THE SLAVE-TRADE TRAUMA IN LÉONERA MIANO'S *LA SAISON DE L'OMBRE* (SEASON OF THE SHADOW)

Thierry Boudjekeu Kamgang
University of Bayreuth
E-mail: thierry.boudjekeu@uni-bayreuth.de

Abstract

Recent developments in trauma studies call for increased research on postcolonial literatures to expand the scope of trauma theory to the experiences of non-Western societies. Despite numerous memorial initiatives, the slave trade remains relatively unaddressed in the Francophone literary sphere. Contemporary novelists have started to break the silence on this outrageous episode of African history and contribute to completing the puzzle of slave history which, now more than ever, needs the Francophone African perspective. This article will focus on Léonora Miano's La Saison de l'ombre *(2013). It will examine the notable aesthetic features of the slave trade and the ethical accounts through which the author, as a Franco-Cameroonian novelist, revisits the traumatic experience of the slave trade. This analysis will draw from trauma theories and postcolonial models of trauma to understand the tragedy of the slave trade and its effects on the African memory-building and explore the new avenue that African literature in French may open.*

Keywords: Slave Trade Memory, Postcolonial Trauma, Francophone African Literature

The Promise and Potential of African Narratives for the Study of Trauma

Recent trauma studies emphasize the importance of studying postcolonial literatures in the context of trauma studies due to the colonization-related violence that these literatures repeatedly narrate (Whitehead, 2008, p. 4). In the African context, literature has always been concerned with all phases of African traumatic history. African writers generally feel they have a responsibility or "mission" to respond to trauma. Consequently, African trauma narratives are "goldmines" for trauma studies (Kurtz, 2014). Throughout the genre of African postcolonial novels, there is strong evidence that the traumatic experiences critically examined generally pertain to works by Anglophone authors (e.g., Ayi Kwei Armah, Ama Ata Aido, Amos Tutuola, Ayesha Harruna Tatah). The peculiarity of the political and cultural-historical context of societies formerly under French influence makes it intriguing to know how current findings may apply to this context. Examining narratives by French-speaking sub-Saharan writers is likely to consolidate recent results or even bring new perspectives to the study of trauma. In this regard, this article sets out to broaden early research by examining the literary modalities put forth by Franco-Cameroonian Léonora Miano to (re)write the slave-trade trauma experience of Africans in *La Saison de l'ombre*. This work of fiction lends itself quite well to the study of the effects of trauma and its expressions in contemporary sub-Saharan

literature and displays features that are probably of significance to the expansion of trauma studies as it is today.

The award-winning novel *La Saison de l'ombre* (2013) rewrites the memory of the slave trade and offers a refreshing perspective on one of the most painful episodes in human history. In this historical novel, Léonora Miano tells the tragic story of the Mulongo community and portrays the traumatic effect of kidnappings and deportation on precolonial African societies. This article examines the modalities of inscribing trauma and explores the postcolonial position toward the slave trade treated in the text under study. The article further attempts to consider to what extent early models and recent postcolonial approaches to trauma apply to the text. Is the slave-trade trauma uniformly illustrated, or does *La Saison de l'ombre* signal the existence of other explorable aspects relevant to trauma studies? Finally, what are the therapeutic alternatives that the author proposes to overcome this trauma in today's Africa? This article probes into the untapped Francophone African literature to uncover possible new perspectives for trauma studies.

Miano's Origin, Career, and Interest in Slavery

Born in Cameroon in 1973, Léonora Miano left for France in 1991 and is one of the most prolific contemporary sub-Saharan writers. Her work has been translated into several languages, including English, Italian, and German. She has published novels, plays, and short stories, which have earned her various awards from major literary authorities both in France and internationally. Through her work, Miano tells the story of Africans and Afro-descendants both on the continent and in the diaspora. Regardless of where they are set, Miano's characters usually experience the tragic history and the traumatic effects of Western imperialism on the African continent. Furthermore, Miano also writes self-reflexive critical texts to present her vision and explain her approach as a writer. She has respectively published *Habiter la frontière* (2012), a conference anthology that develops her "Afropean" thinking about "living in-between," and *L'Impératif transgressif* (2016), which calls for African self-awareness. She sees herself as belonging to a generation of sub-Saharans sufficiently prepared to explore the shadowed spaces of African history. She argues that her generation is ready to reflect on the shameful, outrageous events African history entails. Out of a deep-seated commitment to sub-Saharan Africa and its peoples, she calls for the understanding of oneself, the acceptance of both individual and collective responsibility as the first step toward absolute freedom. To those who challenge her work as a reproduction of the Eurocentric representation of the African subject (e.g., Lassi, 2015), Miano replies that not wanting to say what hurts in order to discover oneself is highly problematic. Consequently, Miano suggests that highlighting and recognizing this painful past is a precondition for casting off the specter overshadowing Africa's self-consciousness in order to break this silence. Thus, she exercises her *devoir de mémoire* (duty to remember) in order to record the experiences of Africans and Afro-descendants and to build the memory of those African communities who lived before colonization and whose tragic fate no one has narrated (Miano, 2013, p. 246). While actively acknowledging the significant impact of European colonial power in fragmenting African memory, Miano underlines the responsibility of Africans in the slave trade. This is the main focus of *La Saison de l'ombre*, which is analyzed in this article from the perspective of trauma.

Trauma Studies and the Postcolonial Movement

Early theorizations of the notion of trauma have been heavily criticized for their highly Western approaches and frames of reference. Trauma criticism developed almost exclusively from the Euro-American traumatic experience of the Jewish Holocaust, which captured more attention than any other event in an unprecedented way. This Western-centered approach significantly undermined the ethical commitment of the traditional, pioneering models of trauma (e.g., Caruth, 1995), as it surprisingly ignored other past and present trauma experienced elsewhere with equal, if not greater, regularity and emergency (Saunders, 2007, p. 15). Subsequent movements associate postcolonial theories with the study of trauma. These postcolonial trauma models are based on the premise that colonization is one of the most tragic events experienced by the non-Western world, and as such, should be approached as a "collectively inflicted trauma and postcolonisation as a 'post-traumatic cultural formation'" (Craps & Buelens, 2008, p. 2). The 2008 volume *Postcolonial Trauma Novels* concluded with the great potential for "postcolonizing" trauma studies by examining colonial-specific traumata including apartheid, colonialism, and slavery (ibid.). Stef Craps develops this theory by revisiting trauma theory from a "postcolonial perspective" (Craps, 2014, p. 126–127.).

Further criticism, spearheaded by Michael Rothberg's influential work on "multidirectional memory" (2009), has made the case for a comparative approach to memory that examines historical violence through a cross-cultural framework. A comparative and interdisciplinary approach may prove to be productive in understanding the trauma experienced by both non-Western and Western communities. A multidirectional postcolonial memory approach renews the study of trauma and complexifies the already confusing notion of trauma.

Based primarily on Freudian principles, literary models of trauma theory describe trauma as a "late" psychological response to a sudden, overwhelming event that is difficult if not impossible to deal with as the action unfolds. The tragic event dates back to the memory of the traumatized subject. These memories are repressed during their formation, leaving them unavailable for conscious recall. Consequently, they replicate in various ways and take on the form of hallucinations, flashbacks, or nightmares (Caruth, 1996, p. 91). When the traumatic event resurfaces, the sudden clash of past and present "violently opens passages between systems that were once discrete, making unforeseen connections that confuse" (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 3). The trauma strongly resists the subject's articulation and expression that seek to explain the original "unclaimed" experience (ibid.). In this regard, Roger Luckhurst suggests that trauma "also appears in a disturbingly transmissible way: it leaks between mental and physical symptoms, between patients and physicians via the mysterious processes of transference or suggestion, and between victims and their listeners or viewers" (2008, p. 3). While classical trauma theory tends to focus on individual traumatic experiences, the postcolonial model of trauma extends the individual viewpoint to the collective implications of trauma (Murphy, 2008, p. 53). This collective appreciation of trauma ties in with Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which describes how the powerful, often traumatic experience of Holocaust survivors is transmitted to the following generation (Hirsch, 2012).

In the Black Atlantic context, several authors have acknowledged the fact that slavery as a collective form of trauma still shapes African American identity (Eyerman, 2001, p. 2). References to the abovementioned principles of slave-trade-related trauma are spread throughout *La Saison de l'ombre*, in which several characters, mainly female, display a good number of the traits enumerated above and others.

Furthermore, it should be noted that African tradition boasts of trauma-therapeutic processes. One of them is mourning. This notion plays a significant role in Ngũgĩ's vision for the restoration of memory. Mourning fosters the quest for wholeness in the literary text, "a quest that has underlain African struggles since the Atlantic slave trade" (Ngũgĩ, 2009, p. 35). By "struggles," Ngũgĩ means visionary movements like Pan-Africanism, negritude, *ubuntu*, and African humanism. These concepts lean crucially on African social healing resources. "Out of the fragments and the observance of proper mourning rites comes the wholeness of a body re-membered with itself and with its spirit" (Ngũgĩ, 2012, p. 35). The fact that Miano's protagonist follows strict spiritual rules during burial is evidence of African healing practices. By properly mourning the death all through the novel, Miano makes it possible to honor and acknowledge the loss and "purge oneself of the negative effects of trauma" (Miano, 2013, p. 57). To grapple with how Miano deals with trauma in her novel and understand her take on the slave trade, it is relevant to examine her trajectory and positionality.

Miano and the Slave-Trade Trauma

The slave-trade memory is an obsession for Léonora Miano. She has communicated widely regarding her opinion, her vision, and her literary approach on this subject. This tragic history, which entailed the capture of millions of Africans and their deportation across the Atlantic continues to have a tremendous impact on the identity and future of Africans. However, this enterprise could not have been successful without the active participation, willing or otherwise, of at least some portion of the African population. As a native of the Cameroonian coastal region, Miano points out how victims of the slave trade cohabitate with the descendants of those who facilitated the capture of individuals from various antagonistic tribes (Caviglioli, 2013). In addition to the shame of having been colonized by former trading partners, this complicity may account for the silence and the current memory vacuum concerning slavery.

This positioning aligns with Achille Mbembe's statement on the inexistence or fragmentary memory of the slave trade in the African imagination (Mbembe, 2000, p. 32). While subsequent critical reactions challenged this provocative statement, it remains a reality in Francophone Africa, where the slave trade is still only sporadically discussed despite efforts to restore the slave trade to public memory. Borgomano (2000) questions the absence of a memory of the slave trade and slavery in sub-Saharan African literature and deplores the lack of *romans-bilans*[1] on this sensitive history. She notes references in the narratives of a minority of early writers, who have mentioned slavery either in the background, in passing, or as a

[1] By "romans-bilans" Borgonoma refers to African novel which narrate the entire experience of the slave trade on the continent.

coded reference. Nevertheless, for some contemporary novelists, slavery forms the backdrop of their work (e.g. Kangni Alem, *Esclaves* (2009); Wilfried N'sondé, *Un Océan, deux mers trois continents* (2018); and Marième M. Ndiaye, *Le Crépuscule des boekins* (2015)). *La Saison de l'ombre* is one of these.

The Traumatic Memory of Capture

Miano builds the narrative structure of *La Saison de l'ombre* on the trope of capture. As she puts it, the primary purpose of her literary endeavor is to locate the turning point between precolonial Africa and the advent of a new world. Capture is the radically traumatic event that triggers psychosis in Mulongo village. The novel' configuration around a sudden and brutal abduction in the context of the slave trade reflects one of the principles of classical models of trauma. The effect of capture is depicted right at the beginning of the novel, which features isolated women whose sons disappear during the great fire that precedes the opening scene, as can be read in the beginning of the story, "Les cases n'ont pas toutes été rebâties après le grand incendie"[2] (Miano, 2013, p. 11).

In this passage, the women are quarantined to protect the community from the psychological repercussions that their alleged misfortune might have on the entire clan. In their captivity, these women are haunted by the ghosts of their respective sons, whose voices they hear in their dreams. The exchange occurs in a dreamlike fashion that is conducive to communication between the survivors and the missing, between the absent and the present.

Dans leur sommeil, il leur arrive une chose étrange. Comme leur esprit navigue dans les contrées du rêve qui sont une autre dimension de la réalité, elles font une rencontre. Une présence ombreuse vient à elles, à chacune d'elles, et chacune d'elles reconnaîtrait entre mille la voix qui parle. Dans leur rêve, elles penchent la tête, étirent le cou, cherchent à percer cette ombre. Voir ce visage. L'obscurité est épaisse. Elles ne distinguent rien. Il n'y a que cette parole […] *Mère, ouvre-moi, afin que je puisse renaître*.[3] (Miano 2013, p. 14)

Their dreams turn into nightmares, as they can hardly see the faces associated with the voices. They fear this might be the call of a mystical being bearing even more grief. This uncanny situation is completed by the oneiric time setting and the dark cloud covering the distant hut where the women whose sons disappeared are forcibly secluded. Furthermore, these women remain silent even weeks after the tragedy. They are unable to tell their anxiety and never utter the word "loss" or the names of the sons who have not been seen since. They actively fight

[2] "Not all the huts were rebuilt after the big fire."

[3] "In their sleep, something strange happens to them. As their minds navigate through dreamland, which is another dimension of reality, they have an encounter. A shadowy presence comes to them, to each one of them, and each one of them would recognize the voice that speaks from a thousand others. In their dream, they tilt their heads, stretch the neck, try to pierce the shadow to see that face. The darkness is thick. They do not distinguish anything. There is only this phrase […] *Mother, open to me, so that I may be reborn*."

their grief and suffer horrendously inside themselves, repelling the presumably malevolent voices that resemble those of their missing sons and that emanate from their sleep. "Aucune ne parlera de ce rêve. Aucune ne prendra une sœur à part pour lui chuchoter […] Elles ne prononceront pas les noms de ces fils dont on ignore le sort"[4] (Miano, 2013, p. 16). Precaution is taken under the expectation that the worst is yet to happen. The disappeared might still be alive, and calling their names might ruin any chance of seeing them alive.

As can be inferred from these passages, Miano's characters manifest a variety of the psycho-traumatic characteristics described above: hallucinations, nightmares, repression, and the inability to verbalize the effect of the traumatic kidnapping of their sons. This is how silence comes to cover the wound and the pains associated with it, without healing them. Furthermore, these mothers impatiently await the moment they are free to go back to their everyday lives.

Elles tressaillent imperceptiblement dans l'attente du jour. Alors elles sortiront. Vaqueront comme si de rien n'était à leurs occupations. Se demanderont sans rien exiger, s'il leur sera bientôt permis de rejoindre leurs familles. Elle n'échangeront que des paroles banales, celles qu'on dit en exécutant les paroles domestiques.[5] (Ibid., p. 17)

This sequence recalls the reality of Africans living on both sides of the Atlantic, in anguish over what happened, and their eagerness to come to terms with the vast damage caused by centuries of violence through the slave trade. Moreover, the silence and mystery surrounding the slave trade somehow feed the tensions between ethnic groups on the African continent, as well as between Africa and its diaspora. As long as this painful past is repressed by the African consciousness, it will be almost impossible to build the bonds of solidarity hoped for by Pan-Africanist movements.

In *La Saison de l'ombre*, the trope of capture is used to describe the dismemberment of Africa. Ngũgĩ defines "dismemberment" as the fragmentation of the African continent by colonization, globalization, and, most importantly, by the slave trade. He presents the division of the African subject into two entities and his severance from his land, body, and mind. However, Ngũgĩ is primarily interested in the African renaissance and makes little mention of the traumata caused unto Africans by their own brothers or even the psychosomatic impacts of colonial violence. Fanon's work takes this further by providing a psychoanalytic assessment of the devastating impact of colonial violence on the individual and the nation. His work helps to understand the damage to the psycho-emotional balance of the colonized at the hands of colonial oppression. While this approach refers to colonial violence, it can be instrumental in analyzing the slave-trade context in which Miano's novel is set.

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[4] "None will speak of this dream. They will not take a sister aside to whisper to her […] They will not speak the names of those sons whose fate is unknown."

[5] "They flinch imperceptibly as they await the day. Then they will come out. They will go out as if nothing were happening. They will ask themselves, without demanding anything, if they will soon be allowed to get back to their families. They will exchange only banal words, the ones they say while carrying out their domestic duties."

Miano builds on this physical, mental, and spiritual dismemberment. She stages the kidnapping of Mulongo men and their delivery by the neighboring Bwele "brothers," with whom they have long-standing economic ties and peaceful social relations through commerce and other forms of exchange. By portraying the decay of the ethical virtues of African tradition, which prevailed before the advent of the transatlantic slave trade, Miano thus reenacts the aggression of Africans toward Africans. The text takes the form of an investigative journey. All throughout, as members of the Mulongo village—namely Eyabe, followed by chief Mukano—continue to look for the disappeared, they discover that their closest neighbors are the main actors responsible for their dismay and sorrow. This is revealed in many instances in the text and illustrated particularly when chief Mukano meets Queen Njanjo, queen of the Bwele. Humiliated as soon as he enters the Bwele territory's gates, Mukano, despite his rank of chief, is stripped and tied up like a captive, then brought with his guards to Queen Njanjo's palace. Once in the compound, Mukano is shocked to meet his brother Mutango, who had previously come on his own and was arrested, tortured, and exposed in the courtyard, surrounded by the queen's relatives. The queen ironically apologizes for her soldiers' manner and welcomes Mukano (Miano, 2013, p. 108). To him, the queen claims that she does not know much about the fate of the twelve Mulongo men except that traces of a column of men were discovered between the Bwele and Mulongo territories toward "Jedu," the coast (ibid., p. 114). At the prison where he is brought, Mutango learns from Bwemba, a Bwele soldier who participated in the abduction in Mulongo land, that his kingdom has signed a contract with the coastal people, who are asking for men to guarantee peace to the Bwele. This somewhat unexpected situation reflects the stakes for and constraints imposed on the people and leadership of the time by the dynamics of the slave trade—dynamics that rhyme with and result in lies, conspiracy, and betrayal.

Moreover, trauma is manifested in the treatment inflicted on the captives during their journey from the hinterland to the horrific Atlantic coasts. Miano gives voice to the captives to express the suffering and affliction they endure while crossing the forest to reach the slave port. In a long passage in the chapter "Terre de capture [Land of capture]," Mukudi, one of the abducted sons, confides to Eyabe the inhuman treatment they all underwent: "What we were experiencing was already an inversion of all principles […] it did not make sense" (Miano 2013, pp. 187–191). They walked by night "with shaved heads, tied fists, naked like the children we had ceased to be, our necks caught between branches of *mwenge*" (ibid., pp. 187–188), staring forward and forced to advance toward their gruesome common destiny. "These people took everything away from us. All" (ibid., p. 188). "At the back of our jail, we were now dragging metal chains around our ankles" (ibid., p. 189). They "looked at us in a way decency forbids to describe." The reader is confronted with the outrageous reality of the slave trade, caught up in violent aggression and dehumanization. Captives are reduced to raw materials, a commodity maltreated and exploited in the name of the trade. The words Mukudi utters are particularly revealing of Miano's concern to expose the ills of man yesterday and today. This violent system results in the complete destruction of African society and its perennial submission to the power of its oppressor. It moreover emphasizes the active

involvement of Africans in the outrageous economy of the slave trade. Through highlighting the suffering of the victims and the atrocity of the executioners, Miano reconstructs the backdrop of the painful and shameful history of trafficking. She thus breaks taboo and invites us to reflect on this very controversial subject, still to be adequately tackled in Francophone Africa.

La Saison de l'ombre revisits not only the responsibility of Africans in the slave trade, but also crucial questions raised in classical slave narratives. The extreme suffering of human beings that projects the deported to the shores of the supernatural recalls the great novels of Toni Morrison (cf. *Beloved* (1987)). Like the American icon, Léonora Miano resonates with female voices, doubly deprived of the right to speak by the oppressions suffered, and yet spearheading a renaissance. This feminine gaze is an essential reading grid of African identity and memory. Female novelists from the 1990s to today evoke—without taboos—the body and desire of African women, but also their suffering, as evidenced by the works of Mariama Bâ, Fatou Keita, and Calixte Beyala, among others. However, Miano takes a new perspective and gives a different role to her female characters. Miano not only aspires to emancipate women, but also, and above all, has a vocation to contribute to the emancipation of the community as a whole. This aspect is highlighted in the concept of womanism, which corresponds to Miano's literary aspiration. Indeed, it is the entire Black community that the womanist activist wants to emancipate (Laurent, 2011, p. 772). As such, female protagonists in *La Saison de l'ombre* bear all the misfortunes of the Mulongo victims of the slave trade. Women with their maternal, empathetic, and vulnerable nature enable Miano to materialize the pangs of capture. In addition to the fear and pain of the loss of their sons, the twelve women are presented as witches. They live the pain of loss in their flesh. They lose their sons and their village is wiped from the map by the slave raids. Their conditions reflect a state of abjection, such as Kristeva describes it in these words: "Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you" (Kristeva, 1941, p. 4)—in Miano's novel, a brother who sells or kills you. This is the case of Ebeise, the village midwife turned village gravedigger, who will have to bury the lifeless bodies left by the kidnappers after a second fatal attack on the village. With her sister Eyabe, Ebeise also bears the heavy task of transmitting their remaining values and traditions to posterity. This burden can clearly be felt by the reader as Ebeise recalls the tragic episodes she has sadly witnessed. As her feet sink into the moving mud of the mangrove, Ebeise sings a song to build and boost her courage:

> "[…] un air sans joie, comme ceux que les femmes ont créés pour dire la nuit du grand incendie, la disparition des leurs, la réclusion des dix mères éprouvées dans une case isolée […] Elle se souvient d'Eleke sa plus-que-sœur […] L'ancienne pense à son fils aîné, dont elle a dû arracher la tête à une poule. Elle pense à son mari, le

> maître des mystères qui ne s'est pas manifesté. Elle convoque le chef, interroge les sages de la communauté qu'elle a dû enterrer."[6] (Miano, 2013, p. 234–235)

The status, trajectory, and fate of the female character Ebeise make her a major player in Miano's literary approach to staging the effect of trauma on Africa. Ebeise is positioned by Miano as a metaphor for Mother Africa. She embodies Africa as having been traumatized and bruised by numerous successive tragedies. Firstly, Ebeise is one of the direct victims of the fire that ravages the village. She loses her husband, who served as the spiritual guide of the Mulongo community. She then assumes the responsibility for spiritually guiding the chief Mukano and the elite in their decision-making. Despite her grief, she must inspire strength and hope in the traumatized women. She only allows herself to express her feelings and fears to her sister Eleke, who later dies in her arms. As the midwife who delivered the sons and daughters of the clan, she witnesses the carnage that decimates the whole village. These painful and upsetting events keep unfolding. She is puzzled by the unprecedented brutality of the Bwele neighbors against the Mulongo and questions the fate of her own people. Ebeise's fate explicitly symbolizes a tormented Africa that has seen her children tear each other apart and whose future depends on their ability to pose the right questions. "Let it be given to him to say the horror" (Miano, 2013, p. 229). Telling this horror would allow us to reconnect with its deep history, inglorious but necessary to overcome the trauma of the slave trade and bring about a new Africa (cf. Pape-Thoma, 2017).

These different forms of trauma and many others, such as the trauma of the Bwele kidnappers, which is not mentioned in this analysis, connect to give the reader the purview and scale of a practice that deeply affected Africa and continues to compromise the future of the African people dispersed throughout the world. All the same, one question remains: what alternative(s) does Miano concretely propose to face the trauma of the slave trade?

Trauma Healing, Mourning, and African Renaissance

Three criteria summarize the healing models that trauma theory offers to overcome the effects of trauma: "(1) establishing a place of safety and groundedness, however provisional, for those caught up in trauma, (2) the acknowledgment by trauma victims of their losses, along with an understanding of the causes of their trauma, and (3) the forging of new connections and relationships that can ultimately result in a transformed sense of purpose, meaning and identity" (Kurtz, 2014).

In *Something Torn and New: Towards an African Renaissance*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o talks about the need for acts of re-memberment to deal with the painful slave past. After presenting

[6] "An song void of joy, like those that the women composed to depict the night of the great fire, the disappearance of their sons, the seclusion of the ten grieved mothers in an isolated hut […] She remembers Eleke, her more-than-a-sister […] The elder thinks of her eldest son, whose head she must have torn off from a hen. She thinks of her husband, the master of mysteries who does not know how to manifest. She summons the chief, questions the elders of the community she was forced to bury."

the practices of dismemberment exercised by the colonial system, he advocates for the retrieval and exchange of African memory. Ngũgĩ underlines how, in this retrospective effort, literature plays and must play a central role to reconstitute, or to "re-member," the fragments scattered by colonial powers. The notion of remembering can therefore be understood in two ways. First, as the need for retrospection, revisiting previous chapters of African history in order to address the pains and traumata repressed by the effect of greed or by simple reluctance to speak out. The second part concerns reconciliation. To reunite Africa is to reunite the sons and daughters of the continent divided by the slave trade and slavery. The novel puts forth Ngũgĩ's principle of retrospection. Miano's work uncovers the untold and painful stories of millions of Africans abducted, maltreated, and deported, some of whom died in the Middle Passage. *Season of the Shadow* is a tale in which Miano questions hidden history and forgotten memory. The novel has been analyzed as an initiatory narrative that reveals the desire to lift the veil on the African memory of slavery (Achour, 2014), and also as a historical thriller that explores the meanders of the slave trade from the interior (Mokam, 2014).

The notion of re-memberment is further exemplified in Miano's novel by female protagonists; reconnection with the past is materialized by tradition and ancestral beliefs, but also in the characters who embody the victims of trafficking. Eyabe, the main character, embodies this desire for freedom and to unravel the mystery. Like a great rebel, she stepped out of the isolation hut to shed light on the fate of her missing son and others. The heroine of the novel, in her new capacity as investigator, worthy of a detective novel, embarks on an initiatory journey in search of the missing in order to free herself from maternal grief and the trauma that overwhelms her. Through this initiatory journey undertaken by Eyabe, Miano shows the way forward toward self-awareness. It is crucial to turn back and unveil the tragic and shameful past so as to understand what happened in a bid to redefine our identity and eventually reconcile Africans as a whole.

This initiatory journey acts as post-traumatic therapy aimed at helping the traumatized subjects come to terms with the resurgence of the devastating and unbearable past. The author's approach is in line with LaCapra's notion of "working through," which requires the affected person or group to recognize the anteriority of the event, even if the event in question may have repercussions for the present (LaCapra, 2014, p. 22). Eyabe's energy and virtuous qualities allow Miano to take a fresh look at the history and sub-Saharan memory of the slave trade. As mentioned above, mourning is an integral part of the trauma-therapeutic process in the African context. The novel is strewn with several occurrences of burials, necessary to not only pay proper homage to the dead, but most importantly, an eminent way to subdue the pain of losing someone and heal from the trauma death comes with. In the text, mourning rituals are organized and respected at all times, making the novel a form of mourning therapy; each and every dead body is celebrated and given due honor, as is the case with Mutimbo, who is accompanied to his final resting place by songs and funeral orations harmonized by the men and women of Bebayedi.

La femme dont l'appel a fait venir toute la population, s'est mise à chanter. Comme les autres voix féminines de la communauté se mettent à l'accompagner, répondant en chœur aux

phrases qui ponctuent les couplets, Eyabe sait que Mutimbo sera dignement conduit de l'autre côté […] Tout est bien. Mutimbo ne marchera pas seul vers l'autre côté.[7] (Miano, 2013, p. 146–147)

For Eyabe, the funeral ceremony symbolizes life in the afterlife. The therapeutic effect on her can be seen in this passage, in which her tears are both a relief and a recognition. "Elle pleure. Ses sanglots s'amplifient à mesure que croît sa gratitude : Nyambe et les esprits ne l'ont pas abandonnée à sa solitude [She cries. Her sobs increase as her gratitude grows: Nyambe and the Gods have not abandoned her in her loneliness]" (ibid., p. 146). Miano's characters follow strict spiritual rules during burial: evidence of African healing practices. "Out of the fragments and the observance of proper mourning rites comes the wholeness of a body re-membered with itself and with its spirit" (Ngũgĩ, 2012, p. 35). By properly mourning death all through the novel, Miano makes it possible to honor and acknowledge the loss and "purge oneself of the negative effects of trauma" (ibid., p. 57).

Conclusion

This article aimed at exploring the slave-trade trauma in the work of one of the most prominent contemporary African writers in French, Léonora Miano. Miano succeeds in depicting the physical and psychological harm inflicted on sub-Saharan communities by the brutal inhumanity that constituted the transatlantic slave trade on the continent. This article has investigated how different forms of trauma are inscribed in Miano's novel to account for the destructive effect of an outrageous past that marred and continues to jeopardize Africa's renaissance. Miano draws from both canonical and postcolonial models of trauma in a way that throws light on the interactive approach to slave-trade trauma. Her peculiar inscription of trauma in the slave-trade context underlines the potential for non-Western literatures to enrich trauma studies. With this novel, Miano succeeds in entering the African past to tell the story of trafficking and the effects of this violence on the lives of Africans and Afro-descendants. It is also an opportunity for her to question the responsibilities of African actors of trafficking to break a taboo and restore the African subject to its full awareness and voice (Miano, 2016, p. 63). This controversial position accounts for the fact that she is very often denied her own African authenticity (Miano, 2020, p. 11).

[7] "The woman whose call summoned the whole population began to sing. As the other female voices of the community began to accompany her, responding in chorus to the phrases that punctuate the verses, Eyabe knows that Mutimbo will be led with dignity to the other side […] All is well. Mutimbo will not walk alone to the other side."

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