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Visser, Irene

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Trauma in Non-Western Contexts

Irene Visser

In the development of trauma theory the history of contributions from scholarship on non-Western literature and theory has been relatively short but eventful. From its inception in the 1990s, the theorization of trauma in literary studies has aroused not only widespread scholarly approbation and enthusiasm but also resistance and opposition, and much of the latter has come from the side of postcolonial and non-Western literary criticism. Although this response was slow to develop and only became a strong factor in the debates on literary trauma theory in the past decade, its impact on the development of trauma theory has been significant. It is no exaggeration to state that the reformulation of trauma in literary studies in the last decade and the present theorization of trauma in literary studies owes much to the findings from postcolonial and non-Western scholarship, perhaps due to what Bill Ashcroft considers its characteristic and remarkable “facility to use the modes of the dominant discourse against itself and transform it in ways that have been profound and lasting” (2001: 13).

The reformulation and transformation of trauma theory, necessitated by the response from non-Western literary studies, has involved a movement away from Freudian psychoanalysis and deconstruction, which were the foundational elements in the theory formulated by Cathy Caruth and her colleagues in the 1990s, now often referred to as classical trauma theory. In Caruth’s two influential publications, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), cultural trauma is theorized from the dominant, Western diagnostic model, which defines trauma as individual and event based. Due to the influence of critics and trauma therapists reporting on non-Western perspectives of trauma, this orientation has been redirected and transformed to include a much broader spectrum of agents in trauma with a much clearer emphasis on political, historical, and socioeconomic factors. This opening up of trauma theory as a result of non-Western scholarship is noted, for instance, in Michelle Balaev’s edited collection *Contemporary*

Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory (2014). Balaev states that in the development of early trauma theory, which viewed literature as “a closed psychoanalytic system” and which was filled with “contradictory theories and contentious debates,” scholarship on non-Western literatures has been a major influence, particularly in enabling “a view of trauma as multiply figured with diverse representations in literature and far reaching effects in culture” (2, 10). Now incorporating the long-term and systemic violence of colonization, racism, exploitation, and oppression, early trauma theory’s too narrow Eurocentric model has been expanded due to non-Western perspectives to include a broader understanding of trauma.

In its continuing expansion, literary trauma theory presents a complicated entanglement of concepts and approaches. Offering a strong potential for fruitful connections among and within disciplines, it comprises research into many modes of cultural expression, such as written, visual and oral storytelling, drama, and song as well as written literary forms, as cultural modes of coming to terms with victimization and the many effects of traumatization. “As a research paradigm, trauma cannot be stabilized according to a predetermined field of theory,” as Norman Saadi Nikro remarks, “but is both embedded in and traverses relational accommodations between disciplines, geographies, histories, implicating flows of material and imaginary resources and the institutions directing their distribution and access” (2014: 1). The metaphor of a knot is particularly apt in capturing this complex relationality. As a metaphor for trauma theory, it was first proposed by Roger Luckhurst in *The Trauma Question* (2008), following Latour’s concept of knowledge as “hybrid assemblages” or “tangled objects” (14). In *The Future of Trauma Theory* (2014), editors Buelens, Durrant, and Eaglestone describe contemporary trauma theory as indeed such a tangled assemblage, as “perhaps less a field or a methodology than a coming together of concerns and disciplines . . . drawing on literary and cultural studies, history, politics, sociology, psychology and philosophy” (2014: 3). The metaphor of the knot is not only felicitous in expressing this interdisciplinarity, but also in evoking the productive potential of heterogeneity. Following Bruno Latour’s theory of knowledge, Luckhurst explains this potential as follows: “a successful statement can be measured by how many links or associations it makes, not only within the rigours of its own discipline but far beyond it, too, as it loops through different knowledges, institutions, practices, social, political and cultural forums” (2008: 14). The most felicitous aspect of the notion of trauma theory as a knotted assemblage, I would suggest, is that it evokes the image of a nonoppositional, noncompetitive, and nonhierarchical structure, to

which may be added many knowledges and cultural practices without any elitist prioritizing or ranking according to a Eurocentric systematicity.

This chapter discusses the knotted complexity of trauma theory from the perspective of non-Western literary studies. Before addressing the various and specific contributions of trauma researches in non-Western context to the development of trauma theory, it is useful to first consider the common core of the trauma knot, the major cross-cultural features at the center of the intricate entanglement of contemporary trauma theory.

As critics and theorists working in non-Western studies have emphasized, trauma is not only to be understood as an individual, psychological, and/or physical response, but also as a collective, political, and cultural condition with far-reaching material and immaterial dimensions. This leaves undisputed trauma's basic definition as the response to an overwhelming and unassimilable life-threatening event or wounding. This response, as a condition in which the precise experience of the stressor event is inaccessible to conscious cognition, may take a variety of forms, all characterized by an altered experience of time. The traumatizing event is not experienced as past but as continuing in the present; these experiences may take the form of intrusive memories, repetition compulsion, and a broad spectrum of other symptoms that indicate a disruption of cognitive closure. Intergenerational trauma, as memories and experiences incurred by later generations, further testifies to trauma's "belatedness" and nonclosure. The basic and uncontested notion of trauma, then, is that it is a period of aftermath rather than a traumatic event or experience; it is a process following an experience that defies integration.

Trauma as aftermath finds expression in a variety of long-lasting effects or symptoms well known as post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. PTSD is perhaps a somewhat misleading term because trauma is by definition not "post" but persistent, resisting closure in much the same sense in which the term *postcolonial* is often seen as inadequate in view of the ongoing legacy of colonization. This perception is aptly captured in Achille Mbembe's well-known term 'the postcolony.' It is Mbembe's central argument in *On the Postcolony* (2001) that the postcolonial condition is one of aftermath: It is an inherently unstable condition comprising "decomposition and violence" as the trauma of colonialism, and signifies the continuation or nonclosure of the violence of colonization (2001: 103). The postcolony as the condition of displacement and dissociation following colonization is thus defined by the temporal disjunction inherent also in the trauma concept. Mbembe delineates this as the "non-linearity

of time, the discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another . . . [as] an *entanglement*" (14), in words that further underscore the aptness of the metaphor of a knot, signifying not only the diversity of trauma studies but also postcolonial trauma's tangled complexity.

Among the major cross-cultural features of the complex entanglement of trauma, then, are that it is a process of aftermath, encompassing a variety of disorders and phenomena, and that it affects not only individuals, but also communities and nations. As psychologists working in non-Western parts of the world have found, many of trauma's symptoms are universal, occurring throughout time and in many cultures. Intense grief, numbness, affect dysregulation, dissociation, and survivor's guilt are "seen among trauma survivors around the world," as psychological research since the nineteenth century has confirmed (Rhoades and Sar 2005: 4).

The cross-cultural human responses to trauma, however, find specific expression in diverse cultures. Psychological research on trauma, particularly in recent years, confirms that many trauma-related syndromes are culture-bound. The American Psychiatric Association has officially recognized several of those disorders, in a revision to *DSM-IV* released in 2000. For example, anger as a universal trauma symptom takes a culture-bound form in Malaysia, which is known by the specific term "amok," which translates roughly as visibly uncontrollable rage, a phrase that, however, fails to capture its specific cultural connotations. Similarly, the common human reactions of guilt and shame in trauma victims translate in specific forms of altered self-perception or even depersonalization that are often given local names, and whose precise meanings cannot be captured in translation, such as Latin-American "susto." Fear and anxiety attacks have been given culturally specific terms such as Indonesian "latah" (hypersensitivity to fright) and Caribbean "ataque," which, as Rhoades observes, is difficult to define but "seems to be related to symptoms of panic" (2005: 23).

It is due to the response to trauma theory from the area of non-Western studies that not only the comprehensiveness of trauma but also this cultural specificity and diversity have come in for closer scrutiny. In the course of this development, serious objections have been raised against concepts that were foundational in classical trauma theory, but that were incompatible with concepts and findings from non-Western studies. As a result of these objections, trauma theory has become less narrow and less defined by features deriving from deconstruction and Freudian psychoanalytic theory. However, contemporary perspectives on trauma often still display Eurocentric and limiting tendencies, as is demonstrated by the fact that objections continue to be raised by scholars in non-Western areas.

In his introduction to a special issue of *Postcolonial Text* devoted to postcolonial trauma studies, Nikro warns against a “compulsive, though incapacitating binary opposition between the West and the Rest,” which reproduces an Orientalist paradigm in which “trauma in the non-West is always collective, identified through the category of the *what*, the designation of a community, while in the West trauma is identified by the *who*, affording a personal sense of self-representation” (2014: 13). Nikro questions those categories, arguing instead for a consideration of “how works of literature *con/texturalize* various affiliations in which individual and collective are plotted and designed in specific geographies” (13). Nikro’s view that trauma theory today still tends toward Eurocentrism and thus necessitates continuing critical questioning and reformulations resonates with earlier critiques by scholars in non-Western literatures. A prominent critique has been that classical trauma theory’s tenet of the “unsayable” nature of trauma diminishes the literary potential of trauma narratives. The resistance against this tenet has been substantial, particularly in non-Western scholarship, in which trauma has been reformulated to allow for a multiplicity of “saying” trauma, including nonnarrative forms such as dance, song, and sculpture, all expressive of traumatic wounding, and refuting the classic claim of trauma’s inaccessibility. Deriving from the deconstructionist emphasis on aporia, the insistence on the inexpressible nature of traumatic experiences logically entails the denial of any therapeutic or healing potential of trauma narratives.

Non-Western literatures, in fact, often express indigenous ways of healing trauma, as critics have pointed out. Scholars working with Maori literature, for instance, have emphasized that it is characterized by themes of integration and connectivity after trauma, precisely through storytelling as a major cultural tradition (Keown 2007, Knudsen 2004, Visser 2012). Storytelling reduces fragmentation, dissociation, and other trauma symptoms, harnessing the spiritual resources of the ancestors to come to terms with the long-term trauma of racist oppression and land loss. The Waitangi Tribunal in New Zealand Aotearoa has recognized the importance of indigenous language use in trauma recovery, stating in its official documents that “the language is the embodiment of the particular spiritual and mental concepts of the Maori” and that “holistic thinking, group development, family relationships and the spiritual dimensions of life” are specific to Maori culture (1986: 25). This illustrates the importance of language as storytelling, and similar literary modes of expression, as vital instruments in trauma recovery.

The scholarship engaging with political and national trauma institutions such as the Waitangi Tribunal has been a major factor in the development of trauma theory away from its early aporetic dictum. Real-life examples of the expressive power of trauma narratives are provided by the trauma testimonies of public hearings meant precisely to promote large-scale healing and restoration, such as Rwanda's *gacaca* Courts and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings in South Africa. Of particular influence in this development has been the work by Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga on trauma, memory, and narrative in South African literature. Together with other researchers of the TRC hearings in the 1990s, Mengel and Borzaga have found trauma theory in Caruth's dehistoricist model inadequate to the analysis of trauma in South Africa, arguing that the importance of the TRC hearings for trauma theory resides in the recognition that wounding incurred by systemic, political, and long-term traumatization can and should be brought to light by allowing victims to express themselves in oral and written narratives. It is now widely recognized that the trauma of the legacy of apartheid, which is the collective traumatization of several generations, is neither an unclaimed nor "unsayable" experience, and that it is the ethical responsibility of governments to enable and facilitate such public expressions of trauma.

Critics and theorists working in the area of non-Western literatures today concur that many of the claims of early trauma theory are today untenable. Buelens, Durrant, and Eaglestone state in the introduction to their book *The Future of Trauma Theory* that even Caruth's well-known statement that her trauma concept was to provide a link between cultures has failed, citing trauma critic Stef Craps's repeated critique that a broader and more egalitarian cultural engagement precisely through trauma has not been realized. They endorse Craps's standpoint that publications on trauma theory often "marginalize the traumatic experience of non-Western cultures, assume [that] the definitions of trauma and recovery that the West has developed are universal and often favour a distinctly modernist form in order to 'bear witness' to trauma" (Buelens et al. 2014: 5).

While Eurocentrism in trauma criticism indeed still often persists, Craps's critique of trauma theory's exclusive focus on modernist narrative techniques is less pertinent today. Craps's assertion that it is almost "axiomatic within trauma theory" that "traumatic experiences can only be adequately represented through the use of experimental, modernist textual strategies" (2013: 50) suggests a too restrictive and reductive view of modernist narrative techniques in contemporary trauma criticism. A more nuanced perspective on the stance on modernism in trauma

criticism is provided by J. Roger Kurtz in his article, "Literature, Trauma and the African Moral Imagination" (2014). Kurtz states that modernist features of African trauma literature must be understood from this literature's grounding in Western theoretical models that were used in major publishing houses and in universities like Ibadan and Makerere, as "the most influential institutions in shaping the ongoing identity of African writing" (2014: 427). Modernist elements were appropriated by African writers, combined with traditional cultural expressions, and set within the traumatogenic context of African history; as such, they were part of the cultural exchanges within Africa and with the West (424). Kurtz uses the history of the railroad to demonstrate the role of modernism in Africa, demonstrating how, unlike in Western texts, in African literature the railroad as a symbol of modernity did not signify public service and transport, but was an instrument of "colonial extraction and domination" and, hence, "enmeshed with trauma" (428).

What is evident is that trauma critics working with non-Western literatures are well placed to critique, nuance, and modify dominant notions in trauma theory, through relating the systemic effects of trauma to the sociocultural histories and political structures in non-Western texts. Studies of trauma in non-Western texts illuminate underlying, implicit, often figuratively expressed representations of familial and collective modes of dealing with traumatization. In the past decade, connections have been made between literary and cultural theory and sociology and anthropology to delineate new models to aid the exploration of non-Eurocentric, collective, and systemic trauma, resulting in a number of publications that broaden the original trauma paradigm. As Balaev points out, the political and social implications of trauma have recently been addressed "within a variety of frameworks" by critics such as Luckhurst, Mandel, Yaeger and Visser" (2014: 3), whose work uses theories and concepts from anthropology and sociology that aid the expansion of literary trauma theory.

Literary trauma studies may be further enriched by studies that respect the uniqueness of trauma processes in cross-cultural contexts without conforming to models from Western trauma theory. Rhoades's publication of psychological studies on "international trauma around the world" is one such potential fruitful source, comprising trauma research in seventeen nations, as diverse as Iran, China, Hawai'i, and Argentina, from all continents except North America. What becomes clear from this research is that while people respond to traumatization in ways that are found throughout the world, the spiritual and ritual responses to trauma are often culturally determined. An example provided by Rhoades is the trauma of

the tsunami in Sri Lanka in December 2004. Over 38,000 people lost their lives, and 800,000 people became homeless. The people in Sri Lanka responded to this event in ways that are universal, such as intense grief, mourning, and survivor's guilt, as Rhoades reports, but they have also "sought understanding of trauma according to their religious beliefs (Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian) and have used cultural practices that aided recovery" (2005: 4).

Similar to this research, literary studies of trauma texts in non-Western contexts may contribute much that is illuminating to the understanding of culturally specific trauma responses. Through the thoughtful reading of reflections, meditations, and the full ambiguity and ambivalence of human responses to trauma, which literary expressions by definition provide, literary criticism can contribute to a greater viability and validity of trauma theory and may lay to rest the consistent critiques that have weakened the theory from the start. The changes in trauma theory to date are evidence of this potential. An illuminating illustration of this is provided by the debate on melancholy as the outcome of trauma, an outcome insisted on by the adherents of classical trauma theory. Let us briefly consider that debate as a case study of major changes brought about in the development of trauma theory due to the influence of scholarship in non-Western literatures.

In the first decade after the influential publications by Cathy Caruth and her associates, most literary work engaging with trauma, including research in postcolonial literatures, remained closely aligned with Caruth's theory. For example, Samuel Durrant, in his book *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning*, argues for the recognition that mourning is the core quality of postcolonial narration and repudiates scholarship that pays too close attention to closure or healing, stating that his purpose is "to contest the mainstream understanding of postcolonialism as a recuperative, historicizing project and argue for the centrality of a deconstructive, anti-historicist ethics of remembrance" (2004: 7). Durrant thus accentuates the aporetic tenet of Caruth's trauma theory according to which trauma is a weakening disorder, as well as the dehistoricist, Freudian foundation of early trauma theory.

Durrant's views, while being propagated by other scholars following in Caruth's footsteps, also aroused strong resistance at this time, particularly among critics working in non-Western literary studies. Published in the same year as Durrant's book, Eva Rask Knudsen's important study of Australian Aboriginal and New Zealand Maori literature titled *The Circle and the Spiral* speaks out strongly against any theoretical readings that

reduce the “vigour and imaginative impact” of literature from the non-West by making the postcolonial condition “sound like a serious ailment when it fact it has given birth to strong-lived visions of cultural recuperations” (2004: 11). Later publications in trauma criticism support Knudsen’s view in providing literary analyses whose findings refute the dictum that melancholy is the inevitable and universal outcome of traumatization. If melancholy and resilience are incompatible, we must conclude that melancholy cannot be the defining condition of trauma, as non-Western literatures offer a far broader array of responses, often including resilience and healing instead of apathy and enduring stasis.

During the first decade of the new millennium the prescriptiveness of early trauma theory was increasingly interrogated by scholars from non-Western literatures, and as a result its emphasis on melancholy as the inevitable final stage of trauma process was one of the first injunctions to be rejected. Susan Najita’s book *Decolonizing Cultures in the Pacific* (2006) presents an interesting example of this. Najita engages with the Pacific region’s traumatic histories of empire and (post) colonialism. While initially situating her project in this book firmly within classical trauma theory, Najita gradually finds that her close readings of Pacific literature necessitate a rejection of her initial understanding that trauma means a weakening or crippling of a community or of a nation. She eventually makes a strong case for a theory of trauma that moves through and beyond the classic Western model and emphasizes the importance of indigenous cultural forms in the processes of coming to terms with traumatization. Najita points out that Maori authors such as Keri Hulme, Patricia Grace, and Witi Ihimaera reinvoke indigenous cultural forms as the basis for imagining new futures, interweaving “historical documents, genealogy, oral tradition, and testimony in to their fictional representations of actual historical moments of resistance” as ongoing engagement with the traumatic past, “whether it be nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands or the legacy of settlement of Aotearoa” (2006: 13). The result of colonial trauma, as reflected in Oceania’s literature, is therefore not to be defined as melancholia or mourning, Najita concludes, but of ongoing political work, as a way of “imagining the future by exorcizing the past” (27). This emphasis on redress and resilience contradicts the approach exemplified by Durrant’s book, which still saw postcolonial trauma narratives as “engaged in a work of disruption rather than recovery” (Durrant 2004: 117).

The importance of non-Western contexts for a profounder understanding of trauma in decolonization processes is not to be underestimated. Najita’s view that through literature a new future can be imagined, and the

past negotiated and reclaimed in such a way that healing can proceed, has since been more widely expressed in non-Western criticism, perhaps most insistently by Mengel and Borzaga in 2012, who dismiss Caruth's Freudian framework outright, due to its "melancholic vocabulary" marked by "notions of absence, holes, deferral, crises of meaning, unknowing and dissociation," which precludes "any possibility for healing for individuals or entire nations" (2012: xiii). In the development of trauma theory this rejection of melancholy as trauma's inevitable outcome has been a transformational factor. Perhaps influenced by these responses from non-Western studies, even Caruth's theorization is today no longer defined by its earlier "melancholic vocabulary," but allows for avenues of recovery and healing. In her *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013), Caruth departs from her earlier emphasis on melancholia and stasis as inherent in trauma and instead turns to Freud's concept of the life drive "by which Freud signals a mode of speaking and of writing that bear [*sic*] witness to the past by turning toward the future" (2013: xi) to postulate that trauma may also constitute an "imperative to live" (xi). Caruth's recent views, then, are aligned with the views expressed in non-Western trauma studies that literature is of considerable importance in laying bare the workings of processes of recovery and resilience as part of trauma theory.

While, as we have seen, the development of trauma theory has been directly influenced by critical scholarship in non-Western literatures and cultures, trauma theory has also been informed by the theoretical work of non-Western thinkers such as Franz Fanon, Alfred Memmi, and Achille Mbembe. Their influence (past, present, and future) cannot be neglected in an overview of the development of trauma theory in its non-Western context.

Franz Fanon (1925–1961) is undoubtedly the most influential voice among theorists from a non-Western background, as well as the most prominent precursor of trauma theory in postcolonial studies, even though his last major work, *The Wretched of the Earth* was published in 1961, many years before the start of literary trauma theory. Fanon's first major publication, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), was based on his professional experiences as a Western-educated psychiatrist working in the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital in Algeria. He resigned his position when he found that the treatments that he had learned during his studies in France were utterly inadequate in the treatment of the sociopsychological effects of the trauma of colonialism in Algeria. Fanon's letter of resignation states his motivation:

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. (1970: 53)

Fanon's insistence that Eurocentric trauma therapy was very much inadequate in non-Western context because it ignores relevant political and social circumstances has since found resonance in many reports from international trauma workers today. As a pioneer of trauma theory, then, Fanon was the first to posit what is now received knowledge in trauma theory: that to be truly effective and productive, trauma theory must take into account material and ideological circumstances and incorporate a cluster of influences (political, social, economic, ideological, historical).

Although Fanon's importance is uncontested in this respect, it must be noted that his thinking has also come in for much criticism in later years, and that his work has been charged with sexism, racism, bigotry, and homophobia. Most controversial in the context of trauma theory is undoubtedly his emphasis on the emancipatory effect of violence. In his theory of resistance, violence is no longer a criminal act but becomes an instrument of liberation. This radical political stance must be understood from Fanon's personal history of active involvement in armed combat. Fanon fought with the Allied Forces in World War II and later joined the liberation struggle in Algeria, where he had a major role in its underground organization. As Renate Zahar writes, Fanon had "a leading part in the setting up and training of commando units . . . [Fanon] taught the *moujahedin* how to lay booby-traps, how to control their reflexes when making bomb attempts, and which mental or physical attitude to adopt in order to endure tortures" (1974: xi).

Although we understand the circumstances that led to Fanon's emphasis on violence as a justified and indeed necessary method of resistance, this emphasis is ethically unacceptable in trauma theory in which there is no place for an ideology of violence in whatever form. This consideration arguably limits Fanon's contribution to theories of trauma, and perhaps to cultural theory in general. Zahar, writing in the late 1960s, already questions whether Fanon's theory is of general applicability, emphasizing that its focus is only French colonialism: "His theories are limited in scope by the fact of their being based on the historico-economic and political conditions he encountered in his own revolutionary activity" (1974: xxi). Nikro notes this, too, stating that Fanon's work often "has come to be positioned as providing an apparent non-Western approach by wresting trauma studies from its debilitating subject-centred episteme" and has

often been “pitted against the depoliticized tenor of Caruth’s work”; however, to this view Nikro wants to interpolate that Fanon’s work must be refocused on the circumstances of Fanon’s writings, “the jagged terrain of their real time and place of enunciation in Algeria, France, Martinique” (2014: 14). Zahar’s and Nikro’s point that Fanon’s theories cannot be extended to include all forms of colonialism is pertinent also to the discussion of processes of trauma in decolonization today because Fanon died before he could witness the effects of decolonization in Africa.

The problematic stance on violence in Fanon’s theorization has also been addressed by Edward Said in his important book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Re-evaluating the emphasis on justified violence in Fanon’s work, Said points out that this is literature of resistance written “in the thick of battle,” where there is an “understandable tendency” to concentrate on “combative, strident assertiveness” (1994: 274). Concluding his detailed analysis of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Said observes that Fanon asserted the need for violence to combat both imperialism and nationalism, but “could not make the complexity and anti-identitarian force of that counter-narrative explicit”; to elucidate this complexity, Said proposes a connective motivation that is not immediately apparent in Fanon’s formulations but which Said poses as evidence of Fanon’s desire “somehow to bind the European as well as the native together in a new non-adversarial community of awareness and anti-imperialism” (274). This reevaluation of Fanon’s polemicism is important in bringing Fanon’s theorization in closer alignment with the present mode of thinking about trauma, in which relationality and multidirectionality are central notions.

The mutuality of relationships that Said poses in his reading of Fanon is perhaps more immediately evident in the work of Fanon’s contemporary Albert Memmi (1920–), a Tunisian-born theorist and novelist educated in France. Like Fanon, Memmi contributed to the early formulations of postcolonial theory through his anticolonialist writings, most importantly in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), whose main thesis was the paradoxical mutuality of colonial power structures in which the primariness of the colonizer is dependent on the secondariness of the colonized. This was significant pioneering work for postcolonial theory. Memmi argued that the oppression and exploitation inherent in the colonialist system affects both colonizer and colonized; both experience alienation, and the colonizer who regards the colonized as an object or as an animal will himself assume dehumanized features and be himself degraded. These thoughts resonate with present conceptualizations of trauma as affecting

both perpetrators and victims. However, although Memmi's explorations of colonial relations were important contributions to the understanding of trauma as the systemic violence of colonialism, his theories have not been influential in trauma theory and its development since the 1990s. More is perhaps to be expected from his later publication, *Decolonization and the Decolonized* (2006), which engages with what Memmi sees as the disillusion of decolonization: today's situation of ongoing poverty, the problematics of integration, the lack of responsible government, and the failure of, in particular, Arab intellectuals to address the problems adequately; instead, they often "justify the unjustifiable" (2006: 33). Although this book, and in particular Memmi's concept of neocolonialism, was not favorably received by academic reviewers, its theories on transmigration, diaspora, and exile are an area of potential interest for the development of trauma theory in light of the more recent refugee problematics.

More influential today, though certainly not uncontested, are the publications of Achille Mbembe, a Cameroonian theorist, who became a forceful presence in postcolonial theory after his collection of essays titled *On the Postcolony* (2001). In these essays Mbembe combines a poststructuralist stance with notions from existential phenomenology to analyze decolonization in Africa as the continuing influence of colonialism. Questioning entrenched views of colonialism, such as the binary oppression-resistance, Mbembe replaces the victim paradigm with a less simplified account of complicity and (unconscious) guilt as responses to power in postcolonial or decolonized African nations. While thus offering productive areas for further exploration, it cannot be said that Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* has become a central text in postcolonial trauma theory today. This may be attributable to negative critiques by, for instance, Jeremy Weate, who pronounced it as "theoretically confused and devoid of productive substantial argument" (2003: 27), and partly perhaps to Mbembe's critical tone in challenging the discourse of writing about Africa, for instance, in speaking of "the extraordinary poverty of the political science and economics literature on Africa" (Mbembe 2001: 5). However, while Weate deems that Mbembe's claim to instigate a new form of writing about Africa fails to provide "any substantive ground for further development," he also feels compelled to conclude that *On the Postcolony* suggests the way forward "for postcolonial thought as a whole" (Weate 2003: 39). Weate thus recognizes what is indeed the strong potential of Mbembe's work: the thinking through of the need and potential of accounts of trauma at the level of ordinary, everyday life. This way of reading trauma accords with the call for a more specific, yet also

more comprehensive, account of trauma that was often expressed in the early years of the twenty-first century in literary trauma studies.

In a manner similar to Fanon's contributions to postcolonial psychoanalytical theory and Memmi's contributions to ethical debates in postcolonial studies, Mbembe's detailed poststructuralist analyses provide useful contextualization for literary and cultural criticism that seeks to understand the development of trauma from non-Western perspectives. It must, however, be noted that the perspectives of Fanon's and Memmi's twentieth-century analyses are time-bound and hence inevitably limited, and that the polemical, strident tone that characterizes Fanon's and Mbembe's work is out of accord with the ethical, other-directed orientation of early trauma theory and the insistent call in present trauma theory for noncompetitive and nonoppositional modes of thinking. A further consideration relevant in the discussion of these theorists is that while their background is non-Western, their theoretical apparatus is fully Western and, by its nature and origin, incontestably Eurocentric. It cannot be denied that the thrust of their polemical and anti-Eurocentric arguments depends to an important degree on Western-based knowledge and understanding, rather than on non-Western knowledge and learning. Today's trauma critics often express their sensitivity to this issue. Ananya Kabir, for instance, acknowledges a duality in her own thinking about trauma, caused by the fact that trauma theory is Euro-American; it is "an existing, sophisticated set of theoretical approaches," which for her own thinking as a critic from a non-Western background results in an uneasy combination of Western and non-Western positions that she continues to grapple with in her intellectual work (2014: 64). Critics and theorists who, like Kabir, are keenly aware of their dual positions herald a new development in trauma criticism, one that promises a strong engagement with trauma narratives from a non-Western theoretical perspective.

The duality between Euro-American theories and indigenous perceptions of trauma has already come to the fore in today's trauma criticism. Native American scholarship, for instance, is a site of resistance against the dominance of Western traditional theorization in literary studies, a resistance that is based on the dual knowledge of indigenous thinking and Western cultural theory. Contemporary Native American theorists are mapping out their relationship with mainstream methodologies, some faulting the uncritical and unreflective use of Western theories, and some focusing on developing new models and methodologies based on indigenous thinking. Their contributions to postcolonial theory are substantial, and their focus on Native American concerns in the discussion of land,

identity, and the discourse of discovery offer a significant potential for elaboration in trauma theory, as does their work on the long-term effects of the discourse of discovery, of Manifest Destiny and the myth of the West. Prominent Native American writers such as Paula Gunn Allen and Gerald Vizenor deliberate the relationship between Native American experiences and postcolonial theory, and they question the usefulness of such theoretical approaches as poststructuralism and Freudian psychoanalysis for the exploration of Native American histories and literature. Vizenor in particular has consistently expressed his concern that the specific nature and history of Native American trauma may be elided in trauma studies that appropriate it and reconfigure it by presenting it in the dominant, conventional trauma discourse. Stating that it is important to bring to light the precise ways in which Native communities were subjected to exploitation and oppression, Vizenor also emphasizes the need to acknowledge the ways in which they have survived, with language and storytelling as their tools of resilience and resistance. Seeing language not only as an instrument of colonization, but also as the way of resistance and liberation, Vizenor has created new words, such as *survivance*, *post-indian*, and *storying*, to emphasize the specific contribution of Native American literature to postcolonial theory. The term *survivance*, central in Vizenor's work, illustrates Vizenor's rejection of victimhood and melancholia as defining characteristics of trauma: "Survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories . . . Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy; and the legacy of victimry" (2008: 1). For the development of trauma theory as the aftermath of historical, political, and ecological oppression the introduction of Native American approaches will be a vital enrichment and rejuvenation, as will the contributions by other indigenous modes of thinking in non-Western studies.

For the development of a non-Eurocentric trauma theory, the literatures of Africa may well prove of major importance. Increasingly, the African moral imagination reflected in contemporary writing offers an "intrinsically transformational impulse," as Kurtz states (2014: 421). It is evident that trauma theory stands to gain substantially from a broader and deeper engagement with non-Western literary studies. Culturally specific approaches to trauma from other non-Western theorists such as Chicano/a, Australian Aboriginal, and the literatures Oceania, the West Indies, and many more are potentially fruitful directions for the future of trauma studies.

Critics working with non-Western literature are currently offering ways for further development of trauma theory through a focus on indigenous concepts of language. A recent article by Xavier Garnier presents a strong case for potential renewal of trauma criticism through attention to untranslated African-language or Indian-language texts. Garnier asserts that these texts, which despite their long histories have remained unexplored to date, can teach us much about trauma in non-Western contexts: “These texts exist now, and no one knows what their fate will be. By their very existence, they are a potential renewal of theoretical approaches sometimes a little too sure of themselves” (2012: 510). A further underresearched area is the role and function of rituals and ceremonies in the engagement with trauma victims. As Kabir writes, the challenge to scholars interested in the “future of trauma theory” is to find ways of analyzing the traumas of the non-Western world that “acknowledge the myriad modes of consolation, memorializing and reconciliation which are deployed by traumatized subjects who may never have heard of Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis and, indeed, ‘trauma theory’” (2014: 64).

It is not surprising, perhaps, that non-Western criticism has provided a strong and valuable rejuvenation of trauma theory. It is well placed to explore literary trauma fiction and analyze its cultural metaphors, area-specific use of language, and indigenous rituals, symbols, and archetypes, throwing fresh light on the literary representation of human experiences of trauma. Research on culture-specific indigenous traditions constitutes a rich potential for the further development of trauma theory. In addition to the inclusion of more culturally and historically specific narratives, what is needed in literary trauma studies is an ongoing, careful delineation of the parameters and categories that guide theorization, while developing a multidirectional and relational approach in which the entrenched binary oppositions between the West and the non-West may be collapsed and cultural differences may be celebrated as enriching and illuminating the expanding field of literary trauma theory.