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## **Memory and Trauma in Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory.**

Thesis Submitted as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Of *Master* in Literature and Civilization

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## **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material that has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution.

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## **Dedication**

To myself

To my mother, my greatest supporter, and to my father may Allah protect and preserve them

To my beloved siblings, Douaa, Salima, and Elhadj

To everyone who supported me along the way, your presence will never be forgotten

To those who carry heavy memories, may healing find you.

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## **Abstract**

This research aims to shed light on the traumatic memories experienced by individuals and societies in Danticate's novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). It emphasizes the internal struggles of the protagonist, Sofie Caco, and her suffering from the PTSD symptoms even after the sexual abuse she faced, which is an inherited act in Haitian society. Her behaviour reflects her shattered feelings and her efforts to maintain healing. The Freudian psychoanalysis is utilized to examine her behaviour and psychological conflicts. The study also examines the harrowing memories shared by the entire community. Some are rooted in unconscious social practices, while others are shaped by the echo of a collective history that continues to influence memory and behavior. This aspect has been critically analyzed through the lens of collective memory theory, providing insight into the connection between personal recollections that are historically embedded. This research concludes that both personal traumas of sexual violence and the collective trauma of slavery have played a pivotal role in reshaping the collective shattered identity of Haitian people. This paper contributes to the canon of trauma literature by introducing perspectives shaped by historical oppression, inherited social roles, and deeply rooted cultural norms.

**Key words :** collective memory, Freudian psychoanalysis, PTSD, sexual abuse , trauma

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# **General Introduction**

## General Introduction

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Breath, Eyes, Memory (1994) by Edwidge Danticat discusses haunting struggles and memories of individuals and societies. As a Haitian writer affected by the turbulent history of Haiti and its complex social fabric, Danticat conveys insightful depictions of memory and trauma from the individual and collective perspectives. Thus, she has succeeded in describing the character's sentimental and psychological state and enriched her novel with notable themes, such as trauma, guilt, women's oppression, identity, mother-daughter relationship and the power of storytelling. This makes her novel a distinguished piece of writing. This research focuses not only on personal traumatic memory experienced by the protagonist "Sofie Cacao", but also explores profound inherited traumas affecting Black Haitian women that have deep roots in the history of Haiti, such as slavery, rape, and sexual violence. It highlights the extent to which characters respond to their memories variously.

While there have been many studies on the impact of trauma and memory on the psychological aspect of individuals, there has been a gap in terms of delving into the origin of these memories and what they originated from. This study goes beyond the scope of the individual experience to a trauma that originated from social practices and a historical background that had a great impact in forming a collective memory, or in other words, a traumatic memory lived by the entire community. In most studies, only the dark side of these traumatic experiences was addressed without giving importance to the aspect of healing and recovery, which were always neglected. Healing thus represents an important stage, especially when dealing with the trauma process in the novel.

This research aims to make readers aware of the extent to which memories influence the formation of people's lives, identity, and societies. In addition, it focuses on the trauma of Black Haitian womanhood as a phenomenon that is pervasive in the novel. Moreover, it refers to how it is built, constructed, and how it influences Haitian women. The main argument is that the traumatic memories of sexual violence lived by Sofie and Martine are experienced and lived in personal and individual terms, but their roots are embedded in larger social and historical conflicts such as patriarchal social norms and slavery. In other words, individual and personal traumas are based on collective and cultural traumas in the novel. Another aim is to focus on the importance of taking a step towards recovery and breaking the cycle of suffering and facing fear and trauma, especially that which is rooted in generations and cultures.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions :

1. How did the historical events contribute to the formation of cultural traumas and shared memories?
2. How was the term of trauma embodied in the novel, and how did these harsh memories shape the characters' lives as they struggled between remembering and forgetting painful experiences?
3. How did the cultural idea of female purity in Haitian society and the practice of virginity testing create intergenerational trauma?
4. How was the idea of recovery and healing depicted in the novel?

As a result, the following hypotheses are proposed to answer the earlier questions:

1. The hostile milieu and the complex history that were full of brutality and strict oppressive systems constituted a shared memory in Haitian society ; some of the harshest experiences within it represented a collective trauma.
2. The concept of memory and trauma was discussed differently by many theorists and notable scholars, such as Sigmund Freud, Maurice Halbwachs .etc. The concept of trauma in the novel was depicted through the narrative voice of the protagonist Sofie Cacao who experienced sexual abuse “ testing ” and lived through psychological struggles in various bumps: youth, marriage, and motherhood. The Freudian analysis was applied to analyze the protagonist's unconscious mind .
3. In the novel, the individual memories were based on collective memories shared among all the Haitian women. The protagonists inherited a traumatic memory from their mothers, and this was analyzed from the perspective of cultural trauma.
4. In the novel, the strict Haitian mind, in contrast to the free minded American traditions and ideals, contributed strongly to shaping Haitian women's oppression, traumas, and harrowing memories.

The methodology of this research is based on a qualitative literary analysis of " Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*". The novel is the primary source supported by scholarly articles and books on memory and trauma. This choice of qualitative analysis allows for a detailed exploration of themes and the development of characters in the narrative

## General Introduction

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structure of the novel. Such an approach is particularly suitable in studies where the issue of the textual analysis and exploration of themes is central in the world of literature.

This research is divided into three chapters. The first chapter, titled “ Historical Context ”, is a foundation to understand the pivotal historical junctures and the culturally embedded practices that play a formative role in the configuration of Haitian society. The second theoretical chapter, titled “ Memory and Trauma ; Concepts and Theories ” will deal with the conceptualizing of memory and shed light on its role in the remembering stage. It focuses on both individual and collective memories. In addition, it focuses on the concept of trauma, its types, post- traumatic stress and, the notion of healing through narrativization . In this research, the psychological approach is used to analyze the protagonist’s internal struggles, and a sociocultural approach is applied to analyze how traumatic memory shaped the social framework and how communities remember the past collectively. The third chapter, titled “Trauma and Memory in Breath, Eye, Memory”, portrays the protagonist psychological struggles and the traumatic memories experienced by all the characters through examining the past lived by the whole society .

The main limitation of this study is based on only one literary work; it may be insufficient to cover a wide spectrum of experiences regarding memory and trauma in multicultural environments.

This research aims to make an academic contribution by providing a nuanced understanding of memory and trauma as presented in contemporary literature, which might derive implications for cultural studies, psychology, and literary criticism.

## **Chapter I: Historical Context**

## **I.1 Introduction**

Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) is highly interconnected with the Haitian complex history. By examining the historical, cultural, and social contexts that shape the novel's characters and themes, we can gain a deeper appreciation for the enduring impact of trauma on individuals and communities. This chapter provides a brief historical overview of Haiti, focusing on key events that have shaped the nation's identity and culture. It explores the impact of colonization, slavery, and the Haitian Revolution on the Haitian people. This chapter answers questions like, what are the long-lasting effects of the political unrest on Haitian society and culture? How does the enduring legacy of colonization perpetuate cycles of trauma in Haitian society, and how do individuals and communities grapple with these historical burdens? It also examines the role of patriarchal structures in shaping individual experiences and the struggle to break free from these societal constraints and challenge the patriarchal norms that limit their potential. The chapter exhibits the most crucial debate when we are dealing with trauma: that how we can link trauma with the harmful system of slavery in Haiti. It examines the ways in which the trauma of slavery has been transmitted across. The chapter also examines the issue of sexual violence in Haiti, focusing on its use as a weapon of war and oppression. I explore the devastating impact of sexual violence on individuals and communities. Moreover, attempts are made to explore the cultural and social factors that contribute to the silencing of survivors of sexual violence.

## **I.2 Haiti Geographical Position**

The Republic of Haiti, or what is called "the land of the high mountains," occupies the western three-eighths of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. This geographical division highlights Haiti's position as a significant part of Hispaniola; this region was colonized by various European powers, with Haiti emerging as a distinct nation following its successful revolution against French colonial rule in 1804. This context underscores Haiti's unique cultural and historical identity within the Caribbean landscape (Dardik, 2016).

Haiti is the third largest country in the Caribbean with 27,750 square miles, following Cuba and the Dominican Republic. It has an estimated population of 11.4 million, making it the most populous nation in the region. This demographic significance underscores Haiti's role



in Caribbean affairs and its cultural diversity. The population density and size can impact various socio-economic factors, including resource distribution and political representation (André, 2024). Haiti recognizes Haitian Creole and French as its official languages. Haitian Creole, spoken by the vast majority of the population, developed during the colonial era as a linguistic fusion of French and various African languages, with additional influences from Spanish, Taíno, and English. This language evolves as a practical means of communication between enslaved Africans and French colonizers. French, as an official language, is used by a smaller segment of the population, primarily in governmental, educational, and formal contexts. The coexistence of these two languages underscores Haiti's intricate colonial legacy and its enduring social and cultural dynamics.

According to Seguin (2020), Haitian Creole emerged through the interaction between French settlers and enslaved Africans during the 17th and 18th centuries in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, now known as Haiti. This linguistic development occurred in the context of the Atlantic slave trade, where diverse African languages mixed with French to form what is now Haitian Creole, and categorized into three major dialects: Northern, Central, and Southern. The Northern dialect is predominantly spoken in Cap-Haitien, the Central dialect is primarily used in Port-au-Prince, and the Southern dialect is common in the Cayes region. [This dialectal variation reflects the linguistic diversity within different geographic areas of Haiti and highlights the importance of regional linguistic identities within the broader context of Haitian Creole...](Schieffelin and Doucet, 1994).

In Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the use of language exemplifies this duality; her narrative often shifts between languages to capture the complexities of identity and belonging. The linguistic choices made by characters reveal their social status and cultural affiliations, illustrating how language can both empower and alienate individuals.

### **I.3 A Historical Overview**

Haitian society represented an intricate tapestry of historical events full of harsh acts, such as colonialism and slavery. The latter created a hostile milieu and complex traumas for Haitian men and women.

#### **I.3.1 Haiti's Historical Significance**

Haiti's historical significance stems from its emergence as the first nation founded by former slaves, following the successful Haitian Revolution from 1791 to 1804. This revolt

challenged prevailing notions of racial inferiority and established a state ruled by non-whites, profoundly influencing global perceptions of race and freedom.

The intertwining of personal and national histories shapes their identities and worldviews. The historical backdrop of Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* significantly shapes its narrative, particularly during the tumultuous period of the 1970s to 1990s in Haiti. The revolts against François Duvalier's regime (1984 -1986) serve as a critical context for Sophie's migration to New York; she confronts both personal and historical event that Sofie and her family were part of when citizens in Gonaïves protested against President Jean-Claude Duvalier's regime, particularly in response to police brutality.

The movement escalated over the following years, culminating in Duvalier's overthrow on February 7, 1986. This period also saw the reinstatement of Haiti's original flag and coat of arms, symbolizing a significant political shift in the country when citizens in Gonaïves protested against President Jean-Claude Duvalier's regime, particularly in response to police brutality. The movement escalated over the following years, culminating in Duvalier's overthrow on February 7, 1986. This period also saw the reinstatement of Haiti's original flag and coat of arms, symbolizing a significant political shift in the country , and illustrating how the characters are unable to escape Haiti's haunting past.

The record of Haiti history began in 1492, when the European captain and explorer Christopher Columbus landed on a large island in the region of the western Atlantic Ocean that later came to be known as the Caribbean. Before the discovery of the island from a European perspective, Haiti was located on the island of Hispaniola, which was originally inhabited by the Taíno and Arawakan peoples. They referred to their island as Ayiti. Following Christopher Columbus's arrival in 1492, the island was claimed for the Spanish Crown and named La Isla Española, meaning "the Spanish Island," a name that was later Latinized to Hispaniola. Spain controlled the entire island when French pirates began establishing bases on its western side, leading to significant colonial developments and the eventual division of the island into Spanish and French territories. Hispaniola was inhabited by indigenous peoples. Following this, Spain declared the island as its property. They began to enslave the native Taino and Ciboney, people, forced to mine for gold.

These natives were devastated by European diseases and brutal working conditions, and by the end of the 16th century, the people had virtually vanished. Thousands of slaves imported from other Caribbean islands met the same fate soon after December 1492. However, in the 17th century, the French established control over the western part of Hispaniola and Tortuga by 1659. As C.L.R. James discusses in *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1963), the French established their presence on the western portion of Hispaniola, including Tortuga Island, by 1659. This marked the beginning of French colonial ambitions in the region. The situation evolved significantly with the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, when Spain formally recognized French control over Tortuga and the western third of Hispaniola, which would come to be known as Saint-Domingue (McAlister, 2012).

This transfer led to increased French investment in the region, particularly in sugar plantations. To sustain this economic model, the French relied heavily on the transatlantic slave trade, importing millions of enslaved Africans to work on the plantations. The brutal conditions of slavery and the exploitation of the land laid the foundation for the immense wealth accumulated by French colonists and the French crown. However, this wealth was built upon the suffering and exploitation of enslaved Africans, a legacy that would continue to shape the region's history and ultimately lead to the Haitian Revolution.

Under French rule, the colony became increasingly reliant on African slave labor, as nearly all indigenous people had succumbed to the harsh conditions imposed by European colonizers. The influx of African slaves into Saint-Domingue was substantial, leading to a demographic shift that would shape the colony's social structure. Unlike the United States, Saint-Domingue had a notable population of free mulattos and Blacks who coexisted with white colonists, creating a complex social hierarchy. The violent oppression faced by both enslaved individuals and free non-whites contributed to escalating tensions within the colony. The conditions under French colonial rule were marked by systemic violence and exploitation, which ultimately culminated in a widespread uprising against white supremacy. This revolt began on August 22, 1791, and was characterized by significant leadership from figures such as *Toussaint L'Ouverture*.

The revolution led to series of conflicts that ultimately resulted in the defeat of colonial forces. By January 1, 1804, Haiti was declared independent, becoming the first nation to abolish slavery through an uprising. The new republic was named Haiti, derived from "Aiti,"

the indigenous name for the island prior to European colonization. This renaming symbolized a profound break from colonial oppression and represented a significant moment in the history of anti-colonial movements worldwide. The early decades of Haitian independence were marked by political instability and economic hardship. A series of dictators and civil wars plagued the nation, hindering its development and hindering its potential. The country's leaders struggled to establish a stable government and foster economic growth while also confronting the challenges of international isolation and debt.

In the mid-19th century, Haiti faced further setbacks with the loss of the Dominican Republic, which declared its independence in 1844. This territorial loss further weakened the nation and exacerbated its economic problems.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries witnessed a period of increasing foreign intervention, particularly from the United States. In 1915, the U.S. military occupied Haiti, citing the need to protect American interests and stabilize the country. However, this occupation was characterized by human rights abuses, economic exploitation, and political interference. The U.S. military imposed a constitution that favored American interests and suppressed Haitian sovereignty. After the U.S. occupation ended in 1934, Haiti continued to grapple with political instability and economic challenges. A series of coups and elections marked the period leading up to the Duvalier era.

In 1957, François Duvalier Chapter: The Rule of François “Papa Doc” Duvalier in Haiti (1957), a period characterized by authoritarian governance, widespread corruption, and profound social and cultural impacts. His regime employed a variety of political strategies to maintain power, while his dealings with the Tonton Macoute militia and manipulation of Vodou Duvalier established a strong personal image, presenting himself as the savior of the Haitian people. He utilized state propaganda to cultivate a charismatic persona, often depicting himself as a mystical figure with supernatural powers. By integrating Vodou imagery into his governance, he appealed to the spiritual beliefs of many Haitians, portraying himself as a protector and leader chosen by the spirits (16). Furthermore, Duvalier established a civilian militia known as the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale*, more commonly referred to as the Tonton Macoutes, a Haitian term for the bogeyman (17). The Macoutes served as instruments of intimidation and terror, silencing dissent through violence, rape, and murder.

Dash contends that the Duvalier regime's power extended beyond mere terror. It relied on a substantial social base and the skillful manipulation of popular culture, which ultimately transformed it into a hereditary dictatorship (17). Additionally, F. Duvalier employed the concept of international Black consciousness as a propaganda tool (17).

In 1959, Duvalier formed the Tonton Macoute, a paramilitary force named after a mythical figure that kidnaps children. This group was instrumental in instilling fear within the populace. The Tonton Macoute engaged in arbitrary arrests, torture, and killings of perceived enemies, effectively silencing dissent and maintaining Duvalier's grip on power through terror.

### **I.3.2 Suppression of Opposition**

Dash asserts that François Duvalier exiled intellectuals who opposed his regime, subjected journalists to torture, eliminated army generals he deemed untrustworthy, and expelled all Catholic priests. Duvalier systematically dismantled political opposition throughout his rule. By 1963, he had eliminated most political parties and consolidated power under his regime. He employed brutal tactics against rivals, including imprisonment and execution. Media censorship was rampant; dissenting voices were silenced, creating an environment where fear stifled free expression.

In 1964, Duvalier declared himself president for life through a manipulated referendum. This move further entrenched his authoritarian rule and eliminated any semblance of democratic governance in Haiti. Duvalier's regime was marked by extensive corruption. He embezzled state funds for personal use while rewarding loyalists with government positions and contracts. This patronage system created a network of loyalty based on fear and financial gain. The mismanagement of resources contributed to Haiti's economic decline; by the late 1960s, the country faced severe poverty and underdevelopment.

### **I.3.3. Exodus of Professionals**

The oppressive political climate led to a significant exodus of educated Haitians seeking better opportunities abroad. This brain drain crippled Haiti's human capital, exacerbating economic challenges and leaving the country without skilled professionals necessary for development.

### **I.3.4 Social and Cultural Atmosphere**

The pervasive violence and repression during Duvalier's rule fostered an atmosphere of fear among Haitians. Families were often afraid to speak out against the regime or associate with anyone perceived as a dissenter. This climate of mistrust fragmented communities and stifled social cohesion. Duvalier skillfully integrated Vodou into his governance to connect with the populace while justifying his rule. He claimed that his power derived from Vodou spirits, which helped him gain popular support among those who revered these beliefs. However, this manipulation distorted traditional Vodou practices and created confusion regarding its role in society (Greene 2001, 16). Even Artistic expression suffered under strict censorship; however, some artists found ways to critique the regime indirectly through allegory. Despite repression, Haitian culture demonstrated resilience through underground movements that preserved traditional music, dance, and art forms (Diederich, B, & ; Burt, A. ,1969).

### **I.4 Religion in Haiti**

Regarding religion in Haiti, the Haitian religious history is marked by a fluid and plural landscape, characterized by the interplay of Voudou, Catholicism, and Protestantism. Voudou, rooted in African traditions, serves as a vital cultural expression and source of resilience for Haitians, particularly in the face of historical suppression. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Danticat employs religious imagery to explore the protagonist's connection to Vodou practices, illustrating how spirituality informs her identity and experiences of trauma. Danticat states that these religious elements provide a framework for understanding personal suffering and resilience, highlighting the importance of faith in navigating life's challenges (Danticat, 1994). Catholicism, introduced by European colonizers, became intertwined with local practices, often blending with Voudou elements. Meanwhile, Protestantism has gained prominence since the 1970s, providing a spiritual refuge for many within the diaspora. This complex religious tapestry reflects Haiti's unique social and historical dynamics (Richman, 2012).

### **I.5 Landscape**

Haiti's rugged mountains and coastal plains shape the cultural identity of its people and depict these landscapes as integral to their characters' lives, illustrating how geography

influences personal and collective identities. The challenges faced by peasant communities are illustrated against the backdrop of Haiti's stunning mountains and fertile valleys, emphasizing how these landscapes shape the identities and aspirations of the characters. The land is portrayed as not merely a setting but an essential part of the Haitian spirit, symbolizing hope and resistance against oppression. This celebration of the natural environment reflects a profound connection to Haitian culture and heritage, instilling a sense of national pride (Roumain,1944:34).

### **I.6 Patriarchal Social Norms in Haiti**

Patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices through which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. This conceptualization provides a foundational understanding of patriarchy, framing it as a pervasive societal system that extends beyond individual behaviors to institutional and cultural norm (Walbys, 2010). This definition highlights the interconnectedness of social structures in sustaining gender inequality, setting the stage for a deeper examination of how patriarchal systems shape both personal identities and broader societal dynamics. The Haitian society is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures that influence various aspects of life; the roles of fathers figure strongly throughout family and political systems, demonstrating the depth of societal gender inequality. The subordination of women and the dominance of men are factors that dictate one's role in Haiti. Through the suppression of women, absence of basic human rights, and violence against women, we can comprehend why gender equality continues to be a major challenge when looking at the deeply rooted status quo of women in Haiti and the roots of those problems ( Walbys,2010).

The system of slavery was integrated with deeply rooted patriarchal societal constructs. Women who were enslaved worked at the plantations and served their masters in their houses. For instance, not only did they labor in farmlands but were also classified as nurses and service attendants. This division not only stripped them of their rights and undermined their existence but also made them economically and socially inferior.

On top of this, enslaved women were also at the mercy of their masters or even male overseers, who sexually exploited them. This act of sexual violence not only subdued oppression but also made the control more authoritative. As men gained control over women's bodies, reproductive labor, and the land that women worked, the dynamics of power relations

in society underwent a shift. The children that were born out of the patriarchal oppression and forced marriages were treated as possessions. This represents the control that patriarchy has over women's rights to their bodies as well as inspirational freedoms.

### **I.6.1 Patriarchal Social Norms during Post- revolutionary Haiti**

The country of Haiti claimed its independence in the year of 1804. It still keep a lot of the French cultural and legal styles, which deepened patriarchy in the already rigid society. While overthrowing colonial rulers did not significantly change gender relations. Women like Marie-Jeanne Lamartinière, who fought alongside men in the revolution, were largely excluded from the historical narrative. Despite their participation in the struggle, they were not granted political rights, and gender roles remained rigid in the post-revolutionary period.

In addition, French legal systems, such as the Code Napoléon, influenced the legal framework in Haiti, particularly with respect to women's rights. Codes placed women under the authority of their husbands, denying them autonomy in matters such as inheritance or property ownership. This legal structure entrenched male dominance, as women's roles were confined to the domestic sphere, further reinforcing patriarchal control over society.

During the Duvalier regime, which began in 1957 and ended in 1986, the father and his adolescent son, François Duvalier and Jean-Claude Duvalier, had maintained a highly centralized political system where men dominated in all leadership roles. Women practically did not have any power when it came to public matters or politics. For instance, the government during the time reinforced traditional values, which placed men and boys on pedestals while women were prisoners of the household. Regime policies along with public speeches, reinforced the thought of women being just mothers and caregivers and thus pushed women on the margins when it came to politics and the economy (James, 2010).

Patriarchal norms in Haitian society are not merely frameworks of male dominance; they are pervasive systems that shape the identity of individuals by dictating their roles, opportunities, and societal values, for instance, mainly constructed around being a housewife, devoted, and a subordinate figure, with little education or profession to speak of. On the other hand, a man is viewed from the perspective of power, where his being includes having the ability to make choices and economic superiority. Such dynamics have a profound impact on



how an individual perceives themselves and manages their identity in an environment that is full of deep-seated social disparities.

One particular example of these norms is the ongoing restriction of women's education throughout rural Haiti, where cultural customs as well as economic resources are directed towards males. Recent studies suggest that girls in these areas tend to leave school at a much earlier age, with their identities being feminized to potential housewives. This difference is also seen in economic participation, where women oftentimes have to take on informal and low wage- jobs and are constantly dependent on males.

In addition, gender- based violence has proven to be a crucial element of the process of identity creation. In cultures where family violence is treated as normal by society, a large number of females suffer from internalized inferiority or dread, leading them to formulate an identity focused on survival rather than thriving. For example, people who have gone through violent sexual acts not only suffer physical consequences but are also blamed by and excluded from society, thus leading them to develop a split self that tries to accommodate societal norms with their personal suffering. Whereas, in a patriarchal society, men do not escape the identity-forming process.

The need to assert and safeguard power may give rise to a hyper masculine identity, where any form of sensitivity, including the expression of deep emotions, is considered a liability. Such a cruel way of defining manhood not only cultivates unhealthy relationships but also inhibits men from forming caring, non-violent relationships. Through these examples, it becomes evident how accepted cultural behaviors create powerful constraints that subjugate people. This is contended in light of imagining how gendered behavior is performed and reinforced during the process of identity creation, questioning whether it can be performed differently or if it is always performed the same.

### **I.7 The Effects of Patriarchal Norms and Oppression: Fragmentation of Female Identity**

Patriarchal beliefs in Haiti often make women circumstantially create identities based on silence and endurance. For example, the practice of *restaveks*<sup>1</sup> (which is socially accepted in modern Haiti) has disproportionately adverse effects on young girls who are taken away from their families to work in abusive settings. These girls do not receive any proper education (if they are given any at all) and are subjected to various types of abuse including verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, followed by an identity shaped around low self-esteem. As these girls grow up equating their self-worth to submission and suffering, the trauma of abuse leaves scars that run deep. Such girls are impaired with a broken identity, like the normalization of their experiences and *restavèk* abuse that permeates across each facet of managing joy and ultimately leaves no opportunity for the conception of a life independently.

## **I.8 Different Factors Provoking the Haitian Trauma**

Diverse factors and agents contributed in the birth of numerous cultural traumas in Haitian society.

### **I.8.1 Hypermasculine Identity as a Catalyst for Cycles of Trauma**

Hypermasculinity is an ideal that forms a part of what Haitian men are supposed to possess, for example, being dominant, aggressive, and emotionally stoic. This is epitomized in cultural practices like “*pote pwa*”, which caters to boys being excessively coddled with the idea that they must take on difficult responsibilities from a young age. This cultural practice focuses on the masculine attributes of strength and endurance. It denies them self-exploration and the ability to express emotional weakness, which leads to neglect and violence in their personal and intimate relationships. For instance, in the case of Haiti, the wide practice of domestic violence is one that stems from men's dominance over women as a way to control them. By doing so, they enforce a traumatic cycle for themselves and the women, which inevitably leads to trauma. This harms women by restricting them to roles without freedom.

### **I.8.2 The patriarchal Norms Role in the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma**

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<sup>1</sup> “*restaveks*” : children are sent by their parents to live with families who employ them as domestic workers, responsible for doing everything for no pay and living in dire conditions.

This intergenerational trauma of patriarchy has parents enforcing harmful systems because they think that is what's best for their children. One clear example is the practice of “virginity testing”, in which mothers have their daughters poked and prodded to confirm they are virgins who can offer a male partner as an expression of honor for her family via marriage. While mothers think of this as a solution to maintain the status quo of their daughters, all it does is layer shame, humiliation, and fear into young girls’ notion, causing them trauma at an early age. And these girls grow up often passing down the same practices to their daughters. Therefore, they contribute to traumatizing their identity.

### **I.8.3 The Trauma of Slavery and Its Effect on Collective Memory**

Racism is a system of injustice and racial inequality that became prominent in the 1600s, although it has existed for thousands of years. It involves institutionalized discrimination against certain racial groups, often used to justify the exploitation and oppression of these groups. Rooted in colonialism, it manifests in laws, policies, and practices that disadvantage marginalized racial groups and uphold the privileges of others. Racism is not just about individual prejudice but a broader societal structure that maintains inequality across social, political, and economic systems (Darity & Davis, 2005).

The vicious and harrowing trauma associated with slavery in Haiti is a psychological scar that invokes the worst forms of mental suffering and continues to have deep-rooted implications towards the construction of Haitian identity. Ernestine (Saint Louis, 2022) attempts to scratch the surface of this problem by developing interpretative phenomenological frameworks that explain the implications of the legacy of slavery on the minds of the Haitians. Her usage of the most hideous themes of metaphysical and psychological expressions, such as a deep wound, recurring and compounding events, or constant remembering, Sadness, and Physical Expression of Grief, as well as Sadness exposed the unprecedented trauma that even modern generations of the Haitian people face. This harsh trauma deeply embedded into the cultural memory of a nation is constantly re-emphasized across different generations. After the decimation of the ancestors, the descendants suffered the repercussions of pain that invokes the feeling of nowhere to escape to.

The brutality, torture, and violence that enslaved Africans were subjected to did not stop with chains or abolition. Rather, those experiences merged with the identity of the Haitian

social structure and psyche, and the broken cages became metaphysical chains that controlled the minds of millions. One striking feature of historical trauma is that it is self-perpetuating (Hirsch, 2008). Haitians did not treat trauma as an event but rather as a process continually exacerbated by different forms of political, economic, and social violence. This phenomenon in Haiti demonstrated the legacy of slavery, where racial and economic structures derived from colonial rule have been entrenched and replicated in postcolonial Haiti. Lack of access to basic human needs, another category in this study that illustrated how historical injustices have inflicted deep socio-economic damage. The exploitation of African people created modern systems of inequality, which makes contemporary struggles in Haiti complex and multifaceted and inextricable from the trauma of enslavement. It is easy to see how, as these cycles of trauma profoundly affect the daily lives of Haitians and demonstrate the severe economic and psychological consequences of slavery (Saint Louis, 2022).

Multidimensional suffering has resulted, but the existence of Haiti's wounds has never healed. How does a country move on when every new problem seems to re-inject the underlying gashes of a nation's trauma? Yet, the trauma is not only an element that brings suffering but can also foster the development of resilience and transformation. Issues such as Positive Changes for the Collective highlight how the historical trauma has been used as a motivation by Haitians during their revolutionary spirit and also strengthened their cultural endurance. Haiti is the first Black republic that successfully emerged from colonial rule, and the immense suffering caused by slavery proves that resistance can indeed arise from trauma. This idea of using pain to turn to strength is an intricate part of the identity of the country of Haiti as seen in the varied spirit, and artistic appreciation in the country, which pays respect to ancestors. In this light, slavery, although immensely tragic, becomes a source of cultural endurance and defiance for the country (Saint Louis, 2022).

#### **I.8.4 Sexual Violence in Haitian History: A Source of Personal and Collective Trauma**

In the Caribbean slave system, Black women were routinely and brutally sexually assaulted enslaved women. They were not merely subjected to back-breaking labor but also endured rampant sexual exploitation that was either condoned or simply ignored. The crime of rape remains unacknowledged and unpunished proposition; a harsher truth was established where it was never even regarded as a crime at all if the victim was a slave (Feinstein, 2018).

Rape of enslaved women for instance, was treated as a form of property damage within the law as opposed to bodily trauma as a person.

In fact, rape was never legal, but rather it was not publicly condemned by society and thus tended to be ignored. The existence of these distinctions is important because it alters the burden of proof from legal culpability towards the matter of the absence of basic humanity in the legal paradigm. Enslavement did not mark the absence of a body for a woman: instead it was the complete understanding that she was slackly bodied within an unpunished patriarchal society, and raping was never recognized as a crime in Haiti. During the years leading to the revolution in Saint-Domingue, sexual abuse of Black women was both an instrument of dominance and a means to gain economically. Black women were routinely raped and these relationships were used to enhance the workforce while guaranteeing the captivity of the offspring born from these children. These children were enslaved, further bolstering the system in existence.

Key legal frameworks, like the Code Noir (1685, 1724 revision), sanctioned concubinage and, thus allowed white men to use enslaved women as breeding machines. Besides, the plaçage system established a racially constructive middle class whose children born out of these relationships remained dependent on the colonial economy. With slavery being a primary source of social exploitation, this sexual economy heightened social tensions, leading to enslaved and mixed-race individuals exploiting one another. This was one of the factors fueling the Haitian revolution. The greater the abuse amongst enslaved women rose, the more struggle the revolution faced to seek freedom and equality that led to the economic exploitation of enslaved women. Cultural stereotypes that endorsed violence against Black women in the Caribbean stemmed from the idea that they were hypersexual, readily available, and submitted to white male oppression. Such representations served to promote sexual violence as well as enforce a system of colonial racism and trauma (Chancy, 1997).

### **I.8.5 The Jezebel Stereotype in the Caribbean**

The most common cultural stereotype that facilitated sexual violence in the Caribbean was the Jezebel stereotype. This stereotype cast African and Afro-Caribbean women as inherently and uncontrollably promiscuous. European colonizers, including Hans Sloane, who chronicled life in Jamaica from the late 17th century, characterized enslaved women as being

“naturally lascivious.” This depiction was employed to justify the sexual abuse of Black women by framing such acts as a natural consequence of their “wild” sexuality or as something they chose to partake in. The stereotype completely obliterated the notion of rape and rendered sexual violence not just inevitable, but in a twisted way, deserved. This idea continued to persist influencing the conceptualization of Black women as sexual objects with unrestricted access by white men, especially during slavery. Such perceptions of violence were not only acceptable to many colonial societies, but were also deeply seated in the culture, concubinage and the Maroon system.

In Saint-Domingue, the practice of concubinage employed by wealthier French men, particularly plantation owners and military officers, led to the institutionalized sexual exploitation of women in Saint-Domingue. These owners kept Black and mixed- race women as concubines, and even though these relationships were viewed as affectionate or romantic, they were rarely consensual. Black women within these relationships had no power to reject them and were forced into sexual coercion. This served to reinforce the normalization of sexual violence. These relationships were part of a larger system that sought to exploit women’s bodies, where Black women were viewed as property and their sexual labor was used for personal and economic benefits. (Feinstein, 2018)

The establishment of concubinage relationships in the Maroon system also led to the emergence of a class of mixed- race children who, although viewed as subordinate to the free white population, held a greater social status than enslaved Black people and faced the economic realities of enslavement. The system of race and sexual violence subjugation required the women to bear children so that the oppression tower could be maintained, and the concubine exploitation further strengthened the hierarchy. The sexual violence against Black women was not only an aspect of slavery, but it was also an essential tool of colonial control. Their reproductive power was transformed into profit by governing systems, while cultural stereotypes cast them as promiscuous. Laws, as well as economic systems, did not safeguard them.

### **I.8.6 The Trauma of Immigration and its Effects on Haitian Memory and Identity**

At its most fundamental level, migration is understood as the relocation of people from one region to another, typically for economic, political, or environmental reasons. Sometimes migration is seen as the search for new and better opportunities, but it is often the result of

deliberate violence, economic despair, or natural calamities, which have caused the displacement of Haitians for hundreds of years. For Haitians, migration is not just a movement from one location to another, but a mental fracture that disconnects a person from their country, culture, and family history. This fracture is more pronounced when people are forcibly migrated rather than when they choose to migrate. This leads to, as Edward Said (2000) describes it, “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home.” (137).

Studies on transgenerational trauma of migration in Haitian families made by Jessica Yanick Pierre (2016) present a comprehensive frame of analysis of trauma beyond the first-generation migration. Pierre argues that the Haitian diaspora, especially their 1.5 and second generations, suffer from a profound sense of disconnection from their heritage. Pierre’s studies suggest that during the Haitian Revolutionary War, participants understood their reality. There was an understanding concerning family histories, the origins of certain cultural practices, and the overarching struggles that shaped their families. Such losses are certainly not trivial. They highlight the patterns of historical erasure, a condition where trauma becomes non-discussable, erasing significant emotional and cognitive connections between generations.

Such patterns of absence are consistent with Hirsch’s notion of postmemory, whereby children of survivors do not live through trauma, firsthand but rather bear its emotional and psychological consequences. Haitian parents tend to shelter their children from the violence, extreme poverty, and dire political repression that led them into an exiled life, but this equally cloistered form of existence is traumatizing in itself. Far from eliminating trauma, such distortion gives rise to it.

The younger generation is raised feeling a sense of incompleteness, an era that remains critically missing in determining their dominant identity. Such phenomena alienate people from their Haitian identity. As well as from the country in which they are now settled and where they are treated as outsiders. This phenomenon of dual alienation breeds what Bhabha (1994) terms the ‘third space’ - the space occupied by immigrants who live between cultures and do not feel fully accepted in either. Furthermore, the strains resulting from historical grief in Haitian immigrant families are evident in psychological and social behaviors.

Pierre implies that her subjects felt passionately sad and mourned for the loss of a sense of community, the language, and the beauty of Haiti, which at once indicates diasporic grief. This links with Paul Gilroy’s (1993) concept of the Black Atlantic of the African diaspora, like

the Haitians possessing a historical consciousness of dislocation, subjugation, and destruction. The inability to go back to a homeland that is rich in culture and history exacerbates this melancholia. It results in the construction of identity through the confinement of longing rather than belonging.

According to Pierre's analysis, transformative learning to interact with how Haitian history is taught, with cultural narratives, and family stories may be effective in treating these intergenerational traumas. It is by attending to historical consciousness that the second generation Haitians can reconnect the broken links between past and present and craft an identity that celebrates them and their culture rather than identifies them as victims of trauma. However, it requires making purposeful efforts by families, teachers, and community leaders to address the default erasure that comes with changes, which is the focus of this paper. In other words, the trauma of immigration is not just a personal issue but a social one that requires psychological and historical retrieval. This concern extends beyond migration because there is growing research around trauma that has roots in historical and socio-political landscapes and manifests in the present. It starts with (self) dislocation, continues through perpetual cultural and historical dislocation, and through psychological, trauma-driven self over-identification

Pierre's work suggests that the absence of history, language, and family stories renders the immigrants stateless, apathetic, and unable to place themselves. The dilemma is while they seek to define a position in the world, all they encounter is trauma.

## **I.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I tried to summarize the key points related to Haitian society. I resumed the major events related to the historical process in Haiti. In addition, attempts were made to exhibit its social and cultural context. This chapter focused on the diverse cultural traumas that imprisoned Haitian body, especially women and its traumatic memories.





## **Chapter II: Memory and Trauma: Conceptualizing and Theories**

## II.1 Introduction

It can be difficult to take the suffering of a person and a society and depict it in a piece of literature. It requires talent and the ability to make the readers have a vivid picture of the story and its details. With mastery of narrative mechanisms that serve the reader's imagination and as the novel's title, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* suggests, the memories were central in this story, mainly the traumatic ones, which have become ingrained in Haitian society to become a burden on every person's soul. And from here begins a semi- autobiographical smooth narrative journey based on real and inspired events taken from personal and cultural experiences and implicit criticism of what made people prisoners of their traumatic memories that crystallized from the environment in which they lived. In this theoretical chapter, I will try to explain the psychoanalytic concepts, such as memory, trauma, traumatic memory, and Post-traumatic Stress. The chapter also will focus on the basic theories related to memory and trauma and how they interconnect. I will conclude with narrativization theory and the use of word's power as a tool to maintain the healing process .

## II.2 Memory (an overview)

Probably, memories shape who we are; without memories there's no existence , and no memories without memory. In scientific term, memory refers to the cognitive process by which information is encoded, stored, and retrieved. It refers to the mental capacity to retain, recall, and recognize past experiences, knowledge, and learned skills .In popular culture, memory is often understood as “some kind of physical thing that is stored in the brain; a subjective, personal experience that we can recall at will.” This conventional view has led to questions such as whether there is “a maximum amount of memories we can have and could be an infinite number" Zlotnik & Vansintjan (2019).

The concept of memory has been explored by many thinkers and researchers across different fields. The first who defined memory was Hermann Ebbinghaus, a pioneer in memory research, in his 1885 work "*Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology*": as the process of retaining and recalling information. He emphasized the role of attention and rehearsal in strengthening memory retention. Another definition suggested by Toketemu Ohwovoriole (2024) consider memory as the ability to store and retrieve information when needed.

In psychology, the senses involve sight, hearing, touch, and smell. In everyday life, you may see an apple that is red in color, hear music, feel a soft blanket, or smell freshly baked bread. The sensation processes begin with the sensory organs, which take sensory inputs and convert them into signals that can be understood by the brain. This process of conversion is known as encoding. The way this information is encoded is highly relative to the factors which influence the stimulus.

One of the most common factors which affects the encoding of information is “*attention*”, If an individual engrosses himself in what has been seen or heard, then there is a wider possibility of retention. For example, if a student is actively attending to all the explanations given to him or her in a class by the teacher, there is a big chance that this student will be able to remember things especially when he or she is undistracted. Moreover, emotionally charged events like extreme sadness, happiness, or even fear can greatly impact how strong the memory becomes. For instance, strong emotional memories include happy ones such as birthday parties and terrifying memories such as horrible accidents. Another factor is “*repetition*”, When we repeat something many times, our brain stores it more deeply. For example, repeating a new phone number out loud several times can help you remember it later. All these factors—attention, emotion, and repetition affect how well a memory is formed and how long it lasts in your brain (Squire et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2016; Serences, 2016).

Memory actually encompasses more than how the term is used in day-to-day speech. Foster, in his work *Memory: A Very Short Introduction* published in 2008, highlights that memory is one of the most basic building blocks of existence as a human being, along with behavior. To quote his work, “Without [memory], we would be unable to speak, run, identify objects, navigate our way around our environment, or maintain personal relationships” (03). As previously mentioned, memory involves far more than simply recalling past experiences; it is an intricate system that permits us to operate within our environment. For example, speaking involves accessing an extensive vocabulary and a complex system of grammar, and navigating a familiar quarter relies on constructed spatial memories of repeatedly traversing the area.

Foster also discusses how memory projects itself onto later events, he argues that “Memory is far more than simply bringing to mind information encountered at some previous time. Whenever the experience of some past event influences someone at a later time, the influence of the previous experience is a reflection of memory for that past event” (08). This implies that memory operates even when we are not consciously recalling a specific moment.

For example, if someone who has once touched a hot stove instinctively avoids placing their hand too close to heat again, that reaction is shaped by the influence of past experience. In this way, memory becomes a filter through which we process new events, shaping behavior, decision-making, and emotional responses.

In addition, how we experience events in life is bound to have an impact on how we think, feel, and perceive the world. Our memory is certainly a vital part of our personal identity ; who we are as a person largely depends on the memories we were able to create based on the places we have been to and the things we have witnessed. It is very possible for a child who is frequently always encouraged, for instance, for being inquisitive, to turn out to be an adult gratified with a confidence in learning new things owing to the memories that reinforce a sense of capability.

Foster point out that “Memories are intrinsically personal and so are internal; however, what we can do externally, such as having a conversation or recognizing someone as a friend, remembering some important details, acting on initiative ideas, succeeding at work, or even learning to walk, becomes possible only in the presence of having memory.”(52)

These simple daily activities rely upon the blend of various systems of memory, which include working memory that aids in the processing of information currently being received, while information that has been stored is retrieved from long-term memory. On a greater detail, seeing a friend’s face from far away involves the ability of the brain to access the stored picture of the person’s face and match it with the one being seen in real time. Often the matching part has to be done within seconds or even fractions of seconds. Similarly, doing one’s job may involve remembering elaborate instruction guides, tailoring solutions developed from experience to the ever-evolving challenges, and even recalling past interactions with co-workers in order to apply them in team management.

Foster’s explanation of memories as intricate recollections demonstrates that memories are often commercialized, yet they contain a deeply profound scope of social complexity. Memory also stores familial structure understanding, offering memories integrated into society. Knowing how to behave between family dinners and classrooms is learned and remembered after being exposed, corrected, and “iterated” throughout the passage of time. Memory aids an individual in maintaining social coherence whilst servicing personal continuity. It can be divided into four main types: sensory memory (SM), short- term memory (STM), working

memory (WM), long-term memory (LTM). Sensory memory is the brief retention of sensory information after the original stimulus has ended, such as remembering a sound, a touch, or a visual image. Researchers who view memory as stages suggest that all memories begin as sensory experiences. Though fleeting, these memories can transition into short-term or long-term memory if they are repeatedly experienced and associated with other memories. The three main types of sensory memory are iconic (visual), echoic (auditory), and haptic (tactile).

The Short-term memory, also called primary or active memory, allows for the temporary recall of information for about 15 to 30 seconds. It is less fleeting than sensory memory but not as lasting as long-term memory. Repeating or rehearsing information, like a phone number, can help retain it briefly, but without reinforcement, the details are usually forgotten within minutes. According to Cowan (2017), working memory is a system of components that holds a limited amount of information temporarily in a heightened state of availability for use in ongoing processing. Though sometimes considered a separate type of memory, it is often classified as a part of short-term memory, and the two terms are frequently used interchangeably, like solving a math problem or understanding a concept while reading.

The fourth type is LTM, where information is stored for extended periods and can be further categorized. McLeod (2023) explains that long-term memory (LTM) represents the final stage in the multi-store memory model and enables the durable storage of information and skills. He asserts that LTM can potentially hold unlimited information, and its retrieval depends more on accessibility than availability. He divides LTM into two main categories: explicit (declarative) memory, which requires conscious thought, and implicit (non-declarative) memory, which is unconscious and automatic. Explicit memory includes episodic memory (personal experiences) and semantic memory (general knowledge and concepts). Implicit memory, by contrast, includes procedural memory (skills and actions) and emotional conditioning. McLeod highlights that semantic and episodic memory reflect “knowing that” something is true, while procedural memory reflects “knowing how” to do things, such as riding a bicycle. The classification echoes Tulving’s (1972) influential distinction among episodic, semantic, and procedural memory is supported by Cohen and Squire’s (1980) work on the difference between declarative and procedural knowledge. For instance, when attending a lecture, you first perceive the information through SM, transfer it to STM, use WM to process it, and, with repeated review, it becomes part of your LTM, either implicit or explicit.

### II.2.1 Memory Role and Power

Memory helps in the formation of self- identity. It is more than just an accumulation of experiences; it actively enables an individual to relate to themselves across time. This phenomenon consolidates memories from various ages into a singular and effortless account, giving rise to the perception of a constant and stable existence . The Self-Memory System (SMS) theory of Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000) emphasizes the importance of autobiographical memory in the construction and maintenance of self- identity. As the name suggests, the self and memory are in constant interplay.

The self determines how and when autobiographical memories are retrieved and organized, and those memories reinforce and stabilize the self- concept. Memory does not only reflect identity but also actively shapes it. This becomes especially clear in the case of amnesia<sup>2</sup>. Patients experience a drastic change in identity with the loss of memory. From self-describing the amnesic states as disorienting and bizarre. Inaccessible self- defining memories result in a disconnection from their autobiographical account, which they perceive as strife fragmented, leading to the experience of altered identity. The phenomenon lucidly illustrates the idea that identity is not something that has been constructed but rather a narrative crafted through the passage of time and experiences. X

A person with Alzheimer's disease forgets the smallest details of his life, the names of close people like his children, or forgetting the way home, and then forgetting who he is. This is the most extreme thing that a person can be stripped of , his memories.

Memory does far more than help us recall the past; it quietly shapes the way we connect, relate, and understand others in our daily lives. In social situations, memory becomes a kind of inner compass. It draws on past experiences to help us interpret people's behaviors, anticipate their reactions, and respond with empathy. For example, when a friend is going through a heartbreak, we might not fully understand their unique pain, but we remember how we once felt when someone disappointed us. That memory, even if years old, helps us to comfort them more genuinely and be more present. Rather than simply storing information, memory is

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<sup>2</sup> Amnesia is a condition marked by the loss or inability to form memories, often due to brain injury, trauma, or illness.

constantly working behind the scenes to make our relationships smoother and more meaningful, and each day comes with a variety of decisions to make, and most, if not all, require careful evaluation before reaching a conclusion, unlike hasty spontaneous actions that can go awfully wrong for the decision-maker. More often than not, going through the decision-making process requires a deep reflection for one to be fully sure about what one is about to do. Without either ignoring or being conscious of it, each of us carries particular memories mentally and emotionally alongside guides, whether in the form of good and bad experiences, guiding choice selection in the present.

Infact, memories do act as a framework whereby one is able to evaluate options, risks, consequences, and even anticipate prospective outcomes. In situations where one is not sure of themselves, it is natural to turn to past experiences, be they learned or observed- it could be handy. Memories in this case are some of the best counselors, and due to that, people tend to consider decisions that have minimally risky outcomes. To explain, let us take the case of an individual deciding not to get involved in a certain relationship – there is a strong possibility they are trying to get access to cues , warning signals. It is highly probable too that the individual making such a decision has been through an emotionally crippling relationship ordeal in the past. Going through such situations requires a lot of careful thought evaluation .This intuition is backed by neuroscientific research. The studies indicate that the hippocampus<sup>3</sup> and the prefrontal cortex<sup>4</sup>, both of which are associated with memory, are also actively engaged in the processes of decision-making (Shohamy & Wagner, 2008).

This overlap indicates that remembering is not merely about reliving something from the past; it is more about anticipation of what is to come. When we remember how a past effort led to success, we become more willing to take a similar risk again. Conversely, when a memory carries emotional weight such as regret or shame, it can alter our future decisions by promoting avoidance, hesitation, or self-protection. This is especially true in emotionally charged decisions. Imagine someone deciding whether to forgive a betrayal. The choice is not made in isolation; it is shaped by a memory of how forgiveness unfolded in the past. Was it healing? Was it painful? Did it lead to reconciliation or disappointment? The person's memory, often

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<sup>3</sup> Hippocampus: Brain structure essential for forming and storing long-term memories.

<sup>4</sup> Prefrontal Cortex: Brain region responsible for decision-making, planning, and controlling behavior.



combined with emotional residue, becomes a compass pointing toward what they feel is the wiser or safer path.

Even in ordinary decisions, what to study, who to trust, and where to go, memory narrows the field of possibilities. It filters out irrelevant or harmful options and brings forward the ones that feel familiar or rewarding. As Wimmer and Shohamy (2012) explain, the brain engages in what is called “memory sampling,” retrieving fragments of past experiences that resemble the current situation to make more adaptive choices.

Memory is not just something we carry in our minds; it lives in our bodies, in our reactions, in the way we flinch at a sound or freeze in a moment we can’t explain. For people who have experienced trauma, memory can be especially complex. Unlike everyday memories that fade gently into the background, traumatic memories often stay vivid and raw, sometimes without being accessible through words or conscious thought. As Bessel van der Kolk (1994) explains, the brain tends to store these overwhelming experiences differently through sensations, emotions, and bodily responses rather than as clear, organized stories we can tell. This helps explain why someone who experienced abuse in childhood might not remember the details but still feels anxious in situations that echo the past. Their body remembers, even when their mind cannot. A voice, a smell, or even a sudden movement can trigger fear or panic that seems to come out of nowhere.

These reactions are not irrational; they are echoes of memory stored deep in the nervous system, where trauma often hides. Van der Kolk’s work, *“The Body Keeps the Score”* (2015), reminds us that healing from trauma cannot rely on talk alone. When words fail, the body speaks. This is why many trauma survivors find relief through therapies that go beyond traditional conversation methods like EMDR<sup>5</sup> or body-focused practices that gently help them reconnect with those hidden memories and process them safely. It’s not about forgetting the trauma, but about finally being able to understand it, name it, and place it in the past where it belongs. In this way, memory power is the wound and the key to healing. It holds the pain, yes, but it also carries the possibility of reclaiming one’s story. And when a person begins to piece

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<sup>5</sup> EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) is a psychotherapy approach designed to help individuals process and integrate traumatic memories by using bilateral stimulation—such as guided eye movements to reduce the emotional intensity of distressing experiences and support psychological healing.

together those broken memories, something remarkable happens: the past loses its power to control the present.

### II.2.2 Remembering, the Path to Relieve a Memory

Having memories would be futile without the ability to remember. Remembering is more than just accessing stored information; it's the act of bringing the past into the present, shaped by who we are now and what we need in the moment. If memory is like a library, then remembering is the act of walking in, picking a book off the shelf, and reading it. Or, if memory is a photograph, then remembering is looking at it and interpreting what it means to you now.

McNally distinguishes between memory and remembering as the first underlying storage of experiences and the second is a conscious act of retrieval, so memory is the system that stores past events, while remembering is the active engagement of the mind in bringing those stored events to the present. Astrid Erll explains in *Memory in Culture* (2011), remembering is always present-oriented and deeply constructed. It is not about replaying a perfect recording of what once happened, but about piecing together fragments of the past in ways that make sense to us now. “Re-membering,” she says, is exactly that: assembling memories according to our current thoughts, emotions, and needs.

Take, for example, the memory of a childhood friend. One day, you might recall how much you laughed together; another day, the memory may shift toward a painful goodbye. The memory itself hasn't changed, but what you remember and how you feel about it do because you have changed. Paul Ricoeur calls this the refiguration of memory, where remembering is always colored by the passage of time and by narrative reinterpretation. We are not just remembering events, we are retelling them to ourselves, often in ways that help us cope, connect, or understand.

This idea is echoed by memory theorist John Sutton, who notes that memory is a “tool for thought” rather than a fixed archive. It serves our identity, our goals, and even our survival. Maurice Halbwachs also reminds that even individual memories are shaped within social frameworks. What we remember and what we forget is often influenced by the people around us, the culture we live in, and the stories we are told. As Foster (2008) insightfully adds, memory is not just passive storage. It is a selective and interpretive process, meaning we choose

what to hold on to, often without realizing it. We might remember the smell of our grandmother's kitchen more vividly than what she said, not because her words were unimportant, but because that smell holds emotional weight. It's tied to love, comfort, or loss. So remembering is not a neutral act. It's a creative reconstruction, shaped by emotion, perspective, and purpose.

Every time we recall something, we're not simply revisiting the past; we're reshaping it. This is why, when studying memory, it is often more revealing to focus on the act of remembering itself rather than the event it tries to recall. Memory scholars have identified different types of remembering that demonstrate how multifaceted and functional this process is in our daily lives and identities .

Autobiographical remembering, for instance, involves recollections tied to our personal histories- those emotionally charged or identity-shaping events we revisit often. These memories provide a kind of narrative continuity, a sense of "the same person who experienced this event. "While the earlier discussion emphasized how remembering reshapes memories with each retrieval, here we see how that reshaping allows the self to adapt and evolve while maintaining coherence.

Meanwhile, collective remembering shifts our focus from the individual to the social. These are not just personal memories, but those shared across families, cultures, and nations—remembrances of colonial trauma, revolutions, or national celebrations. This collective dimension connects directly to Astrid Erll's idea that memory is never a mirror of the past, but a reflection of current needs and values. Collective remembering, then, functions as a cultural act: it maintains group identity and continuity, especially in the face of change or crisis.

Emotional remembering adds yet another layer. Here, we don't consciously choose to remember something; instead, a strong emotion or sensory trigger brings the past surging into the present. These moments confirm that remembering isn't always rational or intentional; it can be sudden, overwhelming, and deeply revealing of what still matters to us. Finally, there is procedural remembering, often overlooked in discussions of memory's emotional or cultural weight. These are the skills we recall and perform without storytelling like speaking, walking, or writing. While not autobiographical in the traditional sense, they are part of the embodied self, another layer of identity that memory silently supports.

Remembering has a deep impact on the formation of Identity. John Locke argued that memory is the very foundation of personal identity. What makes someone the same person over time, despite physical and psychological changes, is their ability to recall their past experiences. In this sense, remembering is more than a mental operation; it is the very condition for being a self. This complements Ricoeur's claim that identity is narratively constructed: we are the stories we tell ourselves, and remembering is the act of telling. But unlike fixed narratives, the act of remembering, as we've seen, is fluid, selective, and always in dialogue with the present. Therefore, remembering is not only how we preserve identity but also how we transform it.

### II.2.3 Traumatic Memory

In life, persons are exposed to shocks; who among us has not been betrayed or lost someone close to him? No one is immune to living such events, this moment leaving behind scars, sadness or depression forming what we call traumatic memory. Therefore, traumatic memory is what arises from events that leave psychological or physical impact. The impact depends on the person's interaction and if he or she coexists and copes with these traumatic memories or they represent a source of anxiety, fear, and emotional imbalance. Dabiec and Altemus define traumatic memory as "Traumatic memories are formed after an experience that causes high levels of emotional arousal and the activation of stress hormones. These memories become consolidated, stable, and enduring LTMs<sup>6</sup> through the synthesis of proteins only a few hours after the initial experience."

People who experience traumatic events find their lives isolated from others. Being exposed to a traffic accident, losing a home or relatives due to a natural disaster, or being threatened with death is not something that is easy to overcome, no matter how strong or steadfast you are (Ethlers et., al 2000). And in psychology, traumatic memory refers to the way that individuals remember distressing or life-threatening events in a manner that differs from ordinary memories. These memories can be fragmented, intrusive, and emotional, making them a significant aspect of conditions. Traumatic memories are often difficult to overcome because they are painful in nature (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1995),

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<sup>6</sup> LTMs long term Memories are stored information that remains in the brain for an extended duration—ranging from hours to an entire lifetime. These memories are formed through a process called consolidation, often involving structural changes in the brain and protein synthesis, especially when the experience is emotionally significant.

For years since the term traumatic memory appeared, the debate has been about whether traumatic memories have the same processing, and recovery, and development as normal memories. Opinion has been divided between those who support that by yes, there is no difference between them, and others who took the initiative to put forward their ideas and arguments that the two do not follow a single approach and each has its own differences.

Delving into how traumatic memories are remembered by the person who experienced them and what makes them different from normal memories is a starting point for treating many of the mental and psychological problems resulting from them.

The first to come up with the idea that traumatic memories are not like others was Sigmund Freud. In the late nineteenth century, Freud believed that when a person goes through a traumatic event or experience that is beyond his capabilities, the “ego,” which is responsible for dealing with reality, protects the self by distorting and suppressing that painful memory in the subconscious mind. This is what is called psychogenic amnesia<sup>7</sup>, where it is difficult for the person to remember the details of that incident (Freud, 1895). Gant (1889) supported this concept on the basis that stress reaches its peak when a shocking event occurs, causing the mind to be unable to form a coherent memory of the event, meaning that the mind becomes confused and unable to build a memory as a result of the repercussions of that incident, and this was confirmed by many neurologists that severe psychological stress disrupts the brain's ability and memory and limits the quality of information processing, storage, and retrieval.

In his theory of biological psychology, Van der Kolk (1994) confirmed after analyzing several cases, that the traumatic experience narrows the scope of attention and disrupts the areas responsible for forming harmonious and sequential memories in the brain. Modern science has confirmed the classical theses on this matter, starting with what Freud proposed through the development of detection and diagnosis tools, as the American Psychiatric Association (2013) included the fifth Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)<sup>8</sup> as the official, approved guide in the world for diagnosing psychological disorders,

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<sup>7</sup> Psychogenic amnesia is a type of memory loss caused by psychological trauma rather than physical injury. It involves an inability to recall important personal information, often related to stressful or traumatic events. This condition serves as a defense mechanism and may include identity loss or temporary travel in severe cases (fugue state).

<sup>8</sup> The DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition) is a standardized manual used by clinicians to diagnose mental health disorders. It categorizes a wide range of psychiatric conditions,

used by all workers, researchers, and those interested in mental health. Its criteria confirm that exposure to traumatic events leads to the disruption of natural memory mechanisms, such that traumatic memories become disorganized or difficult to remember. This explains some disorders, such as psychological dissociation or defensive repression. These old analyses were proved and placed in a precise scientific framework based on developments in neuroscience and clinical psychology. We cannot discuss traumatic memory without mentioning post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

#### **II.2.4 Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the most common psychological disorder and evidence of the long-term effects of traumatic experiences. It is a disorder that affects memory after a person experiences a painful event, where memories of that event flow irregularly, even if it is not desired to remember it. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is defined in the ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders as "a mental and behavioral disorder" (Sartorius et al., 1992) that develops from experiencing a traumatic event, such as sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, warfare and its associated traumas, natural disaster, traffic collision, or other threats to a person's life or well-being, it was recognized in 1980, and it was prevalent, before was given a precise conceptualizing. The symptoms of this syndrome are represented by unconscious processes that are difficult to avoid or control nightmares, vivid flashbacks when feeling like the trauma is happening right now, intrusive thoughts or images, intense distress at real or symbolic reminders of the trauma and physical sensations such as pain, sweating, nausea or trembling.

These symptoms continue for a long period, defined as at least a month or more since the event infected people, unlike normal people, whose symptoms do not last for a long period depending on the severity of the event (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, pp. 271–280). These symptoms have been documented since the time of the ancient Greeks (Carlstedt, 2009), as they appeared after diseases with the same signs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Samuel Pepys described some similar symptoms that spread among people after the London fire of 1666 (O'Brien, 1998) and during the World War, these mental disorders were

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such as mood, anxiety, and psychotic disorders. Each disorder is defined by specific diagnostic criteria based on observable symptoms and behaviors

given many terms, the most prominent of which were shell shock and war nerves (Herman, 2015). Before psychologists and neurologists agreed on one term, which is the PTSD post traumatic stress disorder, and this was after the symptoms spread among American soldiers in the Vietnam War (Friedman, 2013).

Analytical studies of structural MRI have shown a correlation between reduced total brain volume and reduced cranial volume, as well as decreased volume in the hippocampus, insula, and anterior cingulate cortex in patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (Bromis et al., 2018). This is a far-fetched explanation, demonstrating that memory is disrupted during any unusual event. Individuals suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder show inactivity in several areas of the brain, including the anterior cingulate cortex (dorsal and entorhinal), and the medial prefrontal cortex, which are parts responsible for understanding and regulating emotions and feelings, especially in cases of stress and fear (Etkin & Wager, 2007).

According to a clinical study conducted using the amygdala-centric model of post-traumatic stress disorder, the main problem lies in the overactivity of the amygdala and the failure of other regions, such as the medial prefrontal cortex and hippocampus, to keep pace with its activity and to calm it down, especially in an attempt to extinguish a feeling that no longer exists. Let us assume, for example, a retired soldier who has experienced the horrors of war, explosions, and other things. While he is walking on the road, he suddenly hears the loud sound of a motorcycle. He feels terrified, sweats, his temperature rises, and his heartbeat accelerates, as if the explosion of war is happening now. Here, the amygdala begins to work and deal with this sound as if it is a real danger, and inside the amygdala there is an area called the lateral basolateral nucleus (BLA), which is what connects the sound of the explosion that happened in the past with similar sounds, which is the sound of the motorcycle now. This action is called fear learning. The lateral basal nucleus then sends a signal to the central nucleus (CeA), which is responsible for triggering the physical fear response, which includes tension, rapid breathing, fear, and perhaps even a desire to escape. Normally, the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) should step in and tell the amygdala to calm down; it's just the sound of a motorcycle, not bombs exploding in a war. But in PTSD, it doesn't work, or it's simply an underactive gland, and so on.

The hippocampus, whose role is to help the brain distinguish between the past, the traumatic event that occurred in the past and no longer exists, and the present which is the safe situation. It is weak, so it is difficult for the person to differentiate between a past situation and

a lived situation that is not similar to the old one. The result is that the person experiences the exact same shock again, even if there was no real danger, just because his brain made a mistake in constructing a complete memory.

PTSD is one of many disorders that occur as a result of a traumatic event and explains how memories are different in such a type. But the controversy is always there, as there are those who believe that traumatic memories follow the same pattern as normal memories, the only difference being that traumatic memories are characterized by an element of surprise and tension ( McNally ,2003), Shobe & Kihlstrom ,1997).

Sotgiu & Mormont (2008) have confirmed that traumatic memories are very vivid and powerful memories. That is, it is characterized by intense feelings and the strength of the physical response that accompanies them and yet are subject to normal memory mechanisms such as forgetting, confusion, and reconstruction . Waters et al. (2013), suggest that people remember the traumatic event but with the help of surrounding details to form a coherent story. This is the same thing when remembering normal memories. They are retrieved through the environment that is fertile ground for retrieval. Studies conducted on a group of eyewitnesses to crimes found that the witnesses retained precise details about what they witnessed even after a long period of time had passed. This supports the idea that traumatic memories are clear but not photographic. The details may change, be forgotten or be reformulated according to the psychological and social situation and last for a long time, but they can fade over time. This is the same thing that happens to normal memories. Wagenaar and Groeneweg (1990) indicate that even the deepest memories change over time.

### **II.3 Individual Memory and Collective Memory ; two Sides of One Coin**

The relation that interconnects between the individual and the group authorizes both kinds of memory, an individual one and a collective one.

#### **II.3.1 Individual Memory**

The individual, as a unit from the group, is affected by and affects it, and it is an intertwined relationship that cannot be separated. Memory in its individual context is part of its collective one, because individual memory is the product of a collective effort. We cannot



have a personal memory without resorting to the presence of others. If a person succeeds in a test, his memory is embodied by the people who were around him, encouraged him, and believed in his abilities. We cannot embody a memory for ourselves while we are isolated. Before we delve into the two modes of memory, we must distinguish between the individual and the group. For Maurice Halbwachs <sup>9</sup>(1952), the individual is a socially determined singularity meaning that a person's intuitions, thoughts, beliefs and principles are derived from the environment in which he lives, from his group in his society, whether family, friends, or his people, etc. While the term "group" is controversial for him as it is not a fixed term, it means many things at different times. First, it means people when they come together or the way people communicate with each other and the thing that unites them from memories, identity, and society since the society is made up of group of groups.

In this way, the term society is a metaphysical notion and not exactly conceptual, as it ties all the other concepts, notions and so on. Either way, society is a collective being, broader than the groups, and includes them because society has a traditional sense of social structure. In this sense, society is responsible for providing support for groups so that they have a common reference in order to establish some correspondence and communication.

### II.3.1.1 Perception

According to Halbwachs' theory, the individual as social construct is divided into an interpretive being, the part responsible for rational analysis of the world, and a sensitive being, who perceives the world through the senses. The sensitive being stands to the eyewitness situation, in which someone was present in a determined event and witness the incident. Remembrances emerge from the relation between the individual and an event of the reality. Halbwachs inserts the notion of *sensitive intuition* as the remembrance's elements, which came from the individual perception, and the notion of social thinking as the elements that came from the society.

In this respect, Halbwachs states that "there would be in the base of all remembrances, the evocation of a purely individual conscious state, which, for distinguish from the perceptions where there are elements of social thinking" (Halbwachs, 1997 [1950], p.67).

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<sup>9</sup> Maurice Halbwachs French Philosopher and sociologist 1877-1945. One of the first to address "collective memory" his book *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* 1925 and *La mémoire collective* 1950 s are a legacy for contemporary studies to this day on the subject of memory and sociology.

Remembrance is mere a representation of the event occurring in the past, the process of remembrance reflects the reality's snip through the perception operation. Thus, the past event is a portion of the reality with some highlighted parts.

### II.3.1.2 Evocation

Any evocation of a memory demands a reflection made by the individual, i.e., “the reflection precedes the evocation of the remembrances” (Halbwachs, 2004 [1925], p. 45). The evocation of a memory can be achieved when the individual is in a conscious state: “the memory operation supposes a constructive and rational activity of the mind” (Halbwachs, 2004 [1925], p.55). Therefore, remembering is never a dive in the unconscious toward the remembrance maintained in it. When a remembrance is evoked, we displace ourselves from the present and from the “rational thought, allowing us to reconduct the past until we enter in contact with the former reality” (Halbwachs, 2004 [1925], p. 39).

Halbwachs does not comprehend the past evoked by the present through the pure remembrances of the experiences in the unconscious state. This idea of reconstruction of the past from the present requires the use of the unconscious as a kind of trunk, which conserves the remembrances in a pure state

[...] when we remember, we take the present of the general ideas system as a starting point, which is always tangible, the language system and the reference point adopted by the society, i.e., of all the expression means which are available to us. We combine them in a way to find again a detail or a hue of figures or past events, and our former consciousness states. This reconstruction is nothing but an approximation (Halbwachs, 2004 [1925], p.40-1)

The individual builds and reconstructs his remembrances from the social frameworks of memory of the group that facilitate the localization of a past event and what matters are the ones located in the present moment of a group. The process of remembering for the individual takes place within the framework of collectives such as family, religion, social division and

customs. A person only remembers what the group allows. Therefore, Halbwachs (1997) argues that there is no purely individual memory in its origin, but rather every memory has a collective character to some degree. "It is through the group that the individual memory is constructed, filtered, and reconstructed"(37). In her interpretation and conceptual reconstruction of Halbwachs ideas, Cordero (2014) in her "Conceptual (Re)construction of Maurice Halbwachs' Theory of Collective Memory points out "they turn into lost mnemonic contents, which would float without social realization, without interpretation" (p22). Individual memory needs collective support, meaning that it is only valuable when it receives interaction and listening from others. Otherwise, it dies and disappears in a limited individual space.

### II.3.2 Collective Memory

Collective memory first emerged as a notion and concept in the sociological work of Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1994). "*La mémoire collective*" (Halbwachs, 1950) is his second book in which he conceptualized collective memory as the 'living memory' of one's social group. And if history represents the 'dead frame' of the past, including dates, stories, and events thoroughly organized but empty of human existence, collective memory represents the past as it is remembered and lived by those who experienced it. For him, memory stops where the group does.

The collective memory has a deeper relation with a group than the relation established with the individual memory. This occurs because all the elements of collective memory are provided and supported by the group. The moment of perception by the collective being is operated by the individual consciousness.

Collective memory in Halbwachs' analysis is not limited to the memories of individuals, but rather it is a mass of shared memories among members of a social group that derives its meaning from the collective current of thought. It is built through the collective thinking stream that represents the past according to the current situation of the group and its interests. Collective memory never exists in the isolated individual mind, even being supported in the individual memories to be put in movement. For instance, an individual with Black skin belonging to an ethnic group that gathers all Black people who have experienced "slavery" and share the same experience, memories, struggles, and feelings regarding this issue, and this represents a collective memory. In this respect, Halbwach claims;

On the other hand, the individual is able to simply behavior as a member of a group, contributing to evoke and keep the individual memories, in a way that they interest the group. If the memories often interpenetrate each other, the individual memory, specially, can, in order to confirm its remembrances, to better make them accurate and even to fill some gaps, support itself in the collective memory, relocates it in the collective memory, merges itself with the collective memory and this does not mean that the individual memory will not follow his own way and all of this exterior support is progressively assimilated and incorporated to its substance. The collective memory, on the other hand involves the individual memories, however does not confuse itself with them. The collective memory often evolves from its own laws and some individual remembrances sometimes penetrate it, they change when placed in a set, which does not correspond to a personal conscious anymore (Halbwachs, 1997 [1950], p.98).

Collective memory sticks to the “social opinions that are suspended in the group thinking” rather than the object that it represents (Halbwachs, 1997 [1950], p. 221). The individual memory resorts to the collective memory that is a mass of common remembrances constructed in parallel of a stream of collective thinking when missing the certitude of something in the past. This mass of remembrances is especially composed of:

[...] remembrances of events and experiences related to a big part of the members and these resulting from personal lives and from the relation with close groups [...]. Those remembrances which are related to a minor part of the group or to a single individual become to be in a second level, although they still are products generated within the group limits and embraced by the group memory (Halbwachs, 1997 [1950], p. 51)

A remembrance is always a common feature and sacred part of the collective memory. This latter is usually understood as a set of common individual remembrances. The individual always summarizes a part of the collective memory, which is not possible to be apprehended as a whole. Therefore, the individual always establishes two positions facing the collective memory: sometimes acting as an individual remembrance that is a part of the collective

memory and sometimes representing a member of a group, which along with the other members, operates as a part of this mass of remembrances .

The members of a group who share their remembrances help to aggravate the sense of solidarity amongst these members. They also develop a sense of coherence and vividness. The more the number of group is, the more solidarity and coherence is possible ;

If the rest of the collective memory takes its strength and duration from the set of individuals support, it is because as a member of a group the individuals are whom remember. From that common mass of remembrances, each one supported on the other, they will not be the same that will appear to them. It is possible to say that each individual memory is a viewpoint of the collective memory and this viewpoint changes according to the place that I occupy in the group and this same place changes according to the relations that I keep with other environment (Halbwachs, 1997 [1950], p. 94)

In his book, *Cultural trauma, Slavery, and the Formation of African American Identity*, Ron Ehrman (2001), states that collective memory helps us to discover who we are, the place we came from, where we are now and where we are going to in historical, political and cultural contexts (6). In collective memory, past, present and future unite together and exhibit a significant process in the negotiation of individual identity (6). Therefore, it is very essential for people to be able to identify/recognize themselves with a specific social group or groups. And this identification is based on ethnicity, history, sex, and so on. Thus, collective memory coincides and couples with collective identities .

In society, every group has a collective memory about a certain issue, which is what distinguishes it from others, and it differs according to its experiential background. People who have experienced colonialism have a collective memory that distinguishes them from others.

Historical memory in the Halbwachsian theory is different from collective memory. Historical memory is unique, ordered, and based on rational organization of events of the past and dates. However, the collective memory conforms to the memory of many groups and is based on the stream of collective thinking, which is interconnected to the interaction with the individual memory.

A historical memory offers tools for the individual memory, including dates and specific locations that can be taken by a given group as social frameworks of memory that aid in marking out the memory of individuals. On the other hand, the collective memory is a living history ; is the social context through which our individual memory can be supported. The historical memory is steady and is not reshaped by the group or individual, while collective memory "[...] is a continuous stream of collective thinking, a continuity that has nothing artificial because it does not retain the past but what is still alive and is able to live in the consciousness of the group that maintains it" (Halbwachs, 1997 [1950], p. 131).

A prominent element in shaping any collective memory is language. Wartsch (2002), a researcher in the field of collective memory and discourse, believes that language is the decisive medium for constructing social memory. The way we narrate the past, the stories we tell, and the linguistic frameworks we use shape how we remember and understand the shared past .

Jeffrey k.Olick (1999) , in his work *Collective Memory*, declares that collective memory is not only directed towards the past, but it also has an impact on directing the present by influencing identities, values, and social beliefs. Therefore, different discourses, whether historical or cultural, must be monitored and analyzed to direct it.

#### **II.4 Trauma : A Theoretical Framework**

Usually, all the memory studies based on “ trauma ” as a central issue in the memory side used to describe the state of a person who feels insecure, psychologically unstable, and emotionally unstable as a result of a certain event.

Trauma breaks the safe course of life that makes it so harmful when you live every day on the ruins of something harsh that has passed, but it makes you uncomfortable, you wait for something worse to happen. Instead of enjoying the moments you have, you remain afraid of the unknown. Here, the person's thinking and behavior are affected.

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5), trauma is defined as when an individual person is exposed “to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013, p. 271).

Felman (2002) defines it as “a shock that creates a psychological split or rupture” (171). It is a state in which a person feels as if he is separated from himself and from the world around him, Tal (1995) in his paper, *Reading the Literature of Trauma* described trauma as, “a life threatening event that displace one's preconceived notions about the world” (59). In other words, a person's outlook changes towards the environment around him and towards people , it is not the same as it was before experiencing the shock. It was described in a broader context when, Horowitz (1989) mentioned it as a sudden and forceful event that overwhelms a person's ability to respond to it, recognizing that a trauma need not involve actual physical harm to oneself; an event can be traumatic if it contradicts one's worldview and overpowers one's ability to cope :it is not necessary that it be the result of an event, but sometimes people are unable to adapt, whether in life as a whole or in a situation or condition, which creates a feeling of helplessness since there is an overlap in many factors to cause it. Loger Lukhurst describes the trauma as a “ conceptual knot”.

Due to its complex nature and the different cases, it is difficult to give it an accurate definition due to the overlap of many influential points. For a good while, psychological trauma was considered a “mental disorder , but some have diagnosed it as a normal reaction as a survival mechanism (Turnbull,1998). This natural process does not become pathological unless it persists or is left without follow-up or treatment.

Additionally, according to Scott (1990), there's what is known as “ the complex trauma ” ; when a person experiences the same type of trauma overtime or different types repeatedly. People who have complex trauma, their treatment requires a special protocol that matches their deep needs for healing, because it is repeatedly refined in the mind of the afflicted person, creating a disorder in the regulation of emotions and difficulty in adapting (Van Der kolk et al (1996).

In his seminal work *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), Herman Suggests a change in DSM criteria and includes “The complex Post traumatic disorder” as a new term representing the peak of trauma instead of the PTSD that I have mentioned it before. Symptoms that include any post traumatic event and are not as severe as complex trauma simply because people with complex trauma often have additional disturbances in their ability to self regulate beyond those seen in PTSD .

#### **II.4.1 The Aftermath of Trauma on the Individual Perspective**

Perhaps Freud's studies (1927) in the theory of psychoanalysis were the basis to start understanding the psychological effects that arise from trauma are the result of repression, especially those related to sexual experiences in early life. These unacceptable memories, filled with intense emotions, are stored at the subconscious level and appear in the form of physical symptoms. This is what is called somatic memory, as memories are kept implicitly and affect the individual's behavior and relationships even after a long time has passed. Freud's theory has been proven and developed later on with more scientific evidence and development.

The repercussions of trauma mainly appear after some time and not necessarily at the moment of occurrence, and this is what forces it. The expression follows from Cathy Caruth in her book, *Assume their Force Precisely in Their Temporal Delay* (1993). Being influenced by Freud, she emphasized the belatedness concept, which means delayed perception or posteriority; that is, the trauma is not understood at the moment and its effect is not noticed until later. Shedding light on what's next the trauma, each individual reacts to shock differently depending on factors, the most important of which is age according to Kolk (1993).

Exposure to trauma at a young age is more difficult than at other ages because it affects brain development. Research suggests that “the first stage in a cascade of events produced by early trauma and/or maltreatment involves the disruption of chemicals that function as neurotransmitters (e.g., cortisol, norepinephrine, dopamine), causing escalation of the stress response” (Heim, Mletzky, Purselle, Musselman, & Nemeroff (2008). These chemical responses can then negatively affect critical neural growth during specific sensitive periods of childhood development, and can even lead to cell death. Being raped at a young age or seeing your parents fighting brutally every day is something that is really hard to erase from your memory definitely. The impact will be so bad and will grow, causing psychological complexes and inability to make decision. There is always fear of the future, anxiety, confusion, hesitation, negativity, fatigue, emotion, sadness, and the inability to overcome and control feelings and intense intrusive recollections that continue despite a return to safety.

Usually, when we talk about trauma, we associate it with the psychological aspect, but the latter has effects on the physical, organic side. Janet (1907) indicates that “traumatic memory is inscribed beneath the threshold of consciousness as a 'bodily memory’” (132). Common physical disorders and symptoms include somatic complaints; sleep disturbances; gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, neurological, musculoskeletal, respiratory, and dermatological



disorders occurs as a result of a shock that causes a malfunction in the level of organ function due to the high level of cortisol resulting from stress, which causes sterile health problems.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and publications on health outcome (2012) declared that exposure to traumas leads to biological change and high response to stress. During his long-term study, *Trauma and Aging :A Thirty year follow up*, Krystal, H. (1995) examines the effects of facing trauma. He clarifies that one of the most dangerous consequences of trauma is when a person resorts to suppressing his memories or escaping from them as a defense mechanism and refusing to acknowledge what he experienced. This leads to a split in personality, stripping himself of feelings and thoughts. This detachment from the self leads the person to believe that his feelings, thoughts, and nightmares are his enemy as a compulsive imposition. Therefore, the sense of the “I” becomes weak, psychological gaps increase , and exaggerated symptoms such as pseudophakia appear. Here, self-control and reactions become very difficult to the point of losing the sense of self .

#### **II.4.2 Collective Trauma (cultural trauma)**

Collective trauma is a new approach that has been added to the experience of trauma. Kai Erikson (1995) explained that social trauma can occur at the community level as it does at the individual level. Jeffrey C. Alexander’s definition of cultural trauma resumes carefully what this type of trauma indicates. He states in “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma” (2004) that:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (1)

Therefore, the experiences of colonialism and slavery are prominent examples to reveal how groups are affected collectively, and how colonialism and slavery as traumatic events affect their collective memory and the formation of their identities.

While individual trauma is related to the person, cultural trauma includes a group of people. Eyerman (2001) explains this issue in the following way:

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and

the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. (2)

Eyerman explains how the effects of trauma on the mind differ from those on the cultural level:

As opposed to psychological and physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. (Eyerman, 2001:2).

In his book, *the formation of an African American identity*, explored through the theory of cultural trauma (Alexander et al. 2001), and here “trauma” in question is slavery. It is not seen from the perspective of institution or even experience, but as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounds the identity-formation of a people.

In a crucial explanation, Alexander continues by contending that the interpretation of the incident and the way it is expressed within a community or social group is more traumatic than the actual event itself. This implies a contentious, often complex, social process through which the nature of collective trauma is described. The most common method of capturing this mechanism is through narration, which may be found in a variety of discourse modes, including films, political speeches, religious sermons, and, of course, literature. Indeed, Literature has a significant impact on how cultural trauma is communicated and portrayed.

In the seminal work on slavery and cultural trauma, Eyerman examines how African American identity is formed through the lens of cultural trauma by several chosen authors, including Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Langston Hughes, and Maya Angelou. He also emphasizes how these authors' writings provide varying perspectives on the collective identity of Black Americans vis-à-vis slavery (Eyerman, 2001).

Cultural traumas are not created by the event itself, but rather are formed or recognized

over time by specific carrier groups or what Alexander (2004) referred to as agents of memory. The ability of memory-making and meaning-making organizations to create cultural trauma is a function of their success; the more powerful the voice, the more likely the incident is to have a lasting and widespread impact on the community.

### II.4.3 Narrativization as Tool Towards the Healing

Healing sometimes requires courage and patience because the long journey humans are living is full of fears and uncertainties. Not everyone is capable of that. People avoid confrontation only because it reminds them of how weak they are. They prefer to live in suffering behind their silence because it has become a safe zone, even if it causes them pain. Therefore, not everyone goes through trauma can heal.

Cathy Caruth (1996), in her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, emphasizes her therapeutic narrative theory that “trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or a simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language”(04). This means that trauma is not only a psychological illness, but rather a wound that wants to be narrated and emerge from the realm of repression. Furthermore, healing does not come from complete understanding, but rather from facing what we do not understand and sharing it with others to lighten the burden.

Peter Goggin and Maureen Goggin (2005) in their research about the role of narrativization, assert that "trauma can only be tackled, grappled with discursively; it is not until it is spoken/written that trauma is made present" (29). If we want to positively influence the traumatized person, we must have the trauma story, and here lies the essence of the narrative, where suffering is transformed into somewhat understandable words and unravels the knots with each word narrated, given that every person is the product of his own words. Through narrative, we re-examine ourselves, offer new interpretations, and look at ourselves and our experiences from different perspectives. This is what is common in modern psychiatry,

where people are placed in a safe environment and asked to narrate what they experienced. White and Epston (1990), stated, "Through the telling and retelling of stories, people develop a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives" (p. 13).

Cathy (1996) continues that listening to others is an ethical act within the storytelling process. The suffering of others cannot be taken as a source of entertainment or diminished in value when literature acts as a medium that captures people's pain and gives it a voice. Listening to someone who has survived trauma is an ethical act which makes the road to recovery easier and worth it.

## **II.5 Conclusion**

If a person is unable to cope with and overcome his memories, especially the difficult ones, they crystallize into a shock that results in dire consequences that hinder the course of life and make it difficult. Thus, in this chapter, I tried to focus on the main concepts and theories related to memory and trauma. In addition, I focused on the ways and tools towards the path of relief and healing.



### **Chapter III: Trauma and Memory in “Breath, Eyes, Memory”**

### III.1 introduction

Edwidge Danticat's novel addresses personal experiences full of the sense of trauma. It is through this novel that she represents a mirror of many events circulating in society as a whole. Through the protagonist, Sofie Cacao, she discusses themes such as grief, shame, dual identity, social and moral corruption. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the novel from different angles and uncover the psychological wounds of the characters and the memories that shape a collective trauma and highlight the idea of recovering.

In this chapter, I tried to analyze the character's psychological journey by depicting the individual experiences and then the system of slavery as a shared memory and collective trauma, shedding light on the recovery path through the narrativization process.

### III .2 Depiction of Mother and Daughter's Personal Traumas: Immigration and Sexual Violence

It is almost self-evident that Afro-Caribbean writers have succeeded in conveying the harsh experience that was a series of traumas from history to society to beliefs. We can taste this in their writings, where the individual and collective memory have been characterized by lacks, lacunae, and traumatized events that shape their union past. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) by Edwidge Danticat is one of those novels that was woven with threads of miserable reality.

In her novel, Edwidge Danticat, with the voice of the protagonist Sofie Cacao, narrates the struggle of Haitian society with memories, especially those carrying pain, fear, and suffering within her folds, in a wounded society, where women continue to live under the social norms' weight, with no choice but to survive.

Through the voice of the protagonist and the narrator of this novel, Sofie cacao, the reader enjoys a deep reading through her words that depict the psychological development of each case in the story. Her journey began as a little girl raised in the arms of her aunt Atie. Their relationship was good under all that emotionally charged atmosphere. Both of them feel the emptiness of losing something, and each one expresses it differently; their lives consist of struggles, distraction, insecurity, loss and repression. The first bump Sophie faced when she was eleven years, it was time to travel to her mother Martine. It wasn't planned, the two of them needed time to accept that. Atie knew that she was just a chapter in Sophie's life. What is

common is that the mother is the one who raises and not who gives birth. It is completely opposite to what Atie recognized “We are each going to our mother”( BEM 19), the son's place is always with his mom.

The same for Sophie. She was not ready to part with the person who had been with her all these years, the one who taught her cleaning, love, and responsibility “[...] I tried to hide my tears behind the teacup , my tears had already fallen and hit my cheeks ”( BEM 25), we notice that Atie asked Sophie “ to be strong as mountain”, but deep down, she knew that Sophie's presence made her feel valuable, regardless of the shortcomings in other areas of her life (BEM 17) .

Sophie's journey was full of danger at a time when Haiti was experiencing a dangerous political escalation; people were dying everywhere , you can lose your life at any moment, there's no security, only fear spread among souls ( BEM 30).

Atie was looking at the bright side of this. Sophie would finally have a chance to leave this hell and live in a safe environment that would encourage her to be an educated and independent woman. The women Atie never could be, While Sophie, all she saw was that she would leave her home. when she expressed her loss, “are you seeing what are you leaving” “ I know I'm leaving you” (BEM 29).

Sophie never knew her mother except through a picture or the nightmares she sees every time . “[...] I lay in bed , waiting for the nightmare where my mother would finally get to take me away ” (BEM 22) , this passage draws attention to her emotional distance from Martine .

Finally, the moment came when Sofie met her mom. She wasn't the same as she had pictured in her mind; she was completely different, as she states :

“As a child, the mother I had imagined for myself was like Erzullie, the lavish Virgin Mother. She was the healer of all women and the desire of all men. She had gorgeous dresses in satin, silk, and lace, necklaces, pendants, earrings, bracelets, anklets, and lots and lots of French perfume. She never had to work for anything because the rainbow and the stars did her work for her. Even though she was far away, she was always with me. I could always count on her, like one counts on the sun coming out at dawn ” (BEM 35) .



All she found was a broken, tired woman with flabby features, as if she had never stopped working in the cornfields, Martine wanted to breathe new life into the relationship and fill the void that had grown over the years with love and care despite all the circumstances. She didn't hesitate to tell Sophie that she would always be by her side and that she should work hard and focus on her studies: “ I want you to go to school. ” “I want you to get a doctorate, or even higher than that ”( BEM 49) . In her view , it was the only thing that made a person valued. “These were buried hopes of Martine's that she couldn't fulfill, so she saw Sophie as her only hope” (BEM 36) .

Although Sophie is a conservative Haitian girl, she finds herself in a completely different society where Haitians are subjected to racism (BEM 42) ; it was not easy at all. She had no choice but to start this new chapter as Martin's daughter and Atie's child. Sophie was always under her mother's strict supervision until she realized her mother's experience with sexual violence, which explains her condition :“Later that night, I heard that same voice screaming as though someone was trying to kill her [...] When she saw me, she quickly covered her face with her hands and turned away”( BEM 40). This passage touches on the harsh feelings caused by a harsh experience, yes it happened a long time ago, but it is still stuck in Martin's memory, and her body is still living it. Even though she left her homeland to escape her memory, she didn't realize that our memories, even that brings pain, are belong to us. We can't never get rid of them.

The hardest thing Sofie faced was her new emotional state when finally meeting someone was presenting home and wisdom : “he was old. he was old like God is old to me, ever present and full of wisdom.”( BEM 52) Joseph was a very nostalgic person bringing peace to Sofie's life and putting her in a conflict between what she wanted and the limits that her mother set. Also, It's necessary to explain Sofie's feelings for him, as he represents the fatherhood she never had : “ he was older than her on age and in thoughts” (BEM 67).

However, her relationship with him forced her to experience the worst thing in her life : virginity test“ I tried to tell her that I had not done anything wrong, but it was three in the morning.....she made me lie on my bed and she tested me. ” This position embodies that women do not even have the right to their own body , “there are secret you cannot keep ” for Sofie. This physical violence is trauma itself, the image will certainly remain in her memory and bring psychological pain, shame, and disgust. It's not easy watching your mother exposed you to this harm every time just because traditions say so. The only way to get rid of suffering each time

she was subjected to “*testing*” was when she decided to lose her hymen herself and transform from a bleeding woman into a free butterfly representing a rebellion against what the generations faced before .

Despite this, the wounds did not stop bleeding. Sofie was struggling with her trauma, so she took a bold step; return to her roots, to Haiti, looking for answers, but not alone this time, with Brigitte Ife Woods, the cacao women’s granddaughter. There, she found an explanation from Grandma Ife that testing was every woman's duty toward her daughter's honor : “if a child dies, you do not die , but if your child is disgraced, you are disgraced, and people, they think daughters will be raised trash with no man in the house.”( BEM 122). It passed down through generation ; Atie , Martine, Sofie and all the Haitian girls experience it (BEM 124) . It represents a collective trauma faced not only by the Cacao women. Grandma’s answer somewhat eased Sofie's anger, but it never healed her . All she has to do now is to liberate herself because she becomes a mother too (BEM 124) . And a person cannot be liberated unless he forgives, the first step to that was to declare peace with her mother despite all the harm she caused .

From chapters 23 to 29, all that can be concluded is the remorse that the mothers bear towards the pain that the girls experienced embodied in Grandma Ifé when she says : “ my Heart, it weeps like a river [...] for the pain we have caused you ” (BEM 124) , and Martine, when she asks Sofie:“ you forgive me . don't you? ” (BEM 154). Through these two passages, Sophie realized that every woman in her family was a victim. Sometimes circumstances force us to hurt the people we love, not just because we want to but because it's what must be done .

Through analyzing this novel, it can be noticeable that the memories of sexual violence build a prominent trauma, and it is the most noticed trauma faced by the main characters, mainly Martine and Sofie who subjected to two types of sexual violence; testing and rape. Testing could be regarded as a form of sexual violence. Due to the way mothers do it and the harm it causes , it is similar to sexual exploitation.

When women are exposed to testing, they lose their power and become weak. But once they become mothers themselves, they regain that power and take control of their daughters. This barbaric inherited violence against the woman's body and psyche could be seen as a female oppression or a gender bias that lead to a sexual violence. As it is mentioned before testing was

a mother's responsibility to preserve her daughter and the family honor. Ifé was tested herself when she was a girl, she really knew the pain and how it felt but yet continued practicing it on her daughters .

This violence represents a type of women's repression, influenced by patriarchal norms influenced by the post-colonial legacies as the jezebel stereotypes that characterized enslaved women as being “naturally lascivious.” This version was employed to justify the sexual abuse of Black women by framing it as a natural consequence of their “wild” sexuality or as something they chose to partake in. This served to reinforce the normalization of sexual violence. These relationships were part of a larger system that sought to exploit women's bodies. This background contributed to the perception of women as contemptible and inferior, where they have no right even over their own bodies. In this extract, Atie has describes the social control to Sofie:

“ They train you to find a husband, they poke at your panties in the middle  
Of Night to , to see if you are still whole [...] , they Make you burn your  
Fingers: Learning to cook , then still you have nothing ” (BEM 109)

Sofie suffers from sexual violence as much as her mother. In her view, she was raped every time her mother tested her. Hence, she felt her bodily right was taken , and lay off her self- sense of female sexuality. She suffers from feelings of shame and inferiority considering herself a curse with no paternal roots, questioning her identity as human and her worth as a woman. Harming herself was her way to reclaim the power taken from her. Where Sofie suffers the acute effects of trauma at the level of mental and relational well being, Martine was dealing with two traumas deeply affecting her life , Martin discusses her pain with Sofie :

“I realize standing here that the two greatest pains of my life are vey  
much related . The one good thing about my being raped was that it  
made the testing stop ” (BEM 136) .

### III-3 Remembering the Past, Traumatic Memories and PTSD

The protagonists in Danticat's novels are too much influenced by the memories of their past. These memories stand as a preserver and destroyer of life in *Breath, Eye, Memory*. While

Sophie is usually haunted by the bad memories of 'testing', her mother Martine is obsessed with nightmares of rape.

Martine subjected to testing and then to rape, making the memories reinforce her trauma, she left traumatized for her whole life, suffering from the nightmares, invasive feelings, and insomnia (BEM 48). In addition to her emotional detachment, as a clear symptoms of the PTSD we had discussed in the previous chapter. The nightmares operated similarly as memories, reliving trauma overtime.

«Later that night, I heard the same voice screaming as though someone was trying to kill her. I rushed over, but my mother was alone thrashing the sheets. I shook her nally and woke her up. When she saw me, she quickly covered her face with her hands and turned away....  
“It is the night,” she said. “Sometimes, I see horrible visions in my sleep.” (BEM 45)

Simulating the process of “*remembering*” led to a more severe symptoms ;schizophrenia; when a person loses touch with reality, experiencing hallucination delusions and confused thinking (BEM 173). Moreover, Martine’s view to Sophie as she represented her rapist father, made her unable to heal.

Martine’s thinking was blindly subject to the norms of Haitian society. The shameful view that was held of her as a non-virgin woman, even though she was a mother. It makes her ashamed to disclose her struggles, she did not find support, so the decision to end her life was the best option for her (BEM 179).

Testing' represents a Haitian tradition for many centuries. Through this process a mother ensures that her daughter is a pure and virgin by using her little finger and see if it can pass the daughter's hymen. Memories of 'testing' shaped a phobia for sex in Sophie. She felt ashamed of her body. Grandma Ifé told Sophie, “My heart, it weeps like a river,” she said “for the pain we have caused you” (BEM,157).

Place became another agent of memory in this novel. For Martine , returning to Haiti was like returning to rape. Martine hesitated to visit Haiti because it made her nightmares more brutal, “I have to go back to make nal arrangements for your grandmother's resting place. I want to see her before she dies, but I don't want to stay there for more than three or four days. I know that sounds bad, but that is the only way I can do it. There are ghosts there that I can't face,

things that are still very painful for me”( BEM 76). Haiti for Martine meant sleepless, “Whenever I'm there, I feel like I sleep with ghosts. The rst night I was there, I woke up pounding at my stomach”( BEM 192)

Martine's nightmare echoed in Sophie. In her dreams, she saw a masked man raping a young girl in the cane field « After Joseph and I got married, all through the rst year I had suicidal thoughts. Some nights I woke up in a cold sweat wondering if my mother's anxiety was somehow hereditary or if it

was something that I had “caught” from living with her. Her nightmares had somehow become my own, so much so that I would wake up some mornings wondering if we hadn't both spent the night dreaming about same thing: a man with no face, pounding a life into a helpless young girl. (BEM 196)

Martine's fear to subject to therapeutic classes and to live again her experience of rape resulted in ending her life. Sophie's therapeutic liberated her from the traumatic memories.

As we notice from the first chapter to the last one, the psychological struggles of the characters were based on sexual violence, which has its roots in historical backgrounds and social oppression of women. The characters in the novel were all subjected to this kind of violence in some way or another. That create a deep-rooted, inherited cultural trauma embodied through individual's memories and experiences.

### III.3.1 Sofie's Repression and Unconscious Mind (Freud's Analysis)

The emotions and thoughts that come to a person's mind during a traumatic event are difficult for one's consciousness to accept it. When someone tries to push them away or bury them, he submits to the process of “*repression*”. These memories appear unconsciously in the behaviors and psychological responses of human beings.

Through analyzing Sophie's psychological state, we can note that the repressed feelings accompanied her throughout various phases in her life, starting from the period of childhood. Her mother's absence during her childhood appeared first in her dreams and nightmares and could be considered as unconscious response. When we try to hide or avoid our memories, feelings, or thoughts, we are very likely to fall asleep and encounter those feelings and thoughts

again while we are asleep. Sofie’s growing distance and rejection came as nightmares when she was little girl :

“I sometimes saw my mother in my dreams, she would chase me through a field of wildflowers as tall as tall as the sky . When she caught , she would try to squeeze me into a small frame so I could be in the picture with her. I would scream and scream until my voice gave out , then Tante Atie would come and save me from her grasp. ” (BEM 10)

Besides that, when she moved to live with her mother in America, there was always a difficulty in establishing a dialogue and a real conversation between a mother and daughter. There is always a negative tension between the two of them. Simply because Sophie had feelings of blame and anger towards her mother for abandoning her, and Martin felt that Sophie was the seed of her suffering. Although this faded with time, when Sophie realized her mother’s suffering . The repressed feelings returned when she faced the worst thing in her life, which is testing .

When she subjected to this sexual violence from her mother, she maintained silence as an attempt to suppress and resist its memory about a hurting experience. She did not show an explicit reaction to the “virginity test.” Instead of showing anger and rejection, she pushed those feelings into the unconscious as a defensive suppression process. However, this suppression did not end the pain but rather made it a buried pain that later appeared in several forms.(70)

Even when she got married , the nightmares never left her. Furthermore, she suffered from sexual phobia, which created marital problems, making her feel unfit to be a wife, as she perceived .

After Sofie got back to Haiti, she showed her emotional breakdown to her grandmother Ifé when they had a deep emotional conversation. The grandmother answered her granddaughter’s questions :

“Did your mother do this to you?” “From a 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 ” \_ “ When u tested my mother and Tante Atie, couldn’t you tell that they hated it ? \_ “ I had to keep them clean until they had

husbands ” \_ “ but they don’t have a husbands” \_ “the burden was not mine alone ” “ I hated the tests ” she said “ it is the most horrible thing that ever happened to me [...]” with patience, it goes away “No, Grandma Ifé , it does not.”

“ I held the statue against my chest as I cried all night. ” (BEM 124)

In the end of this expert, the act of crying is a unconscious reflection of the repressed memories and accumulations that happened due to the external stimuli. From a Freudian analytical perspective, when a person is exposed to shock or psychological pressure at an early age, and does not express it immediately but rather represses it internally without releasing it. Thus, in a charged moment that provokes memory and emotion, the person becomes agitated, as was the case with Sophie, whose conversation with her grandmother really shattered her .

Repression wasn’t limited to the psychological aspect alone; it even had an impact on the emergence of physical symptoms that could be classified as a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder we mentioned in the theoretical chapter. Sophie suffered from bulimia, a physical illness that affects the stomach, “it’s when you don’t eat at all and then eat a whole lot\_ bingeing” (BEM 142). This illness could be seen as a physical reaction to her repressed emotions. This is proof of the extent to which the psychological state affects human health. We can also link this to Martine’s struggle with cancer : “ I had just gotten my breasts removed for the cancer , but before that , before the cancer , in the beginning, food was a struggle. To shave so much to eat and not to eat it all ” (BEM 143). They both suffered from physical illnesses due to repression. This confirms the truth that when a person’s psychological state is exhausted, illnesses appear in their body.

### III.4 Slavery as a Site of Collective Memory and Cultural Trauma

As we have discussed in the theoretical chapter , collective memory is embodied in how a group of people remember and interact their shared experiences and struggles. It doesn’t belong to a single individual occurrence , but is constructed through a social engagement that appears in rituals , stories and symbols . Probably , the memory of “ *slavery* ” is incontestable aspect of Haitian history , and we can say it was the source of all the traumas existing in this community. These memories significantly influenced the cultural conventions and scruples.

The context of the novel does not touch on slavery directly, but this trauma is implicitly shown through the social disruption and hybrid Haitian identity, which appears first in the

linguistic structure and through the incorporation of French into everyday language contexts and expressions such as :

“ Honneurs , mes belles ” ( BEM 7) ; “ Bonjour ” (BEM 18) ; “ dactylo ” , “ ki sa” (BEM 78) , “ Henry Je ne sais quoi ” (BEM 64), “ Messi mil fwa ” (BEM 105). Plenty of words could be read as linguistic residue of slavery , and perhaps what most profoundly encapsulates the lingering trauma of slavery was the use of the word “*Ou libéré*. ”. The term was used twice, first in Sofie narration of people’s conditions and daily suffering on her journey when she depicted the hardship of women on the road to earn their living when she states :

“The female street vendors called to one another as they came down the road. When one merchant dropped her heavy basket, another called out of concern, “*Ou libéré?*” Are you free from your heavy load?[...] if she had unloaded her freight without hurting herself.”( BEM 76)

In the first context, the word was used in a simple, everyday context among women in the market, concealing a deep-rooted psychological and social impact beyond its literal meaning. Historically, the slaves who gained their freedom were usually called “*les esclaves libérés*.” As a heavy linguistic legacy linked to slavery, the explicit meaning was that the body is freed from the weight of the basket , while it gestures towards the heavy burden borne by women under social constraints but its deeper significance resides in it’s implicit meeting with the freedom of the soul from the burden of slavery. Thus, everyday language reproduces the memory of slavery without awareness.

The term was repeated in a more symbolic context, transforming the word from a mere daily inquiry into an existential question, through Ifi question to Sophie at the end of the novel “ Ou libéré ? Are you free my daughter ” this passage’s meaning is broader, carrying many questions, such as: Have you been freed from the violence we bequeathed to you? Have you truly been liberated from the slavery that shapes our language, our bodies, and our voices? Are we truly free? Or our memories still besieging us .

Using the enslaver language in daily speeches and in a word that represents an intense symbol of the question of freedom indicates a lack of internal liberation from the trauma of slavery . Memory and place interconnects and in the novel there were many places that held the memories more than the brains did.



The trauma of slavery was restricted to certain places. The cane fields was a site of memory in the novel due to its historical importance on the authentic Haitian collective memory. Slave labor has always been associated with the fields and plantations. There, people were stripped of their humanity and exploited to death. Families served their masters without objection, and human life was worthless. This was summed up through Sofie’s flashback:

“Whenever she was sad, Tante Atie would talk about the sugar cane field, where she and my mother practically lived when they were children. They saw people die there from sun stroke every day. Tante Atie said that, one day while they were all working together, her father-my grandfather stopped to wipe his forehead, leaned forward, and died. My grandmother took the body in her arms and tried to scream the life back to it. They all kept screaming and hollering. As my grandmother's tears bathed the corpse's face. Nothing would bring my grandfather back”( BEM 7)

Sophie’s grandfather was one of those who lost their lives on the field. Through this passage, we can say that the characters are affected by the memory of slavery and the psychological dimension of this memory, as it carries two related feelings: sadness and loss. The cane fields are not just lands where seeds are planted and plowed, but where memories full of pain are revived .

### **III.5 Sexual Violence : Traumatic memory and a Collective trauma**

Another conclusion we can draw is that the fields are also the source of feminist sexual trauma, where black women subjected to rape, which increased the number of slaves as a strategy that served the economy. The increase in enslaved children led to a rise in the labor force, as we discussed in the first chapter. Therefore, the sugarcane field not only symbolizes slave labor in the novel; it is also used as a site of sexual violence. This is particularly true in the case of Martine, who is forced to personally and directly relive the cultural trauma of being raped in the sugarcane field. This can be seen as a metaphor for the sexual abuse suffered by slaves ” (BEM 110). The biggest evidence was Sophie’s portrayal of the hatred she held for these fields:

“ There were only a few men working in the cane field. I ran through the field, attacking the cane. I took off my shoes and began to beat a cane stalk. I pounded it until it began to lean over. I pushed over the cane stalk. It snapped back, striking back my shoulder, I pulled at it, yanking from the ground. My palm was bleeding. ”(BEM 238).

It’s like she’s blaming this place where all the traumatic memories grew. At the same time, she incites a revolt against what previous generations have faced, and affirms its rejection of every action or site that generates repressive memories.

This invites a further inference in the novel, there is a direct depiction of the injustice and oppressive conduct towards civilians by the “ *Tonton Macoute* ”, when we reflect on Haitian history. We find that the dictatorial period was an extension of slavery. People did not gain their full freedom, even after the abolition of slavery, the situation became more tragic and Tonton Macoute was one of the state’s means of suppressing Haitian society.

The Duvalier dynasty dictatorship and its Macoute soldier are therefore symbols of the slavery and its legacy. They practiced their control over Haitian people as the slaves owners did time ago over their slaves.

“My foot, you see, you stepped on it!” The baby-faced Macoute was shouting at a coal vendor. He rammed the back of his machine gun into the coal vendor’s ribs. I turned back for one last look. The coal vendor was curled in a fetal position on the ground. He was spitting blood. The other Macoutes joined in, pounding their boots on the coal seller’s head. Every one watched in shocked silence, but no one said anything shocked silence, but no one said anything.”

My grandmother came back for me.

She grabbed my hand so hard my fingers hurt.

“You want to live your nightmares too?” she hollered. (BEM94)

This passage shed light on the Macoute brutal and barbaric behavior stems from a lack of responsibility towards the people. They kill, rape, and spread fear everywhere, under the protection of the supreme leader. This demonstration of aggressive dominance was shown

through the novel in several scenes as it is mentioned previously. However, what captures the attention most strikingly was the crime that took the life of a market worker Dessalines.

“Li allé. It’s over,” Louise said, panting as though she had asthma and the hiccups at the same time. They killed Dessalines.”

“Who killed Dessalines?” asked my grandmother.

“The Macoutes killed Dessalines.”(110)

This passage indicates what makes the memory of slavery not fade away ; there’s always insecure feelings spreading in the Haitian air, always pushing the people to look back at the past and never escape it. Additionally, the Macoute represents not only a source of slavery but also a sexual violence trauma, Sophie claims that her mother's rapist was one of the Macoute “my father could be one of the Macoute too” (106) and this is not unlikely, as someone who practices injustice and oppression against his people can also exploit the women of his community.

Through the analysis of these aspects that constitute the Haitian identity, this study can conclude that the collective memory of slavery and sexual violence of the Haitian people is embodied in different frameworks between the places and events and the state tools that it represents, and the feeling of oppression and tyranny shared by all individuals is what makes it a collective trauma.

### III.6 The Narrative Voice

In literary texts, especially fictional ones, the narrative voice is very important, particularly if the text has a psychoanalytic dimension, and the use of the first person pronoun “I” lends an honest self testimony puts the reader deep into the experience because it covers an accurate subjective description for thoughts, feelings and memories. Where it offers the chance to listen to the inner voice through the presented monologues since the novel is grounded in past memories.

Sophie expressed her phenomenological experience by using the pronoun “I”. Providing us the chance to enter the labyrinth of her mind, and knowing her position and standpoint towards her condition and the other character’s condition connected to her:

“I want to forget the hidden things, the conflicts you always want me to deal with. I want to look at her as someone I am meeting again for the first time. An acquaintance who I am hoping will become a friend.” (166)

This passage demonstrates a sincere intention to move beyond memories of the past without denying what happened and trying to start a new page. The pronoun “I” reflects Sophie’s internal struggles to achieve peace between herself and others. She is conscious of her wants and reveals a deep level of self-analysis ; she carefully examines her own feelings, doubts and reasons, don’t sit just idly by.

The expressions of exhaustion, absorption, pain, liberation, guilt and responsibility all indicate Sofie’ existence. Through her expressive words, she narrates her trauma and try to find a way “I felt broken at the end of the meeting, but a little closer to being free. I didn’t feel guilty about burning my mother’s name anymore. I knew my hurt and hers were links in a long chain and if she hurt me, it was because she was hurt, too.” ;“ It was up to me to avoid my turn in the fire. It was up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares, and never had her name burnt in the flames.” (BEM 162). She determines that change is her own responsibility now: she understands that she can’t undo the past but could reshape the future. Through those fragmented memories, she shows her awareness through her inner struggles and shift from victimhood to agency.

### **III.7 Steps Towards Healing**

Healing from trauma is not a simple matter, it is akin to putting salt on a wound. Definitely, it is the journey to purify the soul , and the path that a caterpillar takes to turn into a butterfly. It is a long trip requires courage ; only brave persons could heal because usually traumatized people are scared to face their memories. Undoubtedly, recovery blooms from seeds of confrontation. Thus, this subsection will be divided into the role of narrativization in overcoming trauma and the symbols of healing .

### III.7.1 The Healing Power of Narrativization

As it is discussed in the previous chapter, in order to heal from trauma, one must move from the realm of silence to the flow of speech and narration. It is a wounded story that must carry out.

In the novel, the protagonist chooses to tell her story. She realized that it was okay to remember again and that the only way to heal was to break her silence and her feeling of pessimism towards her memories. She started moving from silence to speaking about her pain. Narrativization was her way to understand what she'd been through and looking to comfort her trauma by facing and no longer suppressing this part from who she is.

Once, a person recognizes that healing is his duty towards himself, the journey becomes more meaningful. Sofie gives herself another chance, she goes back to Haiti, questioning the reason behind what she lived. She doesn't mind to talk and listen to her grandmother, her mother and the women in her society, looking for the patterns and gathering the pieces that allow giving it a sense by telling her feeling without running away. Narrativization here was her way of facing: “I hated the test, it is the most terrible thing that ever happened to me” (BEM 124).

She expresses her frank point of view which allowed to organize the internal chaos and regain control over the memories. She tried to say what she was not able to open up about a long time ago. It is thus a “confrontational therapy”.

Modern psychotherapy addresses aspects that allow the patient to change his view about his traumatic memories and make them a companion rather than an enemy. Sofie took the same path she carried all the weights on her ankles and revealed them to a therapist. In a safe atmosphere that allows reshaping the memory but from a completely different perspective. She states:

My therapist was a gorgeous black woman who was an initiated Santeria priestess. She had done two years in the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic, which showed in the brightly colored prints, noisy bangles, and open sandals she wore.

Her clinic was in a penthouse overlooking the Seekonk River. " " I looked over the collection of Brazilian paintings and ceremonial African masks on her walls. We usually had our sessions in the woods by the river.

"So what is happening in your life?" she asked. (BEM 165)

If we look closely, in this excerpt, the therapeutic narrative has a spiritual and cultural dimensions embodied in the background of the African-Caribbean psychotherapist. Sofie finally finds someone who can listen and understand her wound and make the image more clear as a guidance towards peace. In addition to that, her description of therapy atmosphere sheds light on the comfort this place offers to unfold everything, where often the secrets can be told. As we have addressed in the theoretical framework, remembering the traumatic memories in a safe zone powers the reconstruction, where haunting memories slowly dissolve, shifting from a position of power to one of quiet surrender.

she knows what happened when trauma speaks. This is powerfully reflected in her candid advice to her mother, when she said “You should tell someone” (BEM 159), but Martine lacked the fortitude and grit to confront her fears and voice them unlike her daughter. This nuanced detail profoundly explains why not everyone who experiences trauma finds healing. It reveals that recovery is not a guaranteed outcome of suffering; rather, it depends on one’s inner strength.

The nature of trauma pushes a person to be isolated and increases his feelings of guilt and shame, but once he opens the door to share it with others, the trauma transforms into a shared awareness. Telling your pain to those who have lived through the same experience doesn’t erase the wounds, but it softens their weight, because in their eyes, your story is no longer a burden. This is clearly demonstrated in the scene with Sophie, where she describes meeting women who had experienced similar forms of trauma. The shared space of pain allows for mutual understanding and emotional release when she states:

“ There were three of us in my sexual phobia group, we gave it that name because that’s what Rena – the therapist who introduced us – liked to call it [...], God grant us the courage to change those things we can, the serenity to accept the things we can’t, and the wisdom to know the difference ” (BEM 161)

By reflecting on this passage, we can truly appreciate the power of collective storytelling as a healing force. Within a shared space, the individual finally finds a place to scream without judgment, a space where there is a collective recognition that “I was not to blame. It was never my fault , It is a place where pain is not silenced but seen, and where one can declare I am still hurting, but I am healing and Sofie described this deeply “ I feel broken at the end of the meeting, but a little closer to being free”( BEM 162).

Narrativization brings out the exhausting stories of bodies and minds and liberates the repressed feelings represented through writing letters from the women who faced the abuse as they are. Narrativization creates a healing space by releasing anger. Then, the act of presenting it to others is to demonstrate that pain is no longer a secret that is ashamed to reveal but rather is the basis of a collective story. Sofie states , “Since I survived this, I can survive anything" (BEM 162). This is a metamorphosis moment from a tale of suffering into a powerful proclamation of resilience and the dawn of healing.

### III.7.2 Symbols of Healing

Since healing is a continuous process rather than a momentary retreat, the symbols of healing from trauma recur consistently throughout the novel, manifesting across its various chapters and narrative stages. In literature, these symbols provide a sense of positivity for the reader. At the end of every dark tunnel, there is always a small ray of hope, and this is what the novel contains in terms of symbols.

**Daffodils:** it is the symbol that remains from the beginning to the end of the novel , the flower that grows outside its native soil . yet ,still survive symbolizes the new beginning, resilience in the face of adversity, and the healing process .

**Leeches :** symbolize physical and emotional healing through removing the illness that bad blood caused to the body .

**Rain water:** symbolize the spiritual purification and healing from the burdens that the soul has long carried .

**The Erzullie statue :** in the Haitian cultural heritage, it represents the God of love and ancestral strength, but we can consider it through the development of the story’s events, as it is shown that it is used as a source of cultural and familial healing.

The Seekonk river : Given that , the therapy sessions are held near this river that is a site representing a backdrop for emotional processing and healing.

### **III.8 Conclusion**

This chapter is an analytical part about memory and trauma in Edwidge Danticate’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. It aimed to shed light on how the individual and collective memory deteriorate to be a trauma, and how the broken memories and traumatic events stored in the unconscious side shaped the characters lives. Finally, it dealt with the process of healing that is weirdly discussed in the novel to negotiate the haunting memories rather than running away from it .



# **General Conclusion**

## General Conclusion

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This current research has provided an overview of the concepts of memory and trauma and how they are explored by scholars and researchers. Its objective is to introduce post-traumatic literature to show the personal memories rooted in generational and cultural trauma. Hence, persons need to reconcile their pain and accept it to reach healing ; otherwise, the weight of these traumatic memories can distort the self to the point of existential collapse. The main purpose of this study is the analysis of Edwidge Danticate's, " Breath, Eyes, Memory, " which is full of choking events causing deep wounds etched in memory, making the percentage of trauma more aggravating.

This research reveals that some issues as memory and trauma, become a central concern among psychoanalytic literature, researchers, and writers as Edwidge Danticat, who writes this piece to highlight the psychological and the cultural effects of the traumatic memories printed in the individual and collective formation. It also concludes by analyzing the struggles that can be depicted by examining the PTSD symptoms and observing behaviour and relationship dynamics.

The main individually depicted trauma in the novel is the trauma of sexual violence. Young girls are exposed to testing by their mothers to protect their virginites. This sexual violence represents the Haitian "virginity cult." Another painful type of sexual violence that emerges in the novel is rape. Sexual violence creates humiliating traumas for both Sophie and Martine. They both reveal symptoms of PTSD, such as dissociation, sleeplessness, intrusive thoughts, and nightmares. Martine and Sophie try to deal with their traumas differently. Martine escapes her memories by leaving Haiti in order to forget, whereas Sophie submits to therapy sessions and turns her traumas into narratives.

The trauma of slavery represents a cultural and historical agent of trauma in the lives of the Cacos. In the novel, the sugar cane field acts as a place where slavery is operated. The field thus stands as a site of memory that has kept the symbolic value of the field. Black Haitian women are affected by cultural trauma via collective memory. The trauma of slavery has played a pivotal role in reshaping the collective shattered identity of Haitian people. Thus, narrativization can be seen as a successful mechanism to achieve healing, especially when a person gives free rein to his memories so he/she comes out of the subconscious mind and reach the ears of others. Therefore, the feelings of denunciation and shame disappear, and the restrictions of this painful experience are removed. In addition to that, the present research

## General Conclusion

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confirmed the existence of a significant interrelation between the historical, social, cultural, and psychological in the traumatic memory fabrication.

By resorting to psychological and psychosocial analysis, the researcher was able to analyze both the emotional and behavior aspects of the protagonist, “Sofie Cacao,” who reflected her response to the traumatic experience and how it shaped her personality. Sofie Cacao’s narrative voice opened the way to dive into her inner thoughts and allowed her to keep pace with the storyline trajectory that transcended the limits of the individual traumatic experience to further social and cultural horizons that contain these same memories. The reader should know what is hidden in contemporary societies and understand to what extent collective impositions influence the formation of individual’s memories, beliefs, and lives. By delving into their suffering and gaining insight into how to deal with and heal from such experiences.

I suggest, for further research a comparative study between *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, focusing on trauma, testimony, and healing in diasporic women’s narratives.

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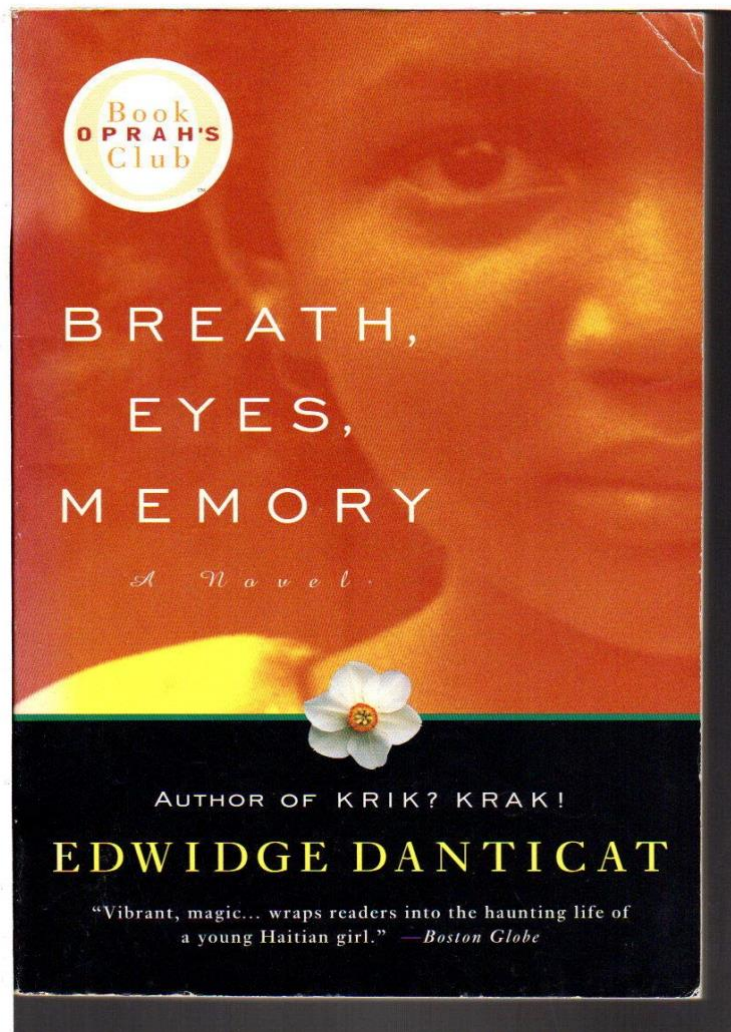
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## **Appendices**



**Appendix1: The cover page of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.**



The cover of the novel is dominated by the orange and black color, The first symbolizes hope and vitality, while the second symbolizes sadness and pain. This gradation tells an emotional story from innocence to suffering. The emergence of the white daffodil flower as a kind of contrast, symbolizing the purity of the black-skinned girl as a representation of identity, alongside the innocent features that carry a kind of fear in her eyes. While the Bold lettered title emphasizes the existence of Breath, Eyes , Memory story ‘The title was aptly chosen, with each word carrying its own significance: ‘Breath’ represents life, ‘Eyes’ evoke the present, and ‘Memory’ refers to the past. These are elements that cannot be separated from one another .The author’s name has been written so that we can uncover the work’s creative origin .

## Appendix 2 : Biography of the Author



The winner of a fiction award from Essence magazine and one of The New York Times Magazine'. The Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat was born January 19, 1969 , in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. When she was two years old, her father, André immigrated to New York, to be followed two years later by her mother Rose. This left Danticat and her younger brother, also named André, to be raised by her aunt and uncle. When asked in an interview about her traditions as a child, she included storytelling, church, and constantly studying school material as all part of growing up. Although her formal education in Haiti was in French, she spoke Haitian Creole at home. Her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, was published in 1994 and went on to become an Oprah's Book Club selection. Danticat has since written or edited several books and has been the recipient of many awards and honors. Her work has dealt with themes of national identity, mother-daughter relationships, and diasporic politics. In 2023, she was named the Wun Tsun Tam Mellon Professor of the Humanities in the department of African American and African Diaspora Studies at Columbia University.

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwidge\\_Danticat](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwidge_Danticat)

### **Appendix 3 : Breath , Eyes , Memory .**

The story begins with Sophie Caco growing up in Haiti under the care of her Aunt Atie, surrounded by the quiet beauty of her homeland but also shadowed by personal and political unrest. Her life takes a sudden turn when she is sent to New York to live with her mother, Martine a woman she barely knows and whose past is marked by trauma. In the unfamiliar rhythms of American life, Sophie begins to unravel the complex layers of her identity, torn between two worlds and two versions of herself.

Haunted by the secret of her birth and her mother's painful memories, she endures the weight of cultural traditions that test her body and spirit. The practice of testing a girl's virginity, once a distant horror, becomes a personal wound that shapes her view of love, trust, and autonomy. As she moves from girlhood to womanhood, she confronts the inherited pain passed down through generations of women in her family.

Her connections with Aunt Atie and her grandmother in Haiti remain vital, even from afar. These relationships offer fragments of wisdom, resilience, and history that help her make sense of the silence and suffering that run through her family. Through painful truths and small acts of healing, Sophie begins to reclaim her voice and her sense of self.

**Danticat, E. (1994). *Breath, eyes, memory*. Soho Press.**

## Glossary

**Hypermasculinity** is the exaggeration of traditional male traits like strength, aggression, dominance, and emotional suppression. It often glorifies violence, sexual conquest, and control as proofs of manhood. This concept is shaped by cultural, social, and media influences and can lead to toxic behaviors.

**Mulattos** historically refers to a person of mixed white (typically European) and Black African ancestry. The word mulatto likely derives from the Spanish and Portuguese word mulato, which itself may stem from mula“mule”, a term associated with the offspring of a horse and a donkey. This etymological link to animals is widely criticized today for its dehumanizing undertone.

**Naturally lascivious:** A phrase used to describe someone who is believed to have an innate or instinctive tendency toward sexual desire or lustful behavior. The term carries a negative, judgmental connotation, often implying excessive or inappropriate sexual interest as part of a person's nature. This expression is often considered offensive or outdated, especially when used to stereotype individuals or groups based on gender, race, or culture. It reflects biased views more than objective traits.

**Pseudophakia** (noun) : A medical condition in which the natural eye lens has been surgically removed (usually due to cataract) and replaced with an artificial intraocular lens (IOL). The eye is then said to be pseudophakic, meaning it has a “false lens.”

**Psychosocial** (adjective): the interaction between a person's psychological factors (thoughts, emotions, behaviors) and their social environment (relationships, culture, community). It describes how social conditions influence mental health and behavior, and vice versa.