

# Between Self and History: Trauma and Illusion of the Other in *O Tibete de África* by Margarida Paredes

## Introduction

*O Tibete de África* (2006), a novel set in the Lusophone postcolonial world, is characterized by the strategy of turning inward to represent complex realities. John Rodden suggests that the individuals' stories of their inner worlds can be studied as 'case histories' of society,<sup>1</sup> so this article will focus on a reading of the psychologies of characters and analyse trauma and the problem of othering, which are testament to the lingering impact of Portuguese colonial history and the omnipresent manipulation of the imperial legacy on individuals from different ethnic backgrounds.

The link between postcolonial studies and trauma studies has long been observed. Hamish Dalley stresses the significance of history when it comes to studying literature in postcolonial spaces, a literature which is 'subject always to conflict over past events and their meaning for present generations'.<sup>2</sup> The application of trauma theory represents an opportunity to probe the problematic and contested history associated with the impact of past experience and human suffering. Placed in the violent independence war in Angola, Paredes's protagonist was unprepared for this transition. This study thus demonstrates the extent to which the self is located as a historical subject.

Taking a psychological approach, which 'to postcolonial studies ha[s] often examined the effects of colonisation and decolonisation on the colonised, or formerly colonised, as well as colonisers',<sup>3</sup> I argue that Margarida Paredes articulates her characters' personal trajectories with the trauma of their time, and represents trauma in the dramatization of the link between past and present. Furthermore, she portrays the individual's trauma through a voice that cries for connection with others, as Cathy Caruth aptly proposes in her trauma theory, which associates traumatic experience with the representation of the Other. In Paredes's novel, the

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<sup>1</sup> John Rodden, *Between Self and Society: Inner Worlds and Outer Limits in the British Psychological Novel* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Hamish Dalley, *The Postcolonial Historical Novel: Realism, Allegory, and the Representation of Contested Pasts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Abigail Ward, 'Introduction', in *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance*, ed. by Abigail Ward (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1–14 (p. 3).

otherness seen by those who witness events also reflects a segmented self-image due to an inability to overcome an entrenched mode of colonial thinking and to access a traumatic past.

The first section of this article will study how trauma dramatizes the question of past and present time in the case of Ana, a *retornada*<sup>4</sup> from Angola. I will illustrate the narrative of trauma, which disrupts linear time with constant flashbacks and anachronistic scenes, and highlights the influence that social and historical memories have on people's psyche and decision-making. The second section will explore how trauma renders individuals from different backgrounds connected with each other, as is shown in the relationship between Ana, Amândio and Justino. The article will also engage with the question of representing the Other, in order to investigate how a cultural Other sees its own Other in a racialized, fetishized gaze bequeathed by imperial survival. Paredes intends to deconstruct this postcolonial mentality by showing imagined otherness to be an illusion and problematize the notion of 'race' and 'home' as one's origin by representing the characters' composite and shifting identities.

### **Dramatization of Past and Present**

Caruth argues that flashback as a feature of 'traumatic reliving' constitutes 'a form of recall that survives at the cost of willed memory or of the very continuity of conscious thought'.<sup>5</sup> The unconscious recollection of the past emerges spontaneously in the ordered narratives in *O Tibete de África* and shapes the characters' psyche and behaviours in the present time locus, thus dramatizing the connection between past and present. As Dalley puts it, 'trauma's key symptom is the breakdown of linear temporality'.<sup>6</sup> This section represents the flashbacks as an impulse to recapturing the past and analyses the trigger and embodiment of trauma in the tension between memory and reality.

Paredes places Ana's traumas of departure and of bereavement in juxtaposition. These interrelated traumatic events are represented not only as mute wounds preserved in the protagonist's personal archive, but are also a miniature of Portugal's colonialism in Angola

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<sup>4</sup> *Retornados*, or returnees, are Portuguese citizens who returned to Portugal from ex-colonies during the period of decolonization in Africa in the wake of the Carnation Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction to Part II', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 151–57 (p. 152).

<sup>6</sup> Dalley, p. 160.

and its aftermath. It can be seen that, for the protagonist, traumatic memories are not simply locatable in the past, but ‘retur[n] to haunt’ her later in life.<sup>7</sup>

The third-person narrative is constantly interrupted by Ana’s recalling voice, which alludes to how the past represented by the narrating ‘I’ exerts ineluctable impacts on the present-experiencing self. According to Caruth, ‘[t]he traumatized [...] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess’.<sup>8</sup> The first-person narrator, with her traumatic childhood as an inescapable part of her personal history, often has difficulty accessing and representing the past: ‘Quando falava sobre a infância as palavras eram articuladas com dificuldade e a expressão sofrida’ [When she talked about her childhood, her words were articulated with difficulty and painful expression].<sup>9</sup>

This discovery of Ana’s symptom of trauma by her then husband, Amândio, is followed by the first flashback in Ana’s narrative, which portrays Aguiar, a black cook who worked for her family in Angola, as well as depicting the childhood scenes that continuously repeat in her traumatic neurosis. By addressing the cook as ‘o meu Aguiar’ [my Aguiar] and ‘o meu querido Aguiar’ [my dear Aguiar], Ana recalls him in a nostalgic and affectionate tone (p. 17, emphasis original). It seems that the cook took responsibility for rearing and accompanying Ana when she was young, and also served as her playmate:

Acordar-me era um dos nossos rituais. Entrava no meu quarto, fazia-me cócegas no pé, dava uma risada e dizia — menina acorda que *o seu Aguiar* chegou e traz pãozinho fresco. (Ibid., emphasis original)

[To wake me up was one of our rituals. He would enter my room, tickle my foot, give a little laugh and say: ‘girl, wake up. *Your Aguiar* has arrived and is bringing you a fresh bread roll.]

The relationship between the black cook and Ana, the white colonizer’s daughter, conjures up what Gilberto Freyre describes as the intimate contact and ‘mimo extremoso’ [extreme

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<sup>7</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Caruth, ‘Introduction to Part I’, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, pp. 3-12 (p. 5).

<sup>9</sup> Margarida Paredes, *O Tibete de África* (Luanda: Chá de Caxinde, 2009), p. 17. Henceforth page references to this work will be given in the text. Translations from Portuguese are my own unless otherwise indicated.

caress] that the ‘mãe-preta’ [black mammy] has with her aristocratic foster son.<sup>10</sup> According to Freyre, the black wet nurse not only has the task of breastfeeding but may also exert a certain impact on the white boy’s ‘pendor sexual’ [sexual propensity], leading to his libidinal precocity.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, the mãe-preta’s role can be understood as ‘primarily only an object which satisfies all [the white boy’s] desires — a good breast’.<sup>12</sup> Not unlike the mãe-preta in the Brazilian master’s house, Aguiar plays the role of little Ana’s love-object. This can be further illustrated by Ana’s reaction at the sight of Aguiar’s corpse after she witnessed his failed attempt to have sex with her mother:

Não percebo o que é, mas grito. Através do vidro fico hipnotizada com aquela imagem filtrada pela poeira. Grito outra vez de horror misturado de prazer porque aquela coisa é bela e não parece de verdade. (p. 20)

[I don’t understand what it is, but I scream. Through the glass, I am hypnotized by that image filtered by the dust. I scream again in horror mixed with pleasure because that thing is beautiful and does not seem to be real.]

Ana’s shock and feeling of pleasure aroused by the scene of Aguiar’s corpse indicate what Melanie Klein proposes as a primitive mental activity, that is, a process of ‘phantasy-building’, which goes along with little Ana’s craving for ‘the gratification [she] lacks’.<sup>13</sup> While she could not fully perceive the ‘bola com pernas e braços’ [ball with legs and arms] that she saw (‘[n]ão percebo o que é’), as well as the ‘alien and disturbing’ scene in the bedroom that she happened to have witnessed,<sup>14</sup> her perplexity and inability to verbalize the buried truth of Aguiar’s death rendered her silent, only able to bear this experience on her own: ‘Ninguém se lembrou de me interrogar’ [No one thought to ask me about it] (p. 21).

Both the scenes in the bedroom and in the warehouse where she discovered Aguiar’s corpse constitute a traumatic seduction to Ana, with the sign of sexuality prematurely introduced to her, that is, ‘o sexo inchado do Aguiar vivo e morto’ [the swollen sexual organ

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<sup>10</sup> Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-grande & Senzala: formação da família brasileira sob o regime da economia patriarcal* (Recife: Fundação Gilberto Freyre, 2003), p. 458.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 367.

<sup>12</sup> Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation, and Other Works, 1921–1945* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 307.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 308.

<sup>14</sup> John Fletcher, *Freud and the Scene of Trauma* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. xiii.

of the living Aguiar and of the dead one] (p. 21). The connection between the figure of Aguiar and ‘o sexo’ reinforces his image as Ana’s love-object, the loss of which frustrates her primitive desire and gives rise to her long-standing hatred towards her mother due to the convergence of Aguiar’s death and the primal scene involving the two. This convergence renders Ana more liable to blame her mother for Aguiar’s death. Ana’s grief at losing Aguiar is thus transferred to aggressive behaviours and hostility towards her mother as a rival for this love-object:

Não podia falar com ninguém e sentia-me muito desconfortável com o que tinha visto porque a mãe parecia-me culpada, mas não sabia de quê! [...] Pelo sim, pelo não, resolvi vingar-me da maneira mais cruel possível. (p. 28)

[I couldn’t speak to anyone and felt very uncomfortable with what I had seen because mother seemed culpable to me, but I didn’t know of what! [...] In any case, I decided to take revenge in the cruellest way possible.]

Ana, the traumatized and silent testimony of the two scenes beyond her comprehension, submerged herself in loneliness, which, according to Klein, results from a child’s sense of insecurity, in that she felt that ‘the good object was only precariously available’.<sup>15</sup> While she felt a certain inaccessibility to the world of her parents (‘[o]s adultos tinham muitos segredos e pouca paciência para as crianças’ [those adults had many secrets and little patience for children]), Aguiar represents a sign of intimacy and safety (‘[o] mundo das crianças era o mundo dos criados na cozinha e no quintal’ [the world of the children was the world of the servants in the kitchen and the yard]) (p. 17). For little Ana, Aguiar’s death is connected with the feeling of being bereft of a home: ‘A casa nunca mais pareceu a mesma. Quando acordava, tudo me parecia estranho’ [The house no longer looked the same. When I woke up, everything seemed strange to me] (p. 28). Ana’s shock and grief serve as a foil to her parents’ scarce emotion when dealing with the death of Aguiar, the colonized. While ‘[a] morte do Aguiar foi atirada para o fundo do poço que é o esquecimento dos vivos depois de as autoridades a terem considerado accidental’ [After the authority considered it accidental, Aguiar’s death was thrown to the bottom of the well, which is the forgetfulness of the living]

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<sup>15</sup> Meira Likierman, *Melanie Klein: Her Work in Context* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 128.

(p. 21), it left in Ana a wounded psyche with a story ‘that cries out [...] in the attempt to tell [others] of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available’.<sup>16</sup>

Trapped in the wound, Ana’s loneliness as a result of childhood trauma gives rise to a longing for understanding. Paredes strategically dovetails Ana’s first-person narrative of this painful case in her childhood with the third-person narrative of Ana’s conversation with Amândio, interrogating his past as a revolutionary in Portugal while they were in Leuven (Louvain), the Belgian city where they met. This disarrangement in time dramatically links together the two characters ‘*sem terra*’ [without a homeland] while illustrating trauma’s effect in keeping Ana unconsciously revisiting the past (p. 24, italics original). However, her attempt to address the mute suffering to others by recollecting the past with Amândio proves to be futile, as the calm third-person narrative is once again interrupted by the intrusion of Ana’s memory of war and her forced departure to Portugal with her mother, a series of catastrophic events that reinforced the sense of losing her home:

Para mim não era regressar, era fugir da *minha terra* porque nunca tinha conhecido outra [...] parecia que tínhamos ficado todos órfãos de um dia para o outro?! (pp. 32–33, italics original)

[For me, it was not about returning, but escaping from *my land* because I had never known any other [...] It seemed that we had all become orphans from one day to the next?!]

Ana, a *retornada*, does not consider moving to Portugal as a return, but rather an exile and a radical break from the past. This sense of uprootedness is intensified as Paredes combines Ana’s departure from her native land with bereavement. The first-person narrator describes her somatic reactions when she is informed of her father’s death: ‘Em estado de choque, deixei de respirar [In a state of shock, I stopped breathing] (p. 41). This sensation of suffocation constitutes a re-enactment of her reactions to Aguiar’s death: ‘a sensação de opressão era tão violenta que tinha de sair a correr para a luz do sol, sentir a terra e o capim debaixo dos pés nus, para conseguir respirar de novo’ [A sensation of oppression was so violent that I had to run out into the sunlight, feel the earth and grass under my bare feet, so that I could breathe again] (p. 28).

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<sup>16</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 4.

In this way, Paredes embodies trauma by depicting the ‘repeated infliction of a wound’ on the protagonist’s body and psyche. She carries on with this strategy in order to emphasize the ‘historical power of the trauma’.<sup>17</sup> Ana goes to great lengths to forget the painful events that she has undergone as a child, especially after she discovered that her father is not her biological father: ‘Cada vez menos fios me ligavam ao passado’ [I felt less and less connected to the past] (p. 44). As a young woman, Ana resolves to re-establish a relation with Africa only for the purpose of developing her business, with ‘the wilful forgetting of certain elements of the past’:<sup>18</sup> ‘É verdade, regressei muito pequena mas sou uma pessoa muito pragmática. Cortei o cordão umbilical há anos e, para mim, África é apenas um mercado de negócios, mais nada’ [It is true. I returned at a very young age but I’m a very pragmatic person. I cut the umbilical cord years ago and, for me, Africa is just a business market, that’s all] (p. 52).

While Ana believes that she has cut off all connections with Angola and is capable of constructing a future no longer continuous with her traumatic past, she unconsciously relives it in the forms of dreams and nightmares. Caruth observes that the response to a traumatic experience ‘occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena’.<sup>19</sup> In Ana’s interjecting first-person narrative, the female cook, Fina, who constitutes a substitution for Aguiar after his death, may symbolize her conscious intention to repress her memory, yet the figure of the former cook is far from sinking into oblivion. Later in her life, the recurrence of the familiar sensation of suffocation marks Ana’s symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder related to her childhood bereavement: ‘Sentia o ar do quarto pesado e custava-lhe respirar’ [The air in the room felt heavy and she found it difficult to breath] (p. 73). This sensation is triggered by her repetitive nightmares of being persecuted. Being addressed as ‘menina’ hints that, in the nightmares, Ana is positioned in her childhood. While she cannot figure out who the person is that persecutes and calls her simultaneously, she instinctively thinks of Aguiar: ‘Sem nada para fazer tentou recordar-se das feições do Aguiar e foi à procura do rosto do criado no álbum de fotografias da sua infância’ (p. 74) [With nothing to do, she tried to remember Aguiar’s features and looked for the face of this servant in the photo album of her childhood].

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 3, p. 17.

<sup>18</sup> Paulo de Medeiros, ‘Postcolonial Memories and Lusophone Literatures’, *European Review*, 13.1 (2005), 151–61 (p. 151).

<sup>19</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 11.

The repressed memory about Aguiar related in the third-person narrative is placed at a distance and returns to Ana only in the state of unconsciousness, which demonstrates the ‘inherent latency’ of the traumatic events as well as the protagonist’s psychic split.<sup>20</sup> Ana links the cook to the unknown figure in her nightmares, who is persecutory and at the same time shows her the sign of intimacy by calling her, like her beloved Aguiar. The loss of Aguiar as a love-object in childhood constitutes a frustration which is, according to Klein’s study, often ‘felt as persecution’, given that in children’s ‘primitive stage of development there is no experience of absence — the lack of the good object is felt as an attack by bad objects’.<sup>21</sup> Ana’s persecutory anxiety ‘revive[s] [the] need for idealization’ of her primary good object and a desire for ‘a much more secure relation to’ it.<sup>22</sup> This idealization of Aguiar as a love-object evokes her nostalgia for Angola in her childhood and an obsession with people who have the same skin colour as Aguiar, including her Angolan colleague, Justino. While ‘[o] mistério das feições do desconhecido continuava por deslindar’ [the mystery of the unknown’s features remained to be unravelled], the persecutory nightmare transforms into ‘*um sonho erótico com um colega*’ [*an erotic dream with a colleague*] (p. 74, italics original). In this way, the author represents trauma’s function of bringing about hallucination and connection with others, which will be discussed in detail in the second section.

Despite the fact that Paredes represents trauma in a self-referential personal history of the protagonist as she focuses on Ana’s inner life, she does not disengage this novel from historical and political concerns. By delineating the black cook’s silent death and Ana’s sensual current towards him as well as Ana’s equation of Africa with a mere business market as a grown-up, the author discloses the objectification of black people and of Africa by their (ex)-colonizers. Moreover, with the inclusion of quoted texts from historical documentation, the author positions Ana in the history of transition in Portugal:

*Retornados e profundamente infelizes, tentámos recomeçar a vida sob pressão de uma comunidade que, em vez de culpabilizar os ventos da história, se virou contra nós [...]*  
(Câncio, p. 42, italics original)

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Hanna Segal, *Klein* (London: Karnac, 2002), p. 116.

<sup>22</sup> Melanie Klein, *Narrative of a Child Analysis: The Conduct of the Psycho-analysis of Children as Seen in the Treatment of a Ten Year Old Boy* (n.p.: The International Psycho-analytical Library, 1961), p. 465.



[Returned and deeply unhappy, we tried to restart our life under the pressure of a community that, instead of blaming the tide of history, turned against us.]

It is obvious that Paredes combines the depiction of the general conditions of *retornados* at that time with the portrayal of Ana's personal experience and psyche. By conflating Ana's structural trauma with the historical, collective one, Paredes vividly represents the way in which trauma is inscribed in history from the perspective of the *retornado*.

In Paredes's bildungsroman portrait of the transition period of decolonization in Angola and Portugal based on Ana's psychological progression, she interweaves in this novel historical and political realities with a narrative of individual anecdotes. Paredes uses the trick of placing Ana in a flashback battlefield event in Rwanda where she is on her business trip. In this way, she represents the repetition of traumatic scenes as a sort of fate that Ana cannot escape:

O vidro da janela partiu-se com o impacto de uma bala. O susto e instinto de sobrevivência fizeram com que se atirasse ao chão [...] Através do vidro partido via as balas tracejantes das kalashnikov que cruzavam o céu desafiando a beleza das estrelas, ouvia os disparos dos rockets e estremecia com o impacto dos rebentamentos no solo. (p. 97, italics original)

[The windowpane broke with the impact of a bullet. The fright and instinct for survival made her throw herself to the ground. Through the broken windowpane she saw the tracer bullets from the Kalashnikovs that crossed the sky defying the beauty of stars, heard the launching of the rockets and shuddered with the impact of the blasts on the ground.]

Re-experiencing the war awakens Ana's traumatic memory in Angola before her definitive departure to Portugal, especially when the subconscious reaction of 'refugia[r] debaixo das mesas e das camas por causa das balas perdidas' [taking refuge under desks and beds because of stray bullets] constitutes a replication of the past (p. 30). Like the 'balas' that intrude on the beautiful starry sky ('beleza das estrelas'), the 'universo [...] muito bem organizado em negócios, mercados, investimentos, lucros e riscos' [universe very much organized in business, markets, investments, profits and risks] that she creates with the fantasy and expectation of a scenic Rwanda in *Tibete de África*, as well as her nostalgic sentiment towards Africa evoked by her Angolan colleague, Justino, are reduced to complete disillusionment.

This repetition, while disclosing the unchangeable cruelty of war inflicted upon innocent individuals, also demonstrates Ana's hopelessness confronted with the fated re-enactment.

As Sandra Courtman contends, collective traumas are often 'connected by an historically determined experience of loss'.<sup>23</sup> The juncture of her father's death and her loss of Aguiar symbolizes the breakdown of colonial regime, while disconnecting her from Angola, her native land. Ana's loss associated with the demise of colonialism reflects the irreversible historical trend, embodied in the collective trauma of the *retornados*. Moreover, the absence of a biological father, as is shown in Ana, is accompanied by a confusion in identity and conflict in one's origin. When informed of the fact that she is actually the biological daughter of someone she did not even know ('passei a ser filha de um desconhecido'), Ana's feeling of being an orphan is reinforced: 'Foi como se tivesse ficado órfã duas vezes' [It was as if I became an orphan twice] (p. 41). As Hilary Owen aptly puts it, this 'lack of psychic connection to a homeland is largely represented as a fractured paternal connection, a lack of affiliation expressed as anger toward the mother'.<sup>24</sup> Ana's lack of acquaintance with her biological father in Portugal is bound up with her unfamiliarity with the country, which she does not identify as her fatherland: 'A minha deslealdade para o país que me acolheu não me incomodava, eu nem sequer nasci aqui!' [My disloyalty to the country that welcomed me did not bother me, because I was not even born here!] (p. 46).

This historically located, collective trauma induced by 'the formative impact of the social context of colonial domination on individual consciousness', are delineated as 'incessant quotidian' when narrated in a domestic setting and personal anecdotes,<sup>25</sup> which attests to their insidiousness and pervasiveness. Ana hovers between an imaginary return to her childhood self in the colonialist family in Angola and a practical businesswoman in Portugal who consciously eschews any connection with her old identity, demonstrating a certain lack of 'solid and stable sense of self'.<sup>26</sup> Her grief, however, is not 'privatizing' but 'furnishes a sense

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<sup>23</sup> Sandra Courtman, 'From Mary Prince to Joan Riley: Women Writers and the "Casual Cruelty" of a West Indian Childhood', in *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance*, ed. by Abigail Ward (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 30–47 (p. 34).

<sup>24</sup> Hilary Owen, *Mother Africa, Father Marx: Women's Writing of Mozambique, 1948–2002* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007), p. 154.

<sup>25</sup> Pheng Cheah, 'Crises of Money', *Positions: Asia Critique*, 16.1 (2008), 189–219 (p. 196).

<sup>26</sup> Pieter Vermeulen, 'The Biopolitics of Trauma', in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant and Robert Eaglestone (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 141–55 (p. 144).

of political community of a complex order' while 'bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency' determined by the colonial order.<sup>27</sup>

Ana's trauma is not simply a grief of loss that afflicts her as an independent individual, considering that what is attached to her loss actually composes who she is: the individual's trauma can always be in connection with others.

### **Trauma and Connection with Others**

#### *Ana and Amândio*

According to Caruth, 'one's own trauma' can be easily 'tied up with the trauma of another', thus leading to 'the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound'.<sup>28</sup> Paredes's novel engages the question of mutual understanding that the traumatic experiences of the individuals engender.

It is noticeable that the conversations between Ana and Amândio are often concerned with their past experiences: 'Ana, como para ti parece que há mais vida no passado que no presente talvez te interesse saber que pertenço a uma das famílias mais antigas do Penedo da Saudade...' [Ana, since it seems to you that there is more life in the past than in the present, you might be interested to know that I belong to one of the most ancient families of Penedo da Saudade] (p. 23, italics original). Stuck in her tragedy, Ana unconsciously lets her wound speak out and feels she is being understood by Amândio, who was once a Portuguese revolutionary and a political refugee: 'Porque será que a Ana faz tanta questão em olhar para trás? É como se tentasse encontrar uma ponte entre dois mundos diferentes' [Why does Ana make such a point of looking back? It's as if she were trying to find a bridge between two different worlds] (p. 24).

Talking about the past constitutes not only an exchange of memories but also a combination of their experiences. Despite their age gap and differences in life trajectories, their traumas (the experience of dictatorship and political exile for Amândio, who was forced to leave his native Coimbra; and the suffering of forced departure from Angola and bereavement for Ana) echo each other: 'Ana olhou para o Amândio cheia de ternura. Estava cada vez mais ligada a ele. Sem saberem, ambos tinham sido vítimas do mesmo sistema filho da puta' [Ana looked at Amândio full to tenderness. She was increasingly connected to him.

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<sup>27</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 8.

Without knowing it, both of them had been victims of the same bastard system] (p. 25). Ana's attempt to bridge two different worlds shows a problematic mode of recalling and addressing. It unfolds not only Ana's 'imperative to tell and to be heard',<sup>29</sup> but also the inability for both fully to access their memories that have been traumatically distorted. For Amândio, exile rendered him 'sem referências' and '*sem terra*' [without points of reference and without a homeland] (italics original, pp. 23–24). Like other political refugees, he is disconnected from his past and origin and he lives in a state of suspension: 'O único sofrimento que tive a encarar foi o vazio' [the only suffering that I had to face was the void] (p. 24). The rupture in realities erases his history, reducing him to a state of emptiness where he is '[i]solated in the present' and refuses to reflect on his past or to envisage his future:<sup>30</sup> 'O presente era a única prioridade' [The present was the only priority] (p. 16). As for Ana, her departure to Portugal constitutes an erasure of her past in Angola, where she had a mute wound that is difficult to articulate. In this sense, Amândio and Ana, both dispossessed, are 'linked in the missing of their traumas' and memories.<sup>31</sup> As Kolk and Hart contend, traumatic memories 'need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language'. Ana's exploration into the past reveals her drive 'to complete it' so that her 'story can be told'.<sup>32</sup>

The establishment of their connection thus indicates the possibility of reconstructing their respective histories and healing their pasts, which is shown in their decision to move back to Portugal and the intention to recommence their life: 'ela era nova, tinha objetivos e ia lutar pelos dois' [she was young, had goals and was going to fight for both of them] (p. 25). Nevertheless, as the novel starts with their divorce, this anachronic narration elaborated by the author suggests conversely an erosion of hope for the traumatized jointly to cast off the shadow of their past: Amândio's failure to find employment in Portugal and Ana's covert and unfulfilled dream concerning her 'passado mágico' [magical past] in Angola (p. 43), which 'was never fully grasped in the first place',<sup>33</sup> contribute to their separation and lay bare their

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<sup>29</sup> Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 61–75 (p. 63).

<sup>30</sup> Marie Josephine Diamond, 'Rape, Representation and Metamorphosis in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*', in *Postcolonial Traumas: Memory, Narrative, Resistance*, ed. by Abigail Ward (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 173–89 (p. 181).

<sup>31</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 41.

<sup>32</sup> B. A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, 'The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma', *American Imago*, 48.4 (1991), *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Trauma: II*, 425–54 (p. 447).

<sup>33</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 62.

incomprehension for each other. Their inability to bridge ‘the realm of the trauma and the realm of their current, ordinary life’ results in the perplexity over their own fates,<sup>34</sup> underscoring the precariousness of hope.

### *Ana and Justino*

While trauma can bring a link between individuals, it does not always bring empathy. Ana’s encounter with Justino indicates how traumatic memory leads to their connection but fails to create mutual understanding. Caruth points out that trauma is related to ‘the profound link between the death of the loved one and the ongoing life of the survivor’.<sup>35</sup> Ana’s affair with Justino implies that her life is inextricable from her childhood experience of losing her beloved Aguiar:

*O je ne sais quoi era o cheiro! Ela conhecia aquele cheiro! [...] Cheirava a pele lavada com sabonete. Sabonete Feno de Portugal. O mesmo cheiro do Aguiar. (p. 66, italics original)*

[This *je ne sais quoi* was the smell! She knew this smell! [...] It is the smell of the skin washed with soap. Sabonete Feno from Portugal. The same smell of Aguiar.]

While Ana intentionally stays dissociated from her past in the workplace, the involuntary memory evoked by the smell ‘inevitably return to overwhelm her’,<sup>36</sup> as is typical of a traumatic re-emergence:

*Leva-se uma vida inteira a esconder, debaixo de camadas e camadas de recordações, os segredos que nos magoaram em criança, e quando pensamos que estamos a salvo, o passado sai das dobras do esquecimento e confronta-nos com as nossas indeléveis misérias. (p. 66, italics original)*

[It takes a whole lifetime to hide, under layers and layers of memories, those secrets that hurt us in childhood and, when we think we are healed, the past emerges from the folds of oblivion and makes us confront with our indelible miseries.]

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<sup>34</sup> Kolk and Hart, p. 448.

<sup>35</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 8.

<sup>36</sup> Diamond, p. 183.

The equivalent sensation engenders a hallucination of the past that has long been submerged, giving rise to a confusion between the body of the dead and Justino's living body. The sight of Justino caught by Ana constitutes 'the continual reappearance of a death she has not quite grasped'.<sup>37</sup> Ana's ensuing dreams of a blurry black figure referring to Justino or Aguiar indicates that subconsciously she fails to distinguish the living from the dead, or reality from the past. By associating Justino's body with Aguiar's, Ana is impelled to erase her and Justino's different individual histories and to structure the present 'as a substitute for the mourned past'.<sup>38</sup> Her question 'Tino, não sei se vais entender' [Tino, I don't know if you can understand] (p. 91) can be considered as a request to Justino for understanding. Nevertheless, the latter refuses to empathize with her sentimental expression about the past and Africa, but instead regards Ana's emotion for Africa as a collective pathology, manifesting his complete rejection of 'fill[ing] out a place preestablished in [Ana's] dream'.<sup>39</sup> Justino's refusal, however, does not simply isolate the two but rather ruthlessly interrupts Ana's indulgence in the past and the nostalgia for Aguiar, revealing for her the reality and the real living body and mind of Justino, neither of which Ana is familiar with, yet this interruption still seems to be feeble compared to Ana's obstinate memory and obsession: 'Não podes perceber o que é viver encarcerada no mito de um passado e de uma África que não existe a não ser na minha cabeça! Quem me garante que as minhas lembranças são verdadeiras?' [You cannot understand what it is like to live imprisoned in the myth of a past and of an Africa that does not exist except in my head! Who can guarantee me that my memories are true?] (p. 116). Ana's uncertainty about a repressed, distant memory implies a certain degree of distortion of reality that peculiarly arouses her obsession with Justino, who resists the role of 'an audience [...] that [is] generous, sensitive, and self-effacing enough to obliterate its own existence and be nothing but a substitutive actors of her unexplicated memory'.<sup>40</sup> As he sharply points out: 'Estava no sítio errado, à hora errada. Se não tivesse sido eu, era outro qualquer africano' [You were in the wrong place and at the wrong time. Had this not been me, it could be any other African] (p. 115). Justino's revelation of Ana's

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<sup>37</sup> Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> Laub, p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!: Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Laub, p. 63.

illusion not only breaks the private communication between the lovers but opens up the question of the representation of the cultural Other, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **The Illusion of the Other**

Taking adroit control of Ana and Justino's perspectives, Paredes shows the way a cultural Other sees its Other in the postcolonial context. Ana's affection for Aguiar essentially involves the objectification of black people from the colonizer's stance, exemplified by her gaze on the cook's corpse:

Ainda hoje sonho com aquele corpo, mais belo morto do que alguma vez foi vivo e que se gravou na minha memória como uma das mais fascinantes imagens que vi. Nenhum escultor teria o arrojo estético de produzir uma obra tão sedutora e inquietante como o cadáver do Aguiar [...]. (pp. 20–21)

[Even today I dream of that body, more beautiful dead than it ever was alive and which was recorded in my memory as one of the most fascinating images I saw. No sculptor would have the aesthetic boldness to produce a work as seductive and unsettling as Aguiar's corpse [...]]

Ana's gaze on the dead body reminds the reader of Salomé's fetishistic, necrophilic love for John the Baptist. Like the depiction in Oscar Wilde's play, in which Salomé obsessively adores the impeccable beauty of John's decapitated head, intoxicated in the ecstasy of taking hold of it, Ana was aroused by the aesthetic pleasure at the sight of the corpse that she compares to a sculpture, while feeling hypnotized by horror ('fico hipnotizada') (p. 20). Here, Aguiar's body is dissected piece by piece in Ana's gaze, fetishized as an object of desire that she attempts to possess, which is evocative of the Luso-tropical legacy with a sexual inversion. This fetishistic obsession with the racial and sexual Other recurs to Ana in the later hotel episode with Justino: 'aquilo não é um sexo, é uma obra da arte, uma escultura' [that is not a sexual organ, but a work of art, a sculpture] (p. 90). This repetition in analogy conveys the repercussion of traumatic scene blending the pain of loss with sexual elation. Just as Freud proposes that fetishism starts with the vexing discovery of difference, Ana's detailed memory underlying 'pele negra' and 'pénis erecto' [black skin and erect penis] as metonyms of Aguiar indicates her perplexed sensation at the encounter of racial and sexual differences (p. 21),

which yields an anxiety over her own identity as a white woman in Angola and at the same time leads to Ana's '*attempts to mediate the confrontation with the "other"*' through a process of fantasizing later in her life.<sup>41</sup> This disturbance in identity was exacerbated when she moved to Portugal, a country that adopted her as '*coisinha retornada*' [*little returnee*] (p. 45, italics original). Isolated and alienated in Portuguese society, Ana tried to retrieve what seems to be a connection with Angola and her own past. This intention was managed in an operation of fantasy, as she mentions her passion for a black football player in her puberty:

Ele fazia-me lembrar o meu saudoso Aguiar, tinha o mesmo sorriso tímido e os olhos amendoados. Não era tão escuro. O meu Aguiar era cor do chocolate preto e amargo. O homem que era alvo da minha paixão era cor de chocolate com leite. (p. 45, italics original)

[He reminded me of my dear Aguiar, who had the same timid smile and almond-shaped eyes. He wasn't so dark. My Aguiar was the colour of dark, bitter chocolate. The man I was passionate about was the colour of milk chocolate.]

The timid smile (a sign of obedience), almond eyes and skin colour of chocolate become emblems by which the two figures are fantastically alloyed, thus constituting a stereotype or simplification of black people in 'an arrested, fixated form of representation'.<sup>42</sup> It is also evident that Ana has an extreme sensibility to skin colour that is believed to be indicative of one's '*natural "identity"*'.<sup>43</sup> Her emphasis on the nuanced difference between the two black men's complexions and the analogy she draws to the skin colours as two types of chocolates further demonstrate her obsession with her fetish object, or what Édouard Glissant claims as the historically constructed racial Other. This racial fetishism, however, is only perceived by Ana in the form of love, which is essentially a 'self-love', given that this fantasy 'affords a semblance of unity [and] wholeness' that she seeks.<sup>44</sup> It is within the same fantasy, which 'appear[s] in intimate connection with' memory as an effect of traumatic seduction,<sup>45</sup> that Ana

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<sup>41</sup> Derek Hook, *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* (Hove and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 32 (italics original).

<sup>42</sup> Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 75.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 80 (italics original).

<sup>44</sup> Hook, p. 196.

<sup>45</sup> Fletcher, *Freud and the Scene of Trauma*, p. 222.



becomes obsessed with Justino. The unexpected coincidence of the scent of soap compels Ana to associate him with Aguiar and fetishize him as an element of her nostalgic Africa.

In the narration of the hotel episode involving the two, a shift from the past tense to the present tense functions to stress the particular immediacy in this key moment unlocatable in object time, which Ana perceives as a merger between the past and present, memory and reality. Ana and Justino are positioned in the hotel bedroom, a scene outside time and place in reality, that is, Ana's 'santuário' [sanctuary] (p. 90). The sexual relation with Justino affords her a temporary feeling of reparation to her childhood trauma, constituting a gratification of her early fantasy caused by the frustration and loss of Aguiar:

— Tino, não sei se vais entender, mas parece que esperei a vida toda por este momento. Hoje é um dia muito importante, porque contigo percebi que só posso ser feliz se me reconciliar com o passado, se não renegar as minhas origens africanas. (p. 91)

[— Tino, I don't know if you can understand, but it seems that I've waited my whole life for this moment. Today is a very important day, because with you I realized that I can only be happy if I reconcile myself with the past, if I do not deny my African origins.]

Ana's obsessive love towards Justino is enhanced by the illusion that offers a possibility of reconciling with the past, since she is able to embrace a part of herself that she tried to deny. This link between the affection for her love-partner and her reconciliation with Angolan identity mirrors Ana's colonialist and imperialistic mindset first unveiled in her early fantasy towards Aguiar, displaying 'a certain amnesia regarding the brutality of Portuguese colonialism' in Angola.<sup>46</sup>

For Justino, a black man born in colonial Angola who pursues his career in Portugal, the power-knowledge relation has an indelible impact on his mind. His impression of white people ('imagens de brancas como a neve') is first derived from the image created by the colonizers in his childhood (p. 57). This fantasy towards his racial Other is evoked when he sees Carla, a white woman:

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<sup>46</sup> Margarida Rendeiro and Federica Lupati, 'Introduction', in *Challenging Memories and Rebuilding Identities: Literary and Artistic Voices that Undo the Lusophone Atlantic* (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 1–10 (p. 3).

*A moça parece uma princesa, igualzinha às princesas dos livros infantis que a mãe lia antes de adormecer. [...] Muitas das recordações maravilhosas do meu mundo mágico da infância são brancas.* (p. 57, italics original)

[The girl seems like a princess, just like those princesses in the children's books that my mother read before I went to sleep. [...] Many of the wonderful memories of my childhood magical world are white.]

Justino's adoration of the woman who is white as 'princesa' in his childhood image showcases how the ex-colonizer's bewitchment still manipulates his mind as it does Ana's, as is reflected in her luso-tropical nostalgia. Justino's representation of Carla also betrays a homologous fetishism, where the white woman is observed as an object. His obsessive gaze upon Carla's white knees set off by black mini-skirt ('uma mini-saia preta a contrastar com os joelhos brancos') (p. 62) is paralleled with Ana's peek at Aguiar's black skin covered with the white foam while bathing:

Ele ensaboava-se energicamente, esfregando a pele negra com o sabonete verde. Ficava muito engraçado cheio de espuma, da carapinha aos pés, parecido com um boneco de borracha que lhe tinham trazido da metrópole. (p. 66)

[He energetically lathered himself, rubbing his black skin with the green soap. He appeared very funny covered with foam, from curly hair to feet, like a rubber doll that he had brought from the metropolis.]

Here, both the white woman's and the black man's bodies are passively observed by their racial and sexual counterparts, who curiously compare them to dolls ('boneco' and 'boneca'). Justino's ambivalent attitudes towards white woman lay bare the covert colonial continuum in the mentality of those who have once been colonized. On the one hand, he is alert to colonizing western ideology, as is shown by his repudiation of Ana's 'lições de moral' [lessons in morality] (p. 114). On the other hand, he still feels certain sense of inferiority and passivity in face of Ana: 'Ela que é branca e adulta que tome a iniciativa' [She is white and adult so let her take the initiative] (p. 85). Even though he received an international education as a member of the Angolan elite and admits that he has almost forgotten his black identity, he is yoked to the embedded colonial and hierarchical perspectives that make him

unconsciously see his racial Other through the knowledge system established by the Portuguese colonial empire. This self-contradictory identity is also shown in Ana, who is both an ex-colonizer and an Angolan and victim of deportation. In her clash with Justino, she indulgently locates herself in the colonial context: ‘Se estivesse a viver num país em guerra [...] matava-te da mesma maneira que o meu pai deve ter feito com o Aguiar...’ [If I were living in a country at war ... I would kill you in the same way my father must have done with Aguiar] (p. 116). As she once bore witness to the black body desecrated by her father, she unconsciously became ‘apprenticed to the oppressive practice of colonial patriarchy’.<sup>47</sup> For Ana, the breakdown of her relationship with Justino and the traumatizing confrontation with genocide in Rwanda debunk her notion that Africa is a land of magic and desire, rendering it a mere illusion or a mirror-image created by the erstwhile colonial empire. The journey of retrieving her African origin ends up unveiling that she is still subject to the enchantment of Luso-tropical mythology. At the end of the novel, Ana is pregnant with Justino’s child, which symbolizes a future of hybrid identity. Paredes indicates this inevitable trend in the voice of Justino: ‘o mundo é cada vez mais mestiço e as pessoas têm cada vez mais identidades...’ [the world is more and more mestizo and people have more and more identities...] (p. 118). Ana’s epiphany stimulated by her disillusionment with Africa (‘não sei nada de África’) (p. 122) constitutes a starting point for dispelling the colonial nostalgia that prompts her to ‘explai[n] the present in relation to the past’.<sup>48</sup> By representing the illusion of the other, Paredes negates the fixity of identity and highlights its provisional nature. She suggests that the way of reconciling self with history lies in the reconstruction of identity, to which the process of disenchantment with the spectre of colonialism may be a prerequisite.

### Conclusion

The nexus between self and history is crucial to the understanding of Paredes’s novel. Combining trauma theories with postcolonial politics, this article has delved into the representation of trauma and othering in *O Tibete de África*, exploring the wider historical and political contexts by interpreting the characters’ psychological experiences.

The constantly shifting narrative position and focalization in the novel blurs the boundary between past and present. This disruption in chronological time by the characters’ subjective time as well as their obstinate and intrusive memories, nightmares that adumbrate the re-

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<sup>47</sup> Courtman, ‘From Mary Prince to Joan Riley’, p. 34.

enactment of certain scenes, are tropes of trauma deployed by the author to represent key themes like war and colonialism ‘as a history not yet past’.<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, Paredes represents unspeakableness as a feature of trauma by demonstrating the precariousness of the bond between individuals and the eroded hope for empathy, reparation and sense of home, as shown in the interconnected networks of the characters which fleetingly shift.

This study also associated trauma with loss, thus making a connection between the individuals’ multiple traumatic experiences like bereavement, exile, and dispossession. The inevitable loss of ordinary people caused by the historical trend raises the concern for the particularity of everyone’s individual experience in a certain period of time.

The study of postcolonial trauma constitutes ‘a warning against repeating the violence and errors of the past’,<sup>50</sup> as this article unveiled the ubiquitous remains of colonial ideologies that manipulate ex-settlers and ex-colonized by exploring the representation of the cultural Other. Enchanted in the mirror-image invented by the ex-colonial empire, the characters are constrained by the entrenched knowledge system, a legacy of Portuguese colonial domination, through which they see themselves and gaze at their racial and sexual others in a fetishistic and objectifying way. The intersectionality is embodied in how Ana, the *retornada*, fetishizes black men. Via Ana’s epiphany and self-discovery, Paredes reveals this illusion of stereotyped re-presentation and exposes the individuals’ composite and hybrid social identities.

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<sup>48</sup> Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 122.

<sup>49</sup> Dalley, *The Postcolonial Historical Novel*, p. 153.

<sup>50</sup> Ward, ‘Introduction’, in *Postcolonial Traumas*, p. 7.