, Dolores Herrero, and Sonia Baelo-Allua. They argue for a decolonial shift, departing from what they see as a constrained framework that is Eurocentric. The critique focuses on four drawbacks of traditional trauma theory that these scholars aim to address. Firstly, there is a concern about the overemphasis on personal or psychological viewpoint, which could separate facts from their causes and downplay the significance of the social and historical background. Furthermore, the notion that trauma is only sparked by one violent incident is challenged, by the proposal that trauma can be collective, cultural, and even structural. Thirdly, there is criticism of the understanding of trauma as a gloomy and porous question with the argument that resilience and healing are also possible and fulfilled through culturally specific ways. Lastly, it highlights a shift away from a concentration on novel and (post)modern narrative techniques as the only effective way to depict pain in fiction, supporting the recognition considering various tactics for resistance and representation in non-Western settings. The scholars mentioned in the article propose a decolonized approach to trauma theory that takes into account political, societal, and economic aspects, especially in non-Western settings, and questions the constraints of classical trauma models.



The article discusses the way sexual assault is portrayed in literature, emphasizing the value of researching the representations of rape in literature, in particular rape trauma syndrome. Roldan Sevillano argues that despite the potential risk of re-victimization and normalization of violence, analyzing such literary representations is crucial for acknowledging the physical, social, and psychological aspects of sexual assault, especially in contexts like Haiti, where it is common to witness sexual assault and challenging to prosecute. The prevalence of sexual violence in Haiti, emphasizes the challenges in prosecuting such cases due to stigma in society and a "culture of impunity." This has led to the development of a rape culture in Haiti, deeply rooted in historical, social, and gender inequalities. The critical silence surrounding rape depictions is a type of epistemic violence, contributing to the continuation of this pervasive issue. The widespread devastation caused by sexual assault in Haiti has prevailed throughout its history, from the colonial founding related to the rape of enslaved African women to the United States occupation in the early twentieth century, the Duvalier regime, and political unrest in the 1990s and 2000s. Haitian women have historically experienced their bodies as "territories of colonial conquest." The historical context of the contemporary situation points out that sexual violence remains a pervasive issue in Haiti, exacerbated by political instability, economic crises, and natural disasters. The author relates this to the thematic focus of Roxane Gay's novel *An Untamed State*, which addresses sexual violence by a Haitian gang during a period marked by toxic masculinity, misogyny, and gender violence. The collective trauma of sexual violence in Haiti illustrates its historical continuity and pervasive impact on Haitian women. It underscores the importance of studying literary representations of sexual violence to bring attention to the silenced dimensions of this issue and challenges the culture of impunity that allows such violence to persist.

The intersectionality of Mireille's identity partly as a Haitian woman adds complexity to her trauma, as she grapples with feelings of betrayal by her second homeland. Mireille's cultural identity emphasizes her cultural métissage and the tension

between her Haitian roots and assimilation into American society. Mireille's distorted image of Haiti, based on her privileged upbringing, transforms when she confronts the harsh realities of the country during her captivity (Roldan-Sevillano 266-282, my paraphrase). The analysis suggests that Mireille's trauma is not only personal but also involves a reevaluation of her cultural identity and a confrontation with the societal issues plaguing Haiti. Hence, this article paves the way for my research as it deals with trauma and the postcolonial condition of Haitian women but it lacks in displaying how postcolonial condition motivates a traumatized individual to fight for their rights and stand for women. My study seeks to cover this gap so that future generations of traumatized victims are not affected by their parent's trauma.

Shaima Abdullah Jasim and Laith Thiab Hameed's article "Politics of Rape in Haiti: A Rape Culture Study of Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*" explores the historical roots of rape, the evolution of societal attitudes toward it, and the emergence of the concept of rape culture. It covers a broad historical and cultural spectrum, linking ancient religious texts, Greco-Roman perspectives, historical legal approaches, and the evolution of societal norms regarding sexual violence. The juxtaposition of the ancient perspectives on rape, especially in religious and legal contexts, with the modern concept of rape culture is effective in illustrating the continuity of certain harmful attitudes and practices over time. The discussion of how societies historically dealt with rape, including the role of fathers and husbands in punishing victims, offers valuable context for understanding the evolution of societal views on sexual violence. The global perspective, emphasizing the spread of rape culture as a 'virus of desire' and characterizing violence against women as a 'global pandemic,' adds a sense of urgency to the issue. It integrates feminist perspectives, framing rape culture as a feminist concept that legitimates the brutality of rapists. The exploration of how rape culture manifests in media, jokes, and victim-blaming contributes to a nuanced understanding of its pervasive nature. Political oppression and sexual violence embodied by the Tonton Macoutes, are woven into the

narrative, emphasizing the pervasive impact of trauma on the characters' lives. Immigration is shown as a remedy for oppression, yet the inability to erase all devastating memories provides a thoughtful reflection on the lasting impact of trauma on individuals, even in new environments. The connection drawn between politics and the portrayal of rape culture in the novel highlights how literature can serve as a lens to examine societal issues and power dynamics. Political rape is a manifestation of political forces, particularly represented by the Macoutes, underscores the intersectionality of political oppression and gender-based violence in the setting of Haiti. Political rape includes the vulnerability of victims and the lack of familial support (Thaib Hameed 5414-5420, my paraphrase). It is beneficial for my research because it shows how political acceptance can create a certain cultural norm even if it is legally wrong, nobody can stop it. This article does not talk about how the collective memory of a family through generations deals with trauma and its closure. To show this gap, my research highlights the significance of collective memory and how generations of a family overcome their trauma.

Natasha Ghosh's article "*Breath, Eyes, Memory: The Inheritance of Burden and of Silence*" emphasizes the harshness of Sophie's upbringing in a third-world setting, acknowledging the reality that she is fully aware this will be her life. As well as the difficulty of dissociating from the added trauma experienced by a child. The incorporation of folklore, folk wisdom, female intuition, and vodou rituals in the novel, is portrayed as defenses against the stark horror. These elements shed light on the hypocrisy and terror of the existing order. The narrative is described as revealing how dominant narratives limit characters' opportunities for self-actualization. It is characterized as brilliant, angry, articulate, self-aware, and deeply human, embodying a woman's experience. The absence of father figures or male role models in Sophie's life is noted, and the centralization of women is seen as broken rather than glorified. The *Caco* women are portrayed as strong but carrying an ancient pain. The significance of cemeteries in Haiti, not just as burial grounds but as places where souls walk, is discussed. The belief in continuity from life into

death gives the women strength and a sense of historical connection. The portrayal of Haiti in the novel is described as largely diasporic, removed from the global perception shaped by news and global media. It creates a timeless space to understand pervasive sexual violence.

The portrayal of Haiti is largely shaped by Sophie's experience as a woman, and the novel creates a spatial dimension for recording underreported violence against Haitian women. The novel is seen as creating a space within which to inscribe records of underreported and accepted physical violence against Haitian women. It highlights the marginalization of women's perspectives and the need to remember those who suffered (Ghosh 1-25, my paraphrase). This article glorifies the silencing of women in Haitian culture whereas trauma needs to be confronted and expressed so its continuity stops in the form of flashbacks but will remain as a memory of strength and confidence for female characters. My research signifies this gap by proving that talking, writing, and expressing traumatic experiences through any medium is helpful for the healing and recovery from trauma.

Ethan Casey's article "Remembering Haiti: Breath, Eyes, Memory" reflects on the literary challenge presented by the tragic history of Haiti, particularly in the wake of the events following Jean-Bertrand Aristide's victory in the December 1990 elections. It considers the new and old aspects of this challenge, highlighting the changed global context post-Cold War and the persistent issues that transcend time. Globally the aftermath of the 1990 election in Haiti revealed certain universal truths about power dynamics, wealth disparities, and global politics that were somewhat obscured during the Cold War. The chapter ending with the American occupation of Haiti in September 1994 is deemed immensely important. Historically C.L.R. James's quote from "The Black Jacobins" is used to emphasize the historical perspective, suggesting that events might be interpreted differently if roles were reversed. The article touches on the complexity of matters concerning race and racism. The discussion navigates the challenge of creating a literary response to Haiti's realities, particularly when political perspectives are highly charged.

The distinction between "the literary" and "the political" is explored, and the question of writing about appalling realities without succumbing to futility is raised. Isabel Allende's novels are presented as examples of literary responses to political repression. Allende's ability to write sympathetically about diverse human experiences in the context of political turmoil is highlighted. Her work is seen as a model for responding to complex political situations through literature. Wendell Berry's idea of enduring protest as a means to preserve one's own values in the face of enormities is brought into the discussion. The article contemplates the balance between silence, protest, and the impact of literature on political discourse. The article introduces Edwidge Danticat as a promising young writer who confidently steps into the literary landscape to address the challenges of Haiti's history. "Breath, Eyes, Memory" is described as a Bildungsroman, capturing the personal story of Sophie and reflecting Danticat's poise and grace in language and narrative technique (Casey 524-526, my paraphrase). The article engages with the complexities of responding to Haiti's history through literature, addressing the intersection of politics and literary expression. However, it does not further explore how change in politics and culture can be brought through literary works by incorporating generational trauma and memory studies to reach the crux of the issue. My research highlights this gap by providing ways as to how these female characters can heal their trauma.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study focuses on generational traumatic memories of sexual abuse and gender violence inflicted upon female characters in Caribbean fiction. I rely on trauma and memory studies to analyze the implications of remembering the traumatic experiences of the past. This study utilizes Victoria Arons and Alan L. Berger's concept of Generational Trauma, Maurice Halbwachs Collective Memory, and Susan J. Brison's Remaking of a Self to analyze postcolonial conditions in Haitian fiction.

#### 3.1 Generational Trauma

Memory and intergenerational trauma demand imagination along the manner in which stories are told, the circumstances under which language forms represent, and extend to the collective experience of memory. Survivor writing faces challenges in capturing memory and trauma. Memory resists sequential coherence and authorial constraint making it difficult to contextualize and convey experiences. The fragmented nature of memory requires survivor narratives to navigate gaps and disruptions caused by time erosion and lack of precedents. The survivor's task is to resurrect memory and transmit experiences while grappling with the difficulties of containing and shaping memory into coherent narratives. Survivor narratives often use repetition and shifts in verb tense to evoke the urgency of memory and its undeniability. Repetition not only emphasizes certain aspects of the narrative but also halts its progress, immersing it in the experience of memory. The repetition of words like 'different' underscores the transformative nature of the traumatic experience. The initial uncertainty and self-corrections in survivor narratives give way to a precise and poignant depiction of memory and its impact on time and place (Arons and L. Berger 42-52, my paraphrase).

The second generation, the children of trauma survivors believe their identities have been shaped before their existence. There are difficulties in accessing and representing traumatic memory in coherent narratives of earlier generations. It suggests that those who did not directly experience trauma but grew under its shadow carry on the legacy of their parent's trauma. The children of the survivors either embrace it deliberately or absorb it through the patterns and underlying strains of their upbringing. My study explores the intergenerational transfer of trauma demonstrating how the survivors' children inherit their parent's experiences. The transmission can occur through open discourse about the past or through silence, which becomes a source of anguish for the survivor parent and of fear for the offspring. The role of replacement of fantasies with the burden of responsibility placed upon the children of the survivors. The second generation often feels compelled to live in the past and tries to change it as a way of converting their parent's pain into victory over the oppressors. Such imagined feats of power always fall short of expectations, but the second generation still feels the burden of testimony and the need to bear witness (Arons and L. Berger 57-59, my paraphrase).

The emergence of the third generation, the grandchildren of survivors, and their relationship to the past, unlike the second generation who had the past imposed on them through direct experience or close proximity to survivors. The third generation approaches the past through a more indirect and circuitous route. They come to the knowledge of the trauma unprompted and unguided, as the past has not directly affected their lives because they have not experienced the immediate aftermath of trauma or participated in the situation of loss. The third generation takes the role of adoptive witnesses. They actively seek to uncover and understand their family history and roots, often driven by a desire to connect to their heritage, and give meaning to their own lives. However, they face challenges in their pursuit, such as resistance from parents and grandparents who may have tried to shield them from the realities of trauma. The third generation's engagement with the past is essential for their own identity formation and understanding of events. Third-

generation narratives whether fiction writings or memoirs, evoke the presence of the past and serve as a contemporary framework for responding to the horror of the trauma. The process of engaging with trauma inheritance through literature enables the third generation to work through their trauma therapeutically and carry memory into the future, acknowledging the weight and relief of a shared inheritance (Arons and L. Berger 63-65, my paraphrase).

According to Arons and L. Berger, the second generations who are children of trauma survivors inherit and live in the shadow of their parent's trauma, which eventually shapes who they are. In contrast, my perspective involves the second generation standing up for their identity and that of the third generation. To prevent the trauma from passing to the third generation, the second generation of trauma survivors battle the trauma that was passed down to them from their parents.

### **3.1.2 Generational Trauma and Memory**

Memory studies investigate how people recall, misremember, interpret, comprehend, learn, and communicate about the past. Even in the private individual collection, memory is an active and subjective process that is socially structured. Maurice Halbwachs in 1925 introduced a term called “Memoire Collective” to emphasize that social contexts determine all remembering, that social interactions play a role in memory formation and remembrance, and that social patterns of thought figuratively impact individual perceptions. Maurice Halbwachs discusses the role of individual memory in their lives. A person's recollection can comprise a substantial portion of their identity, how they act, or how they fit in society. According to Halbwachs, the pressures of society affect how the mind reconstructs memories, which means that our memories have the ability to influence our behavior or morals in different situations. Memory makes one's individuality and self.



### **3.2 Collective Memory of a Family**

Family recollections develop in distinct soils in the awareness of the members of a domestic group. Even if they reside close to one another or are distant. Every person remembers the shared family history in a unique way. Family members' constant interchange of ideas and perspectives reinforces bonds that are strongly felt when these bonds are tried to be broken. Family members will understand that other people's ideas have consequences that they can follow and understand only if it brings them closer together. A child is a full human like a whole unit in school but if he shares his ideas of family in school he is known as a fragment of the unit. Only a collection of images might represent family recollections that define the thoughts and ideas of a domestic group. One's position in a family group is allotted by custom and rules before us, not because of one's personal feelings. Family members do not confuse impressions and emotional reactions with the thoughts and ideas imposed on them. Families are successful in inspiring their members to never stop loving one another, even when they are separated by distance. However, the family structure regulates how people express their emotions. This structure is important for the retention of authority (Halbwachs 1992, 54-57, my paraphrase).

Every family has secrets that are shared only by its members, as well as traumas and experiences that are unique to it. These recollections are made up of more than just a collection of isolated historical photos. They express the overall mindset of the group, reenacting its past, and characterizing its traits, attributes, and shortcomings. When we say, "we are proud", we refer to a physical or moral trait that is innate to the group and is passed down to its constituents. Occasionally, it's the area or place where the family first settled or the characteristics from which the family members inherit their unique characteristics. To establish a framework for the family memory that it seeks to conserve, a variety of these elements are kept from the past as the traditional armor of the family. The dated facts that make up this framework serve as benchmarks for assessments of the family expressing

themselves. The collective notions cannot only focus on a particular place or definite moment over the course of time (Halbwachs 1992, 59, my paraphrase).

A scene from our memories of our home, where our parents play major roles, is ingrained not only as a single event but that memory when recalled, will be renewed with the events preceding and following the scene in question. Such events and figures serve as landmarks in family life. When we reflect upon these events and figures, they attract themselves towards reality because they are at a point of intersection where a number of reflections are formed. Thus, these figures do act as landmarks within the context of family memory, but each one also conveys a whole personality; summarizing a full phase of the group's existence. They are concepts and pictures. Upon reflection, it appears as though we have made contact with the past. However, it simply indicates that we can reconstruct the person's image and facts (Halbwachs 1992, 61, my paraphrase).

Marriage permits new members to join established families. The spouses remember their past entirely, as they had shared a considerable amount of time together, and when the events of their preoccupation entwine, they produce a unique memory that will find a place for the older memories. It will only happen if their parents are present while they are constructing the new family. These more distant recollections will occur within the context of new memories, to the extent that the grandparents will take part in the newly constructed family and share their memories with their grandchildren, evoking an echo of the vanished past (Halbwachs 1992, 77, my paraphrase).

They are unable to resurrect for the new family an entire body of concepts and narratives because such a totality would no longer fit within the parameters that govern the way their descendants think. One cannot accomplish this division between the two generations without work. We are engaged in our family and other groups throughout our entire life. Our family memory extended to encompass recollections from worldly life. We change our memories along the points of view, principles, and judgments. The framework of collective memory of a family is based on the concepts of individuals and events that

are unique and historic yet possess all the traits of ideas shared by an entire group, or even multiple groups. Each family has its particular experiences ensuring cohesion and continuity (Halbwachs 1992, 81-83, my paraphrase).

Maurice Halbwachs asserts that a family's collective memory is created by incorporating the spouses' pasts as a shared memory with their family. In my research, generational trauma is combined with collective memory. As a result, after marriage, second-generation females transfer the trauma of their mothers to their families, and this impacts the family's collective memory. These women unintentionally pass on generational trauma to their offspring, which becomes ingrained in their shared collective family memory.

### **3.2.1 The Living Bond of Generations:**

Children are given access to the distant past of their grandparents. Both grandparents and grandchildren are close to each other because they are not interested in the contemporary present in which their parents are involved. Grandparents are the product of their time and the child does not perceive the stamps of age at that time because of the difference and changes due to time. The grandparents' stories intrigue the child who links the present with the past and future interwoven (Halbwachs 1980, 63, my paraphrase).

The retention of information is not based on facts only but on historical attitudes and modes of thought. The stories of the past give a perfect advantage through which the personage of the old becomes clearer and more colorful with a better understanding of the complete scenario. To occupy an esteemed place in the memory of the grandchildren, it is necessary that the grandparents explain the past with full zeal and zest in order to create complete links that would always be quoted with great importance. The personification of the past in its true sense is necessary for the grandparents to their grandchildren. Collective memory frameworks are genuinely currents of thought and experience within which we recover our history solely by virtue of having lived, rather than being a collection of names,

dates, and formulas. History is neither the entire past nor everything that has survived from it. Living history endures and resurrects itself over time, enabling the retrieval of long-gone ideas (Halbwachs 1980, 64, my paraphrase).

It's possible that the world our grandparents and we shared has disappeared. There may not be many memories outside of our families of that transitional period between the world that was before our birth and the modern one that surrounds us. The group and milieu that we share with our grandparents need to be reconstructed and reconstituted through history, books, and artwork. Our main worries are with "family literature" and "family museums" which are not found in national museums and libraries but in our homes and our friends' homes in the form of magazines and books read by our grandparents. Not only the engravings and books left from the past but are also present in the appearance of people and location, certain individuals' and milieus' enduring ways of thinking and feeling. In the past, we were unaware of the influence our grandparents had on our parents because we are too focused on the distinction between generations. Our parents lead the way and guide us into the future. We pass them and leave them behind in the shadows of the past. Our grandparents and parents represent two distinct periods of time. We don't realize that our parents are more strongly connected to the past and our grandparents to the present. A time will come when fewer people will be thinking in the same way. Our children will become more distant and we will become close to our parent's ideas, thoughts, and interests. It will be because of a converse illusion but in reality, we won't be as distant as we think we are from our children and parents. Depending on age and circumstances, sometimes we are interested in focusing on differences among generations and sometimes similarities (Halbwachs 1980, 65-68, my paraphrase).

According to Maurice Halbwachs, grandparents, who are closer to the present than their parents, leave a deeper influence on their grandchildren. In order to prevent the third generation from inheriting the collective memory of trauma, I propose that the second generation of trauma survivors address their grandparents. By shattering the cultural and

historical conventions surrounding the transmission of trauma between generations, this intervention aids in our understanding and application of theory to the research subject.

These enduring ties between generations reveal something about a family's collective memory. These linkages state that generational trauma is transmitted from the past to the present as though it is a fixation in a family's collective memory. The link that exists between generations is further impacted by this generational trauma, harming their relationship. Generational trauma instills fear in the second and third generations. A family's collective memory is fixed on the horrific event that one of its members went through and the fallout. Because it will ruin their lives entirely, the second and third generations want to stop the transmission of painful experiences to future generations.

Generational trauma and the collective memory of a family help in the realization of female characters to remake and establish their selves as well as their agency. Susan J. Brison's personal account of healing and a philosophical investigation of trauma explore how violence causes one to unmake and reconstruct oneself. It investigates memory, identity, and self, autonomy, and community from an interdisciplinary standpoint. It provides thoughtful criticism of a culture where women frequently encounter and fear sexual violence in addition to providing imaginative access to the experience of a rape survivor. Brison notes that trauma ruins memories, splits the past from the present, and makes it impossible to imagine the future. However, she contends that bearing witness helps heal because it makes the experience part of the survivor's narrative.

### **3.3 Violence and the Remaking of Self**

Sexual violence is so common, that people take it for granted and the frequency of sex crimes is underestimated. On average rape happens after every six minutes and some researchers claim only 10% rape cases are reported, a woman gets beaten every fifteen minutes or so. The high numbers of male violence against women produce a thought process that it is natural, a given, and does not require any explanation. Sexual violence

and its aftermath lead to the breakdown of victims of violence's sense of self, which calls into question ideas of personal identity (Brison 3-4, my paraphrase).

One cannot discuss the effects of sexual and racial violence until the victims share their own words about their experiences. Harrison claims that the permission of the violated woman distinguishes rape from typical sexual behavior. There isn't any such distinction present in other crimes. This could be as a result of the rape phenomenon or jokes, pornography glorifying rape, and a woman's 'No' is considered a 'Yes'. We are not instructed to feel sympathy for the victims. Victims own no claim to a prompt trial or damages reimbursement. They lose their jobs, houses, spouses, money, time, sleep, and peace of mind as a result of being victimized. It is difficult to understand that the victim was unable to predict any kind of attack and be able to steer clear of one later on (Brison 5-10, my paraphrase).

Rape is a taboo, something unspeakable, or self-protective denial which shows the emotional illiteracy of the society. Rape is an intersection of multiple taboos like trauma, violence, and sex. There is a lack of proper vocabulary and there are no social conventions that can ease the awkwardness. Haitian society is so ignorant towards the bewilderment caused by the victim and silence on the part of others, results in misguided caution. When someone does not respond or provide an emotional ear to the victim, they feel as if they have died because they remember the incident every moment and every day. Victim of sexual assault feels that they can blame themselves only to feel that their life is in their control. Victim blaming themselves is not due to a lack of self-esteem or a sex-linked trait of masochism. It is less painful when something is blameworthy rather than thinking that you can be attacked anywhere, at any moment. Having anger toward the attacker may make you think that you are in close proximity to the attacker which is a dangerous thought for the victim in the early stages of recovery, thus the anger is directed toward family memory bringing you back to life (Brison 12-13, my paraphrase).

The hardest thing in self-defense classes for women was to say 'No' to their assailant as they have been taught to use pleading strategies which are less effective in resisting rape. Rape victim faces the destruction of her world alone, unlike war and earthquake victims. Dissociation, flashbacks, hypervigilance, heightened startle response, sleep difficulties, difficulty concentrating, decreased interest in important tasks, and a sense of a truncated future were all symptoms that Brison experienced from her PTSD. Post-traumatic stress disorder is defined by the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual as an experience that falls outside the normal spectrum of human experience. Trauma is unimaginable and abhorrent. It is essential to talk about the trauma again and again in order to remaster it but it can be retraumatizing, especially when someone fails to respond making you feel that you are alone (Brison 15-16, my paraphrase).

Curtailing and restricting the lives of women even when men are the perpetrators shows the absurdity of the approach as one learns that sexual assaults on women can occur anywhere, at any time of day or night, even in their homes in Haiti. The devastating scope of the issue of sexual violence is made invisible by its triviality and mundaneness, while have been the victims. A victim is alone in her rape and healing because of how commonplace it is, which leads to the assault and its aftermath being more traumatic (Brison 19, my paraphrase).

A year after Brison's attack, she was happy to learn that she could go for fifteen minutes without thinking about it. After more time, she could spend hours without having a flashback. Ann Gaulin, their group facilitator said that they can't be the same but they can be better, explaining her perspective that your life has been shattered, leaving you to pick your fragments and examine them closely realizing which you want to work on and which you want to remove or forget. Brison claims that she is proud of being a survivor although she cannot put it on her resume. Two years after her assault, she was able to participate in a philosophical discussion. She was able to recognize the benefits of her

rehabilitation, including her increased self-assurance, networks of support, resolve, and clarity, and the survivors who gave her life purpose (Brison 20, my paraphrase).

Not only are accidents related to one's gender, color, sexual orientation, religion, or class deserving of consideration, but are also present in philosophy thus writing in the first person began not because of self-indulgence but due to intellectual necessity. The foundation of feminist ethics is the real-world experiences of specific people, with a focus on the underappreciated realities of women and other marginalized groups. First-person narratives provide feminist theorists with a creative means of accessing other people's perspectives. Access like this can boost empathy and as a method of moral understanding (Brison 25, my paraphrase).

It is believed that traumatic memories are physical, disjointed, sensory, invasive, repeated, and uncontrollable. Traumatic recollections are selective, articulated, and malleable even though such memory is not under the conscious control of the survivor. There is a gap between events and the experience of it. Events are experienced by their representations in terms of language classification, physical sensation, and sensory perception, all of which are impacted by the events' perceived cultural meanings. Maurice Halbwachs claims that society is the place where people acquire memories in which they recall, recognize, and localize their memories (1992, 38). Furthermore, it depends on one's experiences of trauma and its unconscious categorization (Brison 31, my paraphrase).

First-person accounts of trauma and victimization can give rise to conflicting victimization narratives. As Martha Minow notes, victim speaking frequently results in counter-victim rhetoric. Minow acknowledges that individualized narratives are crucial to preventing dehumanizing abstractions that enable people to minimize or ignore the pain of others. Individual narratives need to be placed within larger historical, social, and political accounts. Migael Scherer states that rape survivors claim to say that they miss their previous selves. It depends on how one defines trauma and the self. The self is both



independent and reliant on society, and it is susceptible to violence (Brison 34-38, my paraphrase).

A traumatic event is one in which a person is completely hopeless to a force that feels life-threatening. When faced with trauma, people often experience anxiety, a lack of control, and a strong fear of annihilation. Long-term psychological reactions include despair, a lack of interest in activities, difficulty concentrating, and a perception that the future is shorter. Long-term physiological responses include hypervigilance, heightened startle response, and sleep difficulties. Judith Herman explains that in PTSD the human self-defense mechanism is overburdened and disjointed; every element of the typical reaction to a threat is modified, and its exaggerated state remains even after the actual trauma is over. Victims of human-inflicted trauma are reduced to mere objects by their tormentors: their subjectivity is considered useless and worthless (Brison 39-40, my paraphrase).

During and after the sexual assault, the pleasure of embodiment is replaced by something terrorizing. Traumatic memory is not a memory but a recurrent sensory replay of traumatic events or flashbacks, with intact or dissatisfied pieces of what was seen, heard, smelt, or felt. Examples of these fragments are uncontrollable sobbing, fury, fear, disjointed feelings, and physical sensations. The body and traumatic memories are linked. The type and frequency of sensory, emotional, and physical flashbacks are altered by trauma. The sense of helplessness connected to the original experience is replayed which is neither modified nor ended. Traumatic memories' physical characteristics make it more difficult to define a person's identity throughout time using the criterion of a continuous body and continuous memories. Trauma asks whether the self can be reconstructed after destruction by others which Cathy Winkler labels as "Social Murder" (Brison 44-45, my paraphrase).

Furthermore, she claims that during an attack victims confront social death and struggle to save themselves. Victim's reconstitution of the self after social death can only be with great difficulty and the help of others. In the aftermath of trauma, the victim's

bodily awareness is changed, and attempts to change the body in order to have some control over it. Dressing to hide and eating issues are common responses to sexual assault (Brison 46, my paraphrase).

Adult rape victims report a splitting from their self during the assault as well as in the aftermath showing a separation from their former selves. Violence forces people to relocate as survivors move from self-destructing torment and subsequently succeed in reconstructing themselves in a new environment. Trauma has the power to erase a person's past emotional repertoire. The trauma victim is rendered desensitized when they are unable to relive their previous emotions and lack the motivation to construct the ongoing narrative. Reconstructing self-narratives requires more than just words but people and listeners who want to hear them. Remaking oneself in the wake of trauma emphasizes how dependent one is on others, which is one of the reasons trauma recovery is challenging as others don't want to listen to your endurance. Survivors also encounter despair and the futility of language to change the world. Common symptoms include the past disappearing and the future appearing sooner of long-lasting trauma as Delbo claims that survivors are confined to a never-ending present because of their lack of connection and non-understandable listeners. For an understanding audience, a survivor must create a story to help externalize the incident (Brison 47-53, my paraphrase).

Narrative memory is an active part of the survivor by giving speech to the reminiscence of the traumatic event and having more control over memory which helps the survivor to remake the self. Trauma survivor needs to have more control over distressing memories and other PTSD symptoms in order to heal and reconnect with humanity. By constructing the narrative of trauma and understanding listeners, the survivor integrates life before and after trauma and also has more control over intrusive memories (Brison 71-72, my paraphrase).

Rape survivors can break the binding force of self-blame and helplessness by taking self-defense classes which will provide them with more control over their lives and enhance

their strength to avoid such situations. Self-blame can be overcome by facilitating appropriate anger towards the assailant once terror-induced helplessness subsides. In the recovery of trauma, physical remastering of trauma is essential by an imaginary reenactment of the traumatic event and changing its end, which would give the survivor more control over the traumatic memories (Brison 75, my paraphrase).

Hearing stories of trauma is the hardest. Not at all, as it strains the audience and isn't always consoling for the storyteller. Trauma brings a surd into a person's life that prevents them from continuing on with the series. According to certain data, unreported trauma increases the risk to the subsequent generations than when it is narrated (Brison 103-110, my paraphrase). Thus, generational trauma and collective memory help the female characters in the study to narrate and give voice to their traumas. It is a healing process that helps the female characters to be resilient and fight all odds for their and their family's betterment. The trauma of sexual abuse and violence should never be considered the end instead it gives rise to warriors who struggle and fight for their rights.

According to Susan Brison, trauma survivors must reclaim their traumatized identities and give voice to their traumas. My research combines collective memory and generational trauma with Brison's idea of remaking the self. The first-generation females under discussion are unable to fight their traumas thus, transfer their traumas to the second-generation females who face and fight these generational traumas as they have suffered a lot due to the collective memory of a family of trauma and living under its shadow. Since some of these second-generation females have also gone through traumatic events, they reshape their identities and form agency to prevent trauma from being passed on to the third generation.

All these lenses of exploration are integrated to evaluate the trauma of gender violence and its response to traumatic memories establishing the transformation of female identity. Remaking of the self occurs through the memories of traumatic encounters of sexual assault. Articulation of female sexual trauma is significant for the survivor's struggle

and breaking the continuation of the traumatic lineage of the family. The collective memory of traumatic experiences is transferred through generations of females which handicaps them in their social lives. Thus, the remaking of a self is a step forward towards a better future for the female protagonists in the chosen novels. The original emphasis of the study is generational trauma and collective memory shifting towards the remaking of the female agency in the selected contemporary Caribbean fiction.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE NOVELS**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

Trauma can affect people from all backgrounds, but the ways in which it is experienced can vary depending on a person's racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic identity. Women from marginalized communities, such as low-income or minority groups, are more likely to experience trauma and less likely to receive adequate support and resources to heal from it. Traumatic experiences can affect individuals especially females. Trauma refers to distressing events or situations that overwhelm a person's ability to cope and can have a significant impact on their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Females may experience a range of traumatic events throughout their lives.

Sexual assault is an extremely traumatic experience that can have profound and long-lasting effects on survivors. The trauma caused by sexual assault can be pervasive and impact various aspects of a survivor's life, including their emotional, psychological, physical, and social well-being. Survivors of sexual assault often experience intense emotions such as fear, anxiety, shame, guilt, anger, and sadness. They may also have mood swings and difficulty regulating their emotion. Many survivors develop PTSD, a condition characterized by flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and hypervigilance. These symptoms can disrupt their daily life and make them feel as if they are reliving the trauma. Sexual assault survivors may develop depression or anxiety disorders due to the overwhelming and distressing nature of the trauma. Sexual assault can result in physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and unwanted pregnancies. Survivors may experience difficulties with intimacy and sexual functioning, which can be both physical and psychological in nature. Some survivors may experience dissociation as a coping

mechanism, where they feel disconnected from their body or emotions. In an attempt to cope with the trauma, survivors may turn to alcohol or drugs, leading to potential substance abuse problems. Many survivors blame themselves for the assault, which can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and self-doubt. Sexual assault can strain relationships with partners, family, and friends, making it difficult for survivors to trust and engage with others. Survivors may avoid situations or places that trigger memories of the assault, limiting their social and daily activities. Survivors may feel isolated and find it challenging to open up about their experiences, leading to a sense of alienation.

This study focuses on the traumatic experiences of female characters in *An Untamed State* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. How the normal life of these female characters is shattered and destroyed through traumatic experiences of rape, abuse, torture, and ill-treatment. It unravels the lives of strong-willed women who sacrifice for their families. Yet again trauma couldn't kill or break their self. This study shows the strength and patience of these female characters who are examples of strong valiant women surviving their traumas.

#### **4.2 Traumatic Experiences of Female Character in *An Untamed State***

The protagonist of the novel Mireille is kidnapped right outside the estate of her father, the kidnapping that was for ransom only turned into torture and sexual abuse when she was gang raped by seven men in one day because her father refused to pay the million dollars ransom. She was physically, emotionally, and psychologically traumatized during her thirteen days of kidnap. Her body was damaged and wounded for life. This study focuses on the behavior of the female character during a traumatic experience.

The crime rate in Haiti had increased to such an extent that kidnapping became a common norm in the country. The disparity has been an important factor in the formation of these mafia gangs.. Kidnapping being a common norm in Haiti resulted in traumas at

the familial level. In certain cases like Mireille's, the kidnapping for ransom did not proceed smoothly leading to her physical and sexual abuse. Mireille not only carried the trauma of displacement through kidnap but also the trauma of her torture.

For Mireille, Haiti was a deceptive reality. The realization hit her hard the day she was kidnapped, it shattered her understanding of a place she called home. Post-colonial chaos and uncertainty prevailed in the streets of Haiti right outside her home; she was kidnapped and the big gates of her home were closed. It dawned upon Mireille after being kidnapped that this was not the place which both she and her father knew, it was a country where the mafia gangs had the hold of the street. Kidnapping of the elite class was a common norm in Haiti for high ransom. These kidnapers considered it their lawful right to ask for huge sums of ransom, they felt that the elite class was responsible for their situation and misery in life. The sight of her kidnap showcased, yet again, the inhumane indifference largely shown by the general population towards the hue and cry of the innocent Mireille. This also reveals a new dimension of helplessness ultimately leading to tolerance towards such heinous crimes strengthening the mafias. A woman is always ready to sacrifice her life for her family; this instance shows how Mireille is threatened about the safety of her family but at the stake of her own safety. She could see the sight of her infant child and husband about to be harmed thus; she quietly obeys the order that is given to her by the kidnapers that she needs to maintain her calm for the survival and safety of her family. "Go easy or we'll kill your family," a voice threatened. We eliminate all that you have ever loved" (Gay 3). Maurice Halbwachs states that family members reinforce bonds that are strongly felt when these bonds are tried to be broken (1992, 54, my paraphrase). Mireille proved to be the epitome of sacrifice and strength irrespective of the torture by her kidnapers. When any shocking event happens, everything then remains in the past because of the unwanted and traumatizing present that surrounds the individual, The same happened with Mireille who couldn't think of anything else except for what was about to come and when she could be home safely with her family.

My captors put a burlap sack over my head and shoved me into the backseat. The delicate construction of bone in my cheeks throbbed angrily. My skin hurt. The captors told me, in broken English, to do as they said and I would be back with my family soon. I needed to hold the fragile hope that I could find my way back to my happily ever after. I didn't know any better. That was the before. (Gay 4)

Every individual's response to trauma also varies but here Mireille is exhibiting the emotion of anger as the misuse and ill-treatment towards her body had started from the journey of kidnap to the actual cage that was about to come. Even though she tried to maintain her calm she portrayed resilience at every step of kidnapping. The first and foremost trauma that a breastfeeding mother feels is the yearning for her baby to be fed who would be desperate by now for his mother's milk. Mireille's discomfort and maternal pain started from the ache in her breasts as her baby hadn't been fed. It was traumatic for her to have experienced such discomfort and ache while her son would want to be fed but the presence of his mother is lost from his side. She could feel the bodily ache in her breasts as the milk hadn't been removed and it was piling up with the indication that it might dry up soon. A mother's sacrifice and trauma of being away from her infant child is unfathomable.

Mireille's resilient attitude led to her increased torture and abuse as when she made a clever reply to the commander, she had to face brutality at his hands in this scene when the commander is introducing himself, she asks about his army to which he lunges towards her, grabbing her by the throat while tightening his grip, she became breathless. His character wanted to show her, his power and authority which she denied from the beginning. When she was released, he expected her to cry, acting like a normal woman instead she refused to cry claiming that she does not waste her tears uselessly. It was the beginning of a journey in which she would lose many things but again remained steadfast, tough, and irrepressible. Her strength and toughness proved to be insurmountable. Aarons and L. Berger claim that second-generation children of trauma survivors live in the shadow



of their parents (57). Here the victim being second generation shows resilience in the face of trauma and doesn't show the conventional behavior of trauma survivors who are unable to defend themselves. Mireille transforms her agency to survival mode and a mother who wants to protect her child and family in trauma.

In the initial days of her kidnap, whenever the commander had to call her family he would threaten her verbally and physically to show her family that she was in pain whereas she did not want to scare her young child or family and always said that she is doing fine and well, not panicking her family due to her treatment at the hands of her kidnapers. Trauma shows us that we are capable of a lot more than we think we are.

The kidnapers did not let her be alone in the washroom, and she had to be naked in front of a guard who stood at the door. He kept eying her body parts which she had never shown to anyone else. She felt uncomfortable and humiliated but she had no way out. She had a pressing urge to attend the call of nature which she had to suppress for several days now every passing moment seemed an eternity. Every inch of her body cried for help, for every cell of her body had given up and she could no longer bear it. The least desired place was now the most desired for her: a washroom. After she had comforted herself, the guard came inside the washroom closing the door, to which Mireille was bewildered and taken off guard.

The door stays open..... my hands shook as I pushed my jeans and bikini bottoms down my thighs..... I tried to relax. I tried to breathe, to give in to the humiliation. I tried to let go but I couldn't. All I could feel was that man's eyes on my body, seeing parts of me I only showed my husband.... My escort laughed, stepped inside the bathroom, and closed the door behind him. 'You cannot be serious.' (Gay 26)

Yet again she was expressive of her thoughts no matter who stood in front of her. She felt immeasurable discomfort surrounded by people who imposed themselves on her rather than showing mercy towards her. The torment that she felt was unimaginable as sometimes

she was physically molested or given life threats for not acting according to as she should. Her face was disfigured due to wounds and shards of glass stuck in her arms as she was shoved into the glass mirror. Seeing herself in the broken mirror showed how fear had engulfed her, reminding herself that she could survive this trauma and pain. She did not lose her resolve and continued resisting, giving orders to be left alone or they won't be paid. She did not want to lose her Self and agency during her kidnap and traumatizing situation. It was just the onset of the traumatizing moments that she had yet to encounter. Her skin started to swell due to the shards of glass but pain could not dissolve her anger or strength that she felt. Her escort wanted to teach her a lesson by forcing his fingers inside her. On this sudden and unexpected intrusion in her body from which she couldn't flee, painful cries for help escaped from her mouth, ignoring the threats. No matter how much pain she experienced at this moment, she continued to calm herself by suppressing wet screams in her throat, covering her mouth, and rocking back and forth. She needed to establish herself as a strong woman because she did not want to lose her mind due to the abuse she was receiving from her tormentors. This acknowledgment shows her strength in the face of traumatizing experience. According to Brison, female victims voice their traumas so that they can reform and reshape their identity (34-38, my paraphrase). Here Mireille shows that even during the experience of trauma, the victim can retain her identity and can continue her struggle for it.

As the negotiations between her captors and her father were taking place, days passed with the immense heat of Haiti. The conditions of the slums were undesirable with scorching heat, dirt, and humidity. The circumstances were much worse for Mireille as she was in extreme pain, leaking milk, and a body that was dehydrated from sweat and lack of food. Her body was a painful mess. Even though every inch of her body was sore she still suppressed the feeling of crying by inflicting pain on her body as a source of distraction. Brison claims that female victims of trauma show strength after the trauma (75). However, by revealing her anguish even to herself, Mireille demonstrates resilience in the face of

adversity. However, she feels scared to death in a traumatic event, but her response to the stress is peculiar and inexplicable. She sees a resilient facet of her body in times of misery and gains a new self.

The duration of the negotiation had ended. And when the last call was made to her family, her fingers were numb while dialing the number. The commander twisted her arm, and the agony made her cry which she irrespectively resisted. He wanted her father to know about her suffering thus, she was hit against the wall. Her body was caught off-guard throbbing with pain. Despite the torment, she remained silent. She suffered all the trauma engulfing it inside her body, she did not want to express her suffering to others. It was her way of defiance towards the maltreatment of her captors. The kidnapping confused Mireille a lot because her homeland became a place that she started to hate. It became a place of fear for her, somewhere she could not be safe. She felt that Haiti was a country beyond understanding emotion signifies the post-colonial condition of people in Caribbean countries. The fear of the unknown alerts certain mechanisms in the bodies of affected people. Despite this, Mireille had a typical Haitian disposition and was just as headstrong as her father. The refusal of Mireille to obey her captor's orders exemplifies the rigidity, roughness, and stubbornness of Haitian women. But the longer she stayed, the more terror consumed even her strong self.

After the second day of futile negotiations, Mireille's sexual abuse and trauma began. Her captor wanted her to know the result of disobeying him. She did not know that she would have to pay such a big price for her audacity and boldness. Her fairytale-like life had started to crumble down slowly and gradually. Before she was only physically and bodily abused but now she would have to experience sexual torment and misery. As the negotiations ended with ineffectiveness, the commander gave the order to his subordinates to take advantage of Mireille's body as she had disobeyed him by not acting as he wanted her to. Thus, she was gang raped with severe wickedness and savagery by seven men. The gang rape tore her body apart and this torture continued for several hours feeling the

betrayal of her body, realizing the grave weakness of the female body and the vulnerability of human flesh. She made every effort to protect herself but her body was forcefully opened by her captors. She attempted to gauge how long each man required so that she could prepare herself for the next one but slowly she couldn't hold on and she could no longer scream. The hoarse sound that she produced was the sound of something lost. In the end, she was cleaned and ushered to the commander for further destruction of her body. The commander's brutality was worse as he used a knife to open new wounds on her body and she was burned with a cigarette in between her thighs and on her stomach. She thought that her body had yet something left to be taken from and she also felt comfort at the smell of her burning flesh:

Everything tore. All I could think about was my body, how the first time in my life I understood the very weakness, the utter fragility of human flesh..... He held the cigarette so close to my skin, that the heat seared. My flesh rose..... The smell of my flesh burning was almost a comfort. I was alive. There was something of me left to burn. I screamed and screamed. (Gay 56-59)

It shows the intensity of madness at a time of severe agony. She passed out due to the soreness, and throbbing ache of the cruelty that was committed against her body. It was a barbarous beginning of the traumatizing experience that she would have to encounter with each passing day as her father was delaying the ransom. In Haitian society, the trauma of kidnapping and torture persisted for generations. Mireille fell victim to the same circumstances that Haitian women of previous generations had faced. The disintegration of her family's collective memory was caused by her father's tardy response. Continual abuse and torture were faced by Mireille, the commander's maltreatment was worse than the others as he used to handcuff her, spilling alcohol on her back which was full of cuts. Despite all the pain and abuse, she still resisted by giving words to her clever thoughts but it usually resulted in further atrocity. Her current state was filled with agony, starvation, and dirt with a little ray of hope to meet her family again. Mireille believed that the Haiti

she experienced during the kidnapping shouldn't be known by anyone, the intensity of brutalities, torture, and abuse was killing her. Survival became a dim light and the commander's statement 'I own these streets, even though your father may believe he owns the city' (Gay 95) showed the power division of Haitian society. The power shift in Haiti manifests the lack of governmental authorities to control the general public and eradicate mafia groups. Mafias were ruling the country illicitly without any guilt, thinking it was their right to take such unlawful steps for the fulfillment of their needs. They considered the elite class to be responsible for such adverse and distressing conditions of Haiti's lower class. These criminals wanted the elites to have a taste of Haiti which they hadn't experienced before. Post-coloniality created a rift between the elite class and the lower class to such an extent that now these gangs did not consider their captives as human (woman and mother) whose trauma can damage the entire family structure and life of their children. A mother's trauma can destroy her children's life as they come in contact with trauma. This trauma is unknowingly and unwontedly passed on among generations of a family. As Aarons and L. Berger state second-generation trauma survivors either consciously choose to embrace trauma or are exposed to it as a result of underlying stressors and patterns in their upbringing (57, my paraphrase).

As time went on, the negotiations weren't leading to any fruitful end either for Mireille or the commander, who threatened her to kidnap her son which may force her father to pay the ransom. He was mentally torturing her, but she couldn't bear the thought of her family being in that dirt and going through such agonizing trauma. She did not want her child to be exposed to such trauma who was already traumatized by the absence of his mother. "If your father does not pay soon, I may have to take his only grandson. Maybe then he'll be compelled to pay. Men are strangely moved to preserve their bloodlines, though, in your father's case, it's hard to say" (Gay 124). From the beginning, daughters born and raised in such countries are taught to be tough and vigorous due to the prevalent conditions of the country. Haiti proved to be a place of continuous struggle and fight against the odds of life. Haiti did not leave the elite class and its women behind in that struggle. In

Haiti, everyone has to taste injustice and inequality. But Haitian women had a lot more to lose because of their gender which could be easily exploited and manipulated. Every day, the commander had a new way of torturing her body and self. She was physically molested and mentally tormented. The pain of being abandoned by her father was excruciating, feeling that her heart was no longer safe and composed. Mireille's agony cannot be felt by us commoners, she had been orphaned although her father was still roaming down the streets of Haiti. Now trauma had reached the doorstep of her heart and the whole universe could not help her out.

When she was informed about her impending release, she insisted on being killed by her captors rather than be returned to the world which was once a fairy tale but now everything had been changed. "You should have killed me..... After days of dying, I was dead" (Gay 146). Everything was taken from her: her sanity, her body, and her life, now she was already dead and nothing could be the same again. She did not know how to return to her life again after so much was damaged. Internally, she was dead and she wished to have died physically as well because of the trauma of being abducted and sexually assaulted, Mireille's former Self was obliterated, and fear prevented her from going back to her ideal life.

During her captivity, she tried to forget who she was, her identity, her name, and all the memories of her previous life. So, when she was reunited with her family, she attempted to recall her name and cling to a piece of her previous identity. After losing all hope of her release, she transformed herself into a nobody with no family and name. Thus, it became very difficult for her to remember her previous self which was whole rather than the current shattered one. 'I repeated my name in a whisper, trying to conceal the reality and figure out how to fit into that identity. I was a nameless woman with no family; I was nobody.' (Gay 149). According to Aarons and L. Berger, survivors struggle to control and shape memory into coherent narratives, but they also restore memory and transmit experiences (50). Thus, Mireille found it difficult to reach out to her self/identity before

her kidnapping because she had undergone severe torment during which she lost her previous identity.

The sight of men around her was overwhelming because men had destroyed her. She couldn't let her husband or father touch her. "Don't any of you touch me" (Gay 150). She couldn't bear any man around her at that present moment because then she was extremely scared of them. She did not want any other man to harm her anymore. It is very difficult to remove all the previous memories of a fairytale-like life of a happy family. When she met her husband, she asked him for the picture of their child, there's an irony that even though she had forgotten her past, she still remembered her child. A mother's love and bond can never be rubbed off from her memory. Trauma had a diverse impact on her being. She had tried to erase all those happy moments and memories of her child yet her heart remembered him. According to Aarons and L. Berger, survivor narratives' initial ambiguity and self-corrections give birth to an accurate and moving portrayal of memory and its effects on place and time (52, my paraphrase). Despite her best efforts to forget it, Mireille demonstrated that trauma could not destroy her memory.

Sexual abuse causes such profound pain, that a victim would want to clean herself and get rid of all the dirt the abuse has left on her body, but she would never be clean. The damage, suffering, and filth that sexual assault inflicts on a female's body cannot be undone by water: "I would never get clean. There was not enough water" (Gay 153). The fact that her painful memories are meant to accompany her until the end of her life is extremely upsetting and unpleasant.

Mireille's kidnap was not only traumatizing for her but for her family as well especially her husband, for whom every passing moment was torturous. She couldn't let her husband touch her after her abusive captivity. She couldn't stand any man touching her because so much damage had been caused to her body and soul by men. Now it became difficult for her to be whole again as she was before. She thought that maybe she could be normal again as she had been but she couldn't process her way back from trauma. Life

after a traumatic experience becomes really difficult because the traumatized and her family do not know how much time it will take to be normal and how it will happen.

Mireille's trauma could not let her be a mother to her child thus the beginning of generational trauma that the child feels the separation of a mother which shapes the identity of the child who feels deprived of the right to his mother's love and attention. "Do you want to see Christophe?" I did, very much but shook my head" (Gay 161). The children of victims haven't witnessed trauma but the shadow of trauma lingers over their lives as their mother has faced it and its impact on their lives will always remain (Aarons and L. Berger 58, my paraphrase). Mireille's husband Michael could not understand her trauma and what she had faced under dire circumstances. His waiting could not be compared to the torture that Mireille had received and neither could he imagine. Sometimes it is difficult for the partners to understand the severity of the situation thus, Mireille is unable to explain or tell her about what had happened to her and she was severely abused and tortured. As Brison claims Haitian society is ignorant towards the bewilderment of the victim and the lack of an emotional ear to the victim leads to the misguided caution (12). As trauma takes time to heal, the victim's family must be patient and empathetic with them.

Mireille's mother thought that as she was back home her misery and torture were over expecting her to act normal with her family which was too much to ask from a traumatized person in the initial phases of her trauma. "Your ordeal is over, Mireille. We can move on from this.... I'm sure you can move on from this, Mireille said, but I'm never going to move on. I'm still in that cage, where they confined me..... It's like I can't remember my name or my life but...I can. I mean, it's all there but I can't quite reach myself. I am so tired" (Gay 169). According to Brison, societal norms and appropriate words are lacking, making embarrassing situations more difficult (12, my paraphrase). Moving on from gang rape and assault is not an easy task and nobody can ever move on from that as people can be just fine with the trauma remaining with them. Mireille tries to explain to her mother that she still feels suffocated and caged as if she can be back any



moment in that traumatizing small room. She wants to remember her previous normal self but she cannot reach there as she is still caged by her trauma. It tires her to feel that everything is so near yet so far from normal.

The regret and trauma that she felt by the abandonment of her father who let her be in that cage for thirteen days with dreadful and nasty torture at the hand of her captors who destroyed her body from inside out. 'I'm no longer anyone's daughter. I may have been forced by you, but he allowed me to rot and you allowed him to, so now I'm rotten. Your child is all gone ..... He didn't come for me. None of you came for me. You all let me rot' (Gay 170). Cathy Winkler states that victims of abuse confront social death and struggle to save themselves as Mireille claims to be rotten after her sexual assault (Susan Brison 46, my paraphrase). Her situation is further elaborated by her father's treatment who considered wealth to be more important than his daughter's safety. He being a businessman, thought and acted like one even in such a grave situation. He thought that if he paid so easily they would come after his remaining family ultimately leaving him penniless. During her kidnap with each passing day, she came to believe that she does not have a family neither is she anyone's daughter. Her entire family let her-self perish with every torment and atrocity that was committed against her body. She blames her father for her abuse.

For a sexually molested person, it is so difficult to be touched by a man again even if it is for checking purposes at the airport. The same happened with Mireille, who felt like her skin would peel off, destroying her remains. She felt suffocated as her neck tightened producing a ringing sound in her ears. She thought how much other people would take advantage of her body. It was like a recap of all the trauma and abuse that she had been through:

The security agent's hand slid lower. It was getting difficult for me to keep count of the men who had no right to my body taking liberties. He pressed my ankles between his hands, my calves between his hands, my thighs between his hands. The

agent's hands were a blade, peeling me apart, slowly separating what remained of me. I looked into Michael's eyes. The leash around my neck was so tight, the ringing in my ears so loud that my world reduced itself to nothing. (Gay 175)

On the flight back to America, again she felt strangulated among all these people so she went to the restroom but when she took a lot of time her husband stepped inside that small space. Mireille could not bear the thought of a man even though he was her husband, would stand with her in such an enclosed space. "Michael tried talking to me, to reach me but I was no longer there, I was no one again, surrounded by strangers sitting next to the husband and child of another woman"(Gay 176). She couldn't remain in her senses, she had a panic attack. When she woke up, she couldn't be herself instead had become a nobody. Her husband wanted to talk to her but now and then she zoned out, depicting generational trauma by denying her presence and her relationship to her child, which impedes the child's development. Brison argues that because rape is so widespread, the victim is alone in her recovery process and the assault becomes more traumatizing (19, my paraphrase).

The news of her kidnapping had spread on news channels in Haiti and America, and many journalists and news anchors were present at Miami airport to interview her. "Camera flashes were going off and so much shouting, so many bodies wanting something from me..... a gaggle of reporters waited, shouting questions, wanting to know what happened, if I would ever return to Haiti, and on and on. I had no answers" (Gay 180). According to Martha Minow, personalized narratives are essential for avoiding dehumanizing abstractions that allow individuals to downplay or disregard the suffering of others rather than build a more powerful version of the victim (Brison 34-38, my paraphrase). They couldn't understand that it was an inhumane act as she had experienced severe trauma. Such crowd and noise with a bombardment of questions and flashlights aren't helpful for a victim of trauma and abuse. Mireille was surrounded by her husband who was trying his best to make way for her in a big crowd.

When Mireille met her sister at the airport, she made her promise to look after her child whenever her help was required as she couldn't imagine touching her baby or breastfeeding him. She thought her dirt and pain would reach him making him dirty. Thus, she wanted him to clean of any such pain and filth. This demonstrates how Mireille's kidnapping impacted her family's lives and caused generational trauma since she was unable to care for her child. As Aarons and L. Berger claim transmission can occur through open discourse about the past or through silence, which causes pain for the parent who survived and anxiety for the child (58, my paraphrase).

Mireille exhibited all post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. She was having nightmares, she woke up screaming, she couldn't eat anything because she did not want to have anything inside her and she practically starved herself losing a lot of weight. Food meant to feel everything and she did not want to remember anything related to that traumatizing time. She was in a lot of pain and her bruises were more prominent. Despite extreme agony, she still did not cry instead took sedatives/ sleeping pills to forget and be at ease. Following a traumatic event, a victim's knowledge of their body changes, and they may attempt to control it by dressing to hide or eating disorders, which are common reactions to sexual assault (Brison 46, my paraphrase).

I woke up screaming. My throat was still raw, and torn, but I had become accustomed to that discomfort. Lorraine ran to my room, Michael's room..... The sharp, familiar ache between my thighs and up through my navel returned. I had a dull headache. I bit my lower lip, angry that everything still hurt, hurt worse, that the bruises were deeper, uglier. I wondered when the pain would disappear. I will not cry. (Gay 195)

She told her mother-in-law how her captors had taken full advantage of her body. She wanted someone to witness her pain and agony, who could understand her calmly and patiently. She wanted to show someone how she had been destroyed so that she could be helped to heal. "I wanted a witness. I wanted someone to see even though she could not

see. 'What did they do to you?' I swallowed hard and looked up 'Everything' (Gay 196). According to Brison, remaking of self after trauma highlights one's dependence on others, which contributes to the difficulty of trauma recovery because people don't want to hear about perseverance (49, my paraphrase). It took her too long to confess to someone about her abuse although most of it was visible by looking at her body. As After such a traumatic incident, one wants to hide somewhere same was with Mireille who had slept under the bed for more than a day. She wanted to escape from those memories that were haunting her making her life a living hell.

Mireille in a hurtful way is explaining to her mother-in-law that she does not know how to be fine or alive. She explains that her father took so long to pay that her milk dried up, now she couldn't feed her son again. "Mireille had no idea what to do with herself, how to move forward from one moment to the next, how to be alive.... My dad took a very long time to compensate me. I blurted out as my milk dried up. I'm unable to feed my son" (Gay 201). It is really painful for a breastfeeding woman who loses her milk. She could never forget how her father's abandonment had cost her in different torturous ways. Lorraine (her mother-in-law) is the only one who could control or calm Mireille after her assault. Mireille opened up to her mother-in-law as she was a comfort zone for her. She opened up to her and it seemed comforting to cry in front of someone who says that they understand the pain of the traumatized individual. That is how people confront their trauma moving towards its healing. Many a times, victims feel they are not heard and understood by others. Sometimes victims just need some assurance that life would be back to normal only if they work on themselves.

Mireille's traumatizing experience had a devastating impact on her immediate family as she could not hold her son and neither live with her husband. Her husband had been looking after their child who was an infant and was teething thus, in a lot of pain. Her trauma had a severe impact on her child as he was deprived of motherly love and his milk when he needed it the most. According to Maurice Halbwachs, families are successful in

encouraging their members to love each other unconditionally, even when distance separates them. However, family structure controls how individuals communicate their feelings. The maintenance of authority depends on this arrangement (1992, 57, my paraphrase). The collective memory of their happy family was now traumatized by the absence of a mother and how her motherly figure had been destroyed by the assault.

Michael answered, Christophe was crying in the background. Michael sounded tired and irritated. He started talking about his day and then he stopped. He said, 'You know what, I just don't have it in me today, Miri. Your sister just left. Our son is teething. He needs me. We need you. There's not much else that matters, is there? I heard Christophe wail harder even louder. I pictured his little face, bright red, his eyes angry with tears. My breasts ached anew. I wanted to beg Michael to talk to me. I wanted to tell him his voice was holding me together but the words could not come out. He sighed heavily. 'I'm sorry but I don't know what to do and I'm sick of this.' He hung up. (Gay 204)

Over here, we can observe how generational trauma develops among families of victims who are difficult to heal. The child's isolation and lack of a motherly figure in his life leads to disturbance in his normal life and growth. The child would have anxiety, nervousness, and fear just like his mother. The separation and absence of his mother while growing up made their family's life difficult and frustrating because a mother holds the family together. Mireille thought that starvation would help her body and self forget her past and it would also finish men's interest in her. Thus, she didn't want to have any food because it was the source of life but being already dead, she did not want to look appealing to any other man now. She also thought she would be safe if she did not have any food.

Her husband couldn't understand her, and it was becoming difficult for them to live together. When he showed anger, she couldn't stand it because she thought he was a man and he could cause her harm. "Michael slammed his fist against the table, making my

silverware jump. His anger was too much. He was too close. He could hurt me. I got up and ran out of the room” (Gay 211). It is not easy to understand and deal with a victim of abuse as they need their time to heal. Anger is focused on family memories that bring you back to life since harboring resentment towards the attacker can lead you to believe that you are close to them, which is perilous for a victim in the early stages of recovery (Brisson 13). In her anger, she had left the farmhouse towards the fields which was dangerous. Her family was searching for her. She heard her husband’s sound which sounded like the commander so she ran further into the field at night and ultimately found a shed in which she curled up into a ball. Realizing that men had surrounded her so she started screaming later her mother-in-law came to soothe and calm her. She was completely terrorized.

I wanted to die but I was already dead. I couldn’t bear the thought of the commander taking me to a new cage. A woman was screaming and she sounded peculiar-hoarse and hollow and hopeless. My skin crawled as I realized I was the woman screaming. It took an hour to get me out of the shed. Michael and Glen and family friends had spent all night searching for me. It was Michael who followed me but in my terror, all I heard was the commander. I stayed huddled in the corner, screaming, as the men tried to approach me. It was too much, to be in so small cage once again, so many men hulking over me. (Gay 213)

Such incidents are common to happen with traumatized people but understanding and supporting them is very rare. Not every family member can become a supporting figure no matter how much we want them to be. People who have experienced trauma frequently feel anxious, and helpless having a great fear of annihilation (Brisson 39).

Mireille thought that she was losing her husband because of her trauma thus; she tries to prepare herself to have intercourse with him so that she could make him stay. It was her way of communicating as after the assault she couldn’t talk and would even remain silent on phone calls just hearing his voice which helped her survive. “I needed him to stay

with me more than it would hurt to do what needed to be done to make him stay. This was my new ransom. I braced myself for the pain. I thought, ‘I will show you what I can take’ (Gay 217). She thought that it was a new ransom that she had to pay so that she wouldn’t lose him. His presence and support in her life were helping her survive otherwise, she would have long lost it.

Mireille’s mother-in-law convinced her for a proper checkup and treatment by a doctor. In the beginning, she had refused to be treated by any doctor because it was like opening her wounds and trauma again. “You also need to talk to someone,’ she said. ‘You are exhibiting all the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder’” (Gay 224). Finally, after her checkup, the doctor told her to take some psychiatric and therapy sessions to heal quickly. Medical assistance is very much required for a victim of trauma so that their disorder can be timely identified and treated properly to be near to the whole that was shattered into pieces.

It is crucial to recognize that each survivor's story is distinct and not everyone will display the same reactions or symptoms. The healing process is different for each individual, and seeking professional help from counselors, therapists, or support groups can play a crucial role in recovery. Empathy, support, and understanding from loved ones can also be essential in helping survivors cope with the trauma of sexual assault. Thus, Mireille proved to be one of the second generation of trauma that prevailed in the society who reshaped her identity and reestablished her agency so that her child (the third generation) wouldn’t be living in a traumatized family.

#### **4.3 Traumatic Experiences of Female Characters in *Breath, Eyes, Memory***

Sophie used to live with her aunt Tante Atie, who would share their family history with her now and then. They belonged to the Caco family and lived in a village. All their childhood her mother and aunt used to help their parents in the sugar cane fields. Political

unrest caused a lot of damage to the living conditions of its inhabitants. The general population of Croix-des-Rosets was workers who lived in small houses after independence and had to support big families with less income. Sophie's existence is a reminder of her mother's traumatic past because she was the offspring of rape. Martine's trauma wasn't cured or healed thus it diversely influenced Sophie's life as she was exposed to her mother's trauma. Martine traumatized Sophie with her obsession with her purity and chastity. This study focuses on the lives of female characters and how they are transmitting trauma among different generations.

Tante Atie shows the true and sad picture of the customs and cultural activities that Haitians engage in. These are exclusive to the females because their chastity is important to them. They focused on the harsh grooming of young girls who shouldn't be swayed by the tide of puberty. Girls are only trained to find husbands but are still considered not to know anything. For generations, Haitian society did not realize that all these worthless commotions for only a husband guaranteed trauma in the lives of girls. Sophie's mother's controlling nature reveals that she is restricting her daughter and making boundaries for her which might suffocate her and worsen their relationship. Haitians' obsession with female purity and virginity is mortifying. Haitians do not want their daughters to be wild like Americans. "She is not going to be running wild like American girls," my mother said. "She will have a boyfriend when she is eighteen" (Danticat 40). This controlling attitude would worsen the mother-daughter bond which will bow seeds for Sophie's trauma.

The distance and gap between their relationship was visible as they had just got together in America. Sophie had lived twelve years apart from her mother. Now Martine wanted to know about Sophie's past relations. For Haitians, a good girl is someone who is not touched by any man. "You're a good girl, aren't you?" By that, she meant if I had ever been touched, if I had ever held hands, or kissed a boy" (Danticat 44). She wanted to know



how pure Sophie was. Martine feels it is her right as a mother to know about such delicate issues.

Martine tells Sophie about their traditional testing of girls to check their purity. Martine and Atie had experienced it at the hands of their mother but she claims that it wasn't her mother's fault as the society that she grew up in demanded such actions from its mothers.

Martin's mother used to put us to the test when we were little to check if we were virgins. Putting her finger in our most intimate areas, she would test if it would go inside. It irked your Tante Atie. She used to scream like a butcher shop pig. That is what a mother is expected to do to her daughter until the daughter gets married, according to the way my mother was raised. It is her duty to maintain her purity.  
(Danticat 44)

The testing was always painful but it was something inevitable. Traditionally mothers must maintain their daughters' virginity until marriage. But such actions can harm the young girl's mind which can cause trauma. It also leads to strained relationships with their mothers. It also seems discrimination based on gender as young boys were not tested and their purity and chastity weren't considered, they were left to act as they pleased while all the pressure came for young girls puzzling their innocent minds and corrupting them. Such traditional norms and cultures can create hatred in the girls' hearts for themselves and their bodies. Such actions create an uncomfortable environment at home which puts strain on relationships.

Martine is sharing her traumatic experience with Sophie and how she was the result of rape. She did not resemble her mother but she resembled her unknown father. Martine was raped at a very young age after which she experienced nightmares. Aarons and L. Berger claim that the second generation of trauma survivors are exposed to trauma through

open discourse as in the case of Sophie (57). All these years, she had been reliving the same trauma in her nightmares which she couldn't escape. The Macoutes were lawless military officers who only fulfilled their desires. They killed innocent people, raided houses, and abused women openly. They were given a free hand from the government thus; they acted as they wished which the countrymen feared. Fear was evident among the inhabitants of Dame Marie (their village). Sophie believed that her father could have been a Macoute as well, as he raped Martine, her mother, and threatened to kill her if she got up to look. Sophie was born as a result of rape. "But it happened like this. A man grabbed me from the side of the road, pulled me into a cane field, and put you in my body. I was still a young girl then, just barely older than you..... a child out of wedlock always looks like its father" (Danticat 45). Martine has been experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms as she has been reliving her trauma each day after her rape in the form of nightmares. Dissociation, flashbacks, sleep difficulties, and a sense of a foreshortened future are all symptoms of PTSD that Brison also experienced (Brison 15).

When Sophie spent some time with Joseph and returned home at three in the morning, she couldn't explain to her mother that she hadn't done anything wrong, she was the same good girl. "Where were you?" Her lifelines grew redder as she tapped the belt against her palm. With a gentle surprise, she took my hand and walked me upstairs to my bedroom. There, she tested me while forcing me to lie on my bed" (Danticat 61). Although now Sophie was eighteen, her mother was like the typical possessive Haitian mother who tested her to check her virginity. Thus, the pattern started and every week Sophie was tested by her mother which she hated. It also resulted in a deterioration in their relationship as both did not speak much. Sophie was traumatized by these tests. Martine did not realize that she was passing generational trauma to her child. The testing had been a generational practice and considered right thus, nobody questioned it. Every Haitian girl suffered from this trauma as mothers were not educated and aware enough to stop such practices which could bring diverse effects on their daughter's life. Aarons and L. Berger state that the

children of trauma survivors believe their identities have been shaped before their existence. These children of second-generation live under the shadow of their parent's trauma (57). But Sophie was directly exposed to Martine's trauma as she inflicted the trauma of testing on her which strained their relationship and started to shatter her identity.

Sophie felt extremely lonely and she couldn't share it with anyone. She felt humiliated by the testing and shocked that her mother couldn't believe or trust her. She couldn't stand the testing anymore. "I was feeling alone and lost like there was no longer any reason for me to live. I went down to the kitchen and searched my mother's cabinet for the mortar and pestle we used to crush spices. I took the pestle to bed with me and held it against my chest" (Danticat 63). Violence forces victims to inflict self-destruction on themselves (Brison 47, my paraphrase). She had to end these traumatizing episodes thus; she decided to take her virginity by herself. Martine's testing had a severe impact on Sophie's life, she felt lost and unfit for life. So she decided to show her mother what she waited for to end this torturous and ineffective practice. She wanted to put an end to the cultural practice of transmitting generational trauma. Aarons and L. Berger state that transmission of trauma happens through actions, open discourse, or silence (58). Sophie felt that just like Martine's rape ended the sessions of testing so she freed herself from the term 'virgin'.

Sophie bore a lot of pain to put an end to her mother's testing. She took her virginity so that she was saved from the mortifying weekly tests. She failed the test upon which her mother told her to go to the man who had done it not knowing that it wasn't any man but Sophie herself because Martine's actions were traumatizing her. "My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet. I took the pestle and the bloody sheet and stuffed them in a bag. It was gone, the veil that always held my mother's finger back every time she tested me..... I ached so hard I could hardly move. Finally, I failed the test" (Danticat 63). Martine should have trusted her

daughter who obeyed her since they were together and cherished their relationship but Martine's traditional and cultural practices destroyed their bond. Martine did not realize the testing's impact on Sophie and how it harmed her. Since she had seen its effects firsthand and could no longer accept that this was the proper method of determining a daughter's virginity, Sophie became determined to put an end to this generational trauma. Sophie was not only the second generation of trauma survivor but she also experienced trauma due to her mother's stubborn cultural norms and traditions.

After Sophie left her home, Marine did not respond to her calls or letters and they hadn't met since. Martine's psychological state worsened with time because of not treating her trauma of rape and reliving it every single night in her dreams. Martine experienced the generational trauma of being tested for virginity and then her rape thus; she was traumatized twice because of her gender.

The conversation between grandmother and granddaughter intensified after Sophie came to Haiti after years of eloping and marriage. "Your mother? Did she test you?"..... "I call it humiliation," I said. "I hate my body. I am ashamed to show it to anybody, including my husband. Sometimes I feel like I should be off somewhere by myself. That is why I am here" (Danticat 88). Sophie claims that she felt humiliated when her mother tested her thus hurting her integrity and destroying her sexual life. Even though she's married, and has a daughter still she feels lost and uncomfortable. She wants to sort out her trauma; she wants to be away from everywhere. And most importantly she doesn't want anything like that to happen to her daughter. As Maurice states the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren links the past and future through the family memories thus this relationship helps in finding the origin of generational trauma which Sophie here feels to solve rather than passing it on to the next generation (1980, 63, my paraphrase).

The result of Sophie's resistance and freedom towards these tests was not good and her husband-to-be was shocked. But Sophie was ready for every sort of outcome because she wanted to be free from the shackles of testing. She couldn't bear it anymore.

I got four weeks of sutures in between my legs and two days in the Providence hospital. Joseph would never comprehend why I had harmed myself in such a terrible way. I was unable to convey to him the idea that it was a liberating gesture equivalent to removing a manacle. Though our wedding night happened weeks later, it was still a traumatic experience. It felt like the tears were happening again; the pain and discomfort had not gone away. That first excruciating period delivered us the child. (Danticat 93)

For her, sexual life with her husband became difficult and painful. She felt her body was chained and traumatized thus; she couldn't have a normal sexual life with her partner which was her dilemma.

Martine had never healed from her traumatic past and suffered from panic attacks when stressed. Another aspect of her personality is revealed that she strongly believes in what was taught to her. "The husband thought she might have come to spend the time with me. I am already having panic attacks about this. Could be she came to her senses, but not to return to me. I have already lit some candles for her. Green for life, like you've always said" (Danticat 95). She believes in traditional and cultural practices and whatever her mother taught her, she practiced that irrespective of any logic or its impact on others. Martine was completely consumed by her trauma as Brison states that victims lose their jobs, houses, spouses, money, time, sleep, and peace of mind as a result of being victimized (9). Martine loses her agency and self to trauma as she is unable to distinguish between a normal pattern of life and a traumatic pattern of life. Thus, involuntarily physically transmits trauma to her daughter (the second generation of trauma survivor).

Sophie's existence was evidence of Martine's trauma and abuse. She attempted suicide several times after her birth. Her nightmares were worse making her feel terrible and nasty. After being assaulted fear hung over Martine's life as she thought her assaulter would kill her any moment and take what remained of her life. A common symptom of trauma for the victim is fear of encountering the assaulter and facing that trauma again. Brison claims that survivors move from self-destructing torment to subsequently succeeding in reconstructing themselves in a new environment (47). But Martine failed to move to the reconstruction of self.

For months Martine was afraid that her rapist would creep out of the night and kill her in her sleep. She was terrified that he would come and tear out the child growing inside her. At night, she tore her sheets and bit pieces of her own flesh when she had nightmares..... she tried to kill herself several times when I was a baby. The nightmares were just too real. (Danticat 100)

It continuously explains the generational trauma that is culturally caused and expected of mothers to groom their daughters in such an evil manner. Daughters as young as children begin hating themselves. "From the time a girl begins to menstruate to the time you turn her over to her husband, the mother is responsible for her purity. If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring her back to me" (Danticat 112). The grandmother explains to Sophie that if a daughter is not a virgin, her husband can disgrace and shame the family even sending the daughter back home. Sophie confronted her grandmother about the transmission of trauma which she had instilled in her mother. Although Maurice Halbwachs states that the world grandchildren share with grandparents may have vanished and there might be fewer memories. Grandparents are more connected to the present than our parents (67, my paraphrase). Thus, grandparents and grandchildren share a unique bond of memories. But according to Aarons and L. Berger, grandparents are a source of unresolved trauma and transmission (62, my

paraphrase). So Sophie complains to her grandmother about the testing ritual which pained her because she couldn't tolerate the same pain again through which she had to go. It traumatized her to the extent of having nightmares but liberated herself by biting her tongue in the act to reduce her pain and focus on something else that would be less traumatizing.

Sophie and Martine's relationship deteriorated by testing which led to her resistance and elopement. Martine came after Sophie who had left her home when her husband was on a music tour. Martine wanted to reconcile with Sophie as her mother had told and guided her. She wanted to start over with their relationship and place their traumas behind which became a hindrance in their relationship.

Manman asked me to come here and make things better between us. It's not right for a mother and daughter to be enemies. Manman thinks it puts a curse on the family. Besides, your husband came for me and I could not refuse him.".....  
"You and I, we started wrong," my mother said. "You are now a woman, with your own house. We are allowed to start again. (Danticat 117)

Martine had no other reason than to transfer the generational trauma as her mother had done to her. She hated the testing but then her rape stopped it. "I did it," she said, "because my mother had done it to me. I have no greater excuse. I realize standing here that the two greatest pains of my life are very much related. The one good thing about my rape was that it made the testing stop. The testing and the rape, I live both every day" (Danticat 124). No matter what she does or where she lives, she relives those traumatic experiences by having nightmares every night. Martine acted according to the expectations of her family and grooming which led her to test Sophie every week. She did not realize that she was transmitting generational trauma that could destroy Sophie's marital life. Martine's mother did not understand that their cultural and traditional testing was going to begin a lineage of generational trauma. This depicts how easily Haitian women have been living under the

shadow of generational trauma that became a common norm and practice in Haiti. Every family has experiences and traumas that are specific to it, as well as secrets that are only known by its members. These memories consist of more than just a haphazard assortment of old pictures. By portraying the group's past and defining its characteristics, they convey the group's general way of thinking (Halbwachs 59, my paraphrase). This is how it became a collective memory of a Haitian family as it was instilled among generations of Haitians.

Martine explains how many deformities she has. She had cancer which led her to lose her breasts. She feels she's not a desirable woman nor an exemplary mother. She doesn't want to marry her longtime boyfriend Marc with all her incapacities. Martine thought her nightmares would go away with time but it got worse, making her relive her traumatic experience. Now that she is pregnant with her boyfriend's child, she feels the baby is like a burden which reminds her of her torturous past. "The nightmares. I thought they would fade with age, but no, it's like getting raped every night. I can't keep this baby" (Danticat 137). She cannot go through that experience again. She does not want to visit a psychiatrist because she cannot face her trauma. Martine is in a state of denial thinking that nothing can save her now. She tells Sophie that every night Marc saves her from killing herself. She feels this baby is going to take away her life. For Martine, Haiti was a place of unrest and trauma as it led to her increased nightmares. She wants to be buried in Haiti, on her soil which had caused her life-long harm and pain. Both Martine and Sophie the mother-daughter duo are affected by Haiti's cultural norms and practices. Martine's rape led to her attempted suicide before Sophie's birth. Similarly, Sophie was traumatized by virginity tests conducted by her mother severing their relationship.

Martine shares her experience with Sophie about how her birth was difficult for her. She tried every way to kill Sophie but she was supposed to be born. Martine's pregnancy was difficult because of an unwanted child at such a young age.



When I was pregnant with you, Manman made me drink all kinds of herbs, baby poisons. I tried beating my stomach with wooden spoons. I tried to destroy you, but you wouldn't go away." ..... "Last night after I talked to Marc about letting it go, I felt the skin getting tight on my belly and for a whole minute I couldn't breathe. I had to lie down and say I had changed my mind before I could breathe normally. (Danticat 138)

Now the current pregnancy made her unable to breathe if she talked about removing it. She was mentally not prepared to have any child all her life because it was out of wedlock. She had to face a traumatizing experience. Martine believes that her increased and intensified nightmares would lead to her death because of her pregnancy. She believes she would lose her sanity at the expense of this baby. Martine and Sophie had been suicidal in their lives, Martine was suicidal due to her trauma of rape and never-ending nightmares that was taking her life while Sophie became suicidal because of the testing which led to her nightmares and insomnia. Martine and Sophie both have been exhibiting symptoms of PTSD throughout their lives. Martine's trauma was severe because she was continuously in a state of denial and did not seek any help.

I had suicidal thoughts for the first year after my marriage. On certain occasions, I would wake up in a cold sweat, questioning whether my mother's anxiousness was inherited or something I had picked up from living with her. Her dreams had somehow permeated my own, to the point where on certain mornings I would wake up wondering if we hadn't dreamed the same thing at night—a faceless man beating a helpless little girl to death.....she would never become a frightened insomniac like my mother and me. (Danticat 140)

Sophie wondered if this anxiety was hereditary or happened due to living with her mother. She imagined whether she and her mother were having the same nightmares about

a faceless man. For Martine, the faceless man was the rapist, and for Sophie, it was her father. Sophie suffered from generational trauma and its nightmares from which coping was difficult.

Martine's hallucinations and nightmares continuously traumatized her; she believed that the baby she conceived was a boy as it spoke to her in a man's voice. She can't give birth to a boy because it haunts her. "Indeed. It spoke to me. I can tell it's not a girl now that it has a man's voice. I will release it from me, for the stars are my eyewitnesses" (Danticat 160). She feels that maybe something from her rape has remained in her body, now trying to be part of her current fetus. Sophie is explaining the impact of pregnancy on her mother. She is unable to act normal although she wants to be ok but her nightmares and ghost voices that she hears do not let her live. She seems to be falling apart with her current state of mind. Martine's pregnancy made her experience her past trauma when she was raped and carrying a child out of wedlock. Her trauma worsened with her current pregnancy which started to suffocate her. She couldn't hold the child. But whenever she talks about letting go, she feels physical pain inside her stomach as if something is tightening. Brison states talking about the trauma repeatedly is necessary to rehabilitate it, but it can be retraumatizing, particularly if someone doesn't answer and you feel abandoned (16, my paraphrase). Here Martine is reliving her trauma in its true sense in the form of her pregnancy which reminds her of her past traumas of rape and subsequent pregnancy.

Due to her trauma, Martine was unable to bear the child; as a result, she had to let go, which would have killed both the child and her. She stabbed herself in the stomach seventeen times to end her life, letting everyone know that she was unable to bear the child. Her death was caused by a lifelong trauma. "She stabbed her stomach with an old rusty knife. I counted, and they counted again in the hospital. Seventeen times." ..... "She could not carry the baby. She said that to the ambulance people" (Danticat 166-167). All her life was a traumatizing experience as she was reliving the trauma of rape. Post-coloniality led to the oppressive patriarchal rule leading to forceful killings, assaults, and

gender abuse. This oppression traumatized women as they were targeted, instilling generational trauma among families and paving the way for its transference.

This study shows how generational trauma is passed through generations of females without realizing it. The female characters' trauma destroys the family system as they are the family builders. Sometimes certain incidents or cultural practices lead to generational trauma. These texts show how generation after generation, trauma is transmitted, upsetting the normal life cycle. The transference of trauma from the first generation to the second is because of the uncured trauma of the first generation. Usually, the first generation is unconsciously transferring trauma to the second generation as they are under cultural pressure. Third-generation or grandchildren have a more indirect relationship with trauma and they seek to uncover and understand their family's history through knowing more about their past and how it affected them. This study categorically focuses on the trauma of the victim and its transference to the second generation who try to resolve the trauma.

## **CHAPTER 5**

# **MEMORY AS A MEDIUM OF TRANSFORMATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This study depicts the role of the collective memory of a family that has undergone a traumatizing experience. It highlights how memory acts as a medium for transforming the female characters and their lives in the novels *An Untamed State* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Further, it focuses on how a traumatic event can change the lives of generations and how its collective memory influences the entire family. The collective memory of a family refers to the shared recollection of experiences, stories, traditions, and values passed down through generations within a family unit. The reservoir of knowledge and narratives connects family members to their shared history and heritage.

### **5.2 Aspects of the collective memory of a family**

Families often have a rich tradition of storytelling, where older generations pass down their stories, experiences, and historical events to younger members. These stories can provide insight into the family's past, the challenges they've overcome, and the values they hold dear. These experiences create shared stories and memories that strengthen family ties. The collective memory of a family is important because it helps maintain a sense of continuity and identity within the family unit. It allows family members to connect with their roots, understand their place in the family narrative, and pass down important lessons and traditions to future generations. Additionally, it fosters a sense of belonging and unity among family members. In a similar vein, when a family member experiences trauma, the event and its aftermath are ingrained in the family's collective memory. The collective memory of a family helps victims move towards the transformation of female agency.

### **5.3 Memory as a Medium of Transformation of Mireille in *An Untamed State***

For Mireille, memory became her turning point as it was difficult for her to undo the thirteen days of her kidnap. The collective memory of her family led her to realize that the re-establishment of her agency is the utmost requirement for her survival. “They held me captive for thirteen days. They wanted to break me. It was not personal. I was not broken. This is what I tell myself” (Gay 1). She remembered how her captors tried to destroy her, while her resilient self always wanted to remember that whatever happened to her was not something personal although much of her personal had been destroyed. Mireille constantly fought her memories because she wanted to recall her calm self. “The people in my life are usually amazed by my memory since I always recall every little detail of anything. My memory was a gift until it turned into a curse and I was unable to forget things that I had to forget to survive, no matter how hard I tried” (Gay 23). Survival for a traumatized individual is not an easy task as their memories are always haunting them. Some of the faculties act against the victim, making their life miserable. Memory retention sometimes is a blessing but sometimes it becomes a curse as trauma victims are unable to forget their traumatizing event. Forgetting such memories is part of survival for victims of sexual assault and kidnap. It is a requirement for them so that they can be normal and alive again. Susan Brison states that traumatic memory is not a memory but a recurring sensory recall of distressing events, often known as flashbacks, either felt intact or discontented fragments (44). The first response to trauma and its memory is forgetting.

Mireille is a woman of extraordinary strength and valor. She wanted to memorize every particular detail about her captors which could be of any help to her justice. “I walked with small steps, tried to memorize everything I saw. We passed the kitchen, where men still sat with dark glass bottles in front of them” (Gay 25). It was so excruciating for Mireille to remember and feel the abuse of one of her captors who crossed the line by inserting fingers inside her because of her comments and resistance that she needed to be alone in

the restroom. “I waited. I had nothing but the memory of a strange man’s fingers inside me, twisting, reaching, taking. I prayed this would be only terrible thing I had to carry” (Gay 29). She prayed it to be the only worse thing that happened to her but little did she know that it was only the beginning. During her kidnap and after it, her memory became a curse for her because it was hindering her normalcy and tortured her further. The historical details comprise the framework of collective memory which operates as standards for evaluations of how the family expresses itself (Halbwachs 1992, 59, my paraphrase). Here, Mireille is unable to go back in time since her collective memory is locked on her tragic event.

Mireille showed to be the perfect example of resilience; she inherited the strength and stubbornness of her father. Thus, when her captors wanted her to express her pain so that the negotiations could speed up, she resisted. Her continuous claim of being treated in the right way: unharmed, infuriated the commander who with time increased her agony. “Performing my distress for my father to demonstrate how badly I was being treated would serve no purpose. I am, or I was, very much like my father. I shook my head. I did not waver. I did not look away. I held the phone to my ear again and said, ‘I am fine and being treated as well as expected, but I am ready to come home’” (Gay 48). Her character showed that she was not like any random woman who would cry and wail. Every day she put on a tough face to fight the suffering. Her resistance showed the strength of her female agency. Her personality did not allow her to ask for mercy from her captors. Her female agency did not want to ask for pity because her body was the embodiment of pain and torture. Her collective memory of Haitian identity played a role in her resisting the commander with immense strength and steadfastness. As Maurice Halbwachs states family structure regulates how people express their emotions. Maintaining authority requires this structure (1992, 57).

After her gang rape, nobody showed mercy towards her body and self. Her body could not take it anymore thus, she passed out and even in that unconscious state her body hurt showing extreme agony. It was her way of keeping her mind away from the torture

that was inflicted on her body to keep count of the pain, thrusts, and how much time it took to break her again. “As I passed out, the commander hovered over me, smiling. Finally, I thought, as I drifted into a place where I felt nothing but still, somehow ached. There was nothing left to count” (Gay 60). Mireille wanted her memories to divert her mind from the present torture but it became impossible when nothing remained of her to be saved, her body was taken. Brison states that trauma’s long-lasting symptom is the disappearance of the past and the foreshortening of the future (39, my paraphrase). As Mireille feels her life destroyed by trauma.

With every torment, she became nobody with no father to claim. Her only aim and emotion that remained was to survive and outlive this moment. She engulfed and absorbed the entire trauma that was not approachable by anyone. With time she was losing her self and agency. Her dealing with trauma was miraculously different from others. Brison claims that victims of rape are prone to self-blame and helplessness but Mireille during her kidnap tries to gain agency with this experience so that she can reduce her pain (12, my paraphrase).

These men had kidnapped the daughter of Sebastian Duval. Even as I became less and less that man’s daughter, my ambition to survive was my only emotion. I swallowed everything else, put it far beyond anyone’s reach, even mine. ‘I tried to think of the necessary words, the correct combination of words the commander wanted my father to hear. I looked up at my captor. I am very stubborn. (Gay 73-74)

During the negotiations, she never said what her captor wanted her to convey to her father. She was headstrong and difficult; she tried every way to defy him. Her fight meant going against her captor's wishes. The last call of negotiations was very painstaking as it had been too much for her to take; she was dirty, hungry, and tired of resisting. Finally, she asked her father to save her remains. Halbwachs states many components are retained from the past as part of the family's traditional armor to create a framework for the memory that the

family is trying to preserve (1992, 59). Mireille gave up, once the pain became too much for her to bear, despite her best efforts to fight under her strong self—which was shaped by her family's collective memories.

The commander began to press the bruise. The pain was breathtaking. I was covered in sweat, filthy, exhausted, starving. I was a mass of desperate need..... I pleaded with my dad to preserve what remained of me. Once more, I was in front of an audience as I faced the humiliation and the possibility of being ignored..... I screamed. I couldn't speak but I screamed..... I wet myself. (Gay 75)

The commander enjoyed giving her agonizing pain which she couldn't resist thus, she screamed and screamed, giving her father an insight that she was harmed and maltreated. Nothing remained of her body, just a shattered mess. She thought she could save her heart, the only place she could protect. Mireille thought her captors could not reach her heart, they could not destroy it. "I did not mind when he doused the cuts on my back with alcohol. My skin burned. Before I passed out, I said, 'My heart is safe. My heart is safe'" (Gay 93). When her body was completely torn, she focused on her heart which nobody reached. Her resistance and reaction towards trauma was rare and unique for her captors which attracted them more towards her. Mireille's reaction and fight against trauma was unusual and extraordinary as she gave in to the commander's desires. She became a woman without memory or family; she forgot her name and the older version of her self.

There was a different way to fight..... I would fight by giving him that which he did not yet want. I feigned surrender..... I became someone different a woman who was capable of fulfilling a man's desires I started to lose memory of everyone and everything I had ever known or loved. I disappeared from the world. I developed into a lady who desired life. That was my fight..... I was no one, so the pain did not matter. (Gay 98)



When an individual becomes a person without any memory of their previous life, they have nothing to lose and the physical pain does not matter then. She confronted her pain by forgetting herself and becoming someone who has no name and no memory to hurt. She eased her suffering by accepting the reality of giving what was desired from her without any resistance. She tried reducing her torment by changing her self. Her resistance to trauma and torture was something impressive which her captors also appreciated. To reduce the pain and torture during her kidnap, she tries to gain agency by creating a different self which does not mind accepting the advances of her perpetrators. She decides to leave everything behind thus, she gains power to do what is unimaginable during a traumatic experience. Being no one made her realize that her body isn't hers anymore and nothing more could be broken because her mind is alive. "The body he had already tried to break but could not break. I was silent.... My body was not my body..... In what was left of my mind, I screamed. I was alive. I made my choice. There is nothing you cannot do when you are no one" (Gay 99). Her body faces every challenge and struggle as she is no one, nothing more could be harmed. Her battle against these transgressors proved her striking headstrong personality and ability to survive in such difficult situations. Mireille attains agency during her kidnapping by differentiating between her body and agency in her fight against the kidnappers.

Mireille wanted to forget her identity as a mother claiming that she's nobody with no child and family. "I do not have a child,' ..... I am not the mother of my child" (Gay 104). She couldn't think of being a mother at that time because her survival would become difficult for her then. She left behind the memories of her happy family because it made her survival excruciating. Being no one meant she had no relations. When she flipped her agency to no one so she wanted to erase the collective memory of her family because a mother wouldn't act like that but dire circumstances require dire actions.

No matter what happened, she did not allow her captors to have her milk because that is for her child. She wasn't afraid of her death but she was extremely tormented by

realizing that she could not save her milk from drying. “I was no one. My death would not matter..... TiPierre brought his mouth to my breast and began to suckle softly..... You cannot do that. You cannot” (Gay 106). She felt discomfort and sore. Despite the little ease that she got from suckling, she resisted giving her milk to anyone other than her child. Preserving her milk acts as her realization of collective memory which connects her with her family. As Halbwachs states we share family memory through our conversations, appearance of people, and places or the way we think with certain people (1992, 56). Mireille being a mother was sharing a part of her body with her child which she could not bear to be attacked as she wanted it to be preserved for her child showing resistance to protect the collective memory of her memory.

With the passing days, Mireille realized that her body had great capabilities. She was alive despite her agonizing torture. She was in so much pain on the tenth night that she associated it with labor pains. “It was only after the baby was all the way out that I groaned, a loose and ugly sound. That is the pain I remembered on the tenth night when so much had been done to my body. It was my only frame of reference for a pain more profound than the body should survive” (Gay 107). She thought that she had never known what her body could take and how much it could take. But the human body proved to be surmountable. Labor pain was the only reference of the collective memory of her family that she could refer to her existing pain of torture.

Mireille knew there was no running away, thus she created two selves when the commander wanted her. For him, she would forget everything from her past because only then she could function properly and outlive the abuse. She created a fine balance between these two selves that she had created. ‘The commander materialized, and the sky grew gloomy. I split into two women: one with complete memory loss and the other with no memory loss. This called for a careful equilibrium’ (Gay 121). But mostly she opted for her new agency of being nobody during the kidnap because otherwise, her torment would be exacerbating.

Facing every sort of torture and abuse, Mireille wanted her husband to know about her love for him and their child because otherwise all her efforts and fight would be completely useless. The destruction of her body and her survival would be futile then. She felt, she might die at any moment but she always outlived the pain. Everything that she had become was the opposite of the woman her family knew especially her husband. Her resistance is shown by becoming a nobody. Mireille wanted her husband and son to remember the collective memories of her past that they shared.

I wanted him to know I was losing myself, that I was all torn apart but I did not want that to be the last thing he knew of me..... 'I'm not going to be all noble and tell you to move on quickly and forget me if I die.....I wanted you to know that. You and our son are the only things that matter and I hope you don't forget any of it..... Michael, I mean it. Don't let him forget me or this would all be in vain.  
(Gay 123)

With each passing day, she was erasing memories of her life because she had become no one. Finally, when the commander felt her father wouldn't pay for his daughter, he threatened Mireille to kidnap her child as well. She was shocked and infuriated as she didn't want her child to be harmed in such sick and dirty conditions. She sacrificed herself for her child by offering her life service to them and some money that she would collect from her banks. It dawned upon her that she wouldn't be able to see her family again. Slowly she tried to remove the memories of her child from her mind so that she could be able to live in her current place and comprehend that she already gave herself to be sacrificed for life. A mother does everything for her child and Mireille proved her selfless love for her child in dire conditions. Mireille tried not to remember her previous life because to be a nobody, she had to put everything behind her. Her resistance was to prove that she could survive in such harsh conditions. She tried to condition herself by remembering that she was no one, with no family or career. It was as if a new individual was born in her skin who could face any hardship and challenge for her survival. This

shows how her agency transformed in the protection of the collective memory of her family.

Mireille's self was indestructible as she even changed the pronoun as if she wasn't talking about her family but somebody else's. She wanted to show her captor that she couldn't be destroyed. There were two selves of Mireille; the before and after. "The thought of my husband and child in this hell was beyond imagination. 'Leave her family alone. Don't mention them. Don't ever think about them'" (Gay 133). The current Mireille was somebody who did not care about being harmed, broken or damaged but the Mireille from before would have gone mad with the destruction and abuse thus, for survival, Mireille's transformation of self was required. She treated the Mireille of before as somebody else as she wanted the collective memory of her family intact. Mireille shifted her mode of being too quickly, every time preparing herself for harm that was supposed to be caused to her body while she would have to stop showing any resistance towards her assault. She did as she was expected, she did what nobody could have done. Her reaction and approach towards her survival strategy was remarkable. Every day, she tried to remove her memories so that her stay could be easy reducing her pain. She emphasized erasing her memories so that it could be less torturous to stay among such filthy people who despite their gross treatment, had families which was unfathomable for Mireille as her family was tortured because of them. She knew that no matter how much her body was abused both physically and sexually, she would outlive it. It was like a revelation upon her that such immense agony and pain can be endured by the human body. The collective memory of her family helps her realize that agency is crucial for the protection of her family. A mother's resistance can cause transformation in a family's history of trauma.

Mireille's comment to the commander proved how women have been subjected to violence on behalf of men. Women have always paid high prices and sacrificed their lives for men. "Your mother did not deserve the unwanted attentions of a man like my father. I did not deserve the unwanted attentions of a man like you. It is often women who pay the

price for what men want” (Gay 140). Women’s dignity and body are always subjected to extreme violence and abuse at the hands of other men. Women are disrespected easily by objectifying their bodies and sexually exploiting them. Mireille had been keeping count of the days and the harm done to her body but now when everything had been taken from her and it was just an agonizing mess, time meant nothing because time had slowed down for her, making her feel the never-ending torture.

After her release, it was very difficult for her to remember what she had tried to forget because she had started to believe that she would live the rest of her life there. She was unable to reach her previous self as it had been locked by her. “I tried to remember my name but I couldn’t. It was locked somewhere I could not reach” (Gay 146). Her trauma made it difficult for her to be who she was. It was very difficult for her traumatized self to connect to her previous self which was lost in memories. Psychologically she had been trapped, even when she had been reunited with her family, she felt as if she was in a cage. Her body was free now but her mind was caged. She couldn’t think properly towards her betterment. She had detached herself from the collective memory of her family that’s why it became difficult to reach her previous self. Slowly and gradually, Mireille tried to remember her previous self unharmed and happy with her family. Brison states adult rape victims report a splitting from their self during the assault as well as in the aftermath showing a separation from their former selves (47).

She displayed resistance towards her medical treatment since she felt she would be harmed again. She wanted to keep her wounds only to herself. She did not want her damaged body and self to be exposed to anyone. Although she was in pain, she did not want anybody near her body. She knew the pain had no limits neither her body. As Brison states victims of trauma find it difficult to heal and they require the support of others to undergo their medical treatment (48). “My body was aware that its endurance had no boundaries. I wanted to tell everyone I met, *you have no idea what I can take*” (Gay 156). Healing would be slow and time-consuming, acting as another torture for her. She being

stubborn always showed resistance towards whatever seemed wrong to her. She wanted to tell the world that her body could endure more than one can imagine. Her body was the epitome of torture, abuse and suffering as it was completely broken with bruises. Her body was the projection of her fight and resistance.

My face was so disfigured it was almost unrecognizable—I had two black eyes, bruises, and contusions. My collarbones were adorned with a series of little bruises. I had deeper bruises all over my neck, shoulders, legs, back, and stomach. A series of small cuts marked my left calf. There were cuts across my back, a very fresh cut between my breasts, wide, open, and weeping. There were so many burns. I studied the attentions of unkind men. My fingernails were ragged and broken. I fought so hard. I was proud. I would have that, always. (Gay 160)

She knew it would remain with her no matter how much it gets healed; it would always be with her. As Brison claims trauma becomes a part of the self of the victim (49). She proudly wore the torture of her fight for survival. Her severe abuse and torture were visible just by having a glance at her body. No matter how tough time her husband had to face, the separation of kidnapping and the separation of healing, still he chose her and stayed with her. Healing and support immensely came from her mother-in-law and husband. Brison states reconstructing self-narratives requires more than just words but people and listeners who want to hear them (50).

Michael, don't. No one expects you to stay with me. No one would choose me right now. Don't insult me by saying what you think you're supposed to.' He held my hand gently. 'I choose you today, yesterday, tomorrow. I swear.' He opened the box again and slowly slid a beautiful diamond ring along my finger and then a thin wedding band that matched his. He closed his hand over mine. (Gay 238)

Love of loved ones heals the traumas although it may take months and years. The collective memory and support of her family brought her back to life. Mireille needed attention, time and care to completely heal which her husband did with the support of her mother-in-law. Her husband did not want to destroy the bond that they had which reminded her of her child and family for whom her coming back to life was necessary. Brison claims remaking oneself in the wake of trauma emphasizes how dependent one is on others (51). These family members help in the reminiscence of the collective memory of the victim's family which supports victims in the transformation of their selves. Mireille's story proved to be an inspiration for the masses. She had given only one interview. An unauthorized movie was made about her kidnapping and coming back to life. She formed her female agency by the fact that her heart and self are indestructible. Brison claims that acceptance helps in overcoming trauma creating a reformed self and new life (109).

Sometimes we need to face realities and truth to be free of the caged mind, especially for Mireille and trauma survivors. The therapists must show reality to the victims so that they can heal properly. "Only one therapist said, 'I'm going to come clean with you, Mireille. You will get better but you will never be okay, not in the way you once were. There is no being okay after what you've been through.' That truth freed me. I said, 'Thank you,' and I meant it. I was lighter and cleaner and calm" (Gay 244). The victim can never be the same again that is a fact but they can be okay with what happened to them. Survival and struggle mean living with trauma with its least effect. Mireille re-established her agency by becoming stronger with her scars.

It was very grand and respectful of Mireille to forgive her father because he was responsible for the trauma and harm that was caused to her. His delay led to her agonizing torture. She believed her forgiveness freed her for the first time after her trauma. Being free of trauma is a part of the healing process but it took years for Mireille to be free again. After five years, when she came across the commander at a restaurant, she wanted to ask him what stopped him from killing her. Now she had become stronger and harder. But one

smile from her captor weakened her as all the memories of her torture flooded her mind. She had taken five years to be alive again but his one action weakened her strength and power that she had been building for all these years. According to Brison, in the recovery of trauma, physical remastering of trauma is essential by an imaginary reenactment of the traumatic event and changing its end, which would give the survivor more control over their memories (75).

I called him by his given name. I said, ‘You should have killed me after you killed me.’ ..... I was strong. I worked very hard five years into the after to be strong, to fight even harder..... The commander looked at me and his lips curled into a smile and I recalled every action he took against me. All of a sudden, the memories overtook my body and threatened to spread like cancer, undoing everything I had done to get back closer to life. (Gay 255)

Irrespective of what Mireille had to lose to be alive, she always showed defiance through her statements. The commander wanted to keep her which Mireille resisted stating she would never belong to people who harmed and broke her body. The character of Mireille in the novel shows how the prevalent different generation's trauma was experienced by Mireille as her cousin was also kidnapped before her. She as the second generation had to face the traumatic event but her self and agency did not let her transmit it to her third generation thus, for the safety of her child the collective memory of her family gave her strength and courage to transform her agency by becoming more resilient.



#### **5.4 Memory as a Medium of Transformation of Female Characters in *Breath, Eyes, Memory***

The function that collective memory plays in the transformation of the female characters in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* has a significant impact on their lives. Memories create our agency and sense of self, if we don't have any memory then we can be anyone we want to but memories keep our lives intact. In this study, collective memory will act as the medium of establishment of female agency as these characters need to be freed from the shackles of certain devastation of cultural, traditional and family practices. For Martine, Sophie was her living past which she did not want to confront. Sophie was the embodiment of her traumatic experience; a memory she could not escape. Sophie's relationship with her mother was not like other mother-daughter relationships because they lived separately in the early years of her life. "My mother now had two lives: Marc belonged to her present life, I was a living memory from the past" (Danticat 40). Sophie was raised by her aunt Tante Atie.

Sophie was young when she was traumatized by her mother thus she couldn't solve her mother's existing trauma which was affecting her. But later when she understood Martine's struggle, it was too late to save her. "It took me twelve years to piece together my mother's entire story. By then, it was already too late" (Danticat 45). Trauma takes years to heal but for Martine, it took her a lifetime without healing.

The memory of her traumatic testing flooded her mind whenever something near to that experience happened. This testing and resistance had a severe impact on Sophie's personality and life. "The little marks the stems left on my skin brought back memories of the enormous goosebumps my mother's testing used to make on my skin" (Danticat 79). Martine's nostalgia led to her loss of appetite. Brison states in the aftermath of trauma, victim attempts to change their body in order to have control over it. Eating disorders are a common symptom of sexual assault (46). She thought Sophie would return to her

humiliated by her boyfriend. But when this didn't happen it cost her a lot. The pain of losing her daughter because of her testing damaged their relationship which had just begun after years of separation. Martine and Sophie's relationship was affected by the testing thus, happy memories in their relationship were less and the rest was filled with the collective memory of their family's generational trauma. 'It might be good for you and your mother to return there and try if you can both leave it behind. There are things you may say to the location where it happened, even if you will never be able to face your father. After your confrontation, I believe you'll be set free. Ghosts will vanish from the world' (Danticat 155). Sophie's therapist guides her that their trauma can only be solved if they face it by visiting its origin. Martine and Sophie both want to live a peaceful life but Martine refuses medical support and treatment whereas Sophie avails it. Brison claims that facing trauma or accepting it to be a part of your life can make you stronger than before (109). Females can fight their traumas and become better individuals.

Martine could not bear the thought of giving birth to a child out of wedlock and heard voices which she claimed to be from her fetus. She stabbed herself seventeen times taking her and her child's life. Martine as the first generation female was unable to face and fight her trauma. She voluntarily passes the trauma of testing as a traditional practice to Sophie the second generation. Sophie had spent her entire life in her mother's trauma as the collective memory of her family, thus to protect herself and the third generation she accepts her trauma and gains agency/ new self by confronting the pain of her mother's rape. After Martine's funeral, Sophie goes to the fields of sugar cane where her mother was sexually assaulted, to confront the trauma on her mother's behalf so she beats the cane stalks to take out her anger on them.

I attacked the cane as I sprinted across the field. I removed my shoes and started to beat a stalk of cane. I hammered it till it started to sag. I stepped on the stalk of the cane. It suddenly sprang back, hitting my shoulder. I tugged at it, lifting it off the floor. My hand was bleeding..... The funeral crowd was now standing between the

stalks, watching me beat and pound the cane..... My grandmother shouted like the women from the marketplace, “Are you free? (Danticat 173)

She had to confront her mother's and her origins of trauma which had generationally passed and was felt as the collective memory of the family. The confrontation was the only way to free herself from every sort of trauma that she and her mother had.

From the thick of the cane fields, I tried my best to tell her, but the words would not roll off my tongue. My grandmother walked over and put her hand on my shoulder. “Listen. Listen before it passes. The words can give wings to your feet. There is so much to say, but time has failed you,” she said. “There is a place where women are buried in clothes the color of flames, where we drop coffee on ground for those who went ahead, where the daughter is never fully a woman until her mother has passed before her. There is a place where, if you listen closely in the night, you will hear your mother telling a story and at the end of the tale, she will ask you this question: “Are you free, my daughter?” ..... “Now,” she said, ‘You will know the answer’ (Danticat)

Martine couldn't show her anger towards her assailant because of the fear that she could be attacked anywhere, and at any moment. As Brison states having anger toward the attacker may make you think that you are near the attacker which is a dangerous thing in the early stages of recovery (13). Thus, it was a difficult moment for Sophie as she was confronting trauma on behalf of her mother, there was so much to say when she was hitting the cane stalks but her tongue wouldn't work at that time. Although her grandmother explains to her that you have become a woman now as you have lowered your mother into the grave, confronted the place of her rape and all the misery from where it started so now you will know the answer to all your queries, ultimately being free. According to Halbwachs, we don't realize that our parents are more connected to the past and our grandparents to the present (1980, 67). But time failed her in the confrontation of trauma

because it cost her, the life of her mother but saved the coming generations as she has a daughter of her own.

According to Brison, violence forces people to relocate as survivors and move from self-destructing torment to subsequently reconstructing themselves in the new environment (47). It is shown through Sophie's character as she took a stand for herself and her daughter by ending the generational practice of testing and transmission of trauma. She also freed her mother's self by taking out her anger on stalks in the cornfield. She confronted the place that originated her mother's trauma. Sophie fought for her Self and her daughters' female agency.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This study highlights gender abuse, kidnappings, and rape as common practices shown in post-colonial Haitian fiction, resulting in women's oppression. The events of physical and sexual violence lead to generational trauma. The novels are set in Haitian society demonstrating the severity of the crisis and its effect on women's lives. Women are shown terrified of mafia gangs, who would kidnap them and rape them. The novels present Haiti as a place where necessities are few, which worsens the living circumstances of Haitians, especially women because of their gender. Rape and kidnappings emerge as a serious issue in the novels. These crimes were not restricted to one generation as it became a societal norm, thus destroying the family structure over generations. Women became vulnerable due to the destruction of their identity and agency. Trauma involuntarily is passed down the generation of female characters under discussion.

The female characters under discussion were raped either for sensual pleasure or ransom. The trauma of physical and sexual abuse was a lot for these female characters to handle as many victims were fixated on that trauma. This trauma led to a complete disruption of the normal life of these female characters. Not only the life of these female characters was destroyed but their families were also influenced by their trauma. This physical and sexual abuse of victims increased fear in their lives and hatred for themselves. This experience had a traumatic impact on these characters as they had complete detachment from their lives and family members. Their trauma damaged their self and purpose of existence as it became difficult to live. Their goals and aims were shattered as the life ahead was blurred by the traumatic event. These victims couldn't think of a future ahead because of the tragedy that they landed in. No matter how hard they tried to be alone in their traumatic zone with all the symptoms of PTSD, their entire family also had the trauma of losing their loved ones to detachment. Family members are directly affected by

the trauma of the victim as their family unit is disturbed. The torture of rape is difficult to heal as with physical injuries, mental stability is also at stake. The effects of abuse are memories that haunt the victim with flashbacks of fragments from that traumatic event. These flashbacks bring about depression, anxiety, and fear which hinder the normal functioning of the person. For instance, Mireille couldn't bear the closeness of her husband and his anger, fearing that she would associate him with the abusers based on manliness whereas Martine lived her life in fear that the macoute would come and kill her. This constant fear was shattering the confidence of our female characters under discussion. Furthermore, the immediate response to trauma was sleeplessness and deprivation from food; the psyche behind it was that the perpetrators wouldn't find victims attractive enough for rape. Thus, starvation is also considered a way to protect them from rape and abuse. These are some strategies that victims think can safeguard them from being in such a situation again.

The trauma of these incidents affected not only the victims but also their family members, especially spouses and children. Victims are first-generation females who encounter traumatic events. Unfortunately and involuntarily trauma from the first generation female mothers is passed on to the second generation. These children were directly exposed to their mothers' trauma making them insecure about their lives. Mothers play a vital role in grooming their children but mothers who have experienced traumatic events unwontedly instill their fear and trauma in their children. As they haven't completely healed from trauma but instead are trapped in symptoms of PTSD this commonly repeats the trauma. Thus, the survivors have to relive the trauma again and again which disrupts their mental peace. Reliving trauma leads to depression that hinders the survivor from fulfilling the role of a mother in the family. The flashbacks of trauma and its repetition can be fatal in severe cases thus such a person is not in the correct state of mind so how can these mothers give a peaceful and happy environment for their children to grow up in?

The second-generation children of victims of rape and abuse are enveloped in the shadow of trauma which is constantly and unknowingly haunting them. They live a broken and damaged life with shattered identities as they are experiencing secondhand trauma. Their growth is hindered by the prevailing confusion related to trauma as they are unable to understand and absorb it completely. Sometimes children deliberately absorb the trauma by facing and understanding it just as Sophie opened her arms to trauma by accepting it. But many times children face second trauma through the patterns and underlying strains in which they are brought up as Mireille's child had to face his mother's detachment and aloofness for more than a year affecting the bond that they shared. The transference of trauma through generations can either be through open discussions of memories, repetition of unresolved trauma in their parent's life, or the silence between generations. It creates fear for the offspring and directly affects their present and future as they are maltreated by their parents many times. The second generation feels a responsibility towards their parent's past and struggles to resolve their trauma as they have the burden of testimony and need to bear witness. Their fantasies of life are replaced by the burden of their parent's trauma.

Third generation, the grandchildren of survivors do not have a direct relation with trauma; the traumatic past of their grandparents does not directly affect their lives. They haven't experienced the aftermath of trauma thus, they act as adoptive witness. The third generation tries to understand and uncover their family's past and heritage. They act as inquisitive beings who try to master their past to relate with and give meaning to their lives. However, they might face resistance from their parents and grandparents because of the effects of trauma on their lives. A common perspective towards trauma is to be quiet for fear of transmitting trauma and suffering to the younger generations. Literature about trauma helps the third generation to understand and care for their trauma inheritance to the future therapeutically accepting the burden and relief of shared inheritance. My research

study focuses on the second generation completely freeing the third generation from trauma and its impact as second-generation females fight it.

The traumatic experience was transferred to successive generations through the medium of collective memory of a family. So the two processes are working simultaneously the transference and formation of collective memory of trauma. The collective memories of a family are filled with shared familial past and recollections, but a traumatic event fixates collective memory on trauma and its recollections impact is transferred among generations through memory. Family memories are formed through pictures, shared thoughts, emotional reactions, and impressions. Thus, collective memory of a family is fixated on trauma which prevents the transmission of healthy and happy memories of a family. The successive generations of the family are bound by the trauma of their elders which impacts them immensely as Sophie's life revolved around her mother's trauma. Trauma drastically affects the relationship of family members who are cohabiting. For example, spouses are greatly affected by the trauma of their partner as one experiences physical trauma and abuse while the other faces emotional trauma and its impact in the case of Mireille's husband (Michael) and Sophie's husband (Joseph) who faced their separation and detachment. Trauma puts marriage at stake because the victim and their loved ones are unaware of how to deal with that trauma and its collective memory which is damaging their relationship. The collective memory of a family is attached to places and situations whereas the victim associates places and circumstances with trauma that brings flashbacks leading to fear and hopelessness. The words and thoughts of a family affect individuals as they can either be a source of motivation or discouragement as Michael was once angry at Mireille due to his frustration towards the situation resulting in her detachment from people while her mother-in-law proved to be a source of motivation as she gave her complete support in the aftermath of trauma. Survivors of rape are usually discouraged by their domestic environment. So it becomes difficult for the victim to be encouraged and hope for a new better future. Thus, the collective memory of a family is



supposed to bring happiness and joy to the existing and future generations but instead acts as a depressing and disappointing memory lineage.

The living bond of generations is such that grandparents have a strong connection of love and care for grandchildren. The first and third generations are close and intimate to each other as the second generation is preoccupied with their work. So transference of memories and family history happens through the storytelling habit of grandparents who want to inform their grandchildren about their familial past and legacy. But when grandparents have experienced trauma, they won't behave normally with their grandchildren nor would they want to transmit those traumatic memories to them. Grandparents always want to protect and keep their grandchildren safe from such events. Thus, trauma affects the relationship between the first and third generations while the second one has been carrying the burden of trauma all their lives. The connection between past and future generations has trauma as shown in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* that Sophie's grandmother deliberately passed the trauma of testing her daughters, instilling it as a right act of a mother that Martine didn't think of once but transferred the trauma to Sophie which scarred her life. But it also gave her strength to confront her grandmother and learn how to end this vicious cycle of transference.

Rarely first generation (the victims themselves) take the initiative to resolve their trauma, spending their entire lives in healing and curing the physical and mental wounds. It needs a lot of courage and motivation from the family because if the family is not supportive enough, the victim might harm themselves unable to heal as in Martine's situation who attempted suicide multiple times. In some cases, victims face separation from their spouses because they couldn't give support. Forming a female agency is significant because it helps them to be independent. Healing is a time-consuming process but can be sped up with the support of family members. Speaking about trauma helps the victim understand their trauma and be cautious for the future. Keeping emotions and trauma inside destroys the self thus opening up about the traumatic event is a way of healing. Victims/

survivors act has motivational figures for other females. Medical and psychiatric help is essential as constant guidance and support from their side is also important. Medical staff aligns the victim and their family in the right direction. Mireille was a gang rape victim but she didn't lose hope instead fought with her trauma headstrong. She took psychiatric and psychological counselling sessions, took self-defence classes, gave interviews, and wrote a book about her trauma and abuse guiding females on how to heal and avoid such situations, forming her agency as Brison has stated in the "Remaking of the Self".

The second generation takes the burden of their parent's trauma and witnesses it. Living and being brought up in such a situation where flashbacks and recollections of trauma are unavoidable so second-generation offspring live under the shadows of trauma. They take hold of their family life by trying to understand and comprehend their mother's trauma and then find ways to heal it. Just like Sophie who was firstly traumatized by her mother's trauma then she inflicted it upon her. Sophie thought to face the location of her mother's rape would help her overcome her anguish. She took her mother's and her own anger on the sugarcane stalks by hitting them continuously til she was tired. Sophie not only freed herself but also her mother's soul and her daughter's future from generational trauma.

Hence the study demonstrates the connection between collective memory and generational trauma, which supports women in developing their agency. The collective memory of a family and generational trauma develop concurrently, fostering a supportive environment and the ability to heal from trauma. As the trauma of their elders consume their lives, the generations within a family come to see the need for a suitable remedy. The remaking of self is crucial for the regular and healthy functioning of the family since it alters the relationships within the family. Females are the ones who unite the family and provide meaning to it. But when these females encounter traumatic events, the family life is at stake as it starts to shatter. The female characters in this study have highlighted that they are important members of family without whom the family unit is incomplete. Their

trauma disturbs the entire family. Their isolation as a prevalent behavior towards trauma causes them more trouble. When these female characters under discussion are supported by family members, shown by the utmost support of Mireille's Mother-in-law and Sophie's husband who speed up their recovery from trauma, they mould their broken identities. Remaking of the "Self" occurs when these female characters grow into stronger, more resilient versions of themselves by accepting and embracing their suffering. To prevent trauma from spreading, they change and start to realize who they are.

## **WORKS CITED**

- Abdullah Jassim, Shaima' and Thiab Hameed, Laith. "Politics of Political Rape in Haiti: A Rape Culture Study of Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*". *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, vol. 6, no. 6, 2022, pg. 5413-5422.
- Ahall, Linda. "The Writing of Heroines: Motherhood and Female Agency in Political Violence." *Security Dialogue*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2012, pp. 287-303.
- Anish, Beth O Leary. "Writing Irish American Communal Memory and the Narrative of Nation in Diaspora." *ProQuest* (2017): 256.
- Barenberg, Christopher R. "Memory and Representation of World War 2 in Contemporary British and German Fiction: A Comparative Analysis." *ProQuest* (2010): 1-40.
- Bhattacharya, Shayani. "Memory in Absentia: The (Im)Possibility of Representing Memory in Post-1945 Anglophone Fiction ." *ProQuest* (2017): 1-4.
- Brison, Susan J. *Aftermath Violence and the Remaking of a Self*. 2002.
- Byrd, Brandi. "Entangled in Story: Narrative Ethics of Memory in Contemporary Irish Fiction." *ProQuest* (2017): 1-10.
- DaynaliFlores-Rodriguez. "Towards A Trans-Caribbean Poetics: A New Aesthetics of Power and Representations." *ProQuest* (2011): 212.
- Demers, Stephane Martin. "Recreating Collective Memories of Africa in the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora: Spiritual Resistance in Cuban Santeria and Haitian Vodou." *Caribbean Quilt*, vol.6, 2022, pp. 90-93.
- Gay, Roxane. *An Untamed State* . NewYork : Grove Atlantic , 2014.
- H.Richter, David. *A Companion to Literary Theory Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture* . Wiley-Blackwell , 2018.
- Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory* . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Jenkins, Tammie. *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Edwidge Danticat*. Routledge, 2019.
- Johnson, Jenny Olivia. "The Luminous Noise of Broken Experience: Synaesthetic, Acosutic Memory and Childhood Sexual Abuse in the 20th Century United States." *ProQuest* (2009): 1-20.

- Josias, Anthea. "Toward an Understanding of Archives as a Feature of Collective Memory." *Archival Journal*, vol.11, 2011, pp. 95-112.
- King, Amy K. "The Grotesque Touch of the Plantation: Representation of Violence between Women in Circum-Caribbean Fictions (1960-2013)." *ProQuest* (2014).
- Kinney, Annelisa. *AS230-FA17-Kinneya*. 1 September 2017. 2022.
- Lahens, Yanick. *Moonbath*. Deep Vellum Publishing , 2014.
- Lopez-Valles, Ilsa. "Slaves to Sex and Violence: A Study of David Dabydeen's Female Characters." *ProQuest* (2014): 1-15.
- Ly, Ravi Seng. "Towards a Fiction of Memory: Cambodian Photography, Orphaned Intentions and Mundane Imaginations." *ProQuest* (2019): 1-10.
- Mundo, Mario. "Reimagining Returns: The Preservation of Caribbean Identity and Generational Trauma of Exiles through Cultural Memory." 2018, pp. 3-39, Haverford College.
- Park, Soyoung. "Witnessing the Unspeakable: Sexual Trauma and Erotic Desire in the Twentieth Century American Fiction." *ProQuest* (2007): 230.
- Pittenger, Rebecca M. "Memoryscapes: Place, Mobility and Memory in the Post-Dictatorial Southern Cone." *Theses and Dissertations- Hispanic Studies* (2011): 275.
- R. Harvey, Mary. "In the Aftermath of Sexual Abuse: Making and Remaking Meaning in Narratives of Trauma and Recovery." *Narrative Inquiry*, vol.10, no.2, 2000, pp. 291-311.
- Robinson, Ellen Ryan. "New Tales of Trauma, Memory and Historical Fiction in PostColonial Caribbean, Iberian, and Afro-Lusophone Women's Writing." *ProQuest* (2020): 1-32.
- Rodriguez, Yanire Sharmay Diaz. "(Ab)Used, Mad and DIscarded: Successful and Failed Healing Rehearsal in Afro-Caribbean Women's Fiction ." *ProQuest* (2021): 1-10.
- Salas, Raquel Castro. "Female Experience of Trauma and Mourning in Two Postcolonial Novels by Claudia Hernandez and Claudia Salazar ." *ProQuest* (2019): 1-13.
- Stokes, Christina E. "Re-Envisioning History: Memory, Myth and Fiction in Literary Representation of the Trujillato." *ProQuest* (2009): 1-10.

Trostel, Katharine G. "Memoryscapes: Women Chart the Post-Trauma City 20th and 21st century Latin America." *ProQuest* (2017): 345.

Watch, Americas. *Human Rights Development* . Washington DC, 1994.

Wolynn, Mark. *It Didn't Start with You: How Inherited Family Trauma Shapes Who We Are and How to End the Cycle*. Penguin Life, 2017.

Yang, Breda Wei. "Fiction as Autobiography: Characterizing the Phenomenology and Functions of Memories of Narrative Fiction." (2021): 202.