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Learning to Listen: An Examination of Trauma in 20th Century Multicultural American Poetry

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LEARNING TO LISTEN: AN EXAMINATION OF TRAUMA
IN 20th CENTURY MULTICULTURAL AMERICAN POETRY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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This study advances the thoughts of literary trauma theory by discussing fragmentation, isolation, abjection, unhomeliness, and traumatic figurative language. The theory pulls from psychological theorists as Stevan E. Hobfoll, who focuses on the idea of stress, and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart who focuses on historical trauma. The focus of the application is on Keiho Soga, Mitsuye Yamada, and Lawson Fusao Inada, who had experiences in Japanese internment camps, as well as the poetry of Amiri Baraka, Lucille Clifton, and June Jordan who attempt to represent the trauma and the black experience while navigating a new form of representation outside of the white aesthetic. Finally, the study examines Native American poets Robin Coffee, Linda Hogan, and Peter Blue Cloud all of whom write on trauma still inherent within Native American cultures stemming from the treatment of their ancestors, and people yet today, by a racist white society.

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CHAPTER 1

UNDERCURRENT: EXAMINING STRESS AND ANXIETY AS RELATED TO TRAUMA, AND HOW HISTORICAL TRAUMA CAN AFFECT RACE AND ETHNICITY

This study engages the poetry of three distinct American minority cultures who have endured traumatic pasts and whose poetry, although to different extents, encouraged empowerment through the engagement of this trauma. From the very outset, I believe it beneficial to acknowledge that, although this study does engage three very different cultures, it does not by any means fully represent the poetry of those cultures, of their particular period, or even the poet him or herself. This study does examine selected poets because of their ability to draw on a tradition of lyric expressivism and expressive emotionalism. I admit that the sample of poets and the sample of poems are relatively small, but the goal of this study is not to examine the evolution of literary trauma theory or engagement with massive stressors for an entire culture. Instead, this study has sought out to reevaluate literary trauma theory and reorient trauma theory to examine poetry, but more specifically, poetry of American minority writers. Most significantly, I would argue, this study finds the importance that engaging massive stressors and historic traumas has with encouraging empowerment among those who have been oppressed and denigrated.

Before continuing farther, it is evident that the defining of key terms is necessary so as not to lose my audience. Although the terms that are being discussed may not be new, they may be used in a fashion not immediately apparent. As the progression of this study continues, the definition of these terms will undoubtedly be repeated. Given that this study revolves a great deal

around trauma, the various terms associated with trauma need to be addressed first. "Trauma" is defined as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviors stemming from the event" (Caruth 4-5).

"Historical trauma" is the legacy of massive stressors that result from a catastrophic event of the past, such as slavery or genocide.

"Literary trauma theory," the main focus of our study, is the examination of a literary work for elements of historical trauma, massive stressors, or poetic articulations of massive stressors.

"Stress," although a very difficult term to define, will be examined and historicized later in this study. We shall focus on the most contemporary definition of stress, as set forth by Stevan Hobfoll as he defines stress as "a reaction to the environment in which there is either (a) the perceived threat of a net loss of resources, (b) the actual net loss of resources, or (c) the lack of resource gain following investment of resources" (54).

"Stressors," on the other hand, are the events that cause stress. Although stress may be as mundane as running late for work, or as catastrophic as watching the death of one's children, stressors are what cause the emotional response and distress is the maladaptive response to the stressor. Furthermore, massive stressors or traumatic stressors are extreme forms of stress, which "frequently result[s] in psychological symptoms of a more significant nature than more common stressors and may result in psychological disorders for many people who experience traumatic

stress” (Resick 2-3). For this study, massive stressors and traumatic stressors will be used interchangeably.

As we engage the literature, there are certain motifs that will be engaged. Traditionally, literary trauma theory has focused on different aspects, such as repetition, but the four main motifs that are concentrated on in this study are abjection, isolation, unhomeliness, and traumatic figurative language. Because these are all terms and ideas used to discuss the artistic engagement with trauma, I refer to them as poetic articulations of massive stressors.

Perhaps most straightforward is the idea of "isolation." Isolation is to be completely alone or unable to connect with another individual. This is a common characteristic, both reactionary and self-imposed by survivors of trauma, because of the overwhelming feeling that no one can understand the feelings they are going through because of what they have witnessed.

"Unhomeliness," which is very similar to the postcolonial understanding of the term, adopts Homi K. Bhabha's definition as being "the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation. It is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres" (13).

"Abjection" is defined by as being "misplaced, astray and without identity. Abjection is a terrifying borderline state which estranges the individual from all social relations. It is the stigma of the modern subject that cannot locate itself via another object" (Fuchs 1).

Finally, an idea of my own creation is "traumatic figurative language." In order to represent trauma, which is essentially unrepresentable, the survivor or, for our purpose, the

speaker of the poem, utilizes metaphor, or other types of figurative language, in order to discuss an event that has happened to him or her, and uses the descriptions or specific words that are associated with a more traumatic event. Because the event is too painful or frightening to directly examine, traumatic metaphors are a type of displacement that the survivor uses in order to cope and discuss the trauma. Poets use traumatic figurative language when discussing or showing the trauma within their poems because, just as the event is too traumatic to discuss directly, poets may use traumatic figurative language as a means of both displacing the trauma and discussing it. Although a survivor may use a traumatic metaphor to displace the event in order to discuss it, poets utilize traumatic figurative language to grapple with representing what may be unrepresentable. The reason for focusing on these specific poetic articulations of massive stressors in place of others is due in part with the regularity in which these motifs presented themselves within the traumas that are written specifically about massive stressors and distress. The poetic articulations fall in line with emotions commonly felt with people coping with distress associated with cultural traumas, such as isolation, abjection, and unhomeliness. In addition, traumatic figurative language, as will be examined closer in this study, is very similar to a way survivors of trauma engage memories of the event.

Literary trauma theory examines the history of different groups and the traumatic events that have taken place in the past which still impact the people of that particular group. The traumatic events endured fundamentally defy a satisfactory definition or representation—otherwise, they would not be traumatic—forcing writers to utilize other means of signification within their writing. Literary trauma theory recognizes the attempt by writers to voice the stories not only of those traumas but of those who have been oppressed, marginalized, and silenced

throughout history and may continue to be today. This is a partial definition of literary trauma theory; the aim of this study is to prove that this is the direction in which literary trauma theory needs to go, as the current focus of study in literary trauma theory is far too narrow in scope.

The poets of this study were selected based on the specific cultural group they belong to and their engagement with historic or direct trauma. For the Japanese American poets, Keiho Soga was selected because he was a prisoner in the internment camps and because his poetry, unlike the other poets in the collection *Poets Behind Barbed Wire*, because I felt him to have a higher level of engagement with massive stressors. Like Soga, Mitsuye Yamada and Lawson Fusao Inada were selected because they spent time incarcerated in the internment camps, had a high level of engagement with massive stressors, and because they provide perspectives of the events from different stages of their lives. Yamada was incarcerated in her late teens while Inada was incarcerated as a child. As such, the manner in which the massive stressors and traumatic events are discussed in varied and unique ways. More specifically, the poems selected for this study were chosen because they told of direct events that occurred in the speakers' lives (not necessarily the poets'), which caused distress to be presented within the writing. The poem by Yamada, for example, discusses an incident that occurs to a speaker who is assaulted verbally and spat upon due to her ethnicity, but also because of historically traumatic events. The poems of the Japanese American writers engage, discuss, and articulate the events in part so they can be remembered, although such memories are not to be dwelled upon in a positive light, but more as a means to not be forgotten. Other poems, like Inada's "Healing Gila," are written to empower Japanese Americans as well as other minorities who may be oppressed and discusses how the

treatment of the Japanese Americans is not a new event in the history of the treatment of minorities in the United States.

The African American poets examined in this study were selected, like the Japanese American poets, because of their level of engagement with traumatic events of the past and discussion of massive stressors. Obviously many African American poets engage with this type of subject matter. Like Larry Neal, Haki Madhubuti, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Yusef Komunyakha, these poets were selected because of their involvement with the Black Arts Movement, their obvious level of engagement with trauma, but also the manner in which they attempted to empower their audience by discussing and engaging massive stressors. Amiri Baraka is a clear choice for this examination, and the time period of his writing selected I found to be most appropriate for engaging trauma; however, it is abundantly clear that much of Baraka's poetry lends itself readily to examination through the literary trauma lens and would be a very beneficial endeavor in the future. I also selected two women poets from the Black Arts Movement to discuss the perspective of double oppression and need for empowerment for African American women. Lucille Clifton was selected for this study because of her discussion of the massive stressors facing African American women. I limited focus to her book *Good Times* in part because of when it was written (1969) in proximity to the Black Arts Movement, and because of the recognition it received. Rather than focus on later poems by Clifton, some of which would benefit greatly from an examination through the literary trauma lens, I wanted to restrict my focus to this collection. Much like Clifton, a great deal of June Jordan's poetry would lend itself to further examination under the literary trauma lens. I selected "Who Look at Me" because of the period in which it was written, but also because of its discussion of the massive

stressors facing African Americans under the oppressive white society and the empowerment that the poem promotes. Without question, the poetry of any of these three poets could encompass an entire book length study, but due to restrictions in time and space, and because of my desire to examine multiple poets of different cultures, my examination is limited.

Finally, the poets selected for the chapter devoted to Native American writers is not as concentrated on a particular time frame. This was due in part because of the writers and writing that I desired to discuss. Robin Coffee's poetry is a necessity in this study because of his devotion to engagement with historic traumas and his boisterous voice of empowerment. Peter Blue Cloud, whose poetry was published ten years earlier, was selected because of its focus on the Alcatraz occupation, but also because many of his poems engaged massive stressors and historical trauma, as well as the merging of present traumas within the speakers' lives and the manner in which the speaker recalled historic traumas in order to discuss massive stressors currently occurring within the speakers' lives. Like Coffee, Blue Cloud calls on the importance of cultural history in order to cope with present day distress. Finally, Linda Hogan was selected because of her discussion of historic trauma, especially in the manner in which these historic traumas continue to influence the lives of her speakers. This is quite evident in her poem "The Truth Is" as the speaker attempts to cope with the legacy of trauma that exist, not only as an historic trauma within the culture, but one manifested in herself as she is both Chickasaw and white. While the poets and poems selected are appropriate for this study, and their poetry lends itself readily to the literary trauma theory, future studies that focus primarily on the poetry produced during the Red Power Movement will be undertaken in the future.

Finally, the focus on literary trauma theory with these specific cultures is both ambitious in its scope, while also quite limited in regards to a deep understanding of one particular poet or culture. This is admitted and understood. This focus was undertaken because of the limited amount of studies that literary trauma has had on minority cultures and I wanted to employ the theory to as many cultures as possible given the time and space.

The focus of the literary version of trauma theory has resided primarily in the literature written by survivors of the Holocaust and in the literature associated with the Holocaust. From Holocaust literature, scholars of literary trauma theory branched into feminist studies and women's literature, as well as literature that dealt with war and veterans, such as that by Tim O'Brien. Although these are pertinent areas where literary trauma theory can be applied—and can be done so with relative ease—the study of trauma as it applies to American minorities is far less common and is distinct in nature. The examination of the effects of trauma on American minorities, and how such trauma has affected their literature, is not only a field brimming with possibility for further exploration, but is an area that needs to be explored to provide a deeper understanding of literature. This study will strive for a deeper insight into poetry by examining distinctive poetic techniques used to express trauma within a poem, such as traumatic metaphor, abjection, and unhomeliness.

In order to understand and discuss the effects of trauma on American minorities, the focus moves away from the direct impact of trauma on individuals to the effect of historical trauma on subsequent generations. This study will examine three groups that have legacies of trauma that transcend the generation directly affected by trauma and who continue to cope with

the aftereffects of the traumas. It should be obvious that the historical trauma that has the potential to be manifested within the African American community is very different from the historical trauma, which may impact those of Native American, Latino/a, or Irish ancestry, or Jews who have the recent trauma of the Holocaust. With that in mind, I believe it is essential to discuss the definition of historic trauma from the outset of this chapter. As such, the theories of Dominick LaCapra and Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart are intrinsic to this study. LaCapra is a preeminent scholar in literary trauma studies and Brave Heart is an expert in historical trauma in the Native American community.

Literary trauma theory, as it has been conventionally utilized, places a great deal of focus on repetition, the attempt to represent the unrepresentable, and the need for a survivor to tell her story. This study will continue the use of these principles and shall extend beyond them in order to discuss how traumas of the past continue to impact people today. Within the poetry of African Americans, Japanese Americans, and Native Americans are examples of repetition, the attempt to represent the unrepresentable, and the need for a survivor to tell her story; however, many of these poets present abjection, traumatic metaphors, and the feeling of unhomeliness, which shall be examined in greater detail. Furthermore, the poets are drawing off a different experience than survivors directly impacted by trauma. Many people, poets included, cope with the lingering effects of trauma from the past called historic trauma. This historic trauma has the ability to impact communities long after the initial trauma has occurred, thus effecting generations and communities for many years. In order to gain a greater understanding of what historic trauma is and how it can be felt by subsequent generations, it is important to examine the work of literary trauma theorists, such as LaCapra and trauma theorists such as Brave Heart.

LaCapra discusses the value of literature engaging with trauma in his text *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. LaCapra compares literature and historiography and the idea of truth claims residing in both types of writing. Historiography is given more credence in regards to its truth claims, but LaCapra argues “that narratives in fiction may also improve truth claims on a structural or general level by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible ‘feel’ for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restricted documentary methods” (13). Therefore, LaCapra is suggesting that literature can allow for insights into traumatic events that history cannot. Furthermore, and perhaps equally intriguing, LaCapra states, “One might, for example, make such a case for Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* with respect to the aftermath of slavery and the role of transgenerational, phantomlike forces that haunt later generations” (13-14). What LaCapra is discussing here is what theorists like Brave Heart call traumatic history, or theorists like Ron Eyerman call cultural traumas. The idea of literature allowing for a unique insight into the traumatic events and historical trauma are two very significant ideas that are intrinsic to this study.

In addition, LaCapra is stating that traumatic stressors belong, not to an individual, but to an entire community. As we examine the theories of Stevan Hobfoll, it becomes apparent that these are ideas that exist presently within psychological studies. LaCapra also states that the traumatic history must be worked through and insists “on the need for empathetic unsettlement, and the discursive inscriptions of that unsettlement, in the response to traumatic events or conditions. Moreover, there is an important sense in which the aftereffect—the hauntingly possessive ghosts—of traumatic events are not fully owned by anyone and, in various ways,

affect everyone” (xi). Not only are these traumatic events not owned by anyone and affect everyone, but LaCapra continues by stating, “I would distinguish between victims of traumatizing events and commentators (or those born later), but even with respect to the latter I put forth what might paradoxically be termed a limited or framed defense of hyperbole—and even more insistently of emphatic unsettlement—as discursive symptom of, and perhaps necessary affect response to, the impact of trauma” (xi). In this statement, LaCapra is furthering the idea of historical trauma affecting people of subsequent generations. LaCapra is not the only theorist interested in the affects of trauma that occur to subsequent generations. As shall be discussed, Brave Heart plays particular attention to the legacies of traumatic stressors and the impact that these have across generations.

Brave Heart examined the legacies of traumas and how they continue to impact people long after the event has subsided. Historic trauma is defined by Brave Heart in her article, “The Historical Trauma Response among Natives and Its Relationship to Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration.” Brave Heart defines historic trauma as the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” (7). In addition to historical trauma, Brave Heart also discusses the idea of historic trauma response, which she defines as “the constellation of features in reaction to this [historic] trauma. The HTR [historic trauma response] may include substance abuse as a vehicle for attempting to numb the pain associated with trauma” (7). This type of substance abuse in order to numb the pain from trauma is not a phenomenon unique to Native Americans, but is quite significant when one considers that the use of illicit drugs and the percentage of binge drinking are highest for Native Americans, as found in the 2007 National Survey on Drug

Use and Health national survey (SAMHSA). The mention and discussion of drinking is apparent within the poetry of many Native American poets. For example, Coffee's small collection of poetry *A Scar Upon Our Voice* contains no less than eleven poems, which make reference to alcohol or alcoholism. Drug and alcohol references also appear in the work of many African American and Asian American poets, as well.

Brave Heart continues with her discussion of historical trauma response by discussing how it also includes other destructive behavior beyond substance abuse. Brave Heart states that historical trauma response "often includes other types of self-destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts and gestures, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions" (7). These types of behaviors and feelings are found readily in the poetry of all three cultures to be discussed in this study, but are readily found in the poetry of all cultures. In addition, Brave Heart stipulates and refers to previous articles published by her that argue that "[a]ssociated with HTR [historical trauma response] is historical unresolved grief that accompanies the trauma; this grief may be considered impaired, delayed, fixated, and/or disenfranchised" (7). The idea of unresolved grief is of great importance because it articulates, perhaps more directly, the sentiments and emotions found within a great deal of poetry with elements of trauma. To state that the poetry of a historically traumatized culture exemplifies the characteristics of historically unresolved grief is more psychologically viable because the characteristics associated with unresolved grief are more readily apparent than the characteristics of trauma, especially those of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Ideas such as these presented by Brave Heart and LaCapra are virtually nonexistent in ethnicity-based readings of trauma and are necessary to gain a greater understanding of how historical trauma continues to

affect different individuals and the emergence of these struggles as they are found in poetry. In the following, I shall demonstrate the limits of existing ethnicity-based readings of trauma and, consequently, the need for more specific theory than allowed by studies of the Holocaust and Toni Morrison's work.

Because the histories of different races and cultures are so varied, the impact of traumas that have occurred to different groups may affect the people of those specific groups differently. The history of whites taking land from Native Americans, slaughtering millions, forcing Native Americans to live on land set aside and away from whites, believing Native Americans to be less than human, and committing many other atrocities against Native Americans is unique to Native Americans. Although African Americans may feel similar feelings and resentments because some of the acts perpetrated against Native Americans are similar to those against African Americans, the histories and cultural memories are different. To further complicate this, it is *imperative* that we, as trauma theorists dealing with historical traumas associated with race and racism, understand, recognize, and verbalize the fact that, just because someone is of a particular race or ethnic group, it does not mean they are affected by historical trauma, and perhaps more importantly, every person's experience with trauma and historical trauma is unique.

The lack of more studies into the effects of historical trauma on American minorities is only partially the problem I see with trauma studies as it exists today. Through my reading of literary trauma theory scholarship, I have found numerous problems with the exploration of historical trauma that I believe need to be resolved if literary trauma theory hopes to evolve into a theory of more substance and importance. Firstly, literary trauma theory in literary studies has focused on prose rather than poetry. As it stands, much of the scholarship in literary trauma

theory focuses on identifying ambiguities, fragmentation, traumatic subject matter, confrontation with death, repetitions (synonymous with a trauma victim reliving the events), and mourning, which are all factors that a trauma theorist may attempt to identify in order to discuss trauma within a text. Many of the same characteristics are found in poetry that contains elements of trauma; however, poets are able to use different methods to represent trauma within the poem beyond narrative. Poets who write about trauma have utilized poetic techniques such as enjambment to create anxiety, short lines and short stanzas to create a fast read (thereby creating anxiety within the poem), violent imagery or language (such as the words “fuck” or “masturbation”) in order to create anxiety within the reader, and metaphors to speak of trauma where straightforward language would be less effective at describing it.

The focus on trauma in poetry by Cassie Premo Steele and Walter Kalaidjian has greatly benefited the field by identifying how trauma can be represented in poetry and various techniques a poet may employ in order to represent trauma within their. Kalaidjian, in his book *The Edge of Modernism*, makes great progress in finding the benefit of analyzing poetry through a traumatic lens, and in my study, I wish to expand on his vein of thinking. Kalaidjian states in his book:

I wish to propose a new consideration of how the agency of the letter in poetic discourse testifies to the truth of traumatic reference in ways that make special claims on us in excess of our normal roles as authors and readers. Although literature’s fictive grounding in the figurative use of language would hardly seem fitted to disclosures of referential truth, I would argue that the poetry of

generations witness—precisely as a linguistic event—manifest its forces in revolutionary ways. What is properly an unspeakable or “buried” trauma in the ancestor, no matter how distant, appears like a ghost haunting the symptomatic actions, phobias, “puppet emotions,” hallucinations, and—most telling—the “staged words” or *cryptonyms* of the decedents. (26)

Kalaidjian and I agree that historical trauma can be manifested in the poetry of subsequent generations. The focus of this study is to apply this concept to poetry produced by three distinct American cultures and examine the way poetry has aided in empowering the writer and cultures. An overlying theme present within the poetry of these cultures is the feeling of displacement and abjection. This feeling, as this study shall show, is common within the poetry dealing with trauma and is a common feeling of many who face traumatic stressors, either within their own life, or as they work through historical trauma as members of a minoritized culture.

The second area where literary trauma theory could greatly improve is in the use of more contemporary psychological research and theory in order to discuss and understand historical trauma and how it is manifested within a creative work. The origins of trauma study are based on the studies and findings of Freud, and many scholars examining literature through a lens of traumatic analysis have mentioned Freud in their research. Although Freud may have been one of, if not *the*, first psychologist to identify the affects of massive stressors on an individual, I believe that, if we are to better understand trauma and its relation to literature, we need to expand our understanding of the field. If we maintain our focus on the ideas of Freud in our understanding of trauma in literature, then we are no different from a researcher looking for

Armenia or Uzbekistan by using a map from the 1930s. Much has changed in the understanding of trauma in psychology since Freud; thus, if we base our understandings of the current theoretical terrain on a map from eighty years ago, we will most certainly be lost.

One of the foremost concerns in my mind is the terminology (or lack thereof) used to discuss trauma in literature. As I have read articles relating to traumatic analysis and literature, very rarely do I run across phrases such as “stress,” “massive stressor,” and “coping,” which are terms of paramount importance in the discussions of posttraumatic stress disorder and trauma studies in Psychology. The lack of such terminology indicates to me that many of the scholars in literary studies today, to continue with the Eastern Europe metaphor, are using a map that still recognizes the Soviet Union.

"Stress" is a term used by psychologists, physicists, and people of every occupation; thus it has a multitude of definitions associated with it. In order to understand the term as psychologists uses it today (and its relevance to trauma), we need a working definition as well as a basic understanding of how stressors affect the body if we, as literary scholars, are going to discuss trauma adeptly in literature. Stevan E. Hobfoll, in his book *The Ecology of Stress*, examines a number of definitions of stress as it pertains to psychology:

Principle among these [definitions of stress] was the definition given by McGrath (1970), who defined stress as a substantive imbalance between perceived environmental demands and the perceived response capability of the organism in situations where the consequences of failure are judged as important to the individual. A more recent definition by Kaplan (1983) was also viewed as making

an additional contribution to our understanding of the stress phenomenon.

According to Kaplan, psychosocial stress reflects individuals' inability to forestall or diminish their perception of disvalued circumstances. (23)

Stressors are of utmost importance when discussing trauma because trauma is not a separate entity, but an extreme form of stress where one believes their life is in danger. Understanding stress as defined by researchers such as Howard Kaplan and Joseph McGrath is necessary in order to improve our understanding of literary trauma theory and its use in the analysis of a text, as well as Hobfoll's resource and loss of resource stress model. As Brave Heart outlines, members of minority groups are at a greater risk for engagement with massive stressors because of historically unresolved trauma; thus, we should be mindful of examples of massive or traumatic stressors related to historical trauma as it manifests in the writing of minority writing.

In the following pages, I will engage these two principles, beginning with literary trauma theory's need to expand upon its use of contemporary psychology and examining where literary trauma theory originates. Secondly, I will explore the fact that literary trauma theory has, as a result, neglected to expand into how race and ethnicity are impacted by historical trauma and how the traces of historical trauma can be found in the literature of writers of many different races. As a result, the failure to utilize ideas within contemporary psychology and expanding thereupon has contributed to the lack of literary trauma theory's expansion into how race and ethnicity are affected by historical trauma and vice versa.

The Psychology Behind Stress and Trauma

In order to gain a greater understanding of trauma studies, particularly as it relates to the poetry of U.S. minorities, one of the best sources is E. Ann Kaplan's *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Loss in Media and Literature*. As this book shows, trauma theories get their start from Freud. From the time of Freud until our present time, clinicians have been working toward gaining a better understanding of trauma, even if it was not labeled as such early on. As Kaplan points out, it was not until the late twentieth century that the technology was available to explore and understand, in greater detail, the physiology of the brain's structures and apparatuses, which in turn proved the early theorists' ideas of how the brain functioned to be correct and to move away from the idea of Freud's unconscious fantasies (25). However, it is not only the greater understanding of the brain's mechanisms that has allowed for more expansive knowledge in the field of trauma. Theorists such as Kaplan understand how trauma and cases of trauma grew exponentially with the advent and growth of the industrial revolution and modernity. The result of industrialization and the bourgeois family created newly identified psychological problems in men and women. For women, a political minority if numerical majority, the bourgeois "family became the site for female hysteria (caused by the family's patriarchal and puritanical codes), while industrialization (that required the bourgeois class, and was, circularly, produced by that class) provided the social conditions for the train and machine accidents, and for large-scale wars" (25). French theorists, such as J. M Charcot and Pierre Janet, who were contemporaries of Freud, as well as Josef Breuer, who worked alongside Freud, began to understand that hysteria was a result of trauma which occurred from the result of war or industrial accidents for men

(mostly) and from the oppressive, stressful patriarchal society, as well as from taking care of the sick and dying, for women (26).

After World War I, many more clinicians and theorist became interested in the study of trauma due to the influx of men returning home from the battlefield. While Freud and others had begun linking hysteria to sexual abuse for women (though Freud controversially questioned that link later in his life), some clinicians began noticing similar symptoms among men returning home from war. As a result, Freud's ideas and understanding of trauma became more complex, but also less anchored to the specific experiences of minorities. Nevertheless, as Kaplan explains, Freud began to understand that

[n]ot everyone responds in the same way to similar experiences, so Freud conceives of a sliding scale and slow series of developments that result in trauma symptoms. It is not too much to infer from what Freud says here that the difference in how soldiers react to similar war trauma may depend on how far the war situation triggered prior psychic conflicts. In war, such internal conflicts, together with intense fear for his life or that of close ones, threatened the soldier's identity and hence the dizzy panic or paralysis that followed... Central to this Freudian theory of trauma is a motivated unconscious. In this case, the traumatic event may trigger early traumatic happenings, already perhaps mingled with fantasy, and shape how the current event is experienced. (32)

Thus, each person who becomes victim to a traumatic experience has an individualized response to the incident depending not only on the person and their ability to cope, but on the experiences

they have encountered previously in life. A variety of methods were implemented to treat victims of trauma both during and after Freud's time, including electroshock therapy. Although the treatment for trauma has significantly changed since Freud's day, his ideas and concepts helped pave the way for current theories in trauma studies. Freud and his contemporaries did understand that people that had experienced similar events, such as soldiers come home from war, had similar, yet unique responses to the trauma. Although this sounds somewhat contradictory, what is meant by "similar, yet unique" resides in the fact that there are general reactions to traumatic events, such as triggered panics, night terrors, and uncontrollable, repetitive flashbacks, but the symptoms experienced by an individual vary in intensity and variety.

When we examine Freud closer, it is evident that Freud wrote very little on the topic of social psychology or psychology as it pertained to groups. In one of the few writings where Freud discussed groups or social psychology, entitled "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," Freud argues that group and individual psychology are virtually the same. Freud notes in his essay that group psychology is only in its beginning stages of research; thus, it was not until after Freud that many advances were made in this area. In addition, it was not until the study of returning veterans from more recent wars that psychological researchers began to understand trauma better as a group phenomenon. In fact, major interest in trauma did not become of major interest to researchers until the 1970s.

After the Vietnam War, researchers began focusing on trauma again. As with World War I, the influx of soldiers suffering from trauma which occurred on the battlefield led to a renewed interest in trying to understand and help victims. While much research did take place during the

period after the Vietnam War, Kaplan notes much of the “research was not widely distributed until the mid-1990s” (32). With the distribution of research came a “veritable flood of media attention and printed books” (Kaplan 33) and an interest in the use of literary trauma theory in the humanities. With research in PTSD being more widely distributed in the 1990s, theorist Dori Laub and Geoffrey Hartman headed the Fortunoff Video Archive Project that focused on Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Survivors were asked to tell their stories and were recorded as video memoirs. The new PTSD research provided new insight and understanding into the study of memoirs that dealt with traumatic events, thus furthering research into Holocaust literature. Furthermore, a great deal of interest in trauma studies was focused on women and trauma which resulted from domestic abuse, incest, and rape. Books such *The Secret Trauma: Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women* by Diana E. H. Russell discusses the impact of traumatic encounters associated with young women and girls being sexually abused by relatives, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life Writing* by Suzette A. Henke discusses the importance that writing about traumatic events can aid in the coping process, as well as *Handbook of Women, Stress, and Trauma*, which examines traumas that are unique within the lives of women. There are many psychological texts devoted to the idea of women and trauma that have been published in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century. Furthermore, books of literary trauma with a focus on women have begun appearing recently, such as *Modernist Women Writers and War: Trauma and the Female Body in Djuna Barks, H.D., and Gertrude Stein* by Julie Goddspeed-Chadwick (2011), *Displaced Memories: The Poetics of Trauma in Argentine Women’s Writing* by M. Eburne Portela (2009), *Traumatic Possession: The Body and Memory in African American Women’s Writing and Performance* by Jennifer L. Griffins (2010), and

Women's Autobiography: War and Trauma by Victoria Stewart (2004) to mention a few studies focused on literary trauma in women's writings. Although these studies are very beneficial for the field of literary trauma theory, the focus of this study resides in the traumatic history and traumatic stressors resonant in the poetry of African American, Native American, and Japanese American poets.

Many humanist scholars utilized ideas about trauma psychology to gain a greater understanding of the influence that traumatic stressors have on people. These ideas influenced humanist theorists who developed specific understandings of the representational strategies of traumatized people. Kaplan notes that "[s]uch theorists apparently influenced Cathy Caruth, whose acceptance in dissociation as central in trauma is evident by her now famous definition of trauma" (34). The definition that Kaplan is referring to is "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviors stemming from the event" (Caruth 4-5). Definitions such as Caruth's are paramount to understanding which aspects of psychological trauma humanist scholars are examining and discussing and the particular theories they developed to apply them to literary texts.

Like other theories used in literature, literary trauma theory has not been without its critics. Those opposed to the use of literary trauma theory, such as deconstructionist scholars, wanted to "focus on language as primary, and accept Lacan's concept of affect and the unconscious split off from signifiers, which obscures emotion" (Kaplan 34). This has been attributed by Kaplan to the intellectual climate of the late 1990s, when some critics, like Elaine

Showalter, felt the social climate of the United States was that of a culture focusing on itself as victims (Kaplan 35). Still other critics, such as Susannah Radstone, believed that “humanists are drawn to the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder because it avoids the complexities of dealing with the unconscious” (Kaplan 35). While it is not the focus of this endeavor to concentrate on the objections to literary trauma theory, I feel it pertinent to acknowledge a few in order to demonstrate that it is because of the objections to certain aspects of literary trauma theory that theorists such as Kaplan have been pressed to “develop a more complex and malleable theoretical system in working on the impact of trauma, the subjects it produces, its implications in ideology, and in search for ways in which trauma can be ‘translated’” (36). It is this search for new theories that has partly inspired this project.

It is at this point that I believe the use of trauma studies can be applied to multiethnic poetry. Just as literary trauma theory gained steam in the 1990s as it was applied toward Holocaust survivors and the literature produced around that event, it is my contention that literary trauma theory should be move forward in its thinking about history and group identity to American minorities. As this thinking opens towards new groups, so should apply it to new genres of literature. As Kalaidjian and Steele have demonstrated in their texts, the application of literary trauma theory to poetry can be quite fruitful.

Steele states that the value of applying a literary trauma theory lens to poetry resides in how poetry allows for a unique insight which is dissimilar than what can be gained by any other genre or art form. According to Steele, “Poetry allows us to witness as survivors to having survived and to witness to others’ survival: poetry, like trauma, takes images, feelings, rhythms,

sounds, and the physical sensations of the body as evidence” (3). Steele also reminds us that “[t]rauma is not recorded narratively, but, as many researchers have found, is recorded as images and feelings. It is poetry—with its visual images, metaphors, sounds, rhythms, and emotional impact—that can give voice to having survived” (3). Unlike typical prose, which usually attempts a type of completion, poetry allows an individual to express a portion of a narrative or a fragment in time and do so unapologetically. Postmodern literature and art are filled with fragmentation, in much the same way trauma is often recorded; however, it is within modern poetry that we find this type of fragmentation most predominantly. In addition, as Steele has discussed, it is precisely in the poetic devices (“visual images, metaphors, sounds, [and] rhythms” [3]) that trauma is most truly represented because it is very similar to the way it is recorded within the mind of the survivor. Steele’s focus within her text is upon the poet rather than the speaker of the poem, which can, at times, be the same, yet I have reservations about trusting the poet as speaker.

My key concern within this revised theory, one that contends with a wider set of formal devices, moves the examination beyond the poet and allows us to think about historical traumas and group identity. Trauma is not limited to the person who may have sustained the incident directly, such as someone being verbally or physically attacked due to racist motivations. Since E. Ann Kaplan’s book in 2005, theorists have been exploring the effects of trauma on people who were not directly involved in the traumatic event. Such indirect effects are known as “vicarious trauma” and are outlined by Kaplan as

2) direct observation of another's trauma (bystander, one step removed); 3) visually mediated trauma (i.e. moviegoer, viewing trauma on film or other media, two steps removed); 4) reading a trauma narrative and constructing visual image of semantic data (news reader, three steps removed); 5) hearing a patient's trauma narrative (91-92)

Understanding the variations of proximity to the experiences as related to trauma can benefit our overall comprehension of trauma and how it can be identified, and can be useful when discussing trauma as it relates to the literature of different poets. By doing so, we can also observe how trauma has affected the people of a certain ethnic group (as vicarious trauma) or the individual speaker, both understood in a larger historical framework.

I would stipulate that, when one examines a poem, the person being examined in reference to trauma is the speaker and not the poet him or herself. It would be easy to examine an Amiri Baraka poem and desire to examine trauma as it may have affected Baraka, but we must be clear that it is the speaker being examined, not the poet. When we take vicarious trauma into consideration, however, the difference between the poet and the speaker may be minimal, as long as it can be deduced that the speaker is of the same ethnicity and, thus, may have shared similar experiences in regards to vicarious trauma. As long as it can be deduced that the speaker and the poet are of the same ethnicity, we can then understand that the voice is *a* representative (and definitely not *the* representative) of the specific group. The speaker may present feelings shared by some members of the group, but not the groups as a whole, and may allow an insight into the massive stressors, traumas, and feelings that may be shared by a large number of people. We

must also be mindful that vicarious trauma affects different cultures because of the experiences the people of that culture's ancestors encountered and the way the community coped with the trauma. This type of vicarious trauma is also known as historic trauma. Although coping is often an individual practice, it is also a response that occurs in familial or larger group settings; thus, in some situations the differences between the poet and the speaker of the poem may be minimal because they are both hypothetically speaking from the same community, and may, therefore, be encountering similar experiences in regards to historical trauma.

It is clear that Kaplan has gone to great lengths outlining various proximities of trauma and from this one can understand how trauma may affect a particular group both presently and as a result of trauma which has occurred in the past. Such a comprehension of the various proximities inherent with the affects of trauma allows for a greater insight into how trauma may be entwined within the culture of a particular ethnicity. Antonius C.G. M. Robben Marcelo and M. Suarez-Orozco state in their essay "Management of Collective Trauma" that

massive traumas do not just nestle themselves in the victim's inner world: they are transmitted within the family and across generations. Gamble introduces the concept of 'radioactivity' in her reflection on social violence to describe how traumatic experiences can continue to do emotional damage to future generations. A 'radioactive' leakage occurs when parents' debilitating traumatic memories affect their children. The children of survivors often internalize incomprehensible fears and anxieties which undermine a healthy separation from inner and outer reality. (44)

Vicarious, or historical, trauma, such as this often extends beyond the familial setting and is found in the shared experiences created by a particular group; for example, through stories. Examples of collective or historical trauma are found in the recounting of familial histories by African Americans of the traumatic experiences of ancestors at the hands of slaveholders, through stories of traumas inflicted through the Civil Rights Movement, as well as encounters of racism that can still be felt presently. These types of historical traumas, as well as examples of individual traumatic experiences, are manifested within the poetry of not only some African American poets, but many, if not all, oppressed cultures. The poetry written by these poets allow for anyone, regardless of culture, to gain an understanding of these experiences and demonstrates literature's "universality," which is not a new idea, but one especially important to the literature I study here. The fact that trauma many times isolates an individual or a group is combated by the "universality" of literature, thereby allowing the poet and other members of a cultural group that suffer through trauma, both direct and vicarious, a means to form a community, not only with one another, but with people outside of their culture who may not understand their struggle

These ideas of vicarious trauma and the universality of trauma reach far beyond what was understood by Freud and other psychologists of our past. Vicarious and direct trauma have impacted millions of people throughout history, yet the underlying element experienced, whether it is in a concentration camp, an abusive relationship, or at the evil hands of racism, is a *massive or traumatic stressor*. Researchers such as Hobfoll and have studied the causes and effects of massive stressors on individuals, yet their findings are not widely discussed when discussing literature. Although "trauma" is the term which many within the literary world have adopted in order to discuss the events and psychological reactions people have encountered, this term is not

always completely appropriate. By no means am I attempting to belittle the traumatic events that survivors have written about, but if we as literary scholars are going to intelligently discuss elements of psychology, we need to do so with a stronger idea of what we are discussing and by using the terms already set in place in other disciplines.

Most people know stress to be the uneasy and debilitating feeling that they feel when events are not running smoothly or deadlines are looming, but, while this is accurate, their understanding is incomplete, particularly as it relates to trauma. Traumatic stressors are “events that are life threatening (and/or threatening to ‘self’ as is the case with incest or other intimate assaults) and that are accompanied by intense fear, helplessness, or horror” (Resick 2). Trauma is an instance of extreme stress where one’s life is believe to be in danger and, as Hobfoll discusses, can occur in wartime, concentration camps, and as a result of natural disasters. Although the factors contributing to massive stressors can be as diverse as preparing for a first date to the reality of watching an explosive kill off half of you platoon, stressors are vast and divergent phenomenon. Traumatic stressors are not only an extreme form of stress, but “frequently result[s] in psychological symptoms of a more significant nature than more common stressors and may result in psychological disorders for many people who experience traumatic stress” (Resick 2-3). Traumatic stressors often influence members of minority groups because of violent historical events that continue to impact members of the group or may result directly from racism and hate crimes. Because vicarious or direct trauma may continue to affect segments of the minority population, the increased prevalence of conditions such as substance abuse and other psychological symptoms are often the result.

Perhaps it is because the concept of stress and massive stressors are so complex that psychologists have had difficulty defining and agreeing on a definition for stress, yet Hobfoll is able to outline the development of the concept of massive stressors and distress in modern psychology within his book *The Ecology of Stress*. Discussing the evolution of stress, Hobfoll states the concept began

with the seminal work of Cannon (1932) and Selye (1950), [where] stress was viewed as a universal response of organisms to an overtaxing of physiological systems. The work of Caplan (1964) and Lindemann (1944) expanded the concept of stress beyond the limited physiological context. They emphasized psychological reactions to psychosocial crises. Their work was especially important because it formed a basis of thinking that psychopathological reactions could occur among normal individuals in response to extreme circumstances. (22)

It is the thinking of Caplan and Lindemann that allowed researchers to understand that the response to a traumatic event and the psychological ailments that occurred due to this stress were not limited to those individuals who had an “underlying psychopathology” (Hobfoll 22).

Therefore, a devastating event can lead to psychological ailments in anyone, but as American history can prove, it is most often the minority groups of the United States that contend with the majority of traumatic events. These groups were not only targeted for attacks, but had the least amount of support (especially financially) to cope with the traumatic events.

Hobfoll discusses “the catalyzing effects of work on stress, anxiety, and cognitions spurred by such theorists as Lazarus (1966) and Spielberger (1966a)” (22) and about them states,

These investigators embarked on an empirical study of stress-related cognitions and emotions, making important distinctions that many other stress researchers have adopted. Spielberger illustrated how personal traits interacted with physical threat and ego-threat in producing anxiety reaction. He noted that personal traits—trait anxiety in particular—did not affect the experience of physical threat, but that those high in trait anxiety were significantly more sensitive to ego-threat than those low in trait anxiety. Lazarus developed a model of stress that emphasized the role of appraisal and coping, showing that individuals' perceptions of event, rather than the objective qualities of the event, mattered most. Following appraisal, he has asserted that coping strategies play a central role in stress reactions. These concepts have remained central to stress research and have led to advances in the understanding of people's reaction to threatening life events. (22)

Thus, one may suspect a person's reaction, regardless of the situation, is unique to that individual, and from this we can gather, even when multiple people experience the same event at the same time, the reaction to the event will be unique to that individual. However, this is an archaic way of understanding distress. As Hobfoll will demonstrate, reaction to massive stressors, especially those born of traumatic events, is collective. For example, when coping with a stressor, an individual will very often utilize resources, such as friends and family, in order to cope with a particular stressor. When an individual is coping with a trauma that has affected a large number of people, the individual may seek other people that have been affected by the event in order to find strength by means of a community. When the trauma is historic, and that

trauma affects a particular ethnicity, the identity of the group is influenced by stressors and the individual is impacted by the identity of the group. Thus, although the individual may have a unique response to a stressor, the influence that an individual's support group has on that individual significantly impacts their coping. This is often manifested within the writing of minority writers. For example, poets of one particular ethnic group may utilize a common image within their poetry that is particularly significant to their group. A noose found in the poetry of African Americans may be common because of the traumatic history of lynching, yet the way in which they use the image will be unique to the poet. Therefore, the reaction to historic trauma will be unique to an individual, but will be influenced by the minority group because of shared history and experiences. Telling of the stressors or trauma by the writer is positive and can aid in the healing process and work toward the building of community as well as group empowerment. By discussing an event, either directly or through analogy, the writer can better cope and heal from distress, as well as encourage others to help make a change within society. Therefore, by discussing their ideas, they have the ability to own the particular situation, thereby empowering themselves through writing and empowering others as they read.

Individuals are able to cope with different stressors by discussing the events with members of their community and with people who have faced similar stressors in their life. While it is apparent that massive stressors may affect different people in different ways, it may be because of this that theorists have had difficulty defining stress. Hobfoll discussed different definitions of stressors as they have been articulated by different theorists in the past stating,

Principal among these was the definition given by McGrath (1970), who defined stress as a substantial imbalance between perceived environmental demand and the perceived response capability of the organism in situations where the consequences of failure are judged as important to the individual. A more recent definition by [Howard] Kaplan (1983) was also stress phenomenon. According to Kaplan, psychosocial stress reflects individuals' inability to forestall or diminish their perception of disvalued circumstances. This definition was seen as especially heuristic, because it parsimoniously defines what type of events are stressful, that is, those that lead to the perception of disvalued circumstances. (23)

Although these two definitions are discussed as being very beneficial in their ambition to discover solutions, problems were identified, thus giving Hobfoll a springboard to the subsequent chapter where he redefines stress. By presenting a quick overview of the evolution of stress, Hobfoll not only prepares us for his definition, thus adding to the evolution, but also allows for a quick and concise history of stress in order that we may see how many psychologists view stress. Thus, it is beneficial for literary scholars to examine these ideas to better understand how massive stressors (rather than simply trauma) affects the writers and speakers within the poems. This is especially important in terms of minority poets because of the emphasis Hobfoll places on loss of resources and the well-documented fact that minorities are often burdened with higher levels of poverty and economic struggles. as will be examined in chapters four and five as they engage the poetry of the Black Arts Movement and poems that involve the Native American Red Power Movement. Poets in these chapters discuss massive stressors that continue to impact

people of the respective cultures and, as a result, we find the struggle against oppression and the organization of movements to resist the oppressor.

An important contribution that this study makes in the field of literary trauma research resides in the examination of distress that still resides in the cultures formed by traumatic events of the past and how the writers of these cultures discuss these a traumatic events and the distress that resides in individuals afterwards as a means for empowerment. The poetry of each of these cultures are calling on distress, but those of the Native American culture and the African American culture presented in this study, are recalling the traumas and distress inherent within their respective cultures as fodder to encourage the establishment of their own arts movement and political empowerment. It becomes very apparent as was we examine the poetry of the Japanese American poets that these sentiments are not calls for empowerment as opposed to the Native American and African American writers. Of course, this begs our attention. The writers examine traumatic events that occurred generations ago, which is dissimilar to the Japanese American poets, each of whom encountered the events first hand. This would suggest that the reactions are different for those who experience the traumatic events directly as opposed to those whom are writing about distress that occurred to previous generations.

Another aspect that becomes quite apparent is the use of traumatic figurative language. While it is quite apparent that this poetic device is used in the writings of African American and Native American writers, it is rarely used in the poetry of the Japanese American poets discussed in this study. As before, we must be mindful that the Japanese American writers are the only ones who encountered historical traumatic events first hand. Overall, the poet exists as mediators attempting to take a unique insight into trauma and distress and articulate for a universal

understanding. In addition, many poets take this position of mediator and encourage a movement for empowerment within their respective cultures. This is quite evident in the writers of the Black Arts Movement and the Red Power Movement. The writers from these microcultures employ various techniques within their writing to not only discuss distress and historical trauma, but also do so in order to rally against the oppressor. As such, we find these writers, not only discussing this position and the experience inherent in it, but the quest for new means of expression and new means of art.

In order to better understand the poets' engagement with historical trauma, it is necessary to understand that the use of the word "trauma" does not suffice in order to aptly discuss what is being encountered. To recall, traumatic events refer to the incidents, and traumatic stressors refer to reactions. In order to understand stressors and distress, it is necessary to understand a contemporary definition of stress; thus, we must return to Hobfoll. Hobfoll defines stress by saying that stress "is defined as a reaction to the environment in which there is either (a) the perceived threat of a net loss of resources, (b) the actual net loss of resources, or (c) the lack of resource gain following investment of resources" (54). Hobfoll defines resources then as "those objects, conditions, personal characteristics, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of valued resources" (54). This model provides a rather clear understanding of how stressors affect people, but also harkens to how those with less capital are less likely to have these "resources" available so as to cope with massive stressors—and the minorities discussed in this study (and beyond) have, both as a people and as individuals, been denied the same resources as others. A very significant aspect of Hobfoll's resource and loss of resource stress model is the idea of "spiral of resource loss" and its impact on minorities (45).

Hobfoll discusses how, “in the case of the poor, some minority groups, many women, those with severe psychiatric problems, and other oppressed people, the options of resources that may be risked or invested are often very limited” (45). In fact, Hobfoll states, “[A] good definition of oppression may be that state or condition in which resources are limited and in which the options to expand or invest resources are restricted” (45). As can be gathered from many of the speakers within the poems of poets representing minority groups, and as shall be examined to a fuller extent in later chapters, the impact of poverty and lack of substantial resources in order to cope with massive stressors (which may in fact be a result of poverty and/or lack of substantial resources) greatly impacts the speaker's life and is many times palpable within the poem. As a result, the literature from these groups may call on empowerment and organization in order to work against the oppressor in an attempt to change the conditions of their lives. Stress, we must remember, is communal; thus, the community must work to overcome the oppressive circumstances that create the cycle of poverty and disempowerment that continues from the original cultural traumas.

Hobfoll continues articulating the impact of stressors on those with limited resources by stating, “[T]he types of stressors experienced by many poor or disenfranchised people are such that they frequently result in a negative spiral. Typically, the poor are confronted with chronic stressors or stressor conditions that eat away at resource reserves” (45). This eating away of resources takes away any resources that they may have had to begin with, leading to a person risking other resources with little chance of gain. In addition, the poor usually do not have access to preventative strategies that may take the form of a “social-economical protective shield” (Hobfoll 45), which is used to offset stressors. The shield may include “insurance, advanced

education, financial planning, moving to a neighborhood with high-quality schools and public safety, and so forth” (Hobfoll 45-46). This shield is not available to everyone; thus, when an incident such as job loss occurs due to an accident, those without such resources as disability insurance, financial planning, or an advanced education are less likely to have the same financial safety net, as well as other coping resources available to them, thus dramatically increasing the level of stress. Hobfoll states that, in scenarios such as this, “[t]he poor... must play out their options on a much more circumscribed field. Indeed, the most likely outcome is that one is constantly trying to minimize past loss of resources, with little gaining equilibrium” (46). As a result, for people without resources such as these at their disposal, “the chances of achieving a protective posture is very low” (Hobfoll 46). To make matters increasingly worse, oppressed people who lack available resources to combat stressors are more likely to risk highly valued resources to minimize the loss of other resources. As a result, people must organize, as in the Black and Red Power Movements, which then becomes palpable in the art surrounding these movements where the speakers often discuss the need to organize and rebel against the oppressor. This study is unique in its approach due to the understanding that trauma and stressors can play in lives of people, how these responses translate into poetry, and the motifs utilized by poets in order to discuss the impact of these stressors, especially as they call for empowerment within the respective culture, as demonstrated in chapters four and five.

To understand more clearly the idea of resource loss and the negative chain of events that can result for an oppressed individual, consider the following analogy of a poor woman by Hobfoll:

To gain love, she [the poor woman] must swallow her pride and accept a relationship without marriage. To feed the child that comes out of this relationship, she may have to end her education and find poor-paying menial employment in a distant area of the city. To be closer to her child and meet her own social and sexual needs, she may involve herself in a new love relationship that holds little chance of success. So, she marries a man with little promise. The burden of the family is too much for him despite his genuine efforts, and the welfare system is structured such that it is preferable for her and the children that he leaves. And the cycle continues. (46)

Stories such as this one are found within a great deal of poetry and fiction. Regardless if this incident is true or not, if a woman suffering from similar circumstances is given the opportunity to read how this affliction has affected others, she may find solace and hope within the writing. Suddenly she is not alone and the circumstances may be, if only for a brief moment, somewhat more bearable. Furthermore, if the message within the poem is encouraging and uplifting, the reader may be given the strength to carry on. Perhaps more importantly, narratives like this are not uncommon. Therefore, stressors such as this become cyclical, for, as we know, the American Dream is simply that, a fallacy, and people born into poverty will most likely die in the same social class. In order to break this cycle, political movement must move forward to empower people, especially minorities, and is often the case, such as with the Black Power Movement and the Red Power Movement, a movement in the arts encouraging empowerment often coincides with political movements, especially in American history. In addition, manifestations of the fight-or-flight response may be found within the poetry and allow the reader a sense of

empowerment and community. In poems where the woman is able to escape the trappings through flight, the reader may also have the feelings of escape or may seek a type of retreat on her own. In poems where the speaker encourages the reader to fight, the woman may feel empowered to fight against the oppressive stressors that have built up around her. Although these types of benefits can be empowering for the audience, the telling of these types of massive stressors can help to alleviate the frustration and helplessness that the woman is feeling if these feelings had been told in a poem, or any other type of writing.

Understanding stress and the effect that it has on individuals is essential when examining trauma poetry. Although stress has traditionally been difficult to define, Hobfoll's definition proves to be very insightful, not only in understanding and defining stress, but in explaining why stressors are more difficult for people of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, which is heavily populated by minority groups. Stress is often accompanied by anxiety and characteristics of anxiety are often found within poetry dealing with stressful or traumatic situations. The remainder of this section will focus on the influence that anxiety has on an individual and the manner in which poetry is not only influenced by anxiety, but uses characteristics of anxiety to propel the speaker's message.

Along with stress and trauma, the production of anxiety is an important aspect of stress that can become manifested within the fight-or-flight response. To return back to Hobfoll and his conservation of resource stress model, it is easy to see how loss of resource can lead to anxiety and stress on the subconscious level. Hobfoll notes how his conservation of resource stress model is a central theme in psychodynamic theory, thus the two are interwoven in how they lead

to distress. Psychodynamic theory is a Freudian theory that studies the underlying motives beneath human behavior, emphasizing on internal conflicts that may surface in behavioral or emotional manifestations. Hobfoll states that “psychodynamic theory suggests that loss of loved objects in adulthood, or loss of emotional states linked to desired loved objects (i.e., security) leads to anxiety” (48). The reason for this anxiety stems from the idea that “subconscious fears of losing a principal love object (especially mother) are reawakened” (48). Although Freud was the first to conceive psychodynamics and the actualization of anxiety due to loss (most specifically, the anxiety felt by a child over the loss of biological needs found within an infant and child’s mother), other psychologists expanded on Freud’s belief. Hobfoll outlines this evolution from Schur, who, in 1958, “reasoned that at a later stage separation anxiety was learned” (49) and the placement of anxiety was not on biological loss, as Freud postulated, but on losing the love object itself. Bolby, in 1973, combined these ideas in his theory and, as Hobfoll discusses, “there is an evolutionary component to this process, in that the species was furthered if organisms created and maintained close attachments at every period of life” (49). Thus, regardless of which theorist we follow, anxiety stems from loss, ultimately agreeing with Hobfoll’s theory of conservation of resources and the stressor is engaged collectively rather than on an individual level.

It would be foolish for us to assume the emotion expressed within all poems to be authentic; however, given the political and social climate surrounding some writers, as well as the historical trauma prevalent within our society, I believe it would be equally foolish to discount the emotions, anxieties, and traumas that exist with some poetry as well. Our job should not be to validate the feelings, stresses, or traumas found within the poetry, but to examine those

elements because they are important to the cultures and times in which they were written. The goal, therefore, is not to attempt to establish PTSD within a poet, but to understand the manifestations of trauma response within the poem as articulated by a speaker who aims not only to speak from an individual perspective, but as a voice within a larger group. The speaker of the poem, of course, does not represent the culture, but she does allow for an insight in the articulation of stressors and trauma felt as a result of historical, and sometimes direct, trauma. Furthermore, some of the poets examined within this study wanted their work to be representative of their respective culture, especially when it is speaking to larger political imperatives that would break the cycles of stressors, especially as they discuss the disenfranchisement and poverty that many within their culture face, which reinforces the massive stressors that the people must engage with. These massive stressors are not only related to disenfranchisement and poverty, but are residual effects of historical traumas.

It is not uncommon for people, when they are feeling stressed, to state ideas like, “I just want to get away” or “I just need to get out of here,” which could be related to the primitive biological response of fleeing a situation when stressed. Another common, and perhaps less accepted practice, is the use of drugs and alcohol to escape a stressful situation mentally. These types of escapes, as well as distractive behaviors such as television and drugs (to recall the work of *Brave Heart*), allow the mind, partially, to flee the situation by attempting to remove the thoughts by means of escapism. Finally, and perhaps even less accepted, are violent outbursts which may erupt when stress levels become high within an individual. When stressed, it is not uncommon for an individual to become confrontational about minuscule or trivial problems. Furthermore, some individuals may lose control because of stress and physically lash out at

objects or people. In extreme cases, individuals have reacted in very violent behavior that may involve firearms. Some violent and confrontational behaviors that are due to increased stress are indicative of the fight response.

As will be demonstrated in the later chapters of this study, the impact of these stressors and historical traumas can cause people to unite and fight against an oppressor. As is evident within the poetry of each poet studied here, the speakers are asking people to remember or not forget that history of their culture, especially when that history is traumatic. Native American and African American poets call for organization against the oppressor and to fight against the people and powers that desire to keep these cultures disempowered. My study recognizes this maneuver by the poets as being incredibly significant. My study also recognizes that, in order to heal, the focus is not the individual, but as Hobfoll discusses, it is the community. In order to cope, the changes need to be made in society, not just the individual, thus empowerment by the means of social change is necessary. This study focuses on these changes and how they manifest in the arts.

As has been discussed, the examination of literature through a trauma lens is a relatively new undertaking within the field of literature and as such, this approach is still evolving. The use of the stress, anxiety, coping, and trauma could prove very valuable as they are applied to literature, particularly literature by minorities, in order to gain a greater insight into the literature and into the experiences it describes. In addition, trauma researchers have examined race and ethnicity in order to see how these factors may influence the stress and anxiety levels within an individual, as well as their ability to cope. In the following chapters, the examination of poetry

through a lens that focuses on stress, anxiety, trauma, and coping will illuminate how poems that contain these elements may aid the writer and readers in coping, healing, and empowerment. Before continuing to the next chapter, it would be pertinent to discuss how the writing of these poems can be empowering to the writer and aid in their coping and healing within minority cultures, as well as how the audience can be healed and empowered by hearing or reading the poems that contain these elements. It goes without saying that poetry and other forms of art are very significant to every culture, especially as a means of representation, but given the historical traumas that permeate many minority cultures, and poetry's ability to aid in coping, poetry can be understood to play a larger role within a culture as a means to cope individually, to empower people to overcome the negative impacts of historic trauma, and to tell stories not recorded in history.

Cultural Significance

As has been stated, it is important to examine poetry in order to gain a greater insight into trauma because of the link poetry has to emotion and to history, thus providing a greater access to both individual and group pain. Poetry has the ability to give voice to memories that exist as images or that are not easily summed into words and are best articulated through formal devices such as metaphor or fragmentation. The articulation of historical trauma is partially because the direct victim of a traumatic event cannot always tell about their trauma and because trauma is often passed down from subsequent generations. Later generations discuss the trauma in order to work through, and ultimately gain control over, the trauma. Trauma has a unique grasp not only on the person directly involved in the traumatic event, but on the people of the group associated

with larger traumatic events. For the individual directly impacted, they may attempt to escape the trauma and continue with their life without engaging with the emotions tied in with the trauma. This escape cannot be fully realized because of the flashbacks, nightmares, and repetitions that plague the victim long after the event; until the trauma is engaged and worked through, the event continues to haunt the victim. In a much similar vein, collective, traumatic histories of particular groups help to make up the identity of the group, thus individuals are tied to trauma, unable to escape, because of being born into a certain culture. If the impact of this collective trauma has a pronounced influence on an individual, they must engage the trauma and attempt to work through the trauma in order to overcome the negative effects of historic trauma.

Literary trauma theory is a theoretical tool, which allows for a greater understanding of how both direct and historic trauma affects the speaker and her group. The use of literary trauma theory is not to suggest an entire culture of victims, but a means to understand how historic atrocities can resonate in members of the same culture and ethnicity generations after such an event has taken place. Not every person of a particular culture feels the affects of historical trauma in the same manner as others, and some may not feel the effects at all. The same applies, of course, to writers and their literature. It would be foolish to assume that, because a writer is from a particular culture, their writing would in some way always contain elements of trauma. There are certain poets and poems, however, that do have these elements of trauma; thus, it is important to examine the poems as they appear. In addition, minority populations are at greater risk for massive stressors than the typical white male population.

The idea that social characteristics play a role in a person's stress levels, reactions, and coping were first discussed by Caplan and Lindemann, as Hobfoll points out:

Caplan's and Lindemann's combined contribution represented a revolutionary departure from previous thinking. They argued that the characteristics of the stressful circumstances were as important as the individual and social characteristics of the affected persons in determining their distress... To suggest that during crisis personal and social characteristics of the individual played a tertiary role in the expression of crisis reactions and that environmental conditions were the principal determinants of these reactions was to go against the accepted grain of psychological thinking of the period. (6)

In addition to Caplan and Lindemann's ideas of the importance of individual and social characteristics, Hobfoll continues discussing the relativity and subjectivity of stress to an individual:

Loss is relative to the individual and is complicated by background, social norms, and culture. Consequently, the concept of loss implies that responding to events will be different for different individuals and between groups that have differing values. This will be reflected in both the type of event to which individuals will react and the intensity of their reaction. (7).

The importance of these ideas is paramount when considering massive stressors and trauma within the poetry of some American minority writers. Since being an American minority can increase the frequency of stressors one faces, which can be exacerbated by discrimination, it is

more likely the poetry written by American minorities would discuss stress and trauma and/or contain palpable elements of stress and trauma within the poetry. Although the telling of this distress and one's reaction to massive stressors are *individual*, the influence of society and culture greatly influence an individual's perception of the event and their reaction because stressors and traumas are not individual but collective. To recall, a noose in poem of an African American poet would hold different significance and meaning than one in the poem of an Asian American. Thus, there are certain words, images, themes, subjects, and so forth that may elicit a strong response out of one minority group that may not be nearly as important to another. Furthermore, these words, images, themes, subjects, and other elements may be more important or inflammatory to certain individuals rather than others. This may seem rather elementary, but it is also integral to our understanding of stress, trauma, anxiety, coping, and empowerment within poetry. There are a great deal of complexities that arise when discussing the idea of race, ethnicity, and culture. These terms are prudent and beneficial for the discussion of different groups within the United States and abroad, I suggest that two new terms are needed in order to more fully articulate the cultures to be discussed throughout this study. I am an American and as such belong to a culture that includes over 300 million people. In addition to this, I have light skin, which would most likely put me in the American majority. Both these cultures are unique to the people that are included within them. For our discussion, however, they are virtually useless.

These kinds of broad, inclusive cultures, I suggest, should be called "macrocultures." Although macrocultures may be beneficial for some discussions and studies, including this one, to an extent, such overarching cultures do not always provide the more specific type of culture

that may be found in the African American community of the Black Arts Movement or of Asian American writers from the post-World War II era. Smaller cultures such as these I would dub "microcultures." Generally, one usually only belongs to one macroculture, while everyone belongs to several microcultures at the same time and, just because one culture is labeled a microculture, it does not negate that culture from also being a macroculture. Although it may be easy to speculate that Asian Americans, African Americans, or Scottish Americans may be labeled microcultures, this presumption is only partially correct. Thus, both race and ethnicity can be both macrocultures and microcultures, dividing or unifying people under the banner of a specific (or broad) culture. The significance of these demarcations is apparent, not only in the different subject matter and characteristics of writers, but the manner and frequency in which they encounter stressful situations.

One aspect that may hinder an individual's ability to cope, especially in the Hobfoll model, is the impact that poverty and inequalities in social economic class have on a person, or more importantly, a group of people. Although it has been demonstrated that one's class can greatly impact the manner in which one can deal with stressors, there is also a link between social economic class and minority groups. This is important when examining not only a specific ethnicity, but also the poetry of a writer of a certain ethnicity so the experience they are portraying is not confused with the experience of belonging to a certain social economic class. For example, being Native American would be a macroculture and being a Native American who is poor and female would be the microculture perspective and experience of the speakers of some poems. However, this is only the perspective of that individual speaker, not the experience of the macrocultures of being Native American, poor, or female.

The question then becomes, if a writer is of a certain micro- or macroculture, does the voice they lend to speakers of their poems guarantee an understanding of that said micro- or macroculture? In order to answer this, one must trust (or not trust) in the author. If the author wishes to aid the audience in understanding the microculture that they exist in and place their own experience into the poem, then the answer is yes. However, if the poet wishes to keep such values hidden by taking on a persona that is not their own and mislead the audience, then the answer is no. So how do we know if the poet is attempting to give an honest understanding? The easy answer is that we don't.

There are a few elements to examine, however, to gain a small insight into the writer's mind. First, we can examine the biography of the writer. For example, Etheridge Knight did serve time in prison; thus, the poems he wrote about prison and the stresses encountered while in prison have the potential to be authentic; however, we still have to trust in the author. Knight's poetry about prison could be legitimate sentiments about a prison experience, although they may not necessarily be Knight's sentiments. In his poetry, Knight could fabricate a great deal; however, his insight into the prison environment *is* authentic. Regardless as to whether the events transpiring within the poems about prison are legitimately factual or not, the experiences of the writer presenting the sentiments are based on experience. Therefore, I would stipulate that the writings of a poet from a certain microculture could produce significant and specific insight into a situation, from an individual perspective, which would allow for a greater insight through the portal of one speaker, given that the qualifications that are necessary to reside in the microculture are met by the writer and verified. This does not necessitate that, simply because one is Native American, the writings that she produces will be *the* insight into what it means to be Native

American, but *can* provide insight into what it means to be *a* Native American from the perspective of *an individual* who happens to be of that microculture.

In order to uncomplicate this before it becomes too obscure, we must remember that the goal of this study is not to gain an authenticated perspective of a certain American minority group through writers of that group, but to explore the poetry in order to see the impact massive stressors may have and how it can be witnessed within the writing towards a transformation of that experience. Traces of stress can be found within the writing, either intentionally or subconsciously by the writer, and by examining massive stressors within the poetry, we can gain *a* perspective in order to gain a greater understanding of the poem, and potentially, and very secondarily, the culture. Gaining greater understandings of the microculture of the writer and speaker enables for a greater understanding of the poem. Likewise, gaining a greater insight into the stressors and distress found within the poetry provides a new layer that enables critics and readers a more in depth understanding of why certain elements exist within the poem and the significance they may have in a broader picture.

The reason American minority poets were chosen for this study resides partially in the fact that American minorities are more susceptible to stressors. It is well understood how belonging to a minority or cultural group may affect the nature and frequency of stressful events. . The events and the perception of the events can vary greatly from individual to individual and by culture due to elements such as residue of historical trauma. Being the only person of your race in a room of people can be particularly unnerving, as I have myself encountered at times,

leading to feelings of hyper-visibility to people in the group that are from a different culture or ethnicity, ultimately leading to higher levels of stress.

The second aspect, and one with particularly close ties to historically traumatic residue, is that it is well understood that people of minority cultures face discrimination regularly, either subtly or overtly. These types of situations, I think, are much more stressful and psychologically damaging, and appear in several poems by poets of all the different minorities studied. Without much speculation, it is quite easy to deduce that discrimination usually has distinct ties to racist ideologies and hate that stems from previous generations. Not only would a certain minority, such as African Americans, have historical trauma manifested within African American culture, but the oppressor has traces of racist ideology within their culture. More specifically, individuals or microcultures who have little experience interacting with minorities, or individuals from dissimilar microcultures, may draw upon preconceived notions which may be inherently false, and may, unfortunately, be based in hate and ignorance. A young white woman from rural Ohio may hold her purse tighter and walk to the other side of the street to avoid being near a black man. This may seem a logical action in her mind, yet such behavior is based on the notion that black men are violent, criminally minded individuals. This type of behavior can be based on (and reinforced by) ideas that may be tied to exaggerations (and biased) reports by the media, prejudices subconsciously instilled within the woman by her microculture (family, friends, neighbors), and/or subconscious fears generated by fear of the unknown generated by lack of exposure to a different culture.

The third factor that may affect the stress upon a minority group has to do with economic class. It is well documented that a higher percentage of minorities make up the lower classes of American society, both presently and historically. As such, they are less likely to have as much political power or availability to financial safety nets or schooling. This results in many being more susceptible to catastrophes involving situations that create massive stressors, and more important for this study, because of a lack of resources available for advancement, the cycle is often cyclical. Massive stressors, which are communal rather than individual, resonate, not only within the community, but across generations, ultimately influenced by traumatic incidents and traumatic stressors of the past. Very similar to Hobfoll's resource model of coping, a major incident within the life of someone with socioeconomic difficulties can lead to elevated stress and potential collapse of other resources, ultimately continuing the downward spiral of resource loss and elevation of stress with limited coping resources. Poets such as Coffee, Hogan, Baraka, Clifton, and Inada discuss the difficulties that exist when resources are not available for people within the community, how these situations are often influenced by traumatic incidents of the past, and some poets, like Baraka and Coffee, call for responses by their audience to change these situations. Poets like Blue Cloud discuss the massive stressors that exist within society, in poems like "For Ace," and the need for people, both in the culture and outside the culture, to make changes. Many of the poets, especially of the Black Arts Movement and the Red Power Movement, call for radical change, not only against the white oppressor, but also for the formation of new groups and new ways of presenting this empowerment in the artwork.

Conclusion

In order to understand the full impact of massive stressors and trauma, and how it is represented in literature, the focus of literary trauma theory needs to include the legacies of unresolved trauma that continue to impact segments of society today. Historic trauma continues to plague members of ethnic groups whose ancestors faced traumatic events and continue to cope with these traumas for generations. Because the histories of various ethnic groups in our culture differ, and often contain legacies of oppression, violence, and trauma, it is imperative that histories of ethnic groups are understood and kept in the forefront of our minds as we examine texts using literary trauma theory. Traces of historical trauma are evident within a minority literature and should not be overlooked. The historical trauma response includes, among other things, the use of substance abuse to numb their feelings, which is significant given the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse in many of the poems that engage unresolved historical trauma. In addition, the legacies of racism and continued financial inequality place minorities at a significant disadvantage for coping as outlined by Hobfoll's resource and loss of resource stress model.

Beyond moving the focus of how race and ethnicity are affected by historical trauma and how historical trauma can be found in the literature of different races, it is imperative that the psychology used to examine trauma and literature be more contemporary than before. Understanding the impact of massive stressors, and how stress and anxiety affect trauma, is essential to our understanding of literature engaging and coping with stress, anxiety, and trauma. Stress models like Hobfoll's resource and loss of resource model enables us to better understand stress, how it may originate, how it may manifest, and, as such, we can identify these elements

within literature. The speaker of a poem may present massive stressors in an indirect and unconscious manner, thus, for we as literature trauma theorist to identify and understand the stressor, it is important that we understand stress and trauma in the way contemporary psychology researchers do.

In addition to understanding the significance of historical trauma and massive stressors, more focus should be placed on applying literary trauma theory to poetry. Many of the characteristic that literary trauma theorists focus on (ambiguities, fragmentation, traumatic subject matter, confrontation with death, repetition, and mourning) can be readily found in many poems that engage trauma. Although these characteristics and literary devices are present in prose, poetry provides an advantage in presentation where the poet may utilize enjambment as well as varied line and stanza length in order to evoke anxiety or control the speed in which the poem is read. As shall be discussed in the next chapter, the link between emotion, representational challenges, and memory is often represented within poetry. Poetry, unlike prose, is able to capture traumatic memories more easily than other media, most specifically for this study by means of traumatic metaphor and abjection. Many times, memories, especially traumatic memories, are recorded in images. Because these images may be too painful to articulate straightforward, they manifest by means of traumatic metaphor, which often appears in poetry. In addition, images and discussion of abjection are recorded in many poems, which is connected to the flight-or-flight response that is a result of stress, anxiety, and trauma. The following chapter will be utilized to examine these ideas more closely before delving into Japanese American, Native American, and African American poetry.

CHAPTER 2

WHY POETRY?: EMOTION, TRAUMATIC MEMORY, ABJECTION, AND UNHOMELINESS

In this chapter, I will advance the ideas of literary trauma theory by discussing various poetic articulations of massive stressors. The devices allow the poet to engage and articulate various stressors that they wish to articulate within their poem. For many poets, this engagement is a means to empower people within their culture and the need to mobilize for political gain within society. Discussion and recognition of current massive stressors and historic traumas have the ability to move people to action. These devices are important because of their use in poetry, and for this study, I find them to be most valuable because of their ability to engage with the massive stressors, the manner in which they mimic historic trauma response, and the manner in which we may gain a greater understanding into the speakers' distress. This is not an uncommon practice when using literary trauma theory to engage a text. Many studies that focus on trauma in literature focus a great deal on repetitions that exist within the literary work because repetition is a common response to trauma and easily identifiable in text. Many survivors of trauma repeat aspects or the entirety of the event that was traumatic in their life in their mind and, sometimes, in their literature. Literary trauma theorists make note of these elements of repetition in a literary work and discuss the correlation therein. As Dorothy Stringer says in the introduction to her book, *Not Even Past: Race, Historical Trauma, and Subjectivity in Faulkner, Larsen, and Van Vechten*, "Like the present work [her own], many other contributors in literary and cultural trauma studies begin analysis with the acknowledgement of repetition" (4). Stringer also makes

note how literary trauma theory takes into account “what cannot be fully re-membered, the illegible, the unspeakable, with a something-repeated, be it an image, a phrase, a metaphor, even a syllable or sound” (5). The present study does not wish to discount repetition or any of the other aspects that literary trauma theory examines in literature. Instead, my study looks to expand beyond these facets and examine traumatic memory and the role of emotion, most specifically in poetry.

Beginning with the positive impact that emotional writing has in the coping process and the link that emotion has with poetry, this chapter opens by discussing why poetry may be one of the best mediums for discussing trauma. The chapter then turns to the use of traumatic figurative language that is apparent in many poems which discuss or display elements of trauma. Traumatic figurative language provides an individual with a way to discuss trauma by using a metaphor, simile, or metonym when discussing it. A very apparent example resides in Sylvia Plath’s poem “Daddy” where the speaker compares her father to a Nazi and uses a great deal of Nazi imagery to discuss the unfortunate relationship the speaker had with her father. This type of traumatic figurative language can be found in many poems, especially those that deal with historic trauma.

After examining traumatic figurative language, the use of abjection and unhomeliness will be discussed in relation to poetry. Due to traumas and unhomeliness (either voluntary or involuntary, and from the past or present), residual articulations of the fight-or-flight response are apparent in a variety of poems. Poetry that includes elements of fight, especially from the Black Arts Movement and from the era of the Red Power Movement, will often articulate a need to fight against the oppressor, and the need to organize in order to work for empowerment. Poetry that includes elements of flight produces tropes or narratives focused on wanderings and

travels, as well as the desire to return to or leave a place. As a result, we find the many appearances of unhomeliness and abjection within the poetry. When abjection or unhomeliness is present, it is often accompanied by imagery or articulation of isolation presented by the speaker. The chapter will conclude with the examination of poetry through the lens of traumatic memory, and abjection and unhomeliness.

Examining literature by looking at traumatic figurative language, abjection, and unhomeliness through a literary trauma lens are rarely used methods of looking at literature, especially poetry. In this chapter, not only will the ideas presented in the previous chapter (historical trauma, new ways and theorists used to further our understanding of trauma, and a refined focus on poetry and minorities), but efforts are made to demonstrate how understanding and identifying abjection, traumatic figurative language, and unhomeliness are beneficial when examining poetry where historical trauma may be present. Understanding these aspects can allow for a deeper appreciation and understanding of how trauma impacted the speaker and how the poet utilizes these devices in order to present trauma either consciously or subconsciously. Finally, these concepts will greatly aid to this study as poetries of different cultures are examined in the subsequent chapters.

Poetry and Emotional Writing

Although trauma is apparent in other genres, such as prose and film, poetry differs in various characteristics from other genres, especially in its healing ability due to its close connection with emotion. James Pennebaker, a professor of psychology, has taken great interest in the healing effects of writing for victims of stress and trauma, and through his various studies,

has been able to show the benefits writing has and how writing aids in the healing process. In his book *Writing to Heal: A Journal for Recovering from Trauma and Emotional Upheaval*, Pennebaker states that, “[s]ince the mid-1980s, an increasing number of studies have focused on the value of expressive writing as a way to bring about healing” (3). Emotional writing has shown to have an incredible number of positive biological side effects, such as “enhancement in immune function” (7), “better lung function among asthma patients and lower pain and disease severity among arthritis sufferers...higher blood cell counts among AIDS patients... and less sleep disruption among patients with metastatic cancers” (8), as well as “modest reduction in resting blood pressure levels... and liver enzyme levels often associated with drinking (8).

Although these physical effects are very positive, they are not the only changes that occur in patients who practice emotion writing. Pennebaker also notes the psychological effects that occur because of writing, which show that, although people generally feel sad and perhaps even worse after a session of emotional writing, the long-term positive effects far outweigh the immediate feeling of sadness. Pennebaker found that patients tend to be “happier and less negative than before writing. Similarly, reports of depressive symptoms, rumination, and general anxiety tend to drop in the weeks and months after writing about emotional upheavals” (8). These results indicate that, as Pennebaker suggests, “When we put our traumatic experiences into words, we tend to become less concerned with the emotional events that have been weighing us down” (3). In fact, in Pennebaker’s book *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, he discusses how holding back, or inhibiting thoughts and feelings, can weaken our immune system and place people at a greater risk for diseases (2). We, as a species, often inhibit our need to tell things, both good and bad, which has actually been shown to be detrimental to

our health. Obviously, we have developed a multitude of ways to tell, such as through prose, cinema, music, or dance, but as shall be shown, poetry allows a unique insight into trauma.

Trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth and Dominque LaCapra have pointed toward the benefit for the writer of literature dealing with trauma as a means of coping with the trauma. Trauma tends to be relived by victims rather than remembered, and the full effect of the trauma, whether historical or direct, individual or group, is never fully comprehended at the time of the trauma. Thus, by reliving the trauma, the person is attempting to gain an understanding of the events. With this in mind, it is very easy to see why people who place great emotional emphasis in their writing, such as poets often do, would be inclined to discuss stressors and traumas occurring in their life or in their community. Furthermore, even Pennebaker as a psychological researcher acknowledges the significant ties of poetry to emotion. In *Writing to Heal*, he encourages his readers to read and write poetry. He states, “Although there has been very little scientific research on the healing power of poetry, it is commonly used in psychotherapy. You might understand intuitively that expressing emotions about powerful experiences through poetry should have positive health effects...” (145), and perhaps most importantly, “Unlike straight prose writing, poetry can often capture the contradictions inherent in most emotions and experiences” (145). This being so, we are left with a confounding dilemma: why have trauma theorists not examined poetry to the extent that they have prose?

With traumas of larger scale, such as the Holocaust and slavery, the impact of the trauma is passed on for many generations and felt by a large group of people. Just as telling one’s trauma is a means of coping for an individual, a similar beneficial coping response can be found

in the reading of trauma by other victims whereby it allows victims to have a sense of community and an ability, much like in writing, to examine trauma from a different perspective. As we examine the poetry in the following chapters, it becomes apparent that many of the poets present their poems in a way to encourage people to form communities, to work for empowerment, and to work against the oppressor. By realizing that the traumatic event occurred in the past (regardless if the trauma is direct or vicarious), the writer and reader are able to conceptualize the fact that the trauma is in the past and the future is available to them. In addition, poetry, unlike other forms of writing, allows for a unique connection to trauma due to the emphasis on poetic devices that are similar to forms of traumatic memory. Because traumatic memory and poetry share many of the same characteristics, and because of the survivor's need to tell, it is logical to find poetry as one of the most appropriate methods to tell about trauma.

Although various art forms lend themselves readily to expression, poetry typically lends itself more readily to expressing emotions and confessions. Unlike other forms of writing, poetry typically places great emphasis on imagery. By using imagery, the poet can elicit an emotional response from her audience that may evoke feelings of fear, helplessness, sadness, anger, or other feelings associated with trauma. In addition, poetry also utilizes the idea of fragmentation more than other types of writings. Many times a poem will present an incident within a person's life or an emotional experience of a person rather than the much more in depth narratives presented in most other forms of creative writing. Finally, poets often present their ideas more indirectly than other writers using literary devices like metaphors and similes. In addition, the general population often views poems as being difficult to understand and as having stratified meanings; thus the indirectness of poetry is well recognized, not only by those that study poetry,

but also by society. As will become evident in the next section, it is not difficult for many poets to translate traumatic memory into poems because of characteristics they both share.

Traumatic Memory and Poetry

The use of imagery, metaphor, and the expression of emotion in poetry are important when we consider Nanette Auerhahn and Dori Laub's discussion of the various forms of traumatic memory in "Intergenerational Memory of the Holocaust." Several of the ten forms of traumatic memory they discuss are akin to poetry as a genre as well as many poetic devices, which makes the telling of the trauma easily translated into poems. Auerhahn and Laub's discussion of traumatic memory is, I believe, intrinsic to the idea of historic trauma and the manner in which it manifests through many generations. In order to gain a greater understanding of the different forms of traumatic knowledge, it is worth discussing not only the forms of traumatic knowledge that are pertinent to this study, but Auerhahn and Laub's discussion of traumatic memory itself:

Traumatic memory thus entails a process of evolution that requires several generations in which to play itself out. We initially understood this to be the result of conflicts arising from the paradoxical yoking of the compulsions to remember and to know trauma with the equally urgent needs to forget and not to know it (Auerhahn and Laub, 1990), but now to see the situation as infinitely more complex. For along with any conscious or unconscious needs to know or not to know exists deficits in our abilities to grasp trauma, name it, recall it, and paradoxically, forget it. We know trauma because it thrusts itself upon us

unbeckoned. But we also fail to know it and frequently forget it because we are incapable of formulating and holding such knowledge in mind. Often, we cannot form an initial memory; at other times, the memory, once held, disappears. (22)

Auerhahn and Laub outline several forms of traumatic memory, many of which are pertinent to this study as they are so akin to poetry.

The first type of memories that lend themselves to poetry are screen memories. Screen memories (the second type of memory discussed by Auerhahn and Laub) are generated because of not knowing, which is the first type of memory discussed. Not knowing is, just as the name implies, the blocking of memories due to their traumatic nature. Screen memories fill this gap by “the creation of an alternative, possibly false, self that screens over the absence of memory. Such a path can readily lead to mythmaking or the creation of false memories that constitute another form of knowing that goes beyond the first level’s awareness of an absence of the creation of a fiction that covers over that absence” (Auerhahn and Laub 25). Obviously, the creation of fictional memories can easily lend itself to a variety of art forms, with poetry being just one outlet. The significance of this form of memory is not that it is unique to poetry, but this fictional telling is a means of coping for many survivors. Auerhahn and Laub address this, stating, “Fictionalization is an inherent part of any attempt to recall trauma, for the truth of trauma can never be fully recaptured. Instead, we have found most true trauma stories to be factually accurate in many ways and factually inaccurate in many ways, containing the facts as perceived (an arduous, incomplete, and interpretive process) and as defended against” (26). This is incredibly important to note because poetry, like many arts, allows the survivor to tell their

trauma without actually telling the exact trauma. In other words, the survivor tells of *a* trauma, which does not necessarily have to be *their* trauma, and allows for a release, if we recall the survivor's intrinsic need to tell. Auerhahn and Laub continue by stating, "[In] many works of art that attempt to give voice to, or master, trauma, there often is a 'lie,' a distortion, covering over the as yet unworked through and unknown aspect of trauma" (26). For our study, this allows the poet to examine this trauma while it is still being worked through and provides an outlet through a mask of fiction. Screen memories, as has been stated, are easily adapted into a variety of art forms; thus it is not surprising to find them appearing in poetry. However, other types of memories discussed by Auerhahn and Laub that are more easily represented by poetry than other forms of writing are "fragments," and "trauma as metaphor."

Fragments or fragmented memories are important for discussions of poetry related to its form. Although a great deal of postmodern art and writing is fragmented in nature, the very art form of poetry is oftentimes a fragment. Auerhahn and Laub state, "Remembering involves the retention of parts of a lived experience in such a way that they are decontextualized and no longer meaningful. The individual has an image, sensation, or isolated thought, but does not know with what it is connected, what it means, or what to do with it" (29). Unlike most novels, short stories, or dramas, which usually contain an element of character development and a narrative structure, poems often provide only a glimpse into a person's life or a scene, which is presented because it is important or significant to the speaker. Poems such as Yusef Komunyakaa's "Reflections," which will be discussed more in the following pages, present a fragmented memory for the reader to see, hear, and attempt to comprehend. In order to present such a fragment, poetry is the perfect genre to portray a fragmented memory because the art form

allows for such disconnectedness. More so than other forms of writing, poems are given a great deal of leeway in regards to their format, their disconnectedness from reality, and ambiguity, each of which are not only acceptable, but are many times expected.

Fragmentation and disconnectedness may also take the form of images or a series of images. Because memory is often recorded as images, it is of little surprise that poets that desire to convey trauma in their poems may utilize images within their poem that evoke response from the reader. Poetry by African Americans may use the imagery of slavery, plantations, whips, nooses, the railroad, or rivers, all of which have had great significance within African American culture. These images are loaded, thus their use is not simply to recall African American heritage, but African American trauma heritage. Japanese American poets may use the images of internment camps recalling the Japanese internment camps of World War II. Native American poets may use imagery of atrocities of the past, displacement from the land, and even present themselves as warrior to fight against the oppressor, recalling the past in their metaphor or metonym. These images are not only used to evoke past traumas, but become symbols of the past traumas. As the following examination of Komunyakaa's poem illustrates, these symbols become intrinsic to the semantic quality of the poem as a vehicle of meaning.

In his poem "Reflections," Komunyakaa presents the very loaded image of a noose that is used for suicide in the poem, but more importantly, the *symbol* of the noose brings forth thoughts of lynching and the trauma associated with the horrific acts perpetrated against African Americans in the not-so-distant past. The poem discusses a figure, "a tall black man" (2) standing beneath a noose. Although it is not apparent whether he is committing suicide or being

lynched, the speaker is obviously distressed. The poem, “Reflections” begins with the line “In the day’s mirror” (1) and ends “your feet / in his shoes” (23-24) as the speaker feels a strong connection with the man who is dying, to the point that “you can feel him/ growing inside you” (19-20). These symbols are reflective techniques used by the poet to show how the traumatic history can affect others as they look back upon their culture’s history. The noose is an image and symbol that has a strong traumatic connection for African Americans because of lynching in the past. The use of this symbol calls upon that past within the poem, and allows the reader to experience the feelings of the past without the speaker mentioning these feelings explicitly. The poem demonstrates that the death of the person in the poem affects the speaker to the point that he or she is connected with the man who is dying, thus demonstrating the impact of historic trauma in this metaphor where the dying of one man, especially through the powerfully symbolic method (noose), directly affects others. By speaking in second person, the poem creates an intimacy with the man in the poem and the reader. Although there is a strong emotional connection with the man in the poem and the speaker, the speaker is also attempting to draw a connection with the reader so that the reader understands that this traumatic historic affects her as well.

The images of lynching used in “Reflection” are a good example; however, Komunyakaa uses this technique in many other poems. In his poem “Annabelle,” the opening lines contain the word “hangs” and the second stanza ends with the line “All to do with rope & blood” (7). Similar Komunyakaa poems like “Family Tree” call upon images of slavery such as “a whip\ across my back,” (2-3) at the start of the poem, thus setting the tone for a poem where the speaker describes some of the hardships the family members had to endure during slavery in America.

Komunyakaa evokes images of oppression, lynching, and slavery with images such as “long chain” (12), “cotton field” (24), “slave” (33), “hanging trees” (36), “chopping cotton” (49), and “mule plowing” (51) to mention just a few. These images within the poems force the reader to realize the traumatic history that the speaker is presenting and that remains in his or her mind.

The poem also utilizes poetic techniques such as very short lines in order to propel the reader along, creating an anxiety within the poem by making the reader’s eyes move quickly down the page. This anxiety is reinforced by Komunyakaa’s use of line breaks, which force the reader to speculate at the end of the line. An example of anxiety produced by a line break occurs in line four of the poem, which reads “trembling, then you witness” which generates a feel of uneasiness in multiple ways. First, the poem is placed in the second person, making it very intimate, but in this line, this placement into the second person is especially troubling because the line tells us that we are a “witness” then stops. We are unsure of what we are witnessing and are forced to pause while our eyes move to the next line. The fact that the line begins with the word “trembling” reinforces the feeling of uneasiness because the word could represent a number of negative emotional manifestations. The “trembling” is tied to the personification of the lines that state, “In the day’s mirror / you see a tall black man. / Fingers of gold cattails” (3). At this point in the poem, we are still not completely sure what is occurring and have been given mainly images to work with. Because of the confusion, the anxiety is magnified and Komunyakaa is able to transfer a feeling of uneasiness to the reader through a combination of narrative and poetic devices rather than telling the reader that they need to feel uneasy.

Komunyakaa's use of traumatic figurative language, the symbolism used in this poem, and the anxiety created through short lines are typical for poets exploring trauma in their poems. Furthermore, Komunyakaa is able to represent trauma within the first six lines by providing mostly images and very little narrative. Traumatic memory, as has been outlined by Steele, as well as several trauma theorists, is recorded as a collection of images rather than a story; thus this first portion of the poem with the collection of images, especially the noose, is very representational of trauma. A feeling of helplessness follows as the "you" within the poem attempts to stop what is occurring, but is unable to because your voice will not reach him. While Komunyakaa's poem presented here is an exemplar of common tropes used to present trauma to the reader, he is only one example of many. Numerous poets utilize the placement of words on the page in order to maximize the feelings of uneasiness that can be evoked, as well as the placement of line breaks and stanza breaks in order to create anxiety. When used alongside images that are particularly traumatic for a certain group, like a noose for African Americans, these poetic techniques become very effective.

As has been examined, the use of screen memories as described by Auerhahn and Laub, although perhaps unbeknownst to the poets, are easily identifiable in poetry discussing trauma. Many of the poetic devices used within the poems are extenuations of the traumatic memories outlined. Traumatic memories, such as screen memories, fragmentation, and disconnectedness, often manifest into images and symbols within the poems. As has been stated, understanding traumatic memory is intrinsic to the study of traumatic history and how such trauma is communicated within poetry. Screen memories allow survivors, and for our discussion, poets, to fictionalize the traumas that they explore in order to discuss that which is unrepresentable.

Komunyakaa is not the first, nor is he alone in presenting elements of trauma, not only in images but also in themes, within his poetry. The images of traumatic events are often used when poets use traumatic figurative language within their poem in order to discuss trauma in their past, or trauma and stressors that they are currently encountering. In the following section, trauma as metaphor, or traumatic figurative language, and their importance in trauma and poetry shall be discussed at length.

Trauma as Metaphor

As we recall from the previous discussion of Auerhahn and Laub, the first type of memories that lend themselves to poetry are screen memories. Screen memories are generated because of not knowing, which is the first type of memory discussed. Screen memories fill this gap by “the creation of an alternative, possibly false, self that screens over the absence of memory. Such a path can readily lead to mythmaking or the creation of false memories that constitute another form of knowing that goes beyond the first level’s awareness of an absence of the creation of a fiction that covers over that absence” (Auerhahn and Laub 25). The second type of memory that is pertinent to this study is trauma as metaphor. Trauma as metaphor “is the use of the imagery and language of massive psychological trauma as metaphor and vehicle for developmental conflict” (33). Trauma as metaphor is similar to types of memory known as witnessed narrative in that “the distance between event and witness is preserved, yet goes beyond (but paradoxically never reaches) the previous level of knowing in that an element of play vis-à-vis the event enters, enabling the event’s use as a metaphor that has some latitude” (33). The survivor or, for our purpose, the speaker of the poem, utilizes metaphor, or other types of

figurative language, in order to discuss an event that has happened to him or her, and uses the descriptions or specific words that are associated with a more traumatic event. Because the event is too painful or frightening to directly examine, traumatic metaphors are a type of displacement that the survivor uses in order to cope and discuss the trauma. Poets use traumatic figurative language when discussing or showing the trauma within their poems because, just as the event is too traumatic to discuss directly, poets may use traumatic figurative language as a means of both displacing the trauma and discussing it. Although a survivor may use a traumatic metaphor to displace the event in order to discuss it, poets utilize traumatic figurative language to grapple with representing what may be unrepresentable.

Auerhahn and Laub continue by stating,

The imagery of trauma becomes more conscious, colorful, plastic, and variable than that found in other levels of knowing. It readily appears in free associations and in dream associations, and does not have to be inferred or drawn out from ingrained silent modes of action. There is a disengagement from the event and its legacy as the individual chooses only those aspects of the event that reverberate with his or her internal conflict. The developmental conflict, rather than the event, is paramount and is the moving force behind the search for an appropriate vehicle of expression; that is, the motive for this form of traumatic memory comes from the need to organize internal experience than, as with the previous forms, from a need to organize the external historical reality. (33-34)

Trauma as metaphor, or traumatic metaphor, is used primarily by individuals coping with historical stress. The developmental conflict being discussed by Auerhahn and Laub refers to the individuals coping with historical trauma that has fallen onto them from their parents, grandparents, or from their cultural heritage. Trauma is not something that can be worked through in one generation; thus, subsequent generations of people may be affected and utilize traumatic metaphors in order to comprehend, cope, and overcome the historic trauma, though, implicitly, this means that direct access to the trauma is impossible or undesired. Auerhahn and Laub give an example of a woman whose paternal grandparents were directly affected by the Holocaust. She describes events in her life by using imagery of the Holocaust. For example, during her tonsillectomy, she refers to her doctor as a Nazi surgeon. Similar use of trauma as metaphor can be found in a poetic sense in Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy." The speaker of Plath's poem describes her father as a Nazi and presents a great deal of Nazi imagery surrounding the speaker's father. Given that Plath's own father, Otto, was a first-generation German immigrant who died when Plath was only eight, mixing Holocaust metaphors with the trauma of losing her father is an excellent example of using trauma as metaphor in the form of traumatic figurative language. As may be apparent in the above example, the poet may utilize traumatic figurative language in order to discuss very stressful (although perhaps not traumatic) incidents within their life and intentionally recalling well-known traumatic events in order to inform the reader of their pain. Poets may also utilize traumatic figurative language to compare historic traumas to contemporary stresses, some of which may be traumatic, that still occur presently, as articulated by poets such as Robin Coffee who compares his speaker within some of his poems to Native American warriors, each of which fight oppression.

The use of traumatic figurative language can be subtle, with the speaker referencing images that may conjure images of an historic trauma, such as the noose used in Komunyakaa's poem, or they may appear more overt, as in Etheridge Knight's poem "Once On A Night in the Delta: A Report From Hell." Knight's poem directly evokes the idea of slavery and compares it to current conditions (in 1981) that African Americans are facing. The poem is addressed and dedicated to Sterling Brown and gives an image of a Southern town that still suffers from the after-effects of slavery. The poem begins by presenting images and names to inform the reader that the setting of the poem is in the South. The second stanza of the poem begins describing the difficult and stressful conditions that many within the town live in. In line seven the speaker states, "The poor live on both / sides / of the tracks" (note the forward slashes here are included by the author and do not indicate line breaks) and tells that the town is "peopled by Blacks" (8). It is apparent that the people being spoken of in this poem are African American and poor. In line nine, the speaker states how the people in the town "now / pack pistols," indicating that violence is a part of the lifestyle in this town. These images are important because they give an insight into the difficulty that the people of the town are facing and lead to the traumatic figurative language within the next stanza.

The third stanza of Knight's poem contains the traumatic figurative language. The first two lines of the stanza read "We will shuffle in lines, like coffles of slaves: / Stamps for food—the welfare rolls and voting polls." (15-16). This traumatic figurative language overtly compares the conditions that African Americans are living in to that of their slave ancestors. Although the people that stand in lines for welfare, food stamps, and to vote are not chained physically as coffles of slaves once were, they are chained together in poverty and oppression. The speaker not

only sees similarities with his present circumstances, but also utilizes the idea of slavery in order to present the massive stressors that he and his fellow townspeople deal with. The impact of the stressors caused by poverty and violence and the historical trauma that is still present within the lives of the townspeople are physically manifested within the next lines as the speaker states, “We frown. Our eyes are dark caves // Of mourning” (17-18). The townspeople are visibly suffering from emotional scars caused by massive stressors related to their poor economic situations. The line break between lines 17 and 18 is significant because the fourth stanza tells of how the suffering continues from Brown’s day until the present. This is reinforced by the speaker as he says, “Mississippi is *still* hell, Sir Brown— / For me and ol Slim Greer” (20-21, Knight’s emphasis). Slim Greer is a reference to a character in Brown’s poem “Slim Greer in Hell” written in the early 1930’s. Given that Knight wrote his poem in 1981, it is evident that he believes the suffering that African Americans faced in the early 1930s is still present fifty years later. The idea of engaging with massive stressors as a result of traumatic events continuing for generations is underscored by the poet as he breaks the description of physical manifestations of distress into the third and fourth stanza. This idea that Mississippi is hell is a second use of traumatic figurative language in the poem and exists as an actual metaphor rather than a simile as the previous one. Both instances of traumatic figurative language utilize realistic trauma (slavery) and mythical trauma (hell) in order to describe the difficulties that the people of the speaker’s town face.

By utilizing traumatic figurative language in the poem, the poet is able to tell of his or her trauma in order to cope with it, or to aid in building a community so that other members of his or her culture that are coping with these traumas may feel part of a community or at least less

isolated. By doing so, the community can work toward empowerment of the group and work against the oppressor. As such, different cultures may present images or motifs that are unique to their culture within the traumatic figurative language, or may draw upon images and motifs shared by many, such as ethnic slurs, to present or discuss their traumas. We also find images that the poets use in order to empower the reader and trauma. Robin Coffee uses the image of the warrior to inspire empowerment, Peter Blue Cloud calls upon traditions of the past for empowerment within the community by using images of traditional Native American dance, and Clifton uses the image of runaway slaves. Additionally, there is the use of stanza breaks and line length in order to promote a feeling of anxiety by attempting to control the speed of how the poem is read or focusing the reader's attention to certain words. In the following section, I will examine motifs that transcend all three cultures to be discussed; specifically, how abjection and unhomeliness are themes that affect all three cultures and how, although they stem from different origins, abjection and unhomeliness are represented in the poetry of all three cultures.

Flight in the Form of Abjection and Unhomeliness

My study of the poetry of different cultures and races does not include Jewish literature; however, much of literary trauma theory has focused on post-Holocaust literature written by Jewish writers and much of that is pertinent to non-Jewish writers who work with traumatic events. Through my reading about literary trauma theory, I have noticed two common characteristics in post-Holocaust literature that point to the way Jewish writers express trauma within their writing. The first characteristic, the narrative of travel, is not unique to Jewish writers; in fact, I found the narrative of travel being used in Asian American, African American,

Latino/a, and Native American writing, ultimately leading to a discovery of the flight or flight response that is inherent within the writing of these different cultures. What is significant, but not unique, about the travel narratives in the writing of Jewish writers is discussed in Anne Fuchs's *Space of Anxiety: Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature*. Fuchs discusses the sense of travel by stating, "Migration, exile, and persecution all involve a loss of the connection with what one might call the 'space of homeliness', commonly considered the locus of identity" (1). This type of travel is, of course, a reaction to the trauma associated with the Holocaust, but is also influenced by the Book of Exodus in the Bible. Fuchs differentiates the travel narratives by these post-Holocaust Jewish writers from travel narratives of the past by telling how they are not the "travel writings of the Enlightenment and Eurocentric kind where travel, with its pitfalls, dangers and challenges, acts as a positive catalyst, allowing the self to undergo a process of self-formation" (1). Instead, the speakers in the travel narrative of these texts are more representative of a "blinded maze-walker whose experience of the world remains disorientating and fragmented" (1). Coping with the diaspora associated with the Holocaust has caused a crisis not only with unhomeliness, but with identity.

The idea of unhomeliness comes from Homi K. Bhabha and is defined as

the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres... The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and,

uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting... Although the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites. (13)

Having to face a history where one's ancestors were kidnapped from their homeland centuries ago and enslaved has the potential to lay heavily on one's psyche, especially when we consider that subsequent generations faced violence and oppression which continues to this day. Most ancestors of African Americans never chose to journey to the United States, nor did the ancestors of Native Americans choose to be displaced from their homeland. Thus, the displacement exists as an historic trauma. Bhabha suggests the idea of historical trauma affecting the condition of unhomeliness a few pages later, stating, "The unhomely moment relates the traumatic ambivalence of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (15). Therefore, to be a minority in a culture that constantly "others" anyone who is not a white male is to live a continually hybrid existence of residing in America, but not being fully accepted. In addition, many minorities are looked upon by society as being African or Asian, even though most have never even set foot on the continent, or to be Indian, although the traditional American Indian culture may be foreign to that person. The result is to have no location where one can feel truly at home.

In addition to having no true place to call home, the motif of travel is also prevalent within the poetry of African American, Native American, and Japanese American writers.

Mitsuye Yamada's poem "Cincinnati" discusses travel to a new city where "no one knew me" (8), yet resulted in a racist attack. Lawson Fusao Inada's long poem "Legends of the Camp" contains a character named "Lost Boy" in the fourth section of his poem who travels aimlessly around the internment camp chasing after a truck and eventually becomes lost. The poem outlines all the things that are taken away from the boy such as his house (86), his food (85), his dog (84), and even his name (79), yet even though the boy becomes physically lost, what remains is the knowledge of his incarceration (89). African American writers such as Etheridge Knight have poems dedicated to such disoriented, fragmented, and sometimes aimless travel. Knight's poems, like "A Poem For Myself (or Blues for a Mississippi Black Boy)," discuss travel across the United States with no real purpose but to travel. Knight's poem "A Conversation With Myself" discusses the speaker's travel to Missouri and begins, "What am I / doing here / in these missouri [sic] hills" (1-3). The speaker in this poem is not only curious about her whereabouts, but is hitchhiking, thus the travel is not only disoriented, but also uncertain and fragmented in her complete dependence on a driver traveling a route that the speaker has no control over. An example of travel, abjection, and unhomeliness can also be found in Native American poems, such as Linda Hogan's "Cities Behind Glass." In the poem, the speaker follows women, and even horses, which are traveling and appear to be struggling with abjection, while later in the poem it the speaker herself is found struggling with unhomeliness. A common thread in many of these poems, beyond the disoriented, fragmented, and aimless travel, is the quest to regain lost identity. Knight's poem "The Bones of My Father" is a perfect example of this as the speaker is traveling in search for the bones of his father, which are representative of his identity. Such aimless travel, in the instance of Knight and African

American poetry, could also call upon the empowering nomadism of the blues singer, either indirectly or directly.

Searching for lost identity through travel is related to the idea of abjection and unhomeliness. Abjection, as described by Fuchs, is “to be misplaced, astray and without identity. Abjection is a terrifying borderline state which estranges the individual from all social relations. It is the stigma of the modern subject that cannot locate itself via another object” (4). To be abject is to be othered and to be without identity, which, for Fuchs, is a direct result of the Holocaust. Identified and persecuted for being an “other” by the Nazis is an extreme form of trauma, but is not unique to the Jewish people. The Holocaust, to be sure, was horrific due to the industrialized form of mass destruction, which became even more devastating because “the Nazis killed or silenced most physical witnesses of the Holocaust but also because the bureaucratically administered genocide destroyed the ethical dimension of language, its capacity to forge bonds between human beings” (Garloff 12-13). Jewish culture, however, is not the only culture to be subjected to genocide, thus abjection, the feeling of unhomeliness, and the wandering and isolation that is identified by these scholars as an effect of trauma is applicable to other cultures.

Because of the lack of a feeling of home, many of the poems dealing with trauma contain elements of travel regardless of the race of the poet. One such manifestation of travel occurs in the form of flight as part of the survival instinct. I have found, thus far, that there is not a specific trend of similar reactions that permeate one culture or ethnicity over another, which reinforces the idea that reactions to trauma tend to be somewhat universal. What is found, overwhelmingly,

is the materialization of the survival instinct within the poetry that occurred as either fight or flight, although these take on different forms. In poems that exhibit flight, one can find examples of movement, often nomadic, in which the speaker, or other individuals within the poem, are attempting to flee. Although it may be an unconscious move for the speaker not to specifically tell or show that they are attempting to flee, it is apparent that they have a desire to get away from the current situation. In a similar vein of flight, the use of drugs, alcohol, or other opiates (a Marxist may include religion) allows for a temporary flight. The use of these substances can be an indicator that a trauma is either taking place, or has taken place, and the speaker is, or others within the poem are, attempting to leave the situation by any means necessary, even if the flight is not physical, but mental and/or emotional.

Often times, the flights occurring in the poems are due to not only incurred trauma, but also a result of unhomeliness resulting from diaspora and displacement. In some of the poetry of Japanese Americans and Native Americans, the unhomeliness is not only due to the change in the physical location, but separation from their native culture. Perhaps no greater component of a culture is the language of the people. As Japanese Americans, Native Americans, and other cultures become subjected to the oppressive, white, English speaking culture, the ability to communicate with the oppressor resides within his language: English. In order to function in society, it is important to utilize the dominant language. To learn and use the dominant language is to become more at home in the dominant culture. One's mother tongue, just as the name implies, is usually where one feels most at home, thus having to speak the oppressor's language in order to communicate is to be, in itself, unhomed. However, in order to take the power back, some manipulate and distort the language in order to make it their own. The blues, we must

remember, is premised on the “bending” of elements, both musically and linguistically, in order to create an art form distinct from that of the oppressor. We also find this as languages have evolved over time where words that traditionally meant one thing, such as the word “bad,” have been altered to fit a different culture and change the meaning of the word. Many such changes came from the jazz scene of the early 1900s.

As such, a second type of flight can be found in poetry where the speaker uses code-switching in order to empower the speakers of both languages rather than just speakers of English. Linguist Susan Gal discusses this type of activity by stating that code-switching is a form of “subversive reworking of dominant linguistic forms by subordinate groups: in short, the forging of new forms and identities out of the already symbolically weighted linguistic material at hand” (358). This type of flight is found in the poetry of American cultures where English is one of two or more languages spoken, such as within Asian American or Native American poetry. By interjecting words or phrases in Japanese, the speaker is able to take control from those who do not speak Japanese, which is many times the case with whites, and not only take power away, but place the non-Japanese speaking reader into an uncomfortable position of being outside a shared communality that the speakers of both languages share. By being able to communicate and share knowledge outside the reach of the oppressor, the poet is able to create a sense of empowerment within his audience that would only include those with the knowledge of the particular language, thereby inverting the power system. For example, Japanese Americans might be oppressed, yet they would have power over the oppressor by being able to communicate and comprehend one another outside the reach of the oppressor. In addition, by

using one's mother tongue, the speaker or writer is able to carve out a place outside the reach of the dominant culture and establish a place reserved for the members of his or her culture.

As demonstrated, the narrative of travel is quite common in poetry that engages trauma, either directly or indirectly. The state of unhomeliness and abjection is commonly the result of the speaker engaging historical trauma. The common threads in many of the poems that engage trauma include, but are not limited to, disorientation, fragmentation, aimless travel, and the quest to regain lost identity. The quest to regain lost identity may take the form of travel in the form of abjection in which the speaker wanders rather aimlessly and blindly. However, travel that exists in these poems may also be a reaction to trauma and exist as a manifestation of the survival instinct. The incessant need to flee may take the form of physical movement or mental escape by means of mind altering substances. A second type of flight may take the form of code-switching where the speaker may utilize her cultures mother tongue in order to carve a space for the people of her cultural heritage in an attempt to establish a space out of the grasp of the oppressor.

In order to demonstrate how distress, anxiety, and trauma may appear in a poem, the following section demonstrates the use of traumatic figurative language and abjection as they appear within the poem. By using these devices, the poet is able to present the trauma in a manner that mimics the reactions and memories of trauma, and does so in an indirect manner. By presenting the trauma in this manner, she may be able to generate connections with readers that empathize, thereby creating a connection with them that is not possible with people who have not experienced the same feelings. As we shall see, a reader of Inada's poem, "A Poet of the High

Seas,” may gain a greater understanding of the poem if they were familiar with literary trauma theory, and the devices discussed in this study.

Applying Literary trauma theory to Poetry

In Inada’s poem “A Poet of the High Seas,” the speaker tells about her position as a poet and the power he has to speak about the collective histories of those impacted by trauma and the ability to bring people together in order to cope. In the first three stanzas of the poem, the speaker is telling her audience that he uses poetry as a means of exploration, not necessarily to different places, but different times, as indicated in the third stanza:

I am a poet of the high seas.
 I travel from land to land,
 Through waves of water, sand,
 Tides and currents of history (9-12)

This line appears rather innocuous in regards to trauma until read alongside the next stanza,

I am a poet of the high seas.
 I call on distant ports—
 Familiar, forbidden, forgotten,
 Crossroads of collective memory (13-16)

By the “distant ports” (14) being “familiar, forbidden, forgotten,” (15) the speaker is suggesting that her exploration of history examines moments of history that may not be as readily spoken of, especially if they are regarded as “forbidden” and “forgotten,” but what is more telling for this study is the fact that they are “crossroads of collective memory” (16). It can be justifiably

deduced that the history being spoken of comes from the stories of those who experienced traumatic events or are passing along stories from people who directly experienced these events.

This is particularly important because we are dealing with trauma in the next stanza:

I am a poet of the high seas.

No storm can deny me.

My rhythms ride the wind

Through disasters, tragedies (16-20)

Given that the speaker has stated poetry is her ship, we can see how poetry helps her cope as she analyzes disasters and tragedies, which are the metaphorical storm that she is alluding to in this stanza. The speaker is not only protected from the storm of tragedy and disaster by her craft (both her metaphorical ship as well as her craft of poetry), but her craft is propelled by it; thus this metaphor is stating that poetry not only protects from tragedy and disaster, but is influenced, and even propelled by it. The influence of disasters and tragedies, which result in trauma, reside not only in an historical manner, as is discussed in the mention of “history” (12) and “collective memory” (16), but in the present as the speaker discusses the storm and wind in the present tense in the fifth stanza.

Inada’s poem concludes with a stanza stating:

I am a poet of the high seas,

The captain and the crew,

A free man of free passage,

So all others can join me (21-24).

Crucial to this stanza, and the overall poem, is the line “So all others can join me” (24) that directly invites other readers to join her as she traverses the traumatic history, and present traumas, so that they may work through the traumas together. Given the very relevant other poems presented by Inada, it is evident that he is writing this poem to demonstrate that, by writing about the traumas, which were incurred by his ancestors who were imprisoned, he can help negotiate the trauma, not only for himself, but for others within his culture, and perhaps for other cultures. He is able to aid in their coping and, perhaps more significantly, he is able to reclaim these experiences in his poems, thereby empowering his readers by writing about the traumas. This is an incredibly important aspect of trauma poetry, and this poem provides a very strong example of how the poet recognizes not only the importance of writing about and reclaiming history, but the importance of this poetry and this action to the community. The speaker invites others to join her because she is “A free man of free passage,” (23) and she can aid those that may be in the storm of trauma, or show those not familiar with the trauma the storm that has affected many others. The speaker is sharing trauma, but is able to move freely in and out of the trauma because she knows and understands the trauma, and she is able to discuss it in this form of writing, which allows for a more personal approach.

The feeling of abjection and unhomeliness are quite evident as we see the speaker traveling from land to land and across different seas. The movement of the speaker appears to have not other purpose than to travel, less her call for others to join her. It is evident that her only home is the craft in which she travels, yet, because the ship is in constant motion, her location is ever changing. As discussed earlier, the “distant ports” (14), being “familiar, forbidden, forgotten” (15), allows the speaker to examine historical trauma, and I would argue that it is

precisely these traumas that cause the speaker to travel as she copes with abjection and unhomeliness. This movement is in search for a collective identity in which the speaker can find a group that shares the collective identity and common memory of the trauma in order to form community. This community can lead to empowerment and aid in coping with such massive stressors. Furthermore, the speaker is attempting to carve a space unique to those who may share her trauma, as is evident from the last two stanzas. Although she does not establish this space by means of code-switching, it is evident that she hopes to help others navigate historic traumas just as she is.

When examined closer, we can see the two devices that are the focus of this study being utilized within this poem. The ship, which Inada is using as a metaphor, is an example of the speaker using traumatic figurative language in order to discuss the trauma. Although not nearly as compelling as Plath's use of Nazis when describing her father, Inada is using a ship weathering a storm as a metaphor for reexamining historical traumas. The ship riding "Through disasters, tragedies" (20) holds double meaning within the poem. The speaker does not directly state that examining the historic traumas of her culture are distressful and, instead, utilizes the metaphor to represent the difficulty. Thus, the speaker is able to represent the difficulty of examining historical traumas in order to help the reader understand just how difficult this process can be. The reason this is traumatic figurative language rather than a traditional figurative language resides in the subject matter. Unlike traditional figurative language, traumatic figurative language uses the description of one type of stressful or traumatic incident to replace another type of stressful or traumatic incident. In this instance, similar to the idea of traumatic

metaphors described by Auerhahn and Laub, the metaphor not only replaces one type of trauma or stressor with another, but also does so by demonstrating Fuch's idea of abjection.

In this metaphor of the ship, we see the speaker as a wanderer who is exploring cultural history and inviting others to join her. The speaker is facing abjection and unhomeliness because, as we can see from the poem, she has no true home other than the boat that "travels from land to land" (10). The speaker is also attempting to gain a better understanding of her identity by traveling the "crossroads of collective memory" (16) and "tides and currents of history" (12). This is her "given calling" (6) because "The elders saw it in the stars / And guided me in my destiny" (7-8). The speaker is also estranged from social relationships, as is discussed in Fuchs' definition of abjection, because she identifies herself as "the captain and the crew" (22) of her vessel, and concludes the poem in hope that "all others can join me" (24). The speaker is alone on these constant travels, thereby fulfilling each aspect of Fuchs' definition of abjection. The speaker is trying to locate and identify herself by examining the histories of her culture, and is left wandering these histories in hopes of finding identity. In addition, she hopes to help others and form a community she can associate with as she does so.

As can be seen in this analysis, abjection and traumatic travel metaphors both exist in this poem by Inada and contribute to our understanding discussion of literary trauma theory. Obviously, the degree to which these devices are used within poems varies a great deal; yet when they are identified, their significance becomes apparent. We are left then with the question, "So what?" Why is it important to identify these devices and how is this beneficial to our understanding of trauma and this kind of poetry? The following section will take up these

questions and show why examining trauma in poetry is beneficial for both the poet and the audience.

The Benefit of Studying Poetry Through a Literary Trauma Lens

A final question I shall pose is, “What purpose does a study like mine serve and how is it beneficial?” The obvious answer is that the use of literary trauma theory can demonstrate why the poetry of Nikki Giovanni or Amiri Baraka written during the Black Arts Movement was filled with so much anger, hostility, and violence, or why certain poems by Robin Coffee, Linda Hogan, Alan Chong Lau, and Mitsuye Yamada are filled with despair, confusion, and frustration. Obviously, the poetry from the Black Arts Movement was a call for change within society and for a radical reconstruction of social, economic, and social power, but we can gain a better understanding for the reason why this frustration existed and how it stems from more than one generation. The urge to fight or flee is the result of historical trauma, which has manifested itself for generation after generation, compounded with the potential for individual traumatic incidents that could have taken place and culminated into, for Baraka, fiery rhetoric that calls for the raping and killing of whites. An untrained reader may easily dismiss such poetry as being hate-filled, but someone who studies the poetry of the Black Arts Movement through the lens of literary trauma theory realizes that such language is used as a call for action after years of torture, abuse, genocide, and oppression. The same can be said for the despair, confusion, and frustration found within the poetry of Lau, Hogan, Yamada, and Coffee. The historical remnants of torture, abuse, genocide, and oppression manifest within the poetry of these poets as frustration or despair rather than rage. Regardless of the emotion, examining poetry through a trauma lens allows for insights not available through other lenses.

Literary trauma theory and trauma poems also allow the reader to empathize with those who have either directly encountered trauma or may be linked to historical trauma due to their heritage. As we recall, poetry, more so than other types of writing, has a very strong connection to emotion. As Caruth and LaCapra have discussed, those coping with trauma often have a strong need to tell of their trauma in order to gain a greater understanding of it. Whether the trauma is direct or historical, many survivors have been said to feel isolated. By reading about the traumas of those who have endured similar struggles, survivors are able to develop a sense of community and are able to examine trauma from perspectives beyond their own. Writers and readers are able then to reinforce the idea that the traumas that have occurred are in the past and the future remains open to them. Moreover, poetry allows for a unique connection to trauma that is unlike other forms of writing because of its emphasis on poetic devices that are similar to traumatic memory. One such device that poetry is well known for is the use of imagery. Poetry, as has been discussed, lends itself more readily to expressing emotions and confessions. The combination of imagery and the tendency to express emotion can elicit and evoke feelings in readers, which can reinforce the sense of community. Ultimately, the reader is able to empathize with the speaker especially if the reader has survived similar expressed by the speaker of the poem.

In addition to the formation of community, literary trauma theory also allows readers to witness a version of history that is not always recorded in historical texts, and, what is more, literary trauma theory allows readers to have a greater understanding of the impact that trauma has had on people throughout history. Reading history may allow a single perspective on events that have taken place in our past, yet history is nearly always written through the voice and

perspective of the oppressor and lacks the personal and individual stories of those who have been silenced. Rather than a cold telling of events that are found in historical documents, writers of traumatic narratives desire to evoke an emotional response from the reader and require a meditation on the form of communication.

Poems may not only present a narrative of a traumatic event such as a lynching or the voyage of a slave ship, but the poem may utilize various techniques, which may evoke anxiety in the reader beyond those that I have discussed so far. Poets may create short lines and stanzas to rush the reader through the poem, or use enjambment to highlight certain words in order to heighten a sense of anxiety in the reading, thereby transposing a small bit of stress upon the reader. Other poets, such as Amiri Baraka, may use words such as “fuck” and “masturbation” to create anxiety that was especially effective in the 1960s and 1970s when audiences were not as commonly exposed to this type of language in movies, music, books, and poetry readings. The fact that using language such as this could be viewed as illegal, due to the obscenity laws of the time, would have further compounded the anxiety that people within the audience might have felt. For certain individuals, these words may still provoke a feeling of uneasiness to this day.

It is important to examine poetry to gain a greater insight into trauma because of the link poetry has to emotion, thus providing a greater access to pain. Poetry also allows for an insight into the very constructs of representational impasse that comprises trauma. Trauma is understood as that which cannot be represented due to the severity of its impact on the survivors. In essence, trauma is form. What is most intriguing about trauma as form resides in our inability to comprehend with our normal tools of consciousness and representation. However, poetry also

has the ability to give voice to memories that exist as images or that are not easily summed into words and are best articulated through figurative language. Traumatic figurative language is the means with which many poets are able to articulate that which is by normal means unrepresentable. As Auerhahn and Laub discussed earlier, traumatic memories are often represented through screen memories (which can take the form of images in poetry) and traumatic metaphors (which can appear as traumatic figurative language in poems). In addition, poets may represent the feelings of abjection and unhomeliness in their poems by producing narratives that discuss travel, flight (either physical or mental), and/or isolation. While these are often feelings that people coping with trauma may endure, poetry not only discusses these types of feelings, but also combats them at the same time by producing a sense of community with the reader.

The importance of having a community for those coping with trauma cannot be overstated, yet this is not the only reason for a poet to take trauma from the private to the public sphere. Many trauma theorists see the benefit of survivor having their words heard as a means of empowerment and coping. Culberson states, “To return fully to the self as socially defined, to establish a relationship again with the world, the survivor must tell what happened” (179). This relationship with the world is a portion of what is tourniqueted with the advent of abjection. Steele also speaks of the benefit of the survivor telling of their experience and the need a survivor has for a witness. Steele argues, “In order to turn trauma into survival, one needs a witness for the reconstruction... The witness is so vitally important because trauma, which cuts connections between people, also cuts off the survivor’s access to an internal witness” (83). The

internal witness that Steele is referring to is what must be utilized to reexamine the trauma in order that the survivor can work through the event and the pain associated with the event.

Thus, as will be examined throughout this study, poetry aids in the empowerment of both the writer and the audience. The writer is empowered by means of reexamining the events associated with the trauma and is therefore able to own the trauma, and is thereby able to more easily work through and cope with the trauma. In addition, by discussing trauma, the writer is able to work against abjection by gaining witnesses to the traumatic event by making their thoughts and feelings public rather than private. By doing so, they are able to open themselves to a community, which can aid in their coping. For the audience, the empowerment is quite similar. By listening to or reading poetry about trauma, the audience members, if they are also coping with the trauma, are able to become part of a community of survivors by witnessing the fact that they are not alone in their struggles with trauma. The community can work together as they cope with the trauma and work to ensure that similar events that cause the trauma do not happen again in the future. As we continue on with the chapters of this study, we will examine how the writing empowers three distinct cultures of the United States and how the trauma has affect the speakers of the poems. Through many of the poems, the writers describe events with a sense of abjection and displacement from community, and the very land that they once called home.

In the next chapter, we begin to see how these poetic articulations of massive stressors come into play in the poetry of Japanese American writers. Each of the poets selected in the following chapter spent time in the internment camps during different time of their lives. Each of the poets use different poetic articulations of massive stressors to engage with the massive

stressor of actually being imprisoned within the internment camps. From the writing of Soga, which was recorded during his time spent incarcerated, to the poetry of Yamada and Inada, who discuss their experience after the fact, each of these writers use poetic articulations of massive stressors to record the events, the distress associated with the events, and in the case of Inada, to move people toward empowerment.

CHAPTER 3:

聞<¹: LISTENING TO TRAUMA IN JAPANESE AMERICAN POETRY

As was discussed in the previous chapter, traumatic figurative language, abjection, and unhomeliness are characteristics often found in poetry discussing trauma. Although the presentation of these characteristics can be overt or subtle, their existence in a poem is beneficial for the writer, as is the need to tell and the need for community. As we now turn our attention to the poetry of specific cultures, it is important to keep these characteristics in mind, as well as the history of the specific culture, to gain a better understanding of the traumas that occurred. This will be paramount for the next three chapters, each approaching a different culture. However, the Japanese poetry examined in this chapter (as may be indicative by the Kanji symbol for listening in the title) will be unique because part of the poetry examined discusses both direct trauma as well as historic trauma. In this chapter, I shall examine the poetry of Japanese Americans that engage with the historical trauma and massive stressors created out of the internment camps. As such, we can gain an insight into the speakers' articulation of distress, as well as, when examining Inada's poetry, see how this engagement can lead to empowerment. Obviously the traumatic events that have occurred within Japanese American and Asian American culture reside far outside the span of the internment camps; however, the poetry surrounding the internment camps is significant because these events surrounding the internment camps, as well as the internment camps themselves, exist as a highlighted and magnified event in the larger traumatic history of Asian American and Japanese American culture and literature.

¹ Japanese: "to listen."

As we delve into the writings produced within Japanese American cultures impacted by traumatizing events, it is important that we take a few moments' pause to examine a portion of the history that influenced the culture and writers. Historical and cultural traumas live beyond their time of occurrence. Cultural trauma passes from one generation to the next and affects each person differently, if at all. For many, this trauma occurred as people began to immigrate to the United States. Although many groups who came to the United States did so for a better life, they often fled racism, violence, and poor living conditions and were often greeted by the same in the U.S. Many people fail to realize that, just like Americans of African descent, many Asian-Americans were not considered, or even allowed to become, citizens. Gary Okihiro states in his text *Margins and Mainstream* that "[t]hree years after the Constitution was ratified, the first Congress met and restricted admission into the American community to 'free white persons' through the Naturalization Act of 1790" (*Margins* 6-7). We must remember that it was not until 1870 that the act was ratified to include African-Americans and, finally, "Chinese nationals in 1943" (*Margins* 7), and "the racial criterion for citizenship was eliminated completely only in 1952, 162 years after the original delineation of the Republic's members, or, according to the Nationalization Act, the 'worthy part of mankind'" (*Margins* 7). Given that even the governmental Nationalization Act did not recognize people of Asian ethnicity as a "worthy part of mankind" until 1943, when many Japanese and Japanese Americans residing in the United States at that time were placed in internment camps, it is with little hesitation that one could suggest the incarceration in internment camps created historical trauma for many.

Although racism existed against Japanese living on American soil prior to World War II, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, public sentiment became filled with more hatred, fear,

and suspicion. Shortly after the attack, FBI agents began raiding homes of people they believed to be spies and people working for the Japanese military and government. The highly trained and extremely efficient agents performed raids which were “choreographed down to the very last detail through advanced rehearsals and machine-like efficiency” (Roxworthy 78). These rehearsals and the efficiency of the raids were very important to Hoover and other Washington leaders in order to “minimize hysteria among the populace and keep the U.S. home front on the gentlemanly side of martial law” (Roxworthy 78-79). The actions of these raids kept the white American public feeling somewhat safe, but, in turn, demoralized some Japanese Americans, such as Kenko Yamashita, an Issei and Buddhist minister in Southern California who stated, “I thought the FBI would come pick me up soon because of this [the raids]. So I put my belongings into a suitcase and I prepared to go at a moment’s notice I was ready for it from the beginning. But they came on March 13, 1942. I was tired of waiting so long” (qtd. in Roxworthy 80). The swift, calculated raids were efficient, not only in incarcerating what were perceived as dangerous people, but also in dissuading those being captured, along with onlookers, from generating any type of resistance. Roxworthy states that the spectacle of these raids “rendered victims and bystanders alike as passive spectators, overawed and even mesmerized” (82). It is evident, in passages such as these, that Japanese and Japanese Americans were not only psychologically overwhelmed by the shock of such raids, but they were left in a helpless state of looming anticipation. Many, if not most Japanese and Japanese Americans, were silent and nonresistant in their incarceration. Even after their release, most internees remained silent about the events surrounding their incarceration. Scholars have surmised this silence and nonresistance were cultural responses of the Japanese tradition, yet Roxworthy suggests, “We interpret former

internees' silence not as a culturally conditioned response to adversity but rather as the structural outgrowth of the particular trauma of this particular internment" (2). Trauma is not only identified through repetition, but in silence. Many survivors repeat the incident in flashbacks, nightmares, or reoccurring thoughts and in literature as repetition in the narrative or literary devices such as images. Another characteristic of trauma, as discussed by Roxworthy, is silence. While silence could explain this reaction, the poets of this chapter utilize traumatic figurative language within their poems, as well as abjection, unhomeliness, and isolation.

As opposed to the African American and Native American writers examined in this study, the Japanese American writers do not focus on empowerment as much as these other groups. The poetry of the African American and Native American writers worked to formulate group resistance to the oppressor, yet, curiously, the Japanese American poets did not have the same thrust for empowerment in their writing. Although the Japanese internment camps were significant to Japanese American traumatic history, they are only a magnified event for the larger tradition of disempowerment and oppression that Asian Americans faced. The reason for this lack of empowerment could be due to the extreme focus that the group faced by law enforcement and government officials, as well as the media. Japanese Americans were already being scrutinized at a microscopic level, thus any movement towards empowerment, even in creative writing, could spell disaster for that individual.

In addition to the raids by FBI agents, vile lambasts of Asian-descended people appearing in the newspapers fueled hatred. Such hatred ultimately resulted in the establishment of internment camps in February of 1942, where, according to the National Parks Service Department of the Interior, more than 110,000 people, mostly of Japanese ancestry, two thirds of

which were U.S. citizens according to Roxworthy (58), were moved many times in an evacuation-type atmosphere. Such was the beginning of the trauma that arose from the civilian and military handling of Japanese-Americans during World War II. The massive stressors that was experienced by Asian Americans at that time, especially Japanese Americans, was not only a result of being placed in internment type camps, but it was also fueled by the public mentality and reinforced racism that spilled out of the rhetoric of this era. The time some spent under extreme stress, like Yamashita, waiting to be taken from their home, as well as those who were taken in such raids, created a great deal of stress, anxiety, and in some cases, trauma. Even if some did not live in constant paranoia and dread of an FBI raid, those taken to the camps faced horrific conditions once incarcerated, and, as will be demonstrated in the poetry of Keiho Soga, some were separated from family and loved ones. To make matters worse, nearly all belongings, personal and business, were left behind, creating further stressors by very probable loss of resources once the period of incarceration was over.

The following chapter will examine poetry written by Japanese Americans from inside the internment camps as well as poetry by Japanese Americans who wrote about trauma after World War II. The poetry of Keiho Soga, Mitsuye Yamada, and Lawson Fusao Inada will be examined through a literary trauma lens focusing on abjection, unhomeliness, and traumatic figurative language. These poets produce poetry that contains these characteristics as a result of direct trauma, as is evident in the poetry of Soga, or through the speaker's historic trauma response because of unresolved historic trauma, which is evident in the poetry of Soga, Yamada, and Inada. As has been stated, the speaker's trauma response is the focus of this study and not that of the poet.

Poetry From Inside the Camps

The internment camps constructed before and during World War II forced many Japanese and Japanese Americans from their homes, placed them in camps, oftentimes with horrid conditions, and isolated many loved ones. The camps were erected in desolate locations and surrounded by barbed wire, spotlights, and, at times, overzealous armed guards (Daniel 63-65). “Most, if not all, of the sites were overcrowded and not really prepared for human habitation,” Roger Daniel states, and to make matters worse, “toilets and bathing facilities were minimal” (65). As if these problems were not difficult enough, “improper sanitation in the makeshift mess kitchens caused mass outbreaks of diarrhea” (Daniel 66), making living conditions in the camps almost unbearable, especially when one considers how many of the camps were often converted facilities, like horseracing tracks where many lived in horse stalls. In addition, the treatment and propaganda that surrounded the camps reinforced racist ideologies already existent in the United States.

The influence of massive stressors that directly impacted people incarcerated into internment camp is captured in *Poets Behind Barbed Wire* where the poetry of Keiho Soga, Taisamboku Mori, Sojin Takei, and Muin Ozaki is translated. The four poets wrote in the tanka form, which offers a terse, 31-syllable platform for the poets to present their emotional response to the conditions of living *in and during* the incarceration. This is not the Wordsworthian “spontaneous overflow of emotion, reflected in tranquility,” as the overly romanticized definition of nostalgic poetry would convey. This form is a direct and immediate reaction to extremely stressful and traumatic experiences, which allows the poets to articulate the pain associated with their ordeal and allows them to tell, which is important for coping. Thus, this is not art for art’s

sake, but poetry created because of the conscious or subconscious need to tell. The poems articulate distress, pain, and trauma that reside within a cultural legacy.

Japanese poetry has a long tradition of poetic form focusing on syllabic structure with the tanka being just one example. The significance of the tanka being used by prisoners resides in the legacy of the poem rather than the syllabic structure. The tanka was often used, as described on *Poets.org*, by lovers because of its small size and its ability for the poet to express emotion. “Like the sonnet, the tanka employs a turn, known as a pivotal image, which marks the transition from the examination of an image to the examination of the personal response” (*Poets.org*). The poem itself is symbolic for the speaker’s life in that traumatic events usually mark an individual’s life as a pivotal event and greatly alter how one understands one’s life. Given the brevity of the poem, the fact that this pivotal image marks not only a turning point, but also an entire line of the five-line poem, suggests how significant the event is to the speaker when considering that the remainder of the poem represents the speaker’s life. The small stature of the poem reinforces how “big” the trauma is in comparison to the speaker’s overall life. The size of the poem is also relevant due to the poor living conditions of the camps and the lack of material the prisoners may have had to write. Because of the scarcity of resources, such as paper and writing utensils, and because of the tanka’s legacy of expressing emotion, this type of poem was appropriate for prisoners to tell of their emotions and frustrations, especially if we recall Pennebaker’s assertions for telling of one’s stress and trauma as a means of coping. Furthermore, the pivotal image within the poem is as important as the emotional telling, given the connection to the manner in which images register within a survivor’s mind in relation to trauma. Each of these aspects are important for the examination of poetry through a traumatic lens, but the

tanka's use of both make it incredibly important for this study when considering the circumstances of when the poems were written.

Abjection, Isolation, and Unhomeliness in Soga's Poetry

I begin with the examination of Soga's poetry because Soga's poems are written earlier than Inada and Yamada's, so, by beginning with Soga, we can follow the progression as the poetry written about trauma begins with the direct trauma incurred by Soga, to the poetry of Inada and Yamada, who experienced the internment camps in their youth, and write about their trauma as historically manifested. In the poetry of Yamada and Inada, there are many more instances of traumatic figurative language, while it is absent from the poetry of Soga. However, many of Soga's poems contain references or traces of abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness, which, alongside traumatic figurative language, are the tropes I feel are most important to understanding the value of trauma poetry. These poems provide insight and allow the reader into a world created by the poet's experience and can provide an insight into the emotional reaction of the speaker and perhaps even the poet. In Soga's poem beginning "There is nothing," the emotion of the captive held during the war is presented to the reader. The poem, like many of the poems written by Soga, contains tropes of abjection, unhomeliness, and isolation:

There is nothing
 More sorrowful than war.
 Here alone,
 All of life's sadness
 Is brought together.

Soga is able to show the reader the immense pain associated with being separated from loved ones due to war. However, the most evident reason for pain in war, the death and destruction of humanity, remains unsaid. Thus, just as trauma is unrepresentable, the poem leaves the reasons for pain absent from the poem. Instead, we are given a perspective that focuses on the isolation that is the result of confinement. Given that the tanka was historically used by lovers to express their emotion, the isolation expressed in this poem is more significant because of the couples, families, and friends who were separated when incarcerated. Rather than a specific person, the audience for this tanka is no one and everyone, and it expresses the pain in a manner such that it remains largely unsaid. In addition, the speaker allows the personal pain to remain unsaid and provides only an observation, thereby allowing his personal pain to remain unrepresented.

Silence, as was discussed earlier, is a significant aspect of the Japanese internment as well as the response, or more appropriately, lack of a response, by those incarcerated. By allowing the speaker's personal pain to remain unsaid, the speaker is showing that the pain he is feeling is unable to be represented in words. In addition, the poem is moving beyond the archetypal tanka subject matter in which lovers proclaim his or her feelings through an intimate connection.

Instead, Soga's poem is attempting to recover what has been lost due to isolation from culture and family in the internment camps. To show the significance, a poem usually used to discuss what has been gained (a lover) in private, in a form usually reserved for couples, becomes a poem about loss of culture (something shared by many) in public. This inverting of the norm brings attention to cultural tradition, the very thing being lost by the forcing of Japanese and Japanese Americans into the camps, stripping them of their culture and family, but does so in a

manner that would normally only be recognizable to people familiar with Japanese culture and the tanka form.

The pivotal image of the poem is the speaker declaring, “Here alone” (3). This is the embodiment of abjection as the speaker is without home or companionship and is the center point for “nothing / More sorrowful than war” (1-2), as he declares, “All of life’s sadness / Is brought together” (4-5). The speaker, therefore, finds himself, much like many other Japanese Americans and Japanese immigrants, in a situation where the results of war have isolated him from the rest of the world, and the coagulation of misery is compounded within the internment camps. The people in the camp are without a country and without an identity, but share many commonalities, especially the grief and trauma resulting from their treatment in this nation and the racism perpetrated against them. They are the embodiment of abjection, as described by Fuchs: it is “to be misplaced, astray and without identity. Abjection is a terrifying borderline state which estranges the individual from all social relations. It is the stigma of the modern subject that cannot locate itself via another object” (4). Furthermore, Soga dislocates the poem from its familiar space, that of the private sphere, and uses this poem reserved for private feelings to express isolation from that which is most public: culture. In doing so, he has also located himself as dislocated from his culture through a medium unique to his culture.

A second poem by Soga that expresses the feeling of abjection is his poem that begins “Like a dog.” This poem focuses on the isolation that many felt in the camps as well as on the treatment of the prisoners:

Like a dog

I am commanded

At a bayonet point.

My heart is inflamed

With burning anguish.

The speaker in this poem is able to capture the anguish of being dehumanized by an armed captor who commands one's every movement as presented in the pivotal image of the bayonet in line three. The more significant aspect of the poem is the idea of abjection and dehumanization rather than violence. The dehumanization begins immediately where the speaker compares himself to a dog, "inu." The use of dog, in this instance, is not an example of traumatic figurative language because the comparison is not between two traumatic events. The speaker is comparing himself to a dog *during* a traumatic event, but in order for this to be an example of traumatic figurative language, the event would have to be compared to another traumatic event. Even though this is not a traumatic simile, the use of this symbol is very significant. The image of a dog is very loaded because "inu" was the term used by inmates for those individuals who were working with the American government. According to Daniel, "There was some violence [in the camps], most of it directed not against the authorities but against fellow Japanese Americans who, it was believed, were collaborating with the oppressive government. Such persons were usually called 'inu,' literally 'dog'" (63). Because the writer uses this word, it provokes a feeling of isolation beyond that of simply being a prisoner. The dehumanization was isolating enough, but it was also compounded by abjection from infighting. More painful is the fact that the prisoners were regarded as enemies by their own country, and the pain is compounded by being regarded as enemies by their own people, which is realized by the use of the word "inu." The result of the anguish felt by the speaker is abjection. The speaker here perfectly exemplifies the

definition to the point that he presents his “othered” state beyond the realm of humanity. Rather than fear, anger, or hostility, the speaker suffers from anguish, a word synonymous with agony, grief, and suffering. It is precisely the suffering of being dehumanized and tormented by a violent captor that resonates as a massive stressor within the speaker.

Understanding the torment felt in this poem provides greater insight into the sorrow expressed in Soga’s poem “There is nothing.” The fifth line, “Here alone,” resonates more clearly if we consider the statements from “Like a dog,” and the anguish therein felt by a person suffering abjection from his incarceration and despair from being turned on by his own countrymen. Because “There is nothing” and “Like a dog” were written by the same person during the time of his incarceration and because both poems speak of war, I would contend that the poems can be read across one another to gain a greater insight into the situation of being imprisoned in an internment camp during a time of war.

The poems by Soga in *Poets Behind Barbed Wire* contain moments of abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness, but the use of traumatic figurative language is not generally used. I believe the main reason that the Japanese American poets do not use traumatic figurative language in their poetry is because, unlike the other poetry examined in this study, the Japanese American poets endured the traumatic events firsthand rather than enduring the traumatic stressors through historical trauma. As such, there has not been sufficient time elapsed between the event and the examination of the event that allows for the use of traumatic figurative language. I believe this to be a device most often used by poets to describe historic traumas, and for these poets, the time has not elapsed to allow them to be as prone to engage with the traumatic stressor in this manner. This is not always the case, as the next poem demonstrates.

Most situations where traumatic figurative language is used describes historical trauma.

However, this final poem does use a traumatic figure to address the trauma felt by the speaker. A traumatic metaphor is defined as “the use of the imagery and language of massive psychological trauma as metaphor and vehicle for developmental conflict” (Auerhahn and Laub 33). In the poem examined above, we find the speaker using a metaphor in reference to the trauma, but the language used to describe the trauma (referring to himself as a dog) is not referring to a previous trauma. Although the word is charged, it is not referencing a previous trauma. The speaker discusses the massive stressors associated with being a prisoner within the camp, but unlike the previous two, the speaker focuses on the stressors being felt by another inmate rather than the stress felt directly by the speaker.

A fellow prisoner
Takes his life with poison.
In the evening darkness,
Streaks of black blood
Stain the camp road.

Like the previous two poems, the speaker in this poem is a prisoner in a wartime camp and is struggling with the stresses associated with such incarceration. The focus on the death of a fellow prisoner by means of poison in the first half of the poem is significant because we are not given any information about the other prisoner other than that he is a prisoner and committed suicide by means of poison. These two elements are significant as the poem discusses the idea of “black blood / Stain[ing] the camp road” (4-5). The likelihood of poison creating a death with a loss of blood is highly unlikely, so the blood takes on a different meaning where it becomes traumatic

figurative language. The black blood is analogous to the darkness of evening found in the previous line, but since it “Stain[s] the camp road” (5), it is placing the blame of the death on the camp. The reason this metaphor is traumatic figurative language and not just a simple metaphor resides in the fact that it is comparing the present trauma to a different trauma in order to discuss something the speaker believes to be unrepresentable. In order to attempt to convey the feelings generated by the trauma, the speaker is attempting to compare the present trauma with another type of trauma, one that has left the roads filled with blood. Furthermore, the fact that we know nothing about the prisoner allows him to represent all prisoners, thus metaphorically staining the camp as visual persecution, literally staining and inscribing the camp enforcers with guilt. Unlike historically specific imagery, like that of whips and ropes within African American poetry, the historical non-specificity of the bloodstained road strengthens the sense of being distinctively ubiquitous in its representation. The means of death of the prisoner is notable because it was 1) by his or her own hand, and 2) by means of poison. The suicide is important to our reading because it implies that the death was directly a result of the stress incurred from the incarceration. Clearly, any stress or psychological distresses exhibited by the prisoners are results of their incarceration. What needs to be remembered is that, although traumas can be collective because they occurred to a group of people, the reactions to the traumas and the way they are engaged in the psyche are unique to the individual. Because of that, making broad assumptions in comparing traumas is not only inaccurate, but also misguided. Traumatic figurative language does not compare traumatic events in this way, and in fact, traumatic figurative language are not utilized to determine which atrocity was more devastating; rather, they are used in order to gain a greater understanding of the traumas themselves.

Traumatic figurative language is able to present what is often considered unrepresentable by deferring representation to another trauma. If we accept that trauma cannot be represented, it is only through traumatic figurative language that trauma can be represented. This comparing of traumas is not meant to clarify one trauma as opposed to another. The comparisons work to deepen the confusion that exists within the trauma by comparing it with another, thereby intensifying the terror associated with the events that have occurred. In addition, the comparison of one traumatic event with another through the use of a traumatic figurative language establishes poetic continuity between events, both historical and traumatic, that would normally be considered completely unrelated.

Returning to the poem, the fact that the death was by means of poison connotes that the massive stressors produced from being held within the camp is also a poison that eats away at the individuals to the point that they would choose to die rather than exist in such circumstances. As demonstrated in “Like a dog,” the stresses associated with abjection could place a prisoner into this type of suicidal mindset, especially when we consider the anguish from the poem and the sorrow and isolation contained within “There is nothing.” Just as in the poem “There is nothing,” we find a tool normally reserved for the private sphere of lovers being modified into a tool and message for the public sphere. This collapsing of spheres is not only important as the poem uses a normally private template for commentary on public events, the poem also takes the idea of stress and trauma, something which is individualize and highly personal, and presents it in a public form that allows countless readers to explore. The poem is presented in the trans-historical public sphere to comment, using a traditionally private method, due especially to the wounded public sphere damaged by internment camps. Trauma exists both very personally and publically

when occurring to a group. This trauma and massive stressors, when internalized, has the ability to isolate individuals even though the feelings may be universal. Discussing the private feelings in a public manner enables the survivor to gain control over massive stressors and trauma by externalizing these feelings as indicated by Pennebaker.

The reason the poetry written by Soga exhibits very few examples of traumatic figurative language Soga's poetry is most likely related to the fact that the trauma is presently occurring to the writer rather than as a type of historical trauma being reexamined by the writer. Not only is the trauma direct for the poet, but it is continuing to occur as Soga is writing his poetry.

Traumatic figurative language is part of traumatic memory, and thus the poem is generated during a time of trauma rather than because of attempting to remember and sort through trauma.

In both instances, many elements remain unrepresentable, yet it is through traumatic memories that traumatic figurative language is formed. In the next section, I will examine the poetry of Mitsuye Yamada, and like Soga, the poems contain elements of abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness, but traumatic figurative language is not overtly present. Although Yamada is producing these poems about the internment camps from memory rather than experience as Soga does, she does not utilize traumatic figurative language as one might expect.

Abjection, Isolation, and Unhomeliness in Mitsuye Yamada's Poetry

In the following section, the poetry of Mitsuye Yamada will be examined from her book *Camp Notes and Other Poems*, published in 1976. Yamada was chosen for this study because she, like Soga, spent time in the internment camps and writes about this time in her poetry.

Unlike Soga, however, Yamada spent time in the camps when she was a child, and she did not compose these poems while incarcerated, and thus more traumatic figurative language is used, as

shall be demonstrated in the section following this one. We find poetry written about historical trauma, or poetry written about trauma years after the trauma occurred, tends to use more traumatic figurative language. This may be due in part because the trauma has had more time to be internalized, either through one person or generations. Traumatic figurative language is only one characteristic found within Yamada's poetry. As she looks back upon her past, it is evident that abjection was evoked because of her time in the Japanese internment camps, yet unlike Soga, the abjection is examined and articulated after incarceration. In her poem "The Question of Loyalty," the speaker discusses the idea of signing loyalty papers which Japanese prisoners were forced to do to forswear any allegiance to the Japanese Emperor. As outlined in her poem, many prisoners, in order to be released from the prison camps, were forced to sign such papers, although not all did, in which case they were refused release. The speaker of this poem states that he has no problem forswearing allegiance because he does not know the Emperor, yet the mother of the speaker protests and stresses how difficult it is to be from Japan and American. The mother states in this poem,

If I sign this
 What will I be?
 I am doubly loyal
 to my American children
 also to my own people.
 How can double mean nothing?
 I wish no one to lose this war.
 Everyone does. (12-19)

Like the speakers in previous poems I have discussed, the mother of the speaker in this poem is having great difficulty belonging to one or either group. Although the speaker has no trouble because he has little knowledge of or about the Japanese Emperor and forswearing allegiance has very little impact on his psyche, the mother is forced to choose allegiance between the country that she now resides and the one of her birth. This poem demonstrates the struggle that many prisoners had as they tried to maneuver the difficulties of abjection and unhomeliness.

The persona of the mother is important as she represents place as well as culture within the poem. By using the figure of mother, the poem is able to show the difficulties many people could have had by having to sign allegiance papers against the country where some may have been born and others maintain cultural and familial ties. The mother in this poem represents, not only Japan, but Japanese culture, and, for some, family. Although many signed papers forswearing allegiance, they were not welcomed as, nor able to become, American citizens. Not surprisingly, many faced the feeling of unhomeliness, just as can be seen in Yamada's poem. Unhomeliness, we should remember, is defined by Bhabha as

the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiation. To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the 'unhomely' be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres... The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting... Although the 'unhomely' is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition, it has a resonance that can be

heard distinctly, if erratically, in fictions that negotiate the powers of cultural difference in a range of transhistorical sites. (13)

In this instance, as was apparent in the previous poems, the unhomeliness stems from Japanese Americans and Japanese citizens residing in the United States being forced from their homes and placed in the internment camps. This poem engages this idea and is able to demonstrate the generational difference in thinking, which many prisoners had, and the senselessness of the imprisonment of more than one hundred thousand Japanese and Japanese Americans during this time.

Being forced to choose between the nation of one's ancestors and the country where the family now calls home, and has (or in some cases, has not because barred legally) acquired citizenship, places a unique distress on a family unit to the extent that it inevitably endures a type of defeat, especially when the family by nature of its ethnicity or original nationality is regarded as an enemy in its new home. Having to sign away one's allegiance to the Emperor means having to forswear allegiance to one's cultural and ancestral home, and, in part, one's culture. While allegiances to the Emperor, or even Japan, may have not been an issue for most, it also meant swearing allegiance to the country that has decided to imprison those singled out as enemies. The result, regardless of whether the documents are signed or not, is abjection. In the end, as the speaker's mother states, no one wins the war. This line, however, has double meaning in that everyone loses the war and that everyone wishes no one to lose the war. This double meaning is especially significant because of the double consciousness that those of the camp were forced to endure. Similar to W.E.B. Dubois's concept of "double consciousness," many Japanese Americans, both inside and outside the camps, were forced to endure an identity that

could never be fully “American” because of their ethnicity and never “Japanese” because of their nationality or residence.

The poem concludes as the speaker admits to signing “my only ticket out” (23) and proclaims he did so because he was “poor / at math” (20-21). We can gather from this statement that, unlike his mother, the double identity of having ties to both sides did not mean a great deal, or as the mother says, “How can double mean nothing” (17). Rather than worrying about any kind of allegiance or historical ties, the reader chooses his freedom, a choice, which, in retrospect it seems, is somewhat regrettable. This regret is evident as the speaker freely states that he was “poor / at math” (20-21) indicating that the decision he made may not have been the best. This reference to being poor at math is also a repudiation of the stereotype of the Asian who is good at math, thus disavowing the idea that all Japanese will be loyal to the Emperor or Japan. By disarming the stereotype of the Asian who is good at math, the speaker is attempting to reject all stereotypes that existed about the Japanese people and culture. Given the fact that, unlike his mother, the speaker quite easily traded his historical allegiances for his freedom, the decision apparently still haunts his mind as he speaks of it in the poem. “The Question of Loyalty” is a question that is beyond the speaker’s control, and as can be seen in poems and history, the people of Japanese ethnicity can pledge their loyalty to the United States, yet white society’s distrust endures regardless of what the individual in question says. To be loyal, therefore, is to be white, something that no one can change and something that one cannot become.

As has been stated, by turning ones back on his or her ancestors, which the signing of this document represents, and by being always already disloyal because of one’s race, the individuals of the poem face a dilemma with their identity and must face abjection. Japanese Americans in

this poem are forced into this state of abjection and isolation from the nation in which they now reside and from the nation of their heritage. The result of their abjection becomes apparent in the next poem by Yamada. Not only does Yamada's poem "Cincinnati" discuss the abjection and racism, but it utilizes figurative language, but not traumatic figurative language, in order to demonstrate the pain felt by actions taken against the speaker.

In "Cincinnati," the speaker is anxious to spend time in a new city where no one knows her until she is verbally assaulted and comes to the realization that she will be recognized as the enemy no matter where she goes. Like the previous poem, the idea of not being accepted because of looking like the enemy is the topic of this Yamada poem. The speaker in this poem begins by discussing her new freedom in a new city where "no one knew me" (8). This poem was placed in the section of her book that focuses on internment camps. In that context, we may deduce the speaker is discussing her freedom from incarceration. In the third stanza, the speaker's joy of freedom is destroyed by the verbal assault of someone she passes and the spittle that lands upon her face.

No one except one
 hissing voice that said
 dirty jap
 warm spittle on my right cheek
 I turned and faced
 the shop window
 and my spittled face
 spilled onto a hill

of books.

Words on display. (9-18)

This stanza follows the single-line stanza that states, “no one knew me” (8) in this new city. The spittle is the actual residue of assault. The spittle physically and mentally stains the speaker and marks her with a sign of otherness. This is a physical and emotional mark, which exists as an assault of trauma upon her face. This point is underscored by the reflection of “words on display” (18). The speaker is on display as an “other.” Like the books that are visible in the window the speaker passes (“Words on display” [18]), so is the spittle of the assailant that came to rest on the face of the speaker. The line breaks of this stanza emphasize some of the most negative elements of the event by placing the most negative words at the beginning of the lines: “No” (9), “hissing” (10), and “dirty” (11). By placing “dirty jap” (11) on its own, the phrase is emphasized or “put on display,” so to speak, making the phrase resonate even more strongly with the reader. As we move to the next line, the word “warm” (12), which usually does not have a negative connotation, does in this instance because it is referring to the spit of the attacker. In lines twelve and fifteen, Yamada deemphasizes spittle by placing it in the middle. Thus, the word order and line breaks convey that the verbal insult holds more impact than the spit. In fact, the spit that affects very little. The negative aspect is what the spit represents: the residue of racism.

These “words on display,” both in the form of the books the reader sees through the window and the spit that is on the speaker’s face, are not communicating, as words typically do, but they are simply on display. There is a disconnection in regards to the functions of words in this stanza. The speaker can see the books, yet she is separated from them by the very glass where she sees her reflection. These books are little more than a collection of words that are

unavailable to her because of the glass and what she sees in the glass. In her reflection, she sees the result of the ethnic slur in spit that runs down her face. In this instance, the words do not communicate, but they leave a visible sign of their utterance on her face. The speaker is marked by the words just as she is marked as an “other” by being of Japanese heritage. As the speaker sees spit on her face by looking at the glass where she sees the other “words on display,” she is unable to find the words she needs in order to articulate the pain she feels from the verbal assault.

The impact of the assailant’s words are quickly apparent as the speaker begins to weep as a result of the assault. The reaction focuses on the words and what the spit represents in the sixth stanza where she says, “My tears would not / wash it. They stopped / and parted” (28-30). The pain and stress associated with the assault are evident by the tears that are unable to wash away the harm inflicted by the assailant’s words. The speaker continues showing her reaction to the assault by stating after she wiped the tears and spit away,

I edged toward the curb
loosened my fisthold
and the bleached lace
mother-ironed hankie blossomed in
the gutter atop teeth marked
gum wads and heeled candy wrappers. (35-40)

This assault not only destroys the pleasant feeling of freedom the speaker holds in her heart, but the assault also has changed her attitude toward familial identity as she drops the “mother-ironed

hankie” (38), which she used to wipe away the spittle and tears, to the ground. This cultural heritage manifested as a handkerchief cannot wipe away the spittle; instead it

brushed
the forked
tears and spittle
together. (31-34)

The handkerchief (cultural heritage), then, combines the spittle (assault and trauma) with the tears (coping), but it cannot wipe the skin completely clean. The speaker then drops the handkerchief (cultural heritage) to the ground. Discarding this item, one that her mother took particular care of, demonstrates discarding a portion of her heritage into the abandoned and forgotten items used up by others, due in part because she uses this item to wipe away the assault. The “teeth marked / gum wads and heeled candy wrappers” (39-40) are also scarred items that have been discarded, similar to the handkerchief, yet these items, unlike the hanky, have been scarred by the users intentionally, while the hanky was tainted as a result of an assault and voluntarily discarded through a forced choice and therefore, not a choice.

The poem closes with a powerful line that exemplifies the difficulty that many minorities face, but especially Japanese Americans during this time: “Everyone knew me” (41). The solitary line is presented after being offset after several blank lines and is a response to line eight, “no one knew me,” as well as the incident where she is assaulted. The peace and happiness at the beginning of the poem, where the speaker believes that she is now free, not only from imprisonment, but also from hatred in a place where no one knows her, has turned to despair by the end. The speaker is resolved to the idea that she is forever marked by her face so that she is

always already marked as “other,” or the enemy, by many of the people she encounters, no matter where she goes. She can never be free because of this.

What is of particular interest in Yamada’s poems “Cincinnati” and “The Question of Loyalty” is that the narratives of each are not that far removed from actual events that occurred in Yamada’s life. In Helen Jaskoski’s interview with Yamada, we find that, in 1942, Yamada and her family were prisoners at the Minidoka War Relocation Center in Idaho (97). Because Yamada and her brother renounced loyalty to the Emperor of Japan, they were allowed to leave the camp (Jaskoski 107). When she left the camp, she went to Cincinnati, as discussed in her interview with Jaskoski:

My mother felt that there was no other alternative except for me to leave [the camp] when I did. Then, I was free to go almost anywhere: there was a whole country to go to. I went to Cincinnati, where I got kicked out of a room I was renting in a sorority house. Apparently the alumni association of the sorority became very upset that there was a Japanese woman living in the dormitory. (107)

Although we must be careful not to deduce these similarities to be actual events, it would not be a stretch to believe that events similar to the ones described in the poems did happen to many Japanese Americans at this time. These descriptions could easily be biographical. By writing them, externalizing her traumatic thoughts through words, Yamada gives her trauma external validation and political potential. Such is the power of writing. This is the approach that one must take when approaching poetry from a trauma perspective. We must be mindful of the poet, noting that the experiences written about may or may not be personal experiences, but the reactions and feelings of the speaker are valid because, in most cases, the events written about,

such as those by Yamada, are events that have actually occurred. As I discussed in detail in my introduction, analyzing poetry through a trauma, anxiety, stress, and coping (TASC) lens is not necessarily to deduce whether or not the event actually occurred to the poet. Analyzing poetry through TASC is to understand how writing can be a useful coping mechanism to glean individual or personalized perspectives on traumatic events that affected an entire group.

The structure of the poem is indicative of the abjection felt by the speaker and the overall change in mindset as the speaker experiences the events of the poem. Broken into three stanzas, the first stanza begins with the word “Freedom” and is positive in its message and tone. The second stanza, however, consists of only one line, “no one knew me” (8), which changes meaning when contrasted with the previous and subsequent stanzas. If read alongside the first stanza, the line evokes the freedom and opportunity expressed within the first stanza. The third stanza, however, contains the traumatic incident where, because she is not known, she is assaulted. When the line of the second stanza is read against the third stanza’s trauma, the meaning changes from hope, freedom, and optimism to a feeling of abjection.

In her poetry, Yamada presents the difficult many had living in the United States and the abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness that many faced. Unlike the poems of Soga, Yamada’s poems discussed these feelings in speakers that lived outside the camps who still faced the racism and abjection, which was due in part to the internment camps. The hatred that many had for the Japanese and Japanese American people manifests in the sentiments and actions of people in Yamada’s poem “Cincinnati.” This hatred and racism existed before the twentieth century, but the rhetoric and actions of the government, politicians, officials, and the war itself created an atmosphere that did not frown upon, and in some instances encouraged, this type of behavior.

The feelings, stresses, and traumas that Japanese Americans felt because of this atmosphere are evident in Yamada's poems presented here. In the next two sections, I will examine the poetry of Lawson Fusao Inada, which draws more from traumatic memory than the previous poems.

Lawson Fusao Inada, Traumatic Memory, and Abjection

Lawson Fusao Inada and his book *Legends of the Camp* provides a perspective that is somewhat different from Yamada's because Inada lived in the internment camps when he was only four years old while Yamada was nineteen. Inada, unlike many poets, is able to draw off both direct and historical trauma because of the age he was when incarcerated. Some poems within *Legends of the Camp*, such as the poem the book is named after, present images and narratives about the camps, but this poem was written with a disconnect; the speaker is distanced from the camp by discussing the events under the context of legends and describing them in retrospect rather than as presently occurring. The disconnect and distance taken by the speaker in "Legends of the Camp" is not unique to Inada's poetry. However, it should be noted that Inada does place the speaker in the first person, present in some of his poems about the internment camps, though the poem "Legends of the Camp" is unique in its attempt to formulate legend. As we know, legends are unverifiable histories and stories that are passed down through history. Although part of their history may be founded in actual events, legends are often the blending of facts and fictions, which are often exaggerated or changed with their retelling and with time. What is produced is a story of half truth that has had to negotiate with the distance and disconnect from the actual event. The same can also be found in Inada's poem. The distance and disconnect found in this poem could be due to Inada's age when he was incarcerated and the fact that his understanding of the events in the camp were undoubtedly affected through the

explanations of his parents and other family members who molded his memories and experiences. Because Inada was so young, the experience may have had a surreal feel, and thus is found the repetition of “legend,” an idea that surrounds some of the poems within the collection.

Inada’s long poem “Legends of the Camp” contains twenty-five sections as well as a prologue. The speaker lists different facts associated with the incarceration of the Japanese Americans, but it concludes the prologue with two stanzas that harken back to the idea of his personal experiences, and those of others, that are so horrible they seem unbelievable, bordering on fiction. He states,

until the event, the experience, the history,
slowly began to lose its memory,
gradually drifting into a kind of fiction—

a “true story based on fact,”
but nevertheless with “all the elements of fiction”—
and then, and then, sun, moon, stars,
we come, we come, to where we are:

Legend. (54-61)

The speaker of this poem openly suggests that these experiences, which may have been inspired by actual events, are altered by the passage of time, rendering the telling a mix between actual events and the subjective altering of memory. In addition, we can infer from these stanzas that the speaker, if it is Inada, is attempting to draw off his young memory, but the speaker

recognizes that his memory and telling will ultimately be distorted by the passage of time and the impact of other stories that he has heard. This is important to note because the speaker recognizes that he is drawing on traumatic memories, and, consequently, his understanding of the actual events may be altered. Rather than examine every section of this long poem, we will discuss only those sections that are most pertinent to this study.

The third section of the poem, subtitled “III. The Legend of Protest” (72), is a short section that focuses on the fact that many Japanese Americans were taken into custody without protest. Believed by some to be a demonstration of commitment to the incarceration and willingness to be incarcerated, the speaker in this poem answers these ideas:

The F.B.I swooped in early,
taking our elders in the process—

for “subversive” that and this.

People ask: “Why didn’t you protest?”

Well, you might say: “They had *hostages*.” (73-77, Inada’s emphasis)

It is important to the concept of trauma to note how the speaker regarded the incarceration as a hostage situation rather than simply incarceration and indicates that any form of resistance might endanger the people already incarcerated. The distress associated with the uncertainty of loved ones being incarcerated is compounded by thoughts of the speaker’s own potential or actual incarceration. The stressors are exacerbated by the fact that this is a terroristic hostage situation, not a state-run prison. There is a feeling of hopelessness knowing protests may have far worse

consequences than a charge like resisting arrest. The fact that the speaker places the word “subversive” (75) in quotation marks indicates that he believes the arrests and incarcerations to be unjustified, yet the helplessness of the situation is magnified with the belief that they are reliant on the mercy and whims of their captors.

As Hobfoll discusses in the resource and loss-of-resource stress model, Japanese Americans had a dramatic increase in distress due to their inability to keep their freedom or aid those who were incarcerated. After being incarcerated, the lack of general necessities, such as freedom, adequate heating, lodging, food, safety, sanitary needs, as well as, in some cases, the ability to communicate and be with loved ones, dramatically impacts the stress of the individual and can ultimately lead to trauma. Hobfoll’s ideas are readily apparent in the next section of the poem as well. Section four, subtitled “IV. The Legend of Lost Boy” (78), follows the actions of a boy incarcerated within one of the internment camps. As this section of the poem begins, the speaker outlines all the things that have been taken away from the boy, as well as many other Japanese Americans:

Lost boy was not his name.

He had another name, a given name—

at another, given time and place—

but those were taken away.

The road was taken away.

The dog was taken away.

The food was taken away.

The house was taken away.

The boy was taken away—

but he was not lost.

Oh, no—he knew exactly where he was— . (79-89)

The fact that they were taken away increases the amount of stress on the incarcerated individuals because of the loss of resources and because they were not simply lost, but were taken away by force. The poem is able to represent trauma by repeating the phrase “was taken away” in several of the lines. Repetition, which, as I have discussed, is a common characteristic of trauma, represents the constant reminder, consciously being aware of being deprived; being “lost” without essential resources he was once used to possessing. In this section of the poem, the speaker provides a superb example of abjection as we see the boy who is now “misplaced, astray and without identity” (Fuchs 4). Everything from his personal possessions and home to his very identity has been stripped away from him with the exception of the knowledge that he now resides in the internment camp.

As the poem continues, we see the boy finds pleasure in following a truck that is spraying water on the ground. The boy is able to chase the truck and enjoy the water as a means of play as well as coping. The boy temporarily forgets that he is incarcerated and finds pleasure when he can play. However, the boy eventually follows the truck to the point that he gets lost and is unable to find his way back to the barracks. This incident gives the boy his name. Like Lost Boy, many individuals within this poem are referred to, not by their name, but by names acquired

through incidents surrounding them. This demonstrates that possessions and freedom are not the only things lost. The very identity of a person is lost when Lost becomes his or her name; lost becomes who the person is. Like Lost Boy, the people in the poem reside in a state of abjection.

Much later in the poem, the speaker gives an insight into the camps, detailing more of the stresses and traumas associated in the camps. Section 19, subtitled “XIX. The Legend of Other Camps” (365), begins with the line “They were out there, all right” (366), implying that, even though the poem to this point has spoken a great deal about legend, the fact was that there were other camps out there. In addition, this line portends that the lines to follow are most likely true. Thus, the inclusion of the word “legend” is not to take away any truthfulness or historical validity. The use of the word “legend” is part of the child’s retrospection, and certainly it conveys how unbelievably horrible or traumatic these events were.

The poem then takes a second turn in the next lines as the speaker says, “but nobody knew what they were up to. / It was tough enough deciphering / what was going on right here” (367-379). These lines force what follows back into legend because the speaker is telling us that all knowledge of other camps is speculative. This stanza demonstrates the frustration that people within the camps had trying to understand what was going on beyond the barbwire trappings where they found themselves living. Without good sources, or in some cases, any source, from which to gain knowledge, everything outside of the camp became legend. The difficulty that the people had understanding what was occurring in other camps, and perhaps more telling, the fact that they had a difficult time deciphering what occurred within their own camp, were not only because information was hard to come by, but because the events themselves were unrepresentable. The ability to communicate, about not only what has happened in a traumatic

event, but the difficulty and inability to internalize the event, created a breakdown in attempts to directly articulate or represent traumatic events. As we see in the next stanza, the events are presented, but they are done so with a disconnection that refuses to identify the dead, and they show little to no emotion coinciding with the telling of events.

The second stanza of this section discusses not only the rumors that filtered in but also tells of the difficult conditions that prisoners faced within the camps.

Still, even barracks have ears:
 so-and-so shot and killed;
 so-and-so shot and lived;
 infants, elders, dying of heat;
 epidemics, with so little care. (370-374)

As Daniel outlines earlier in this chapter, the sanitary conditions of the camps were usually very poor, and during insurrections, and sometimes even in everyday situations, prisoners were shot. To reiterate what Daniel stated about the overzealous guards, consider that there were “fatal riots at both California camps . . . in which armed soldiers guarding the camps shot unarmed protesters to death. And at a camp in Topaz, Utah, a guard killed an old man who, the guard claimed, had tried to go through the fence” (64). Referring to people as “so-and-so” has a hemisected effect on our understanding of events that take place. The first effect is the manner in which it reinforces the qualities of legend and rumor as the people are not named but referred to as “so-and-so.” Talking about events that may or may not have occurred to people that are unnamed reinforce a phantasmatic quality to life in the internment camps. The inability to discern fact from rumor adds to the level of stress, both for the speaker in the poem and the people who

resided in the camps. In addition, when we consider Hobfoll's resource and loss of resource stress model, it is clear that the combination of the lack of personal safety from the guards, the lack of sanitation, the lack of medication, the lack of shelter from the heat, and as the speaker says "so little care" (374), both meaning lack of care for the prisoners and lack of care to the conditions of the prisoners, it is more and more evident how these factors made the living conditions for the inmates extremely stressful. When we combine these factors with the lack of knowledge of events taking place in the world beyond the camp, which in some instances included the anxiety of not knowing the conditions of loved ones (yet another type of care), it is easier to see how they made for a trauma-generating environment for many prisoners. The closing lines of the poem reinforce these ideas by stating, "It was tough enough deciphering / what was going on anywhere" (375-376).

The second effect resides in how the poet is able to demonstrate the idea of abjection in this portion of the poem by referring to people as "so-and-so" (371 and 372). The people referred to as "so-and-so" are spoken of in passing, yet the reason they are spoken of is in reference to who has been shot and is either still alive or dead. Those who did not fall victim to violence but died of the heat or disease were also without identity and referred to only by "infant" or "elder" (373). The speaker uses these vague, impersonal words to describe the prisoners to underscore the dispassionate way they were treated. The guards shot them without hesitation because they, too, viewed the prisoners as nameless nobodies. By presenting these deaths in an aloof manner, the poem takes on a numb quality related, perhaps, to the prevalence of rumor and disinformation, as well as the impact of massive stressors. This type of numbing is quite common for victims of trauma, and the speaker, by using such a nonchalant and emotionally

numb representation of the events, is able to present this characteristic of trauma in a successful manner.

Like Soga and Yamada, Inada's poetry contains examples of abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness. These, as we shall see through this entire project, are common themes in the poetry of different cultures. A second common element found cross-culturally in poetry engaging trauma is the use of traumatic figurative language. Figurative language is common in poetry, but traumatic figurative language is different from traditional figurative language. Traumatic figurative language is akin to traumatic metaphor as defined by Auerhahn and Laub: "the use of the imagery and language of massive psychological trauma as metaphor and vehicle for developmental conflict" (33). In the following section, Inada's use of traumatic figurative language will be illustrated in two poems. The first is Inada's long poem "Legends of the Camp," which will be followed by Inada's poem "Healing Gila." In both poems, the speaker is drawing connections to the reservations set aside for Native Americans and comparing them to the relocation camps used to incarcerate Japanese Americans.

Traumatic Figurative Language in the Poetry of Inada

Many of Inada's poems discuss the internment camps that he and his relatives were forced to stay in during World War II. Abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness have been discussed with each of the poets of this chapter, yet as we continue examining Inada's poems, we find instances where the speakers of the poems utilize traumatic figurative language. Traumatic figurative language, as has been discussed, calls on other traumatic events in order to discuss what has occurred or is occurring to the speaker. Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" is an easy example because in the poem the speaker discusses the abusive father and utilizes Nazi imagery

and language to discuss the trauma that she feels. Of course, this is a very superficial examination of Plath's poem, but I use it here only to demonstrate what a traumatic figurative language is and how it is used.

In Inada's poem "Legends of the Camp," which has been examined in the previous section, we find a section that utilizes traumatic figurative language as a means to discuss the trauma and stressors incurred at the Japanese internment camps and compares the camps with the Native American reservations used to incarcerate Native Americans. Section fifteen, entitled "The Legend of the Full Moon Over Amache," discusses how Amache, the camp the speaker is said to be staying in, was named after an Indian princess who died in "the Sand Creek Massacre" (297). The next stanza contains only two lines where we learn "Her bones floated down / to where camp was now" (298-299). By drawing upon the "Sand Creek Massacre" and discussing how it is believed that the Amache was named after an "Indian princess," the speaker is able to create connections to the treatment of and atrocities committed against Native Americans and is able to compare them to the situation facing the Japanese Americans in the internment camp. The connection is reinforced as it is said that the princess's bones are said to have floated to where the camp is now, thus providing a metaphor of how the treatment, abuse, and trauma committed against Native Americans is now floating down through time to the Japanese Americans facing similar abuses. As trauma is often unrepresentable, it is sometimes necessary for survivors to utilize traumatic figurative language in order to articulate the abuse. This is one of the functions of using the traumatic figurative language here.

The second function of using the traumatic figurative language becomes apparent in the final two stanzas. The speaker refers to the full moon spoken of in the title and states, "it doesn't

have anything to do / with this. It's just there," (301-302). More importantly, the final stanza and final line of the poem state the moon is "illuminating, is all" (303), indicating that this metaphor is also being used to show the commonalities in treatment of Native Americans and Japanese Americans and their incarceration. Not only is this idea "illuminating" (303) to the speaker, but by understanding that the Japanese internment camp was named after an "Indian princess" (293) who died because of the whites' treatment of Native Americans in the past, it allows those in the camp the realization that they are not the first group to suffer this type of treatment. By bringing this idea to the forefront, the poem also allows this fact to be understood by people who are reading the poem and to understand the repeated abuses that minorities have encountered at the hands of a racist government and people.

This idea is also presented in Inada's poem "Healing Gila," which refers to the Gila River Relocation Center, which was an internment camp for Japanese Americans during World War II. This camp is significant because it was placed on the Gila River Indian Reservation, so the land where this camp was placed is not only the place of trauma for many Japanese Americans, but was for many Native Americans as well. The speaker is very careful, however, not to make any references to Native Americans in the poem. The fact that she is referring to Native Americans is inferred by the place and history she is discussing. In addition, she does not mention Japanese Americans in this poem. By not mentioning Native Americans or Japanese Americans specifically, she reinforces the idea that the trauma each culture faced is unrepresentable, and, because she strips their identity, she recognizes their abjection through allusion. The audience understands whom she is speaking about in both cases only because of the history of that place and the history of trauma associated with the place. The traumatic figurative language resides

precisely in the comparison of the Japanese American treatment and the Native American treatment at the hands of the United States government. The traumatic figurative language in this poem exists, but it remains unsaid. It is precisely in the fact that it remains unsaid that it holds more power because it demonstrates the unrepresentativeness of trauma, but also a form of solidarity that is able to cross cultural lines and the similar historical conditions that hold traumatic resonance.

The speaker of the poem harkens to Native American trauma by stating in the second and third stanzas,

that concentration camp
on their reservation

And they avoid that massive site
as they avoid contamination— .(4-7)

The speaker highlights the loaded words “reservation” and “contamination” by making them the last words of these stanzas. The term reservation helps identify the people being discussed, but it also calls upon the trauma of previous relocations performed by the white American society and the trauma associated with that type of relocation. Perhaps even more traumatic is how the contamination also refers to the intentional spreading of diseases, such as smallpox, to the Native American nations by the U.S. army in order to kill as many people as possible. The speaker continues by discussing the Native Americans as “gifted people / gifted with the wisdom / of rivers, seasons, irrigation” (14-16):

What else is there to say?

Then came the nation.

Then came the death.

Then came the desert.

Then came the camp.

But the desert is not deserted.

It goes without saying,

It stays without saying—

wind, spirits, tumbleweeds, pain. (21-29)

The speaker is able to mingle the trauma of both cultures by discussing the destruction and trauma incurred by Native Americans. The speaker also mentions how the camps have now been erected upon land that was given to Native Americans in a similar situation where a group was displaced from its home and moved to a place specifically designed to hold it as a means to make whites feel safer. The speaker believes the parallels are rather apparent by stating, “It goes without saying” in line two before discussing the camps being placed on the land set aside for Native American reservations, and the idea is expressed again in line 27 before mentioning the “pain” on line 29, suggesting the pain felt by one culture may be similar to the pain felt by another culture. In addition, the fact that “It stays without saying—” (28) follows both instances of “It goes without saying” suggests that by not discussing the traumas incurred by the groups or the parallels, the pain and the camps will not go away.

The traumatic figurative language used by Inada in these poems force the audience to recognize the similarities present in the treatment of Japanese Americans in internment camps and the treatment of Native Americans in the past. By doing so, the poems are able to compare the treatment and the trauma to horrors that people may have attempted to grasp before and represent the unrepresentable by means of deferring the representation of trauma. Trauma, which is said to be unrepresentable, is acknowledged by drawing the audience's attention to another unrepresentable trauma. Each event goes beyond fair representation, so the only way to be represented is by calling on another trauma. One trauma is not equal to the other, and it is not the purpose to decide which was more devastating or traumatic, but it is through, and perhaps only through, the discussing of multiple traumas and by comparing them, that we may gain an understanding into that which cannot be represented.

More importantly, this poem is attempting to unite people across different cultures not only to recognize the similarities that exist in the traumatic histories of the culture, but engage in a cross-cultural empowerment to dismantle the oppression that minority cultures face. Inada's attempt to empower through engagement with trauma is unique for Japanese American poets discussed in this study. One of the main reasons, I would speculate, has to do with his age when he was incarcerated. Unlike Soga and Yamada, Inada was a child when incarcerated, thus his understanding of the situation would have been far different because of his age. More importantly, his engagement with the massive stressors is more akin to those engaging with historical trauma because he would have learned a great deal about the events from his community after the events. Unlike poems of the Black Arts Movement and Red Power Movement that try to unify the people of that specific culture in order to rebel against the

oppressor through a single front, Inada's poem is looking to cross cultures in hopes that people of multiple cultures can see the oppression and inhumane treatment of people in order to promote resistance. As will be demonstrated in the next two chapters, the movement toward empowerment is key when attempting to break the cycles of massive stressors that continue to impoverish and disenfranchise people, which is often the result of traumatic pasts. Although the Native American poets and African American poets discussed include calls for empowerment in their writing, such a cross-cultural call for empowerment, which is this overt, is unique to Inada.

Conclusion

The poets of this chapter engaged trauma, both direct and historical, in a manner that was unique to them, coped with the trauma in their own manner, and told of their trauma. Soga and Yamada used abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness in their poems to describe the trauma that impacted the speakers in the poems. The trauma they engaged in was more direct than historical, especially when one considers that both poets spent time in the camps. Although Inada also spent time in the camps, this experience was as a child and his memories were impacted by stories told by others. Like the title of his collection and poem, much of the poem took the form of legend. Unlike Yamada and Soga, Inada utilized traumatic figurative language in his poems in order to discuss the traumas. By the comparing events that occurred to Native Americans, the speakers in Inada's poems were able to draw comparisons between the events and attempted to represent the unrepresentable by comparing the two traumatic events.

The poems presented within this chapter articulate stress, pain, and trauma. Although the speakers in each poem encountered either direct or historical trauma, the overarching factor contributing to each incident is racism. Fear, hatred, and demonization of Japanese American

were perpetrated by Hoover and many others, not only in American history, but the history of humanity. Such actions led to the incarceration camps, where 120,000 people, including Soga, Inada, and Yamada, were incarcerated. The racism felt by Americans long after the internment camps resulted in physical and psychological attacks like those discussed in Yamada's poetry. Racism is a palpable legacy of historical trauma that affects all races, both the victims and attackers. By no means does this excuse those who perpetrate racist attacks, but understanding historical trauma allows for a better insight into why racism exists in the first place. By no means were the internment camps the genesis of racism against Japanese Americans in the United States, yet the impact that the portion of nation's history played in contributing to racism cannot be overlooked. The internment camps were a magnified event that illustrates a larger history of oppression and discrimination against Asian Americans in the history of the United States. Because of the focus that resided on Japanese Americans at the time, and because the treatment of Japanese Americans before and during the raids connected with the internment camps, the discussion of empowerment is not as prevalent in the poetry. It is not until many years later with the poetry of Inada that we begin to see discussions of empowerment in the poetry. Not only is Inada calling for empowerment and group formation to overthrow the power of the oppressor, but he is doing so by unifying different cultures. Inada's poem discusses the similarities of the traumatic events that occurred to different groups at the hands of the government. As we continue into the poetry of the Black Arts Movement, we see a shift toward politically conscious writers looking to bring group solidarity and empowerment to fight against the oppressive forces.

As has been discussed, the writings of Inada, Yamada, and Soga were discussing events that occurred due to direct traumatic stressors rather than historically traumatic stressors. As we

shift to the poetry of the Black Arts Movement, we notice differences in the presentation of the poetry, in part because of the distance between the writer and the traumatic event. Because the atrocities and traumas committed against African Americans are much older in our nation's history, the poetry of Amiri Baraka, June Jordan, and Lucille Clifton focuses more on historical trauma than direct trauma. As will be shown, racism perpetrated by slavery as well as violence and oppression after slavery are large contributors to historical trauma resonant in African American poetry. Most specifically, the chapter focuses on three voices from the Black Arts Movement who attempted to, not only form a new type of representation outside the Eurocentric white standard of art, but attempted to represent the unrepresentable aspects of trauma. Overall, the chapter examines how the Baraka, Jordan, and Clifton utilize abjection, isolation, unhomeliness, traumatic figurative language, and other poetic devices to illustrate the massive stressors or trauma that a speaker may feel in their poetry. Because of the historical distance between the traumatic event and the writing, we find more examples of traumatic figurative language. In addition, just as it took historical distance between the event and poetry of empowerment for Inada, the space between the traumatic events and the writing has resulted in many more voices for empowerment within the arts.

CHAPTER 4

SAURARA²/ TÊTÍ SÍ GBÔ³: LISTENING TO TRAUMA IN AFRICAN

AMERICAN POETRY

The following chapter will engage with poetry produced around the Black Arts Movement and is highly significant to this study in the way it engages traumas, by using poetic articulations of massive stressors, to empower African Americans. As we turn our attention to African American poetry, the trauma is primarily historical rather than direct. Unlike the poems examined in Japanese American poetry, African American poetry is focused more on traumatic figurative language, in part because more time has passed and allowed for more reengagements with the events and their historic pasts. It is understood that the initial traumatic experience occurred when the first slave ships began transporting African slaves to North America. However, what may not be recognized is that not only are the remnants of that historical trauma still present in African America, but the countless occurrences of attacks both physical and psychological over the nearly one hundred and fifty years after slavery left scars just as well. As a result of the attacks and legacy of trauma that exists within African American, the Black Power Movement and the Black Arts Movement arose in the mid twentieth century to empower African Americans from the oppression felt as a result of treatment stemming from slavery. The poets of this chapter are writing just before and during this period when the empowerment of African Americans was a key issue, not only politically, but in the arts. The poems are working to establish a community of the artists sharing similar experiences and people who having lived through and fought in the struggle to give voice to African America.

² Hausa for “to listen”

³ Yoruba for “to listen”

The focus of this chapter is on three poets of the Black Arts Movement because it is in this time that we find a group struggling to find a voice and aesthetic outside of the dominant white culture. Just as trauma attempts to represent the unrepresentable, writers of the Black Arts Movement attempted to represent that black experience in the United States in a manner that was removed from the culture that existed at that time. Therefore, the Black Arts Movement had to articulate an experience, and one intrinsically tied to trauma, not connected to the Eurocentric model of art and expression. Writers such as Amiri Baraka worked to carve out a space for the articulation of the black experience, but also push against white oppression in a manner that unapologetically denounces the idea of white superiority. These writings not only articulate trauma inherent within the culture, but attack the white culture by projecting negativity and refusing readability to white gaze. The traumas spoken of in the poems of this chapter, and in the Black Arts Movement, harken to the events of slavery when people were attacked physically and psychologically, yet through those events, a culture emerge based on both trauma and resilience.

Although many traumas occurred to many African Americans during the twentieth century, it was in the traumas incurred during American slavery that we find one genesis of African America. One of the most damaging aspects of American slavery for African slaves was the attempted obliteration of culture, not only by the process of enslavement itself, but by forcing people of different African cultures together in the new world. The stripping away of one's native culture combined with the well-documented horrors of slavery created irreversible destruction to past cultural identity. Ron Eyerman, in his book *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, discusses these events, stating, "As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and experience of great emotional

anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (2). What these events caused, instead, is the formation of a new cultural identity, and in turn, a collective memory that took generations to form. Eyerman discusses this reformation of identity stating, “Slavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory, one that signified and distinguished a race, a people, or a community depending on the level of abstraction and point of view being put forward” (1-2). This identity, although formed through the traumatic events of slavery, continued to be molded through the freeing of the American slaves, the racist laws that promoted segregation and propagated lynching, and eventually lead to forced assimilation. It is in the writings of the Black Arts Movement that we begin to see a greater push for an African American culture refusing the subjugation of black culture by Eurocentric standards.

The Black Arts Movement worked fervently against the white standard of art and, by creating a relationship between art and politics, worked toward an independent culture and nationhood. Larry Neal in his essay “The Black Arts Movement” discusses this relationship; he states of the Black Arts Movement that “it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. In order to perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic” (184). Other scholars like Hoyt W. Fuller discuss how “young writers of the black ghetto have set out in search of a black aesthetic, a system of isolating and evaluating the artistic works of black people which reflect the special character and imperatives of black experience” (204). Writers needed to move away from what was valued through the white perspective and establish a system of aesthetic values focused on

the black experience, exemplifying what it meant to be black in American and glorifying the experience. Furthermore, Hoyt continues by discussing how the Organization of Black American Culture worked “toward a definition of a black aesthetic... [and were] deliberately striving to invest with work with distinctive styles and rhythms and colors of the ghetto, with those peculiar qualities which, for example, characterized the music of John Coltrane or a Charlie Parker or a Ray Charles” (204). Many poets, like Gwendolyn Brooks, Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, and Haki Madhubuti did precisely this. The Black Arts Movement worked to give an authentic voice to the black experience in America, something that writers like Baraka promoted and succeeded in doing.

In an essay written two years before Neal’s, Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka) discusses this need for an African American literature that gave voice to the uniqueness of the experience and culture. Jones states,

A Negro literature, to be a legitimate product of the Negro experience in America, must get at that experience in exactly the terms America has proposed for it, in its most ruthless identity. Negro reaction to America is as deep a part of America as the root causes of that reaction, and it is impossible to accurately describe that reaction in terms of the American middle class; because for them, the Negro never really existed, never been glimpsed in anything even approaching the complete reality of his humanity. The Negro writer has to go from where he actually is, completely outside of that conscious white myopia. That the Negro does exist is

the point, and as an element of American culture he is completely misunderstood by Americans. (170)

It is evident here that not only does Jones see the need for the black experience to be articulated, but also the need for the black community to cultivate that articulation around a distinctive African American culture. Furthermore, because it has been heavily affected by trauma, as Jones alludes to, the culture needs to tell of the traumatic experiences. Jones is desirous of an authentic black voice speaking of the black experience, and a great part of that experience, as can be seen in the above statement, is one that has evolved from centuries of trauma.

This trauma is, as Eyerman would stipulate, a cultural trauma. However, Eyerman's idea of cultural trauma falls short when we refer back to the ideas of Brave Heart and LaCapra. Historical trauma theory, as defined by Brave Heart, attempts to occupy the space unfulfilled by the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder by examining how past atrocities can inform the future and manifest in subsequent generations. In poetry, these manifestations take the form of poetic devices such as abjection, isolation, unhomeliness, and traumatic figurative language.

Establishing a new aesthetic for African America was the burden shared by many black artists of the 1960s, which was also to represent the unrepresentable. How does one articulate the pain, anger, anxiety, and sadness associated with the burden of a racist society resting upon the legacy of slavery? Many black writers of the Black Arts Movement had the task of representing an experience, which was considered invaluable by the dominant white culture, but had to forge new ground for aesthetic representation. African Americans had the tools in a well-established set of formal devices and genres that were specifically African American, like spirituals and the

blues, but the task was to move this aesthetic forward and do so without the influence of white society. Writers of the Black Arts Movement, in the advancement of the black aesthetic, had to represent something that had not been represented to the extent they desired. There were poems by African Americans, but the goal, in part, was the creation of an entire movement of black arts, one that sought to overthrow the control of white America and to reside outside of white America's reach. In addition, the black experience is one filled with trauma, which, as we understand, is unrepresentable. Therefore, the task to be undertaken by black artists was two fold: the writers must represent an experience that cannot be represented aptly (trauma) and a new type of writing must be established that exists outside the control and influence of white America.

In order to understand this two-fold purpose, it is beneficial to examine the work of Fred Moten. In his book *In the Break*, Moten wrestles with the idea of a type of suffering that renders the survivor mute. Moten's interest is in phenomenology, of which he states, "More specifically, I'm after the way concern with perception and cognition (of the things themselves) leads to the deconstruction of ontology" (90). Moten is describing the reaction to trauma as a person is often unable to articulate event that occur, nor completely comprehend them, but also the way one's very being is deconstructed by the trauma. The experience is both one of tremendous horror, but also empowering. The event is so destructive that it renders one without the appropriate tools in order to comprehend or articulate what has been experienced, and the individual is thus left reevaluating their very own existence and the world around them. In the above statement, Moten is referring to Wittgenstein's idea of phenomenology, and continues by saying, "What I'm after depends upon thinking through the question of the relation between semiotics and

phenomenology *by way of the phenomenon or experience of noticing an aspect...* which is... the experience of meaning or of an insistent interpretation” (90). Furthermore, Moten states, “There is no phenomenology, only phenomenological problems—and to notice in passing that noticing an aspect—a phenomenological problem that, as we shall see, demand *description* in light of its exceeding of *explanation*—is in the aftermath or wake of this formation: not but of not but of not but of” (91). The description of a traumatic event is in a perpetual state of deferment where the survivor cannot aptly describe what has occurred, thus the description often takes the form of traumatic metaphor. Trauma, as we have seen and will continue to see, resides—much like the phenomenon described by Moten—in the rupture where an explanation exceeds, as he stated, the demand for description and makes clear the need for a new ontology. Moten continues by stating that “we must attempt a description of an experience whose provenance or emergence is not reducible to logical structure, pictorial internal relation, or internal similarity” (92). Trauma is precisely this type of entity: a specter of a phenomenon, whose existence goes beyond fair representation, but continues to haunt survivors and their ancestors. Moten continues to describe trauma phenomenology as “an experience of the passage or cut that cannot be explained because those formations upon which our explanations must be grounded... are themselves so profoundly without ground” (92). In order to compensate for this exact difficulty, poets who attempt to represent trauma utilize traumatic figurative language in order-- through a type of phenomenological substitution – to compare, and in some situations, replace one traumatic event with another in hopes that the reader’s familiarity with one or both of the phenomena will allow an understanding of the event and emotional reaction to the event, when neither are truly able to be represented.

Given that trauma is unrepresentable, not only have African Americans struggled with articulating the trauma that has permeated their culture's history and provided the very grounds for identity, but have had to deal with the long legacy of racism that forbade literacy and promoted inequality in educational opportunities, creating barriers to those attempting to articulate the pain, anger, and struggle that resided in the African Americans during and after slavery. Trauma, we must remember, has the ability to resound within a culture for numerous generations; thus, the abuse, rape, and torture American slaves experienced for hundreds of years would not simply cease after the last American slave died. Likewise, the animosity, cultural racism, superstructure of oppression, and hatred that existed in white America did not cease either. What is very apparent in African American culture is the fortitude of even those forbidden to become literate to create art outside the bounds of the written word. It was in song that a great deal of African American art was first recognized. It was also in song that African Americans attempted to represent the unrepresentable. It is no wonder then that we find poets, such as Baraka, so dedicated to the study of African American music as he did in his books *Blues People*, *Black Music*, and *The Music: Reflections on Jazz and Blues*. Song has the ability to represent emotion without relying on words in order to do so; thus, it is not surprising that we find places in the poetry of Baraka where he is using not only elements of song, but also utterances, transcribed to paper, where language fails him.

As we approach the poetry examined in this chapter, it is essential that we consider the poetic devices that these poets used in order to represent historical traumas saturating the culture. The discussion begins with Amiri Baraka as he engages the problems affecting black America and gives voice to those. As Neal states, "Without a culture, Negroes are only a set of reactions

to white people” (189). The key, to return to Moten's phenomenology of trauma, is that carving out a culture while being unhomed and abject—as those of the Black Arts Movement were attempting to do—are produced with relative ease given the many devices and genres invented by slaves in order to express the traumas they were encountering. Many of these modes of artistic expression, such as spirituals, the blues, and field hollers were created to overcome situations where slaves, and later African Americans, were denied other means of articulation. Poets of the Black Arts Movement, such as Baraka, found it relatively hard to carve out a space for this culture given the adversity of the oppressive white aesthetic establishment that found no value in African American art that did not strive to be “white.” Baraka’s poem refuses to conform to white expectations, and in many ways, his poem “Black Dada Nihilismus” does just the opposite. “Black Dada Nihilismus” comes from his 1964 collection *The Dead Lecturer*, from what William Harris refers to as his transitional period between bohemianism and Black Nationalism. The final Baraka poem “Legacy” comes from *Black Magic*, Baraka’s first collection from his Black Nationalist period. Each of these poems articulates the struggle with historical trauma within the speaker as well as the attempt to represent an unrepresentable phenomenon of trauma in order to define a new African American ontology much as has been discussed by Moten’s examination of phenomenology. The chapter continues by discussing Lucille Clifton and June Jordan, two poets also known for their celebration of African American culture, activism, and political vision. Jordan’s poem, “Who Look at Me” incorporates various devices used to discuss trauma within poetry, such as abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness. However, this poem discusses the idea of presenting an experience outside the white aesthetic register and goes as far as to discuss this ideas as the poem repeatedly discusses the “white

stare.” Clifton’s poetry, like Jordan and Baraka’s poetry, also utilizes a variety of poetic devices found in poetry discussing historical trauma. In addition, Clifton also discusses the idea of working within an aesthetic value system that is uniquely black and which resides outside of the influence of whites. This is especially prevalent in her poem “My Mama moved among the days,” which calls upon historic trauma, but also the idea of building a community upon the workings of ancestors. It cannot be overlooked that the person of power in the poem is a woman, and it is through the woman’s work of building community that empowerment is found. This suggests that it is through the help of strong women in African American culture that empowerment and strength can be found as well as the formation of community. Although it is well understood that writings of the Black Arts Movement desired to establish a community, both artistically and politically, that advanced black thoughts, what is less discussed is the idea that the very culture and history that the artists and writers of the Black Arts Movement are drawing from is one filled with trauma and discussions of how these thoughts have manifest within the poems. This chapter will engage with this often overlooked and rarely acknowledged facet of poetry of the Black Arts Movement and demonstrate how and where trauma is resonant within the poetry.

Amiri Baraka, Trauma, and Representing the Unrepresentable

The various periods of Baraka as a writer are well documented. For this study, I chose two poems by Baraka: one poem from his “Transition Period” between 1963 and 1965, and one poem from early on in his “Black Nationalist Period” published in 1969. These poems were chosen, in part, because of the readiness with which they lend themselves to the literary trauma

lens, but also because they represent a period in Baraka's life where he, much like African American literature, existed in a major transition, from the very beginning of the Black Arts Movement until its midpoint. It is in this transition and the grasping for identity that we find a great deal of engagement with representing the unrepresentable in the form of poetry grappling with the discussion of historical trauma and establishing a voice. We find Baraka struggling to represent his identity and articulate trauma more so during his "Transitional Period." During this period, Baraka was working to establish his voice. Later, as Baraka became more involved with Black Nationalism, he found a community that had similar ideas to fight the oppression that African Americans faced. In Baraka's poem "Black Dada Nihilismus," his speaker attacks the white society as he works to establish a representation of Blackness outside of white cultural standards. Later, in Baraka's poem "Legacy," Baraka focuses more on the impact of historical trauma as it has negatively affected African American society. The focus of "Legacy" is less on fighting against the white oppressor, but examining the destruction that history and historical trauma has left behind.

In Baraka's poem "Black Dada Nihilismus," we find a speaker attempting to describe the struggle of articulating the black experience while fighting against the oppressive white culture that has permeated the lives of African Americans. Black writers faced the daunting task of articulating an experience that was uniquely African American while using the language and Eurocentric ideas intrinsic to the United States. In order to call attention to the difficulty of expressing the black experience by using a white language, Baraka calls upon aesthetic values of Europe by naming artists (Mondrian) and cultural movements of Europe (Dadaism and De Stijl), that broke outside of the cultural norm in order to express their art and experience. However, by

referencing Dadaism and artists like Mondrian, the speaker has selected forms that are nonrepresentational while rejecting the prevailing standards of their time, especially when we consider the historic traumas these artists confronted, such as World War I and global revolutions against bourgeois nationalism. The idea is further articulated by the use of the word “nihilismus,” which is not only a word created by the speaker—thus rejecting the prevailing standard of English and mimicking a Latinate sound and look – but also calls upon the idea of nihilism. When broken apart, the word becomes “nihilism us,” calling on blacks to reject the established laws and institutions set up by the white society. By mixing two words, *dada* and *nihilismus*, which both call on the rejections of prevailing standards, with the word “Black,” the speaker is calling on African Americans to do exactly this for a new kind of representation. This means, of course, to be black is to be in a state of abjection. This idea becomes further complicated as we understand that the black experience is one filled with direct and historical trauma, and is, in itself, unrepresentable. This abjection is not just a representation of a culture victimized by the dominant white superstructure, but is a means of attacking white culture. Baraka is continuing on in the African American tradition of projecting vehement negativity towards the dominant white culture. These types of attacks exist within many of African American arts, from the blues, to spirituals, slave hollers, and the writings of Langston Hughes and Claude McKay.

As the poem begins, the speaker immediately begins calling for a contrast with the first line, reading “Against what light.” The speaker is calling for the examination, indicated by the first line calling for a contrast and investigation of the prevailing standards. This is suggested by the title, and that which “is false” (line 2) and “what breath / sucked, for deadness” (2-3).

Although the speaker is calling for an examination of that which is considered false, he is also calling upon historical trauma by immediately calling upon people who have been killed, many of whom, we can argue, did not meet the “false” standard discussed in line two. This idea of trauma is extended in the next lines that read, “Murder, the cleansed / purpose, frail, against / God,” (4-6). Since the line break between lines four and five falls as it does, the murder perpetrated in line four is directed at those who have performed “ethnic cleansing” whose “purpose” is “frail, against / God,” (5-6). The speaker then brings forth a “him” whom we must understand to be one of the people responsible for ethnic cleansing rather than God, given the first letter is lowercase. This speaker states, “if they bring him / bleeding, I would not / forgive, or even call him” (6-8). These lines indicate that the ethnic cleanser will not be forgiven for his actions. Yet, this last line is highly significant when examined against line nine where the speaker states, “or call him / black dada nihilismus” (8-9). As has been discussed, the dada nihilismus is calling for a rejection of prevailing racist standards and values, yet, in this instance, we begin to see a change in the semantic qualities of the phrase “black dada nihilismus.” We can see this phrase as an utterance of the inability to give a fair representation as dada in poetry is a returning to primitivism in language through the use of sounds rather than words as typically recognized. These utterances present the phenomenological dilemma or paradox described by Moten and represent -- although I would argue incompletely -- things unable to be represented by words. By combining this idea of Dadaism with nihilism and blackness, we witness the speaker moving toward an attempt to represent the unrepresentable of trauma by calling on words that attempt to represent things that are unrepresentable, including what it means to be black. If we return to Moten, it appears that Baraka is presenting the idea that black is itself pure

negativity, thus it is necessary to reconstruct the meaning of black being as they are being represented.

The fifth stanza begins to move away from God, as it states, “The protestant love, wide windows, / color blocked to Mondrian” (10-11). It must be recognized that not only was Piet Mondrian a nonrepresentational artist, but also he was the founder of the De Stijl movement, otherwise known as the neo-plasticism movement, where he “believed that abstraction was intellectually pure and ‘natural’” (“Neo-Plasticism”). This is significant because purity has often been reserved for Jesus Christ, as the mention of “protestant love” states in line ten. By having the stained glass window “color blocked to Mondrian” (11), it is suggested that the only purity is through abstraction, which is akin to Dadaism in that it is a form of abstract art, but the purity moves from God to abstraction, each of which is also unrepresentable. Thus, the speaker is here flirting with the idea of the death of god and attempting to represent the unrepresentable, but this idea comes to full realization as we witness the trauma inherent in the remainder of the stanza.

The second half of the fifth stanza discusses “the / ugly silent deaths of jews [sic] under / the surgeon’s knife” (11-13). The proximity of this poem’s publication to the Holocaust forces the reader to associate this line with that horrific event. By discussing the deaths of Jews, the speaker is utilizing traumatic figurative language to evoke associations among the Holocaust, the idea of the murder in the previous stanza, the death of god discussed earlier in this stanza, and the collapse of representation associated with black dada nihilismus. The stanza continues by presenting the next few lines inside an open parenthesis that has not closing mate. Although this may seem insignificant, this is symbolic of the very idea of representating trauma: we witness an

event, but are never granted closure. The event residing inside is “To awake on / 69th street with money and a hip / nose” (13-15). As opposed to the Jews who died under the surgeon’s knife, that I would suggest refers indirectly to medical experiments of the Holocaust where industrialized genocide attempted to destroy the very culture and existence of the Jewish people, this waking on the street is separated by the parenthesis, thus the race and culture of the waking people is unknown. What is known is that they wake up with “money and a hip / nose” (15-16), signifying that their nose was changed; given that we see blackness to be a non-representation as dada and nihilismus suggest, for the nose to be hip, it must be white. The plastic surgery to change the nose, which is symbolic for a changing of one’s culture, whether the individuals are African American or Jewish, is rewarded rather than a billed surgical procedure. As such, the individuals are being rewarded for trying to lose their cultural identity.

In the sixth stanza, we encounter “Trilby,” which may refer to a type of hat. However, more significantly, *Trilby* is a novel about a Jewish hypnotist who teaches the main character, Trilby, to sing. Trilby is unable to sing unless she is in a hypnotized state. Eventually, when the hypnotist dies, the spell is broken and she remembers nothing of her singing career. Thus, Trilby has two identities: one she knows when in a normal state and one that exists when she is under hypnosis. This is significant in the poem, and in African American identity because, before the Black Arts Movement, many blacks had an identity constructed around white American standards, yet it is their own identity that many are in search for. This is also key when we consider that the poem was written during Baraka’s “Transitional Period” between his “Beat Period” and his “Black Nationalist Period,” so Baraka, like many other African American writers of the 1960s, was attempting to construct a new identity, but had yet to engage the Afro-centric,

revolutionary aesthetic that would dominate the BAM. Thus, only by killing the oppressive superstructure of white control can African Americans “wake up” and understand their true identity. In this poem, however, the speaker moves the idea forward stating, “Trilby intrigue / movie house presidents sticky the floor” (16-17). This insinuates the idea of African Americans are being used like Trilby in their films, hypnotized agents being exploited while the “movie house presidents sticky the floor” (17) referring perhaps both to gluttonous actions where things are sloppily eaten and “sticky the floor” or to the masturbatory practices that Baraka has spoken of in other poems. Either insinuation results in the same meaning: the (white) movie house presidents are benefiting and finding joy through the visual and imaginary exploitation of blacks. Later in the sixth stanza, the speaker states, “Hermes, the / blacker art” (18-19), referring to not only the Greek god Hermes, who was the messenger between the gods and humans, but also the art of hermeneutics, or the study of interpretation. To be black, then, is to be an interpreter within and of white culture, especially, as we have seen in the previous stanza, purity resides in abstractions and black dada nihilismus urges us to defy the current modes of representation while attempting to articulate the unrepresentable. This articulation is not one meant to be “therapeutic” for a type of coping within the African American community, but one that refuses to conform or be readily understood by the “eye of whiteness.”

The speaker then turns his attention to “Thievery” in line 19 and uses another opening parenthesis that has no closing mate. Together it reads, “Thievery (ahh, they return / those secret gold killers. Inquisitors / of the cocktail hour” (19-21). The unmated parenthesis refuses to allow closure of the ideas that are being presented. In this sense, much like trauma, closure is not something that comes by easily, if ever. The need to perpetuate the ideas inherent in the poem

are reinforced by this, but the parenthesis also acts like open-ended quotation marks. In situations where the quotation continues into the next paragraph, closed quotations are not used until the end of the quoted passage. The use of open parenthesis here is similar, yet there is no closing, indicating that the voices of African Americans are only not heard, but only understood parenthetically within the white cultural norm. The use of parenthesis also represent a kind of hiding of the text within the text, which exists because of white society's refusal to hear or listen to African Americans, and, especially, African American art.

The thieves and "secret gold killers" (20) referred to in this stanza are the Europeans that colonized North America in search of gold and riches. This is especially evident given the reference to "Moctezuma" in line 24. What is referenced here is historic trauma, as the lines referring to the thievery are mixed with the idea of Hermes and Trismegistus appearing in line 21. Hermes Trismegistus, we must recognize, is a sacred being that is perceivable through divine revelation; thus, the speaker is playing off the idea of religion again, yet begins discusses "transmutations" in line 22. This discussion of transmutations becomes most troubling as he cites turning "lead to burning" (23), referring to the bullets and past violence. The first portion of the poem ends "looting, dead Moctezuma, find the West // a grey hideous space." (24-25). The speaker here is referring to colonization and the looting and killing of people, which transformed the Americas, among other places, into "a grey hideous space" (24-25). The speaker is also using traumatic figurative language to compare the devastation of colonization, exploitation, and genocide perpetrated by the colonizers to the destruction of the African people, which has ultimately destroyed the culture, leaving the ancestors groping to establish a culture of their own.

Black dada nihilismus is the result, as Baraka shows African Americans rejecting the current modes of representation and white standards in order to represent not only the black experience, but also cultural trauma, which encompasses a great deal of the black experience. This rejection of white standards is a resistance against those who attempt to judge African American art under this Eurocentric idea and those who attempt to describe blackness as a singular representation rather than multiplicity. Thus, the speaker and indeed all of those who wish to describe the historical black experience have difficulty trying to discuss the experience through a new form of representation while attempting to represent the unrepresentable. This is key to, not only this poem, but to other poets the Black Arts Movement. Poets such as Sonia Sanchez in poems like “we a badDDD people” and “a chant for young / brothas & sistuhs” and Haki R. Madhubuti in his book *Don’t Cry, SCREAM* attempt to represent the black experience outside the white aesthetic experience by using nonstandard “white” English, and by breaking up the traditional form of the poem by the use of the poems placement on the page. Many poets also call on other African American centered art forms in their poetry, especially jazz and the blues, in order to help articulate and celebrate the experience. Therefore, the white experience and white aesthetic standard is not the norm; in fact, they are to be worked against.

The second half of the poem begins by discussing Sartre, calling into doubt not his existentialism, but more precisely Sartre’s belief in human freedom. This human freedom, as we can easily see, has not included Africans or African Americans historically, nor during the time the poem was written, given the struggle of the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Arts Movement. The lines read, “For Sartre, a white man, it gave / the last breath. And we beg him die, / before he is killed” (23-25). The reason for the inclusion of Sartre in the poem resides in

his belief in conjoining politics and art in order that art may help propel human improvement, just as the Black Arts Movement did. In addition, by using art to propel human improvement, Sartre found himself physically under attack, which at one point included him being the target of a bombing. To return to the poem, the speaker suggests that using art to further a political cause is incredibly dangerous, and to use art in this way, as the poem continues to discuss later, can lead to violence. At the same time, however, the speaker is begging Sartre to die. What is being engaged here is not just issues of freedom and responsibility, but the idea of Sartre's efforts to define ontology beyond the reach of culture and history. This is significant because it allows people like Baraka to imagine themselves outside of realms of white culture and the historical paradigm of whiteness, but at the same time, it denied the legitimacy of black culture and black history. It is black dada nihilismus, the attempt to represent and give a separate culture to an oppressed people, which lead to the death of Sartre, according to the poem. The "plastique" in line 29 is not only a play on Mondrian and neo-plastique as mentioned earlier as well as the plastic surgery spoken lines 15 and 16, but also is referring to the attack on Sartre in 1961 as a plastique explosives bomb went off at his apartment building. The speaker states he does not have such material, only razors.

The speaker then asks in lines 32-40 why blacks do not rise up to overcome oppression. The speaker then turns his frustration stemming from historical trauma and distress associated with the need to express the black experience to violence against the white oppressor and blacks unwilling to advance the movement. The speaker calls for "The cutters, from under / their rented earth" (39-40), referring to the ones carrying razors or "thin heroic blades" (30), to "Come up, black dada nihilismus" (40-41). The speaker personifies historical trauma in these lines by

making the people who have suffered in the past rise from their graves and attack whites and blacks who do not advance the cause of establishing a black voice and black perspective. The raping and killing of whites (41-42) and the killing of blacks whose “dark liver / lips [are] sucking splinters from the master’s thigh” (45-46) are not only a call for an actual killing, but a killing of the white perspective that is the point of reference for the black experience. The fact that the lips are described as being the color of liver and “bilious” presented on line 51 underscores the idea that incorporating the Eurocentric, white values that writers of the Black Arts Movement are working against is a type of poison that harms the authenticity of artistic expression in the black experience. By presenting this idea in this fashion, where the imagery alludes to fellatio, reinforces the negative aspect of incorporating white ideas and aesthetics to talk about the black experience. This homophobic imagery suggests is problematic in its homophobia, but also refers to the demeaning nature that whites have treated blacks. Unless black artists and writers begin establishing their own artistic expression, African Americans will be seen as forever inferior, and forever the slave, as the white man mentioned here is referred to as “master.”

In the next stanza, the poem attempts to represent the unrepresentable by means of harnessing frustrations and emotions influenced by historical trauma. The speaker utilizes vocalizations, which are outside the scope of traditional white culture by producing new forms of utterance not recognized by white aesthetic.

Black scream

and chant, scream,

and dull, un
 earthly
 hollering. Dada, bilious
 what ugliness, learned
 in the dome, colored holy
 shit (I call them sinned
 (47-54)

These screams, hollers, and chants are the utilization of expressions not only outside the traditional white recognition of art because of their legacy in African American culture, but screaming and hollering are also forms of expression that exist as a reaction to pain and trauma. In this manner, the screams and hollers represent both African American tradition as well as trauma. . The poem continues by discussing “all our / learned / art” (59-61), which is identified as “money, God, power, / a moral code, so cruel / it destroyed Byzantium, Tenochtitlan, Commanch” (63-65). These ideas are the white ideals that the speaker is attempting to fight against, and doing so for the African and African American musicians, artists, actors, and activists listed in lines 67 through 71.

The final stanza begins with the fourth and final opening parenthesis without a closing mate and prays to “a lost god damballah” who is the voodoo god attributed with creating all life. Thus, a god who created the world from a religion created by diasporic Africans is prayed to,

perfectly symbolic of the desire of the poem for creating something uniquely African American. The speaker asks to be saved from the murders that he hopes his followers will commit against “his lost white children” (74) and ends with the repeated phrase “black dada nihilismus” (75). The request to be saved to be forgiven for their actions, and the god being spoken of would likely be very understanding given that the god shares a common heritage and existence, being understood as neither African nor American. The speaker is again calling for moving away from the point of reference of white America and instead asking for a new form of representation; through the destruction of white culture, the experience of a black cultural experience can emerge. The chant-like, repetitive quality of the phrase “black dada nihilismus” as it exists in the poem is significant in how it represents in the struggle to articulate the black experience. By being presented in a manner similar to a chant, it harkens to an earlier culture while also working against what is considered “art,” and is thus working against the oppressive white culture. Importantly, the nonrepresentational representation of what is unrepresentable continually reemerges, mimicking the brain’s repeating of traumatic events in order to attempt comprehension. “Black Dada Nihilismus” is not only an idea and a poem, but also a representation of trauma and a burgeoning form of expression of African America attempting to produce and reproduce a black voice, both artistic and political.

Many of Baraka’s poems represent trauma, often in the form of imagery, such as the lynching imagery in his poem “Reggae or Not,” which includes such lines as “our women watched when the crackers cut off our balls / in the grass, they made the little girls watch / stuffed them in our mouths” (lines 38-40). In other poems, images of slavery are readily apparent. In addition, Baraka uses nonsensical words in the form of screams to express that that is impossible to

convey in purely semantic terms. In “Reggae or Not,” screams occur in lines near episodes of trauma such as terror: “our terror...AHEEESSSSHHHHHHHHHEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE” (37) and “Aheeeeeeeeeee—balls/ in the sand” (66-67), the continuation of the lynching description. In both instances, the speaker’s inability to articulate the feelings associated with those traumas is transformed into a scream, representing what cannot be represented by words alone. What is occurring here, if we refer to Moten and his discussion of refusing to reproduce the account of Aunt Hester’s beating in Fredrick Douglass’s narrative, is the presentation of emotion and reaction through a scream rather than the telling of emotion. In Moten’s discussion, he discusses how, although Hartman does not reproduce the account of the violent event, “it is reproduced in her referent to and refusal of it; second, the beating is reproduced in every scene of subjection the book goes on to read” (4). Moten makes clear that he is not suggesting that Hartman tried and could not make the violent account disappear. Instead he states, “Hartman’s considerable, formidable, and rare brilliance is present in the space she leaves for the ongoing (re)production of that performance in all its guises and for a critical awareness of how each of those guises is always already present in and disruptive of the supposed originarity of that primal scene” (Moten 4). Baraka is producing something similar by presenting screams in “Reggae or Not.” Rather than discuss the anguish, frustration, and distress associated with such violent events, Baraka allows these emotions to exist in a vacuum created by this scream. In the place of discussing the pain, torment, and frustration, Baraka fills this void with a scream. Like Hartman, Baraka creates and reproduces that massive stressors and distress by not directly discussing the emotions. This is significant because it is insinuating that the articulation of the distress felt by the speaker and

the discussion of these particular massive stressors cannot aptly be represented, thus the speaker has resorted to articulations that reside outside the bounds or semantic registers.

This is also an articulation that resides outside the cultural understanding and aesthetic and intellectual registers of white America. This is an utterance by a black speaker, for a black audience, about historical black trauma, and current black frustrations. This is a break in the poem, away from words, existing in the poetic equivalent of scat in jazz, where there is both a breakdown, and more importantly for the Black Arts Movement, a movement beyond words for representation into a new mode of understanding. Both of these articulations by the speakers are attempting to articulate the massive stressors and distress, yet the means in which this can aptly be presented escapes the speaker. This harkens back Moten, as he states, “There is no phenomenology, only phenomenological problems—and to notice in passing that noticing an aspect—a phenomenological problem that, as we shall see, demand *description* in light of its exceeding of *explanation*—is in the aftermath or wake of this formation: not but of not but of not but of” (91). The speaker is attempting to describe an event and the feeling of distress, yet this articulation is in a perpetual state of deferment and the speaker in this poem can only partially describe what has occurred, yet understands that a sufficient description of the events and massive stressors associated with the event transcend representation. This is not an attempt on behalf of the poet to transfer the feeling of anxiety to the reader, but rather it is the presentation of feelings and frustrations manifested in a scream where the speaker is unable to formulate the words to express the trauma that has manifested inside. This technique is not the expression of the speaker’s own personal trauma, but the quasi-verbalization of historical trauma, which continues to affect the speaker. In the performance of the poem, such an expression of emotion

and breakdown in understood semantic registers will greatly affect his audience, more so, I believe, than his readership. The expression of trauma is significant because Baraka's speaker is demonstrating, through the screams, how the historical trauma has affected the speaker, yet this technique does not directly tell the audience that he or she has suffered trauma but refers to suffering in a collective "we": "we is a nation in suffering/ we is a nation in chains" (135-136).

This technique has the potential to show the reader and listeners how trauma of the past can influence people of the present and may call on the reader to act. The audience may be encouraged to fight against the oppression and racism they encounter daily and move the Black Power political movement forward. Furthermore, the artists and writers in the audience, understanding the importance of attempting to bring forth a representation of the black experience of the Black Arts Movement, may witness the movement away from traditional representational strategies, as Baraka does by abandoning all semantic forms of language, and strive to further the establishment of the black experience in America, while also calling upon centuries of historical trauma.

Another of Baraka's poems that effectively demonstrates abjection and unhomeliness is "Legacy," published in his 1969 book *Black Magic*. Baraka's *Black Magic* was the first book published after what William J. Harris calls his "bohemian era" and expressed sentiments of black nationalism, which Baraka embraced five years previous to the book's publication. Baraka's poem "Legacy" presents the imagery of African Americans struggling to live in the American South, and it attempts to find ways to escape the massive stressors and torment of their situation. It is apparent from the outset, with the title of the poem "Legacy" and with the first line of the

poem being “In the south” (1), that the poem is focusing on the legacy of Southern slavery, which directly lead to the racism still present in the United States today. The second hint the speaker gives that we are seeing a glimpse into the lives of a group of African Americans appears in lines 13 and 14 where the speaker says, “from this town, to another, where / it is also black.” These lines remember the travel of some of the people from one town to another; as we can see, the town is “black,” meaning most of the inhabitants are African American. The people of the poem are shown “sleeping against / the drug store, growling under / the trucks and stoves” (1-3) and “Frowning / drunk waving moving a hand or lash” (5-6). Both sleeping and drinking are behaviors with which an individual can escape from the stress associated with daily life. Although the mention of these activities is used to present the image of escape and coping against massive stressors associated with historical trauma, the most common motif used within the poem is abjection and unhomeliness.

When examining the images, it is important to note that in none of the activities do we find the people at their homes. This is significant because many of the activities, such as the person sleeping in the first line, would be expected to occur at home. There is a lack of a home presented within the poem, and when we consider the amount of movement, especially in the final portion of the poem, it becomes apparent that abjection is a strong factor present within the poem, for not only the riders of the horses, but also for others within the poem. The first instance of movement occurs with the “stumbling” that occurs at the end of line three. The “stumbling” (3) that goes “through and over the cluttered eyes / of early mysterious night” (4-5) is never attributed to one or more people; therefore, it is impossible to ascertain whether we are witnessing one or more people “stumbling” in this manner. Given that the people are mentioned

sleeping and in a drunken state, the stumbling is associated with these people moving through life in a stupor related to their chosen mental escape.

This is different than the type of abjection we found in the previous chapter on Japanese Americans forced from their home and placed in encampments. The individuals in this poem, because they are African American, had no home to begin with. By being African American, always already unhomed and existing in a dispossessed state of existence without a physical home, and equally important for the Black Arts Movement, no home culture or representation was part of their experience, except mythically and memorially (e.g. Africa). Slaves were never guaranteed safety, security, or stability in their quarters, nor were they recognized as familial units, many of whom were separated through sales. Even after slavery, racist laws, landlords, and communities, as well as the need for work, often lead to transient existences for many. In addition, during the time of this poem's creation, the establishment of a cultural home was on the forefront of the minds of people like Baraka; thus, the home being sought is as much cultural as physical and emotional.

The traumatic imagery of the poem begins to unfold after the “stumbling” where we find the “Frowning / drunk waving moving a hand or lash” (5-6). It is uncertain whether the drunken figure spoken of in line six is one of those stumbling or not; regardless, this person is reacting to a past trauma, indicated by the word “lash,” which ends line six. The inclusion of “lash” (6) recalls historic traumas associated with whips and beatings. However, the frowning person is the one wielding the hand or lash, so it is he or she who is perpetrating the violence, which could be an allusion to slaves who were made foremen and who had the job of beating slaves in order to discipline them. The traumatic language continues in the next line as we see the transformation

in the activities described: “Dancing kneeling reaching out, letting / a hand rest in shadows” (7-8). Although the line starts with “Dancing” (7), the action immediately changes to “kneeling” (7) and “reaching out,” which is indicative of a type of submission, either to a deity or someone in a position of authority. If we consider the “lash” from the previous line and how the wielder of the lash could have been an allusion to a foreman who beat slaves, the people kneeling and reaching out could be doing so to ask for forgiveness from either a deity or person/people because of his actions. The fact that he is “letting / a hand rest in shadows” (7-8) demonstrates that his hand is still residing in the collective, cross-cultural guilt of wrongdoing in the past, and potentially in the present, since part of him is reaching out for forgiveness while his hand resides in the darkness of negativity, illustrated by the shadows. The hand in the shadows is a metaphor for the historic trauma still plaguing the culture today.

As the poem continues, we find that the next images are of an individual “Squatting / to drink or pee” (8-9). As we have seen with the overlapping and uninterrupted flow of images, the poem becomes both confusing and partially fragmented as the images of people are presented and suddenly change. The image of the dancing, kneeling, reaching person just examined quickly changes to an individual squatting. As with the other images within the poem, it is not clear whether or not the individuals squatting are the same as those kneeling. In the next image, we find individuals, as we are given indication of more than one for the first time since line three, who are getting on horses to ride to “where there was sea” (11). Following this image, the speaker then presents the second half of this line and first part of the next in parentheses, which makes the event appear suspect as it says, “(the old song / would have you believe)” (11-12). By presenting the idea in this manner, it makes it appear as myth or legend, quite similar to the poem

by Inada. The sea does not appear again until the final line, and it becomes known that the myth is not about the people, but the “pretended sea” (17) that the riders are trying to find. Given the significance of the Middle Passage, slave ships, and the oceanic slave trade, the sea is a very loaded term. As the speaker refers to “the old song” here, with the poem’s title (“Legacy”) and epigraph “(*For Blues People*),” the speaker is referring to slave spirituals, work songs, the blues, jazz, and traditional African songs that may still exist within community or minds of the individuals. The sea, when sung in the spirituals, often referred to the Moses and the Israelites. The American slaves were well aware of the diasporic Israelites and saw parallels in their plight. Calling upon the sea in these songs would not only have been a reference to the slave ships and crossing of the Atlantic, but a reference to the miracle performed by Moses for the Israelites. This resounded as hope within the song of the enslaved of freedom, either in life or in death. The speaker, by referring to it as pretend and suspect, is discounting this hope. . The ultimate goal is to reach the sea, which is symbolic for finding peace and identity, but the sea is pretend, thus peace and identity are unattainable. The poem is discussing a flawed hope in something that does not, cannot, and never has, existed.

Even in the face of this despondency, there are still those who attempt to find the sea that the speaker does not believe in. In the poem, as the riders mount the horses, we find them traveling “from this town to another, where / it is also black” (13-14). As mentioned earlier, this is an indication that the people spoken of in the poem are African American, but the repetition of another town similar to the one just left creates a feeling that the change the riders seek is unattainable. This is compounded by the mention of the sea being “pretend” in line 17 and by the way the sea is mythologized in lines 11 and 12. As the poem continues, the riders move “Down

the road” (14) where they find more people sleeping. This town, much like the one they left, is similar, not only in its cultural makeup, but in the actions of the inhabitants. The inhabitants of the new town, which the riders are passing through, are encountering the world in the “disoriented and fragmented” (1) state of abjection as identified by Fuchs. The riders, who are searching for the sea, are presented in a state of unhomeliness, in some other place than the sea that they are attempting to find, and, as well, every person in the poem is presented in an unhomely state of abjection. This idea is perpetuated in line 16 where, rather than the speaker mentioning houses, which might give a sense of homeliness to the poem, we are given an image of “the shadows of houses.” In this manner, the poem is presenting the intangible presence of houses, but they exist outside the grasp of the people within the poem. The image of the shadow is significant especially when we consider its representation of historical trauma in line eight. Therefore, not only are the individuals in the poem without homes, but the homes of others reinforce historical trauma within the wandering culture. The sea that the wanderers are in search of, not only represents hope, but home. The sea is what separated the slaves from their homeland, and by searching for the sea, the wanderers may be able to find, not only the sea that divides them from their ancestral home, but, if continue with the sea being a metaphor for hope, the hope for a new home.

Baraka’s poetry, like the other poets examined thus far, utilizes motifs specific to literary trauma theory such as abjection and unhomeliness to engage traumas and massive stressors associated with racism. Although the two Baraka poems examined are not necessarily representative of all the works of Baraka (such an endeavor is far beyond the scope of this study), these two poems are highly representative of Baraka’s poetry focusing on trauma as well

as the need to express the black experience in the United States. Taken from early in the Black Arts Movement, these poems attempt to represent that which could not be aptly represented in regards to a culture striving to use a means of expression beyond the oppressive white society as well as trauma, both of which are fundamentally tied to one another. Other poems by Baraka, as well as other poems coming from the African American community, engage these issues because the idea of expressing what it means to be black in the United States is a crucial issue, but, as we have seen, is always already tied to historical trauma, regardless if the poet wants to engage the issue. Some poets and poems do not, but for those that do, the use of traumatic figurative language, abjection, unhomeliness, and other poetic motifs of literary trauma theory are beneficial to expressing these emotions, but are often found in the poetry regardless if they were used consciously.

As we move to the second poet of this chapter, June Jordan, we find that she, like Baraka works against white oppression and towards a representation of the black experience that is articulated outside the white aesthetic register. Her poem “Who Look at Me” presents an experience outside the white aesthetic and refers to the “white stare” in her poem, and discussed existing outside of it within the poem. At the same time, she utilizes various poetic devices used to discussing trauma literature, such as abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness. As shall be demonstrated in the following section, Jordan’s poetry is especially useful when understanding how poets of the Black Arts Movement moved toward dual representation of trauma (tied intrinsically to African American culture) and the black experience.

Abjection, Fragmentation, Isolation, and Unhomeliness in the Poetry of June Jordan

June Jordan's poem "Who Look at Me" was written during the tumultuous late 1960s and discusses the direct impact of racism that existed at that time and examines historical trauma from early in our nation's history. The long poem spans 304 lines, and within these lines, one can find abjection, unhomeliness, isolation, and fragmentation. Because of its focus on the treatment of African Americans in its subject matter and its use of abjection, fragmentation, isolation, and unhomeliness, "Who Look at Me" will be the singular poem of explication in this section.

The poem begins with "Who would paint a people / black or white?" (lines 1-2), immediately engaging the idea of race, thus setting the focus of the entire poem and informing the reader that the discussions referencing these colors has racial significance: the phrase "A white stare" exists in stanzas that follow. The first instance of unhomeliness and abjection occurs in the second stanza. The speaker is unhomed, or as we saw in the previous poem by Baraka, it may be more appropriate to call the speaker dispossessed. What is also apparent is that the speaker is not only struggling with not having a home, but is struggling with identity and left to wander. Abjection, as we should remember, is discussed by Fuchs as the sense of travel highlighted by "[m]igration, exile, and persecution, all [involving] a loss of the connection with what one might call the 'space of homeliness', commonly considered the locus of identity" (1). The speakers in the travel narratives of these texts are more representative of a "blinded maze-walker whose experience of the world remains disorientating and fragmented" (1). This speaker of Jordan's poem describes this sense of aporia by saying,

For my own I have held
where nothing showing me how

where finally I left alone

to trace another destination. (3-6)

The stanza is fragmented, just as the previous stanza is, in that neither relates to another or makes sense when read together. The two stanzas are separate, fragmented thoughts and are presented with a larger than normal break between stanzas and a mark to indicate that these are isolated, unnumbered sections. The speaker in this instance is isolated by being “left alone” (5) where she must “trace another destination” (6). Thus, the speaker is traveling alone with no true destination in mind. In the next section, again indicated by a larger than normal stanza break and an indicative marking suggestion an unnumbered section, we witness the speaker rendered invisible by a “white stare.”

The “white stare” is found many times in Jordan’s poem and we must keep in mind that the moment this was written, like the poems by Baraka, during the Black Arts Movement. As Mike Sell states in his article "The Black Arts Movement: Performance, Neo-Orality, and the Destruction of the 'White Thing'," during the Black Arts Movement artists and writers were working to present the black experience outside of white way of envisioning blackness tied to minstrelsy and a visual-centric conception of identity. This being so, the white stare takes on a variety of meanings, one being the attempt to silence any representation of the black experience outside the confines of the white aesthetic. The white stare in this instance is very much the white aesthetic. We must also take into account the traumatic nature of the white stare, as is evident in the poem, as it seeks to silence African Americans by ignoring their existence or by recalling a traumatic past. Both ideas are evident as we examine the poem, and examples of each exist within the next few stanzas.

The third stanza begins with “A white stare splits the air / by blindness on the subway” (7-8), which indicates that the speaker is invisible to the stare of whites on the subway, “in department stores” (9), and in “The Elevator” (10). The speaker is ignored by whites, as indicative of these lines and line 12, and this implies that she is ignored explicitly. To be ignored and to be unseen is not only descriptive of a type of racism, but this phenomenon recalls historical eras where Africans and African Americans were not counted as citizens, had no rights, and were ignored by a society fueled laws that prohibited rights as well as segregated and punished the African American citizenry. This thought is reinforced through the fourth stanza, which speaks of the white stare again.

A white stare splits obliterates
the nerve-wrung wrist from work
the breaking ankle or
the turning glory
of a spine. (14-18)

The fact that the “white stare splits” (14) recalls segregation, which occurred legally only a few years before the poem was published. The impact of these laws and the attempts to end segregation are palpable in this statement. To be ignored in the manner that has been discussed is a very painful and damaging type of isolation. People are being isolated from the visual landscape of whites, and it is even more damaging as it is also done legally, through segregation. The word “obliterates” (14) then follows, which could reference the impact of the Jim Crow laws, but it also applies to the subsequent lines. The word “obliterates” could also be applied to “the nerve-wrung wrist from work” (15), indicating the waylaying of black workers from their

work. The “obliterates” also governs the remainder of the stanza where it represents physical trauma through the imagery of “the breaking ankle” (16) and “the turning glory / of a spine” (17-18). These images not only call up physical trauma, but they suggest the removal of freedom in the spine, whose “turning glory” (17) is “obliterated”; consequently, the only freedom that the spine has, its ability to turn, is taken away.

To return to the Black Arts Movement, these discussions of damaging and destroying blacks under the white stare is also damaging in regards to culture. The idea that the “white stare splits obliterates” (14) is a reference to W.E.B. DuBois’s concept of double consciousness as the identity of the blacks is both divided, depending on the race of people that the African Americans are in contact with. As well, this splitting ultimately obliterates an individual’s identity because of having to put on a different persona in front of different people. Furthermore, this white stare damages the representation of a black experience because it is precisely the white cultural aesthetic that artists of the Black Arts Movement must attempt to destroy and move away from in order to have a true representation of the black experience. However, as Sell states in his article, there are issues here beyond Dubois’s conception of double consciousness. Sell states that the white gaze commodifies and objectifies African Americans, which diminishes African American identity into a sellable thing and ultimately traps that identity within the stereotypical performance repertoires of minstrelsy. As such, the white gaze is not only negative in its predatory actions financially, but works against empowerment through its dismissiveness and oppressiveness.

The most significant lines and ideas of the next section occur in lines 20 and 21 where the speaker states, “Is that how we look to you / a partial nothing clearly real?” These lines are a

clear extension of the blindness directed toward blacks spoken of in the previous section. The section continues by describing African Americans whom the whites do not see as well as the value in the culture of the black experience. Although this section is presented mostly in images (although not indicative of traumatic memory), the tone of this section changes on lines 47 and 48 as we are presented with this image: “The axe lies on the ground / She listening to his coming sound.” The “she” refers to the speaker who identifies herself as “a little girl who wears / her first pair of earrings / and a red dress” (39-41). The axe lying on the ground is foreboding and has the potential to create an uneasy feeling in the reader, yet because it rests on the ground and the “she” is “listening,” it suggests that she will not be attacked by the axe. The uneasiness is diffused by the last stanza of the section, which sees “him / just touching his feet / powerful and wary” (49-51) and “anonymous and normal/ parents and their offspring / posed in formal” (52-54). Thus, instead of a murderous scene, we are presented with a father, perhaps separated from his work, as identified through image of the axe, and his family dressed formally. As such, the individuals are not only seen, but are presented as people, something that laws of the past failed to recognize and a culture that stereotypes and objectifies.

Lines 60 through 71 invite the reader to “look” (60 and 66) at black men, yet representations of distress do not become predominant until the unnumbered section beginning on line 72. The speaker is attempting to make the reader see African Americans, and, starting on line 72, the struggle of many is revealed. The speaker states “Who see [sic] starvation at the table / lines of men no work to do / my mother ironing a shirt?” (72-74). These images present a great significant examples of massive stressors, especially when we consider Hobfoll’s resource and loss of resource stress model. Stress becomes magnified by the apparent and obvious lack of

resources available to individuals in this stanza. The African Americans spoken of in the poem are not only subjected to high levels of stress by lack of resources, but their very identity is attacked by whites who refuse to see or acknowledge their very existence. This goes beyond the idea of searching for one's identity through movement as discussed in the loss of locus of identity in the definition of abjection. In this instance, as has been replayed in the poem, the very existence of blacks is attacked; whites refuse to acknowledge the identity of blacks, and their very existence is attacked through selective blindness. Furthermore, any value that could exist in a black art form or representation of the black experience is nullified through the white gaze, especially as that gaze is systematized in the broader cultural paradigm of the white aesthetic.

The discussion of poverty continues in the next stanza where the speaker asks, "Who see a frozen skin the midnight / of the winter and the hallway cold / to kill you like the dirt?" (75-77). We again see the result of lack of resources; however, in this stanza, we see dehumanization as the cold kills people due to lack of resources, but more damning is the manner in which people are being compared to dirt. Although this is not traumatic figurative language, because a previous trauma is not being compared to a current trauma, it is still a metaphor that dehumanizes African Americans and demonstrates trauma. When a group of people is dehumanized by means of selective blindness, as articulated through the eyes of whites, that dehumanization can, and in this instance, does, create self-dehumanization as the speaker begins to identify herself and members of her race as "dirt."

The next section asks the reader to "look close / and see me [sic] black man mouth / for breathing (North and South)" (90-92). These lines force the reader to see the black man and call upon historic trauma by identifying the North and the South as separate entities, which represent

the divided nation of the American Civil War. The speaker then re-humanizes African Americans by presenting the subject as “A MAN // I am black alive and looking back at you” (93-94). The next section continues to show African Americans as humans and does so in order to work against the idea of selective blindness and dehumanization. The section ends with a powerful image that reads,

see me [sic] darkly covered ribs
around my heart across my skull
thin skin protects the part
that dulls from longing. (105-109)

This stanza not only humanizes African Americans, but it also engages their feelings by discussing the heart and brain that are covered with the black skin, and the poem is referencing how these parts of the body “dulls from longing” (109). The heart and brain long to be recognized as human and equal. This longing that the brain and heart feel are key because they represent the areas where trauma may manifest into physical sensations within the human body. In addition, these are the areas associated with creative expression. These lines, as we have witnessed before, are the continuation of the desire for the cultivation of a truly African American art and presentation of the black experience.

In contrast to the image of the dark skin being discussed in this stanza, the following stanza refers to “the thousand miles of solid alabaster space” (110). The alabaster, a distinctly white mineral, is “inscribed keep off keep out don’t touch / and Wait Some More for Half as Much” (111-112) reiterating the idea of segregation and inequality. The fact that it is inscribed on a solid rock that spans thousands of miles demonstrates, not only the far reaching

oppressiveness of the white racist superstructure, but as we see a few stanzas later, the articulation of abjection made through a nautical metaphor. The speaker states,

Describe me broken mast
adrift but strong
regardless what may
come along. (118-121)

The speaker is describing herself as a ship drifting without means of propulsion, yet the ship continues on “regardless what / may come” (120-121). The sea is not mentioned in this stanza or those coming before or after, and refers instead to the “thousand miles of solid alabaster space” (110). The speaker is thus wandering, somewhat aimlessly and reliant on external forces through the white space that continues to control the actions of black Americans. Although the speaker remains strong, there is no true locus of identity or port where this ship may moor. Much like Winslow Homer’s *The Gulf Stream*, where we see a black man in a boat on an open sea surrounded by sharks, in the poem, the boat is left to drift in the sea, damaged from events of the past. This is appropriate given that the historical trauma of slavery has the potential to impact subsequent generations by means of racism, and as the poem continues, this sentiment is in line with what the speaker discusses throughout the poem.

Beginning on line 135, the speaker begins discussing historic trauma that affected African Americans. Line 135 simply reads, “we reveal” and is followed in the next stanza by “a complicated past / of tinderbox and ruin” (136-137). This past led to destruction and a “tinderbox” of negative emotions and actions that continue to affect the African Americans in the poem. In the next stanzas, the cause for this “tinderbox and ruin” (137) are revealed as stemming

from slavery. Lines 138 and 139 reference slavery stating, “where we carried water / for the crops” and continuing in lines 140 and 141 stating “we come from elsewhere [sic] // victim to a rabid cargo crime.” These lines blatantly refer to the traumatic past of African Americans and suggest that the current troubles that African Americans in the poem face are related to the historical trauma of slavery.

The reference to slavery is made concrete in line 147, a line that resides in its own section, which states, “(slavery:) the insolence.” The speaker has completely isolated this idea even though, in previous lines, the idea of slavery was referenced in its impact on the present. The speaker utilizes isolation and fragmentation by separating this line in order to demonstrate that the event and “insolence” surrounding it are so significant that they are, in some ways, inaccessible. They exist on their own, and although we can reference them by discussing them the way the reader has thus far in the poem, we can never know the trauma that slavery created for those individuals who felt the torment directly. This line is separated from the rest of the poem because trauma, as we have already become aware, is largely unable to be represented. At the same time, the line exists in the poem, although isolated, because although trauma is unrepresentable, and in some ways inaccessible, it cannot be separated from the culture. Thus, this line may be the most crucial to the poem as a means of attempting to represent trauma and the impact it has within a culture and the presentation of the trauma and culture within African American art.

The poem at this point begins turning toward an attempt to escape slavery and cope with its aftereffects. Lines 148-150 engage the idea of trying to escape slavery stating, “came to frontiers / of paralyze highways / freedom strictly underground.” The “underground” spoken of

is an unconcealed reference to the Underground Railroad, which was a means of escape and a reference to travel, but unlike the ship with a broken mast spoken of earlier, it is not aimless. The “underground” could also be a reference to the underground existence of the unnamed protagonist in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, where he lives in a space full of light because, for the narrator, light is analogous to truth. In the poem, freedom from the oppression and hate propagated by whites can be escaped through the freedom found as the search the truth. The stanza ends with allusions to trauma stating, “came here to hatred hope labor love / and lynchlength [sic] rope” (151-152). The mention of lynching following the discussions of slavery brings forth more historic trauma and moves time forward. These images and the engagement of different emotions, as specified in line 151, allow the reader to better understand the feelings evoked from engagement with these traumas and with the events of the past to show the progression of racism from slavery to lynching.

Beginning on line 174, we find the longest section of the poem and a section that delves into a variety of historical traumas. The speaker compares African Americans to seeds that have been planted in North America and grown with time. Although the speaker is using figurative language through similes and metaphor, these are not examples of traumatic figurative language because the speaker is not comparing one type of trauma to another. Presented in this section are descriptions of stressful and traumatic instances that affected African Americans and African American culture. The speaker begins exploring the hatred against her culture by stating, “We grew despite the crazy killing scorn / that broke the brightness to be born” (182-183). Thus, the speaker believes that despite the white oppression and destructive hatred of many whites against blacks, the culture was able to form. This is especially significant as we remember that the start

of the poem spoke of selective blindness by whites. This becomes even more significant through the remainder of the section.

In response to the selective blindness of the white stare presented early in the poem, the speaker rebuts their blindness by discussing how African Americans and African American culture are fortified by examining white America and events that are usually not spoken of, which is again a reference to selective blindness, although this time by means of examining history. The speaker continues by stating, “In part we grew / by looking back at you” (184-185). While white American chose not to see African Americans or African American culture, African Americans grew because they were constantly having to look at and thus learn from white America and the hatred the permeated, at times, from the same. The speaker discusses the difficulty of living in this type of environment in the next stanza stating,

that white terrain
impossible for black America to thrive
that hostile soil to mazelike toil
backbreaking people into pain (186-189).

Although the simile used thus far in the poem has compared African Americans to seeds growing in the soil, this stanza not only builds off that image, but it also brings forth elements of African America’s traumatic history. The “toil” on the “hostile soil” and “backbreaking people into pain” invokes slavery by using images analogous to fieldwork. These lines also bring forth the idea of the feeling of unhomeliness as the speaker describes “white terrain” (186) where black America cannot thrive, much like “the thousand miles of solid alabaster space” (110). Thus, not only is the terrain impossible to thrive on, but it is a terrain that will not allow black

America to call home. These lines refer back to the early part of this section which began, “New energies of darkness we / disturbed a continent / like seeds” (174-176). This diasporic element of people being disturbed and uprooted, and then being planted on a new continent, when read alongside the inability of black America to thrive in a terrain dominated by the white power hegemony, allows a greater insight into the unhomeliness that many may have felt and perhaps still do.

The next stanza discusses selective blindness and trauma again. In the first two lines, “we grew by work by waiting / to be seen” (190-191), the speaker is discussing the patience and desire to be seen, yet the imagery turns violent quickly. The speaker continues, “black face black body and black mind / beyond obliterating / homicide of daily insult daily death” (192-194). The imagery in these lines is quite violent, yet upon closer inspection we see that the “homicide” and the “daily death” are by means of insults; the attacks are verbal rather than physical. The poem continues, “the pistol slur the throbbing redneck war / with breath” (195-196). These lines reinforce the fact that the violence is by means of words rather than physical violence; therefore, the damage incurred is psychological. The damage to people is through neglect (selective blindness), humiliation (“black face” (192)), hate-filled “insults” (194) and “slurs” (195). The remainder of this section of the poem discusses growing with the help of a supportive family (225-227), by an understanding of one’s culture and important individuals within the culture (228- 231), and “by setting up a separate sail / to carry life / to start the song” (234-236). The boat motif in this example, unlike the one presented in the poem earlier, signifies a symbolic, independent journey away from the dominant, persecuting culture. Unlike the boat used earlier in the poem, this boat is able to maneuver and does so through song. These last three lines invoke a

separate culture and art, by means of song, which, as the very last lines states, is used “to stop the scream” (237). The use of a song to stop the scream is indicative of several arts, but perhaps most synonymous to the blues. By using song, which could also be suggestive of poetry, people are able to tell of their trauma as a means of coping, which is evidently partially the message of this poem.

Discussions of anguish continue on line 281, where we find the speaker discussing her personal pain: “I grieve the sorrow roar the sorrow sob.” This line is repeated verbatim on line 285 in the same stanza. The repetition in lines 281 and 285, which highlight the speaker’s grief and sorrow, is not only important because it draws the reader’s attention to these feelings, but the repetition is suggestive that these feelings are ongoing, repeated, and traumatic. Repetition also occurs in the final lines of the next stanza as the speaker states, “another black man / died he died again / he died” (295-297). The repetition of the word “died” is not only used to reinforce the ongoing, repeated, and traumatic events, as the previous repetition does, but in this stanza, the repetition emphasizes the massive number of deaths of Africans and African Americans in the American South spoken of in this stanza. The negative tone of this stanza is reinforced by the use of words and images that perpetrate a negative aura in the text. Reference to America as “the shamescape” (287) and the use of words such as “blood” (289), “lunatic” (292), and “graveyard” (293) make the use of the “weeping willow” (291) that much more significant as they are used to mark where these black men died. Death continues in the second to last section stating, “and how many of us died there / on our knees” (300-301). By dying on their knees, the individuals, most certainly the Africans and African Americans spoken of earlier, are being executed. By being forced into submission, the murdered are facing an extreme form of degradation and a

humiliating death. This type of humiliation and degradation catalyzes the trauma into hate within a culture, and it makes the historically traumatic scars of such events more difficult to overcome due to the dehumanization and culmination of negative emotions produced by such events.

With the final line of the poem reading, in all capital letters, “WHO LOOK AT ME?” (304), the speaker is playing off the selective blindness discussed earlier and, at the same time, forcing the reader to confront the trauma that has occurred in the past and to acknowledge emotions like the humiliation in the last sections of the poem. By writing about such emotions as well as reading about such emotion, the speaker of the poem can cope by telling. As well, readers facing similar historic trauma may find community and catharsis about such events by understanding they are not alone in their struggles.

In Jordan’s long poem “Who Look at Me,” race, the struggles with racism, and historic trauma reside at the forefront of the speaker’s mind. In addition, fragmentation and abjection appear early on in the poem, beginning in the second stanza. The fragmentation is made more noticeable as the poem is broken up into unnumbered sections, thus breaking up the flow of the poem. Yet the structure complicates the engagement for the reader by leaving no remarkable cues to understand the reason for this fragmentation. The repetition of the “white stare” and the selective blindness perpetuate the idea of the isolation and the reference to segregation. The poem also touches on Hobfoll’s loss-of-resource stress model by discussing lack of capital for many African Americans within the poem while also articulating the dehumanization of blacks by whites. The poem also highlights abjection that occurs in the present time of the poem and remembers the same from the past, going as far back as the era of slavery. Finally, the poem also discusses the idea of unhomeliness as it exists for many African Americans and their engagement

with historical diaspora, which is magnified by the idea of being reminded that one does not belong, by being subject to the “white stare,” and selective blindness of many of the white community. The speaker discusses the pain, humiliation, and stress of dealing with such emotion in the writing in order to cope and tries to bring forth change in the treatment of African Americans by the attempting to call attention to their plight and even their existence with the last line “WHO LOOK AT ME?” (304). Such struggle, as we can understand from the poems of poets from all cultures discussed, is nothing unusual, yet that does not take away from the significance of each voice, but merely reinforces the commonality of this experience across multiple cultures.

Abjection, Fragmentation, Isolation, and Unhomeliness in the Poetry of Lucille Clifton

As has been demonstrated, Baraka and Jordan engage with the historical trauma inherent within African America and, as they produce writings that speak of the black experience in the United States, they must engage the historical trauma because of its intrinsic place in the black experience, both negatively and in terms of empowering the black nation. Elements of trauma can be found in several of Lucille Clifton’s poems from collection *Good Times* published in 1969. As we move forward, we see Clifton not only engage trauma and the black experience, but isolation. This is a common characteristic, both reactionary and self-imposed, by survivors of trauma because of the overwhelming feeling that no one can understand the feelings her or she are going through because of what they have witnessed. The distress endured by attempting to reconcile historical traumas associated with one’s ancestors, and trauma that may still be apparent when the poem was composed, have the potential to reinforce this feeling of isolation. The poetry of Clifton presents this isolation, and it is a frequent motif found within her poetry,

hence the selection of her for this study. Clifton's poems "love rejected," "the inner city," "My Mama moved among the days," and "If something should happen" each represent isolation as well as other poetic devices common in literary trauma theory. Furthermore, when we consider the need to express the black experience in the Black Arts Movement, it is apparent that isolation plays an important role. The artists wishing to discuss the black experience must isolate themselves from the white aesthetic, but are also already isolated from white society because they are black. Thus it is important to engage isolation, not only when engaging trauma, but the black experience.

The first of Clifton's poems to be examined is untitled but begins "love rejected" and presents elements of unhomeliness and isolation as the speaker discusses the feeling of rejection. The poem begins by outlining the idea of being rejected by a potential love interest: "love rejected / hurts so much more / than Love rejecting;" (1-3). As the poem continues, the pain associated with emotional rejection is being compared to the pain of unhomeliness. There is the association with patriotism in the next line as the speaker states, "they act like they don't love their country" (4). The comparison of a jilted lover is at first compared to someone who does not love the country where he or she is living, but in the final four lines of the poem, the speaker finds a more appropriate example of the country rejecting the person. The fifth line consists of only the word "no," which negates the previous statement and focuses the reader's attention on the idea of negation, which is both representative of the lover's rejection and the rejection of his or her country. Discussing the idea of being rejected by lover is painful and very appropriate in this simile as the person is not rejected by a lover, but by an entire country. This is even more telling as we take into consideration the failure of the majority of society to accept the validity of

the black experience and the black aesthetic being established during the Black Arts Movement. The isolation that would occur because of this would be valued by some, like Baraka, but would be painful for others, as this poem articulates.

The final lines of the poem reinforce the feeling of isolation created as the speaker feels rejected by a potential lover yet is made to feel unhomey by being rejected by his or her country as the poem states, “what it is / is they found out / their country don’t love them” (6-8). The idea of not being loved by one’s country is very similar to ideas in June Jordan’s poetry, and if this poem is read in the context of Clifton’s other poems within this collection together with other collections of poetry, most likely, the people being spoken of in this poem are African American. Therefore, like many poets examined in this study, although the people live in this country and potentially have for several generations, they are considered, and perhaps feel like, outsiders and rejects. The people being spoken of are not only forced into isolation by being rejected by a lover, but they are forced into a state of unhomeliness by the rejection of their country.

The feelings of unhomeliness are also present in the first poem of Clifton’s book *Good Times*. The poem is untitled but begins with the line “in the inner city.” The poem refers, as the first line indicates, to the inner city, and the speaker also states, “or / like we call it / home” (2-4). At this point, it is evident that the speaker and those whom she is referring to have a home, the inner city, but as the poem progresses, this residence is not actually one that the speaker considers home. As the poem continues, the speaker states that “we think a lot about uptown / and the silent nights” (5-6), showing that even though the speaker and those around her have a place they call home, they still think of other places, which as we can see from line six, are more

peaceful. This image of “uptown” (5) is next described by having “houses straight as / dead men / and the pastel lights” (7-9). By the houses appearing “straight” (7), the order that is inferred from the silence from “uptown” is continued in line six. This idea quickly takes a different connotation as line seven compares the straightness of the homes to “dead men.” The negativity associated with death and the houses being as “straight as / dead men” (7-8) makes problematic the idea of “uptown” (5) being a hopeful candidate for “home,” so the speaker does not desire to live in “uptown” and desires only to have a home of some sort, somewhere.

The most telling line associated with unhomeliness occurs in line 10 and reads, “and we hang on to our no place.” It is evident here that the speaker feels that their home is no place. Even though they have a place to reside, neither this place nor the calm “uptown” are places they consider home. In the next line, the speaker proclaims that she and the others are “happy to be alive” (11). Although this happiness is not indicative of happiness in the peoples’ lives, it happiness “to be *alive*” (11, my emphasis). Given the comparison of the houses to dead men in line seven and eight, this line provides great contrast to the silence of uptown and suggests that the speaker and others are happy just to be alive. The happiness here is not an emotion of joy, but a feeling of being thankful for still having one’s life. Presenting the uptown houses and neighborhood, as well as residents, as dead is commentary on white culture, which is in contrast to the vivacity, thus succinct celebration, of the black, yet unhomely, culture celebrated by the happiness to be alive the speaker presents. The final four lines are a repetition of the first four lines, which include the previous line about the inner city and state, “or / like we call it / home” (13-15). As stated, this happiness is not joy, but the feeling of being thankful, thus the speaker and others are thankful to have a place to reside, the inner city, yet this is not, nor will be a place

that can be considered home. This thankfulness is not shared in the white communities because they do not understand that happiness that goes along with being thankful just to be alive. In addition, the speaker is thankful to be alive in the celebration of African American culture as opposed to the silent, dead culture the speaker perceives as existing in the white neighborhoods.

The repetition of the first four lines, as they close the poem, are significant because they are repetitive, and because they occur at the opening and closing of the poem, suggesting that life in the inner city is cyclical. The overall structure of the poem, with its short lines and small stature, forces the reader to pay very close attention to each word. Although this is often expected of poetry, in this case, the longest line is only eight words, and the phrases within the lines jump out to the reader with the centermost line being most striking. Line eight, composed of only two words, “dead men,” is surrounded by the longest lines of the poem. The placement of this line in the inner most portion of the poem is not coincidental, especially given the speaker’s repetition and emphasis on the “inner city.” By placing “dead men” (8) in the center of the poem, this is analogous to the people she speaks of being in the inner city. In this way, the speaker is suggesting that lives of those in the inner city are dangerous, and thus, the fact they are thankful to be alive is a more logical supposition on the poetic persona’s behalf.

This suggested idea of unhomeliness continues in the next poem of the collection although the sentiments of abjection, while often existent alongside unhomeliness, are most predominant in Clifton’s poem beginning, “My Mama moved among the days.” Similar to other poems by Clifton, this poem lacks a title and will be referenced by the first line. The movement in the poem, as we can see by the first line, begins immediately. The second line transforms the

movement into abjection as we see that the mother is moving “among the days / like a dreamwalker in a field;” (1-2). To be a “dreamwalker” (2) is similar to Fuchs’ definition of a “blinded, maze-walker” (1); therefore, “Mama” (1) in Clifton’s poem, moves through the field in a manner that has no true destination, as can be seen later in the poem, and she is also influenced by dreams, which relates strongly to trauma. The subject of the poem is significant in that she is the mother of the speaker: she represents the historical heritage of the speaker, and as demonstrated in lines three and four, she takes on superior, perhaps even mythological, qualities.

“Mama” is described in the next two lines as having abilities that allow her to be impervious to the world around her and also as having a great influence over everything she encounters. The speaker states, “seemed like what she touched was hers / seemed like what touched her couldn’t hold,” (3-4). The mythology created around Mama is significant, not only because she is representative of cultural heritage, but because, as the speaker continues, “she got us almost through the high grass” (5). Because of her inability to be harmed by that which she is touched, Mama is nearly able to navigate the “high grass” (5) even though she is moving through the field like a “dreamwalker” (2). The field navigation and high grass are part of the metaphor used to describe Mama’s movement through days, thus time. The navigation of daily activities is difficult, and although Mama navigated in the manner of abjection, she is able to help those with her. As has been stated, Mama is representative of historical culture, so the speaker is only able to navigate the stresses and difficulties in life by the aid of historical culture. Moreover, the character of Mama is doubly significant in the empowerment, not only of Africa Americans, but African American women. The Black Arts Movement was not especially progressive in its attitude towards women, thus Clifton is provoking two powerful implications through her

character of Mama. First, we see by Mama's inability to leave the "high grass" as commentary on the Black Power movement leaving women behind in the quest for equality and empowerment. This is highly significant because she is suggesting a double oppression that is readily understood in the context of minority women. Secondly, Clifton is empowering African American women by having Mama be the facilitator to aid others as they attempt to navigate the massive historical stressors that affect African Americans. Mama is the strong leader, and Clifton is suggesting that the women of African American culture are the ones that can heal and lead the culture past the influence of the historically traumatic stressors.

The character of Mama in the poem takes a peculiar turn in the final portion of the poem. In line six, the speaker sees Mama change her direction just before the speaker finds the edge of the field. In line five that the word "almost" is essential to the meaning of the line as we see how Mama "got us *almost* through the high grass" (5, my emphasis), indicating that they did not make it through. The aid of Mama is only able to get the speaker so far, and as we see in the next line, Mama turns back. The speaker continues, "then seemed like she turned around and ran / right back in / right back on in" (6-8). These final three lines focus on repetition figuratively, as the character Mama returns to the difficulties of the high grass, and show the actual repetition existent in the seventh and eighth lines. This repetition is highly suggestive of trauma, and we also see the character of Mama returning to the massive stressors represented by the tall grass, thus making the abjection indicated earlier more significant. Rather than understanding Mama to be representative of just cultural heritage, as we see her return into the massive stressors of the high grass, Mama is also representative of cultural trauma. The abject state of the character of Mama and her repetitive nature present her as an archetypal example of traumatic characteristics,

and the fact that she resides and refuses to leave the massive stressors representative of the high grass reinforce this representation. Mama is also, as has been stated, an important figure in African American women empowerment. She is not only leading people through the traumatic stressors, but she chooses to return to help others. This underscores the resilience of African American women, not only in their resolve to preserve through difficult circumstances, but to be selfless in their choices.

It must also be recognized that Mama is isolating herself as she refuses to leave the high grass. She exists in a fragmented isolation, which is only broken up as she attempts to aid those individuals who are lost and trying to find their way. Mama is a martyr attempting to save others so that they do not face the same painful isolation that she faces. Enduring historical trauma can make one feel as though they are isolated, especially by the oppressive culture that remains in power. Mama also becomes symbolic for the art and expressions of the Black Arts Movement as such because it is this art and its political ties that can move African Americans out of the confusing of the tall grass to the realization of self and African American culture. Mama must be isolated because the black experience can only be understood in an aesthetic manner if removed from the white aesthetic. Such removal and presentation of the black experience also provides wisdom. Mama also moves beyond the traditional Black Arts Movement and empowers women, especially African American women because, as we can see by her representation in the poem, it is through the strength of African American women, the poem suggests, that the culture will endure the difficulties that surround them.

The speaker uses historical trauma and cultural heritage in order to navigate present stresses, and through such wisdom, we are shown that one can endure the stresses of daily life. The hope inspired by the mythical characteristics of Mama, as exhibited in lines three and four, allows the speaker and others to transcend the stresses that may infringe upon their abilities to negotiate their daily activities. As such, historical trauma is not only something that must be endured, but as the speaker demonstrates in this poem, the events of the past also may aid individuals as they engage stressors of the present, inspired by hope. In Clifton's final poem to be examined, "If something should happen," the message is not just for African Americans, but for whites, as the speaker gives a very ominous warning not to fight the change occurring in the Black Arts Movement or the empowerment of African Americans. In great contrast to Mama in the previous poem, the people in "If something should happen" are not interested in healing, but the destruction of opposition. This destruction is much more in line with the ideas of destroying the white aesthetic in the Black Arts Movement and one that needs to be engaged before concluding the chapter. In this poem, we see a call for uprising in hopes of creating political and historical trauma to all, especially whites.

The traces of historical trauma inherent within Clifton's poem "If something should happen" appear in the form of images and traumatic figurative language. The poem is one continuous stanza that can be broken into three sections that show different scenes. The first scene shows a boat on the ocean: "if the sea should break / and crash against the decks" (lines 2-3). In these lines, the sea is tumultuous, and this recurs as a constant image throughout the poem. In the next two lines, the speaker continues the question associated with the title and first few lines, asking what would happen if the sea crashes "and below decks break[s] the cargo / against

the sides of the sea” (4-5). Although it is evident that the crashing sea breaks the cargo, the idea of the cargo breaking “against the sides of the sea” (5) rather than the sides of the boat is somewhat confusing. As the poem continues, lines two through five are nearly repeated with the word “chains” replacing “sea” in line seven. By having the chains break and “crash against the decks” (8) rather than the ocean, the cargo can be understood to be human cargo, or slaves, which brings forth traumatic history. This idea of the cargo being human is validated later in the poem, so to consider the cargo here as slaves is not conjecture. Like the previous lines, we again find the similar repetition, where instead of “and below decks break the cargo / against the sides of the sea” (4-5) we find words being removed so that lines nine and ten read, “and below decks break the sides / of the sea.” This line also suggests the sea as a representation of natural order attempting to “break” the unnatural, tyrannical dominance of man over man. The difference here, although subtle, presents the sea breaking rather than the cargo as in lines four and five. The recombination of these words in these lines are significant poetically because the interaction of these words, and what they represent, create an effect whereas the trauma of the slave trade on the African captives as well as the slave traders, as agents, all become interconnected as a human trauma. The actions of the slave trade, and slavery, itself, resulted in highly engrained racism that we have yet to untangle to this day. The sea, as we shall see later on, is the sea of humanity; thus, the poem, and poets, for that matter, move beyond the scope of a singular race or group and speak to a more universal theme against hate and racism.

The crux of the poem resides in the final scene where the seas spoken of in line 12 are not saltwater but people. The poem presents a conditional event: “if the seas of cities / should crash against each other / and break chains” (12-14). This scenario varies greatly from the previous

two scenes. In this instance, the people who have been oppressed, indicated by the chains breaking, become free through a sort of clash of peoples, suggestive of upheaval or revolution leading to a universal freedom for all humankind. In this scene, the people “break the chains / and break the walls holding down the cargo / and break the sides of the seas” (14-16), which indicates the idea of the people rising up and taking material goods in a type of riot, symbolically rebelling against hegemonic power structures of the oppressors. The poem continues following the action of the sea and the people as we see “all the waters of the earth wash together / in a rush of breaking” (17-18). Line 16 is clearly connected to the lines previous, which speak of “breaking the chains” (14) and “the walls holding down the cargo” (15), yet to “break the sides of the seas” (16) is perhaps less a call to riot and action than a call for overcoming the differences of the various races and cultures of humankind. The sea becomes a type of equalizer, a force greater than any, where all must learn to swim or all drown together. Lines 17 and 18 continue in this call for equality where all the people of the world are said to come together “in a rush of breaking” (18). As we examine the poem closer, this “breaking,” which is repeated throughout the poem, is not the destructive action, but a symbolic destruction of ideologies that oppress different peoples as well as a call to establish a new aesthetic that is focused on the black experience. This idea becomes most apparent as we consider the last two lines, “where will the captains run and / to what harbor?” (19-20). These lines further implicate the sea to be not the literal oceanic water, but rather the masses of oppressed people, the sea of humanity. The sea of people causes the captains, who represent the power elite, to run, thus those in power, by having to run, become the unhomed and diasporic. The white aesthetic must be destroyed and overthrown if there is to be a black culture and a black aesthetic.

When read in this manner, the first portion of the poem becomes less confusing, and the scene looks a great deal like the Boston Tea Party as the people crash upon the deck of a ship, go below decks, and “break the cargo / against the sides of the sea” (4-5). The idea of the cargo breaking against the side of the sea then becomes a more tangible image of the captive and the oppressed having their lot thrown in with the greater corpus of humanity and attain a sort of freedom through equalization with the masses. However, we must remember that that sea is a mass of people, and thus a closer reading reveals that this could be both the literal and metaphorical ocean as the previous event discussed and a sort of looting of goods in the form of imperialism and a rebellion against imperialism in the form of the dissolution of the slave trade. If we accept this latter understanding of the poem, then we are witnessing the formation of this country and the exploitation and genocide of the Native Americans. Thus, we are witnessing a comparison between the Native American genocide and African American enslavement in a form of figurative traumatic language. This interpretation is only partially correct when the poem is read in its entirety. The repetition of breaking the sides of the sea is of great significance, and as we examine the last instance when it is presented, it is clear that this action represents the breaking of the symbolic walls that keep a people oppressed. Thus, the first portion of the poem is also discussing the breaking of material inequality, which read alongside the idea of imperialism, is the inequality as a product of exploitation. This exploitation is also an exploitation of African Americans in the arts, thus a call to stop exploiting ourselves for the benefit of whites and to keep black art black.

The idea of imperialism becomes more evident in the second scene as it clearly discusses slavery. The second scene discusses the breaking of chains upon a ship, which is a description,

not only of a slave ship, but the mutiny aboard a slave ship, much like what occurred on the *Amistad*. The chains, as are clearly represented within the text, are broken and “the sides / of the sea” (9-10) are again broken. By rising up against those who keep the people oppressed, the oppressed can gain equality. As the boat mentioned in the previous section by Jordan, where the boat symbolized a journey away from the oppressive culture, the boat in this poem subverts the power of those on the slave ship as a way to sail to a symbolic freedom. Both scenes, in this poem, are calling on concealed presentations of historical trauma, with each taking a form of traumatic figurative language. The third scene is calling for an uprising of people in order to gain equality and is using these types of historical events as examples. Moreover, it is presenting these types of historical traumas to discuss the situation in which oppressed people find themselves. This freedom is also the idea of breaking away from the white aesthetic while creating art to represent the black experience. The speaker is calling on African Americans to continue forward in the Black Arts Movement and, perhaps more importantly, a call to rise up politically.

As discussed, Clifton’s poetry presents examples of abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness and narrates historical trauma. Feelings of unhomeliness and isolation are evident in her poem beginning “love rejected” as well as in the poem beginning “My Mama moved among the days.” Within both poems, the unhomeliness is portrayed and suggests unresolved historical trauma inherent within individuals within the poem. Although “My Mama moved among the days” does utilize a metaphor in discussing the historical trauma, this metaphor is not a type of traumatic figurative language because the metaphor is not comparing the event with a traumatic event that occurred in the past in order to articulate the trauma that is taking place. In

Clifton's poem "If something should happen," the speaker does utilize traumatic figurative language, but the poem does so in a concealed manner where, superficially, the comparison is with the ocean and a ship; however, upon deeper analysis, it becomes evident that the speaker is referring back to slavery and the Native American genocide. Each of Clifton's poems examine traumas, either historical or direct, felt by people, not only from African America, as presented here, but from other cultures. Each of Clifton's poems in this section utilized isolation, a motif that is more prevalent in the poetry of Clifton than many other poets. This isolation not only demonstrates the remnants of historical trauma still inherent within African American culture, but calls for a self-imposed isolation that would help in the advancement in an African American culture that existed outside the white aesthetic. The need to write and create art that was truly African American and escaped the Western cultural aesthetic was intrinsic to the ideas of the Black Arts Movement. Clifton was able to produce such a message, and do so in a manner both positive and calming, as in "My Mama moved among the days" as well as in a call for uprising in "If something should happen."

Conclusion

The poems of Clifton, Baraka, and Jordan explore various aspects of historical and direct trauma, allow the reader an insight to the speaker's exploration of historical trauma, and articulate unresolved traumas that still exist. Such massive stressors stemming from racism have created a sense of unhomeliness and abjection. It is not surprising to find the speakers within Baraka's poetry utilize abjection and unhomeliness to present trauma, just as the speakers of poems written by other poets. The poetry written by Baraka during the Black Arts Movement

called for a drastic change in the way African American artists and writers produced art. No longer was art to be written to appease the white aesthetic. As such, poems like “Black Dada Nihilismus” were produced to demonstrate the difficulty in representing that which was not able to be represented (trauma) and that which had not be represented before (the black experience for blacks, by blacks). Baraka’s poem “Legacy” shows a reader a glimpse of African Americans struggling to live in the American South and presents examples of unhomeliness and abjection as they struggle with the distress they encounter on a daily basis. The focus of Baraka’s poetry during the era when “Legacy” was written was primarily on the empowerment of African Americans. In this poem, the speaker shows the anguish that many African Americans in the town are feeling, the overwhelming sense of having no place to call home, and the need to find a home that may not even exist. June Jordan also began her writing focused on the trauma that African Americans had endured at the hands of white America. Like Baraka, she stressed the movement away from the white aesthetic and produced an insight into black experience. . Jordan’s poem “Who Look at Me” focuses on racism and historical trauma much like the poetry presented by Baraka. The speaker of Jordan’s poem utilizes fragmentation and abjection early on in the poem to help demonstrate the trauma felt by the speaker. The speaker also employs repetition of the phrase “white stare” and selective blindness to perpetuate the ideas of the isolation, power, and segregation. The “white stare” and segregation presented in the poem by means of selective blindness also present the feelings of unhomeliness and diaspora as the African Americans in the poem are constantly reminded that they do not belong in the perception of the whites in the poem. Although this idea is not articulated directly, the presence of the “white stare” and selective blindness make it apparent. Finally, the poem also touches on the lack

of resources available to African Americans through the portrayal of the poverty in which they live. This, when examined through Hobfoll's lack of resource model, allows for an understanding of how the lack of resources adds to the stressors felt by individuals coping with the historical trauma and racism that permeates their lives.

Lucille Clifton's speakers engage stressors and trauma, present these feelings in the form of isolation, abjection, and unhomeliness, and discuss historical trauma as it resides within the culture. Clifton's speaker presents unhomeliness resulting from unresolved historical trauma in her poems "love rejected" and "My Mama moved among the days." Finally, in Clifton's poem "If something should happen," the speaker utilizes traumatic figurative language in a concealed manner where, upon deeper analysis, the speaker is referring to slavery and the Native American genocide. Each of the Clifton poems examines traumas from the African American community and, as evident in the final poem, other communities. The poems by Clifton, in this study, focus more on isolation, which, as has been stated, is not only a response to massive stressors and historical trauma, but also self-imposed in order that a black aesthetic may be established and fortified as opposed to the white aesthetic.

In each of the poems, the sea takes on a significant role, either as hope, something to traverse, or, as in the poem by Clifton, a force to overthrow the oppressive superstructure. In addition, the use of the boats in the poems is a type of subversion of the idea of the slave ship as a way to sail to a symbolic freedom rather than toward enslavement. In each case, it should be remembered that it was the sea that brought Africans to this continent, thus the abject wandering being connected to the sea would be the attempt to reverse, not only the affects of slavery in the

past physically by going back, but psychologically. Although slavery did manifest into a type of cultural trauma, it is the racism and hatred that was perpetrated by the institution of slavery that has left its lasting mark on both the African American culture, but on whites as well. As we move into the final chapter and examine Native American poetry, it is vital to keep in mind the idea of historical traumas of the past manifesting into racism and the ways in which the speakers of the poems cope with these stresses and traumas. Much akin to the speakers of the poems of this chapter, the Native American poets are facing a history where they were never able to have a true home due to historical traumas that forced them into a diasporic state. As such, a great deal of poetic devices used in engaging trauma through poetry are used, as the speakers in the poetry of Robin Coffee, Peter Blue Cloud, and Linda Hogan each work through unresolved historic trauma stemming from historical trauma as well as racism.

The poems of the Black Arts Movement that have been examined in this study exceed the bounds of literary trauma theory by advancing the idea of revolutionary empowerment through the exploration and poetic recreation of trauma. The poetry in the following chapter is very similar in this regard. Each of these cultures are calling upon historical trauma and massive stressors that continue to afflict the people of both African American and Native American cultures. Recalling historical traumas allow the poets to encourage the establishment of an artistic voice outside of the oppressive white culture and call for political empowerment. As we continue to explore historic traumas and the literature that is influenced by them, it is evident that poets are mediators in the Native American culture, just as they have been for the Japanese Americans and African Americans. The poets in the following section, some of whom were influenced by the Red Power movement, allow for insight into trauma and distress by discussing

a universal understanding of stressors. Furthermore, just as with the poets of the Black Arts Movement, the poets in the following chapter are calling for empowerment of Native Americans as they discuss traumas of the past.

CHAPTER 5

HAKLO⁴; RAHRON:KAS⁵; ATVGI'A⁶: LISTENING TO TRAUMA IN NATIVE

AMERICAN POETRY

As we move forward into the poetry of Native Americans, it is critical that we understand the significance that these poems have and what they are responding to politically. The poets I discuss in this chapter engage with historical traumas and do so in order to empower their culture and to demonstrate the universality of massive stressors that continue to impact Native Americans since the time of the Native American genocide. It is a documented fact that millions of Native Americans were killed, murdered, raped, enslaved, and displaced over hundreds of years. Given that our nation's history contains so many traumatic events that victimized Native Americans, it is no surprise that traces of historical trauma can be found in poetry written by Native Americans in the second half of the twentieth century. Much like the previous chapter engaging African American poetry, the poetry examined in this chapter focuses more on historical trauma. This historic trauma has resulted in various psychological disorders that exist within individuals to this day, and statistical data focusing on substance abuse and psychological disorders within the Native American communities reinforce the idea that Native American history has shaped its future. According to an Indian Health Services study, Native Americans were 514% more likely to die of alcohol related incidents, 92% more likely to die of homicide, and 82% more likely to die of suicide than all other American races ("Indian Health Disparities"). Such trauma is palpable within the poetry of various Native American poets such

⁴ Chickasaw for "to listen"

⁵ Mohawk for "to listen"

⁶ Cherokee for "to listen"

as Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), Peter Blue Cloud (Mohawk), and Robin Coffee (Cherokee/Creek/Yankton Sioux), all of whom are discussed in the following chapter. These poets present images to be celebrated and that are unique to Native American culture in order to call for empowerment and to encourage community and nation building. Robin Coffee uses the image of the warrior to show, not only the violent and traumatic past of Native America, but to rejoice and celebrate the warrior as a powerfully symbolic figure of Native American culture. Peter Blue Cloud presents the importance of dance within Native American culture, as well as discussing the occupation of Alcatraz, which was intrinsic to the Red Power movement. Finally, Linda Hogan discusses the difficulties inherent in belonging to two different cultural traditions that have historically warred with one another. The speaker wishes to empower the Native American tradition, and, like the writing of other Native American poets, desires the empowerment and building of community for the people of her culture. Much like poets of the Black Arts Movement, the poets of this chapter work to build community and do so through a quest of empowerment by engaging historical trauma.

It would be beneficial to return to the ideas of Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart and Dominick LaCapra, presented in the first chapter, as she is the theorist who developed the idea of historical literary trauma theory. Historical trauma, historical trauma response, and historically unresolved grief are important elements that must be kept within the forefront of a reader's mind when examining poetry through a literary trauma lens. Historical literary trauma theory attempts to fill the gaps left by the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder. Historical trauma theory transcends the surface-level diagnosis of PTSD to look back across generations in order to show how past atrocities inform the future and manifest themselves in subsequent generations in the

form of abjection, isolation, unhomeliness, and revolutionary consciousness. Thus, historical trauma theory looks beyond surface, current causes to historical causes as the reasons for the negative symptoms found in today's cultural milieu surrounding the several groups focused on in the study. Brave Heart refers to previous studies she has published ("Gender Differences in the Historical Trauma Response among the Lakota," and "Oyate Ptayela: Rebuilding the Lakota Nation through Addressing Historical Trauma among Lakota Parents") and others (Robin W. Robin, Barbara Chester, and David Goldman's "Cumulative Trauma and PTSD in American Indian Communities") stating that historical trauma theory "describes massive cumulative trauma across generations rather than the more limited diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is inadequate for capturing the influence and characteristics of Native trauma" (7). PTSD fails to "adequately capture the influence and characteristics of Native trauma" (Brave Heart 7) because PTSD usually pertains to situations in which a victim has experienced some sort of trauma firsthand, and it also does not account for the influences and characteristics of historical trauma present within Native American cultures and the poetry therein. Brave Heart's ideas merit mention here because the focus of her research is on trauma within Native American cultures and societies, thus her ideas are most aptly applied to the poetry of Native American writers. Although Brave Heart does advance our understanding of the poetry by allowing us a greater understanding of the concept of historical trauma, her ideas are insufficient in demonstrating how poets can explore and represent trauma in a way to redefine the culture and push for empowerment. Poets are able to unite through their words and, when exploring historical traumas and massive stressors that permeate a culture, the poets have the ability to move people, as has been witnessed in the art movements that ran parallel with political

movements. Furthermore, when the political movement is not viewed as being representationally sufficient, as Clifton did with the representation of women in the Black Arts Movement, they poet can critic the movement as she did in her poem "My Mama moved among the days."

The historical trauma that continues to permeate a culture, along with the racism that people of the culture may face, leads to more distress and debilitating behaviors. As Brave Heart articulates, the high rates of substance abuse, suicide, homicide, as well as oppression and poverty place Native Americans at a higher risk for trauma exposure. This is compounded as one takes into account the "background of historically traumatic losses across generations" (Brave Heart 9), which, according to Brave Heart, meet the criteria of genocide as defined by the United Nations. As has been demonstrated by Hobfoll, the lack of available resources, as is evident with many Native Americans, makes coping with both the immediate and historic trauma extremely difficult. As a result, the poetry of many Native Americans, especially with the poets selected for this study, takes great care to articulate the unresolved grief which resides within not only the speaker of the poem, but within the culture. Although not always distinctly articulated by the speaker of the poem, many survivors discuss a variety of coping patterns, which relate to an attempt to cope and resolve the grief that has been passed down for generations.

The writers of this chapter utilize poetry as a means to resist the long oppressive white culture that attempted to strip the culture from Native Americans by attempting to eliminate the language, art, values, and customs in order to Europeanize the various nations of Native America. As such, the poets are engaging with trauma in order to unite the people of the culture and empower the people. Each poet in this section uses poetry as a form of resistance to this oppression through the language of the oppressor. Although some poets attempt to break the

bounds of the oppressor's language by writing in their writing, this falls beyond the scope of this study. Likewise, some poets like Jerome Rothenberg focus on the use of oral poetics, which is again working against the oppressor by focusing on the traditional oral art rather than written language, this also falls outside the focus of this study, but would be a beneficial study worth pursuing. The poets of this chapter focus a great deal on imagery that is unique and important to Native American culture. Many of the poems interject these images, like that of the warrior or ceremonial dance, around images that are more universal. Unlike the poetry of the previous chapter, where poets of the Black Arts Movement fought to establish a unique black perspective and unique black art, the poets of this chapter fight against the oppressor by fighting within it. The Native American poets of this chapter do not try as hard to separate their culture from the oppressive white culture, but try instead to carve out a segment within the oppressive culture. What this creates is a sense of ambivalence; the voices appear to want to break away by placing highly cultural significant images within the poem, but elements and images of the white oppressor are still resonant within the poetry. Ambivalence also resides, as discussed earlier, in the production of poetry from resistance against the oppressor, yet the poetry is written in English, which is the voice of the oppressor, and presented in a written form, which is not the traditional form of Native American poetry. Finally, ambivalence resides in how the resistance is partially a call to fight while also very nomadic, thus attempting to get away. In the following, the poetry of Coffee, Blue Cloud, and Hogan will be examined through a literary trauma lens focusing on abjection, isolation, unhomeliness, and traumatic figurative language. Much like the poetry of African Americans and Japanese Americans discussed earlier, these poets each produce poetry that illustrates these characteristics as a result of a speaker's historic

trauma response as a result of unresolved historic trauma. Coffee's poetry is filled with anger, hostility, and is quite similar to the poetry of Amiri Baraka in its angry tone. Much of his subject matter engages historical traumas of the past and his speaker's attempt to engage these horrors of the past. In Hogan's poetry, the speaker grapples with double consciousness influenced by the fact that the speaker's family is composed of whites and Native Americans and the internal struggle that exists as she engages historical trauma. Her poetry also speaks a great deal on abjection and unhomeliness. Finally, Blue Cloud's poetry discusses abjection and isolation as the speaker compares his existence, and the existence of other Native Americans, as an island, and more specifically, the island of Alcatraz. What is ultimately produced by the poets is a call for empowerment and national formation as the poets engage with historic traumas that continue to inflict massive stressors into the lives of people today. By discussing events that occurred and the cultural traditions, the poets are encouraging Native Americans to establish artistic and political movements to advance Native America.

Abjection and Unhomeliness in the Poetry of Robin Coffee

In Coffee's collection *A Scar Upon Our Voice*, there are many poems that exhibit abjection and unhomeliness, such as "Loneliness," "Lonely Gifted Traveler," "Touched By a Little Sadness," and "My Place Beyond Sadness." Each of these poems discusses wandering and, at times, a nomadic existence where the speaker discusses the desire or need for movement, which is often accompanied by sadness. The speakers in these poems also discuss the isolation they confront and the wandering in search for community.

This abjection is clearly articulated in Coffee's poem "Voices in the Water," where the speaker not only wanders, but also discusses the pain of isolation even when spending time with

another. In the poem, we find the speaker riding in a bus with no specific destination in mind. While traveling, he meets another person also traveling for the sake of travel, and they discuss the difficulties of being strangers on their own land. The beginning of the poem discusses the speaker's meeting of an individual named "Buffalohead" (line 2) and their sharing in both conversation and a bottle of wine. The wine is significant, as has been discussed in earlier chapters, as it is symbolic of the ability to flee as drugs and alcohol provide a certain type of flight. The speaker tells how Buffalohead "called it [the wine] water / To douse / A life's fire" (4-6). Buffalohead is telling the speaker he is using the alcohol precisely for this reason—as an escape from the traumas of life.

Abjection becomes more evident in the lines that follow, "We talked / Of being alone / In the city" (7-9), and, perhaps most significantly, "Nowhere to go / No one to go to" (10-11). The isolation, which both individuals in the poem discuss, is important because it demonstrates neither person has a place where he feels at home or a community to be emotionally supportive. Even though both the speaker and Buffalohead have nowhere to go and no one to go to, the next four lines discuss their travel when

He was going somewhere
On faith alone he said
I was going somewhere
Alone with my faith. (12-15)

The travel the two are undertaking is not to a particular locale, but travel for travel's sake. Buffalohead's travel is "On faith alone" (13), and thus he is traveling with the belief he will be taken care of along the way. The speaker, however, is traveling alone with only his beliefs. The

difference is subtle but important, in that each traveler possesses a feeling of isolation even when traveling with someone with whom he shares much in common.

The poem continues as the speaker states, “We rode the bus / I could not see his face” (16-17). Unable to see Buffalohead’s face, we are presented with an individual stripped of his identity as he travels, which is reinforced by the fact our speaker is never given a gender, much less an identity. At this point, we are left with two individuals without identity and traveling with no particular destination; they exist in a state of abjection. The poem continues with the speaker stating,

Tonight he said

We are

Voices in the water

Strangers in our land. (18-21)

With this, the identities of the two are stripped again, becoming only voices. Given that Buffalohead refers to the wine spoken of earlier in the poem as water, it is logical to reason that this reference to water is another reference to alcohol, thus making the two not just voices, but voices within the alcohol. This renders their existence not only fleeting in the sense of a voice, but without substance since it exists only through intoxication. However, we cannot discount the importance that water has played in the past to Native American cultures. Many creation stories involve water and water has ties to spirituality. Perhaps more realistically, water is one of the most precious substances on the planet. Many nations and settlements, in the Americas and beyond, were founded around easily accessible water sources. Therefore, the speaker and Buffalohead are the voices that people of their culture *need*, even though they are strangers in their own land. The

speaker and Buffalohead are searching, as their ancestors may have, for a home. This is a type of resistance in which the two search for a place to reside outside the reach of the dominant white culture and calling others to establish a different culture. The voices are a means of expression, which is vital to a culture's existence, thus the speaker and Buffalohead are wandering in search for a means of expression outside the white culture.

The feeling of abjection and unhomeliness reaches its zenith in the poem as the speaker described the two travelers as "Strangers in our land" (21), giving the two a complete feeling of unhomeliness. They not only have nowhere to go and no one to go to, but they are left as strangers in a land that was once their home. This sense of unhomeliness is the result of historical trauma still affecting the speaker and Buffalohead, to the point that, in this moment, they exist only in the abject state. The final line of the poem, "The night becomes a blur" (22), concludes the poem not in a resolution, but in a fading out which leaves the poem as only a fragment in the lives of these individuals with no real background or conclusion to their existence.

As can be seen in this example, poems such as "Voices in the Water" articulate the struggle and do so in an ambivalent manner where we find them attempting to resist the white culture, but as they resist, they also remain within it. Buffalohead and the speaker are fleeing, but doing so in a means of public transport, which is owned by the same white government that inflicted the historical trauma upon their culture. . The poem resists and attempts to become a voice, but that voice uses that oppressor's language. Buffalohead calls the water "wine," which creates another ambivalent dynamic; water is essential for life, but in this instance, alcohol is referred to as water. Alcohol exists, in the poem, as a type of *pharmakon*; it is a substance the people live for, but also the substance that causes destruction. In addition, the poem

demonstrates many aspects inherent to poetry representing trauma. Unlike most short stories or novels, we are only left with this fragment of information about the speaker and Buffalohead. Like the fragmented existence that is often felt by survivors of trauma, the poem resides permanently in this fragmented state. This is a very significant reason why poetry is a strong medium for presenting trauma. Poetry not only utilizes images, which is often how traumatic memories exist, but the poem is fragmented, much like the traumatic memories; therefore, poetry can be a very strong representation of how the speaker may feel and understand the world. In addition to presenting trauma within his poems using abjection and unhomeliness, Coffee also presents traumatic figurative language with many of his poems, as the next section will demonstrate.

One of the most intriguing elements of Coffee's poetry, and which continues to be presented by Blue Cloud and Hogan, is the ambivalence that exists within Coffee's poetry. The ambivalence in the poetry embodies elements of uncertainty in how to establish a new form of nation-building, uncertainty in the future for Native Americans, disorientation associated with massive stressors, and the need for empowerment and nation-building. As we can see, and will continue to see as we examine other Native American poets, ambivalence is a reoccurring characteristic with the poems spanning several decades. This ambivalence demonstrates an uncertainty in how to establish a culture outside of the white culture since the white culture has become so oppressive and destroyed so much of the Native American culture. Although it is quite apparent that there is a distinct Native American culture, certain aspects, like the English language and written language, as well as modern medicines and cities, have permeated Native American culture and forever changed it. As such, trying to establish a uniquely Native

American culture is very difficult given the influence that white culture has had on Native America for so many years. Furthermore, returning to the original Native American culture also means having to face a painful traumatic history.

This ambivalence, as it exists on how to establish a new Native American culture, also creates anxieties about the future of the culture. As the white influence continues to affect the Native American culture and change it, this influence could eventually destroy or overtake the culture. As such, there is a *need* to establish a strong Native American culture that fights against the white oppressor, allows for a political movement and an arts movement to preserve Native American culture and tradition. This ambivalence, and the uncertainty that it provokes, can be used to encourage the readers to take steps to preserve and empower Native American culture and politics. As a result of the ambivalence present with the poems, it also creates a disorienting feel that is synonymous with the affect of massive stressors and traumatic stressors.

Robin Coffee and the Warrior

In the poetry of Coffee's *A Scar Upon Our Voice*, the most prominent traumatic figurative language is the speaker of the poems presenting himself as a warrior in the same vein as the Native Americans of hundreds of years ago who fought against colonization by Europeans. In poems such as "In from the Cold," "No Other Way," and "Warriors of Our Time," the speaker presents himself as a warrior set to fight. In the poem "In from the Cold," for example, the speaker instructs another to fight against the system set up to oppress his people. The metaphor compares the fight his people must now take to the fight of warriors from hundreds of years ago. Another instance occurs in the poem "Blood of a Warrior," as the speaker discusses how the blood that runs through his veins is the same as his ancestors who fought

many battles against white oppression and colonialism. The speaker states his blood is ready to continue this fight even though, like his ancestors, his people are outnumbered. Again, we find ambivalence within the voice of the speaker as he attempts to empower his people by calling them to arms and become warriors, but acknowledges that they are again outnumbered, and will most likely be defeated thereby disempowering his people again. Even though the speaker is well aware of the obstacle that he faces, and the inevitable defeat, he pushes forward and calls his brethren to do the same in their resistance.

Coffee uses the image of the warrior as he engages the racism, massive stressors, and trauma incurred by Native Americans for generations. Even though Coffee uses this powerful image of the warrior in his poem to encourage empowerment, we still find elements of ambivalence residing within the poem. In order to discuss historic trauma and empowerment, it is no surprise that his poem “Blood of a Warrior” begins by calling upon the speaker’s ancestors. The speaker states,

Through my veins
Old blood runs
Alive having survived
Many battlegrounds. (1-4)

This is significant because it demonstrates how the speaker is utilizing traumatic figurative language and is calling upon historic trauma, which, as we shall see, still affects him. The traumatic figurative language resides in the idea that the blood that runs in his veins is the same blood that existed in those that fought in battle. This idea is generated by calling the blood “old,”

and suggesting it “survived / many battlegrounds” (3-4). The metaphor does not become complete until the end of the poem.

The speaker is also using the warrior and the warrior’s blood as a call for resistance. The warriors of history refused to accept the suffering and oppression that was forced upon them. Native Americans were notorious for fighting against whites and, as Howard Zinn notes in *The People’s History of the United States*, whites often abandoned the idea of enslaving Native Americans because of their staunch resistance. Coffee uses this warrior resistance, and as we see in the next few lines, he raises his voice, which is itself a form of resistance. The poem continues by telling how the blood just spoken of

raises its voice

Against

The illusion of freedom

In a promised land. (5-8)

These lines are an absolute call of resistance to the legacy that historic trauma has left behind for people like Coffee and others to engage with. Rather than accept the “illusion of freedom” (7), the speaker’s very own blood resists the treatment of his people. The speaker is facing historic trauma and engaging this legacy head on and doing so, not through historically unresolved grief, but historically unresolved anger. The speaker resists, not just because he desires a better way of life, but also because he is called to by the very blood in his veins, which is a blood of warriors that refused to accept defeat, disrespect, oppression, or suffering. This type of resistance is especially significant because it is responding to trauma in a manner unique to Native Americans. The resistance is specific in how it takes the form of a call towards warrior militancy,

and does so by incorporating the historic resistance and culture of Native America. This technique calls for resistance by means of art and language, two things that the oppressors tried to strip from the Native Americans. As such, the speaker shows that the current and historical injustices have affected Native Americans, as is evident by the language being used, but the will to fight, even centuries later, is still strong. The idea that these are actually both current and historic injustices and the urge to resist is shown in the final lines of the poem.

The voice of warrior-blood

Stirs my heart

To rise and stand

Like

30 warriors

Against

200 cavalymen. (12-18)

These lines complete the metaphor, as we realize the blood, which has been spoken of in the poem, is the “warrior-blood” of a Native American, and thus the speaker is comparing the current inequalities and oppression to the atrocities that occurred to Native Americans in the past as well as the bloodshed as a result of battles and wars. Although we are presented with this idea in the title, it is not until we are given the image of the last three lines that we fully understand the significance of the blood. The speaker desires to fight the oppression in the same manner as his ancestors, but understands the great disadvantage as articulated in the last three lines. The idea that current oppression and inequality are related to historic trauma is tangible within the poem, so the metaphor is able to show the despair, anger, and frustration that the speaker has

against the inequalities, but the imagery also harkens to the historic traumas of the past. The fact that the speaker is using the metaphor for a warrior is unique to his culture, and the resistance that he calls on, even though it is against nearly insurmountable odds, is similar to the fights his ancestors fought. There is a play of ambivalence in this call to resistance because, although the speaker is calling for his brethren to resist the oppression and fight back, he acknowledges in this metaphor that the fights will most likely result in defeat. The odds are not only clearly against the warriors, but being so highly outnumbered, the idea of winning appears impossible.

The poem is structured with very short lines, the longest being four words, so the reader's eyes are forced quickly down the page. In addition, the poem contains no stanza breaks, so the reader is forced to encounter the entire poem without a rest. This technique forces the reader to feel rushed as she reads down the page, and the line breaks in these short lines force the reader to focus on certain words and phrases. Lines such as "Old blood runs" (2) and "Many battlegrounds" (4) create a sense of violence while, in the sixth and seventeenth lines, the word "Against" resides alone, forcing the reader to pay special attention to the word. Because of the lack of punctuation and stanza breaks, the poem becomes confusing and disorienting. This feeling forces the reader to reread certain sections in order to make sense out of the poem, just as the mind attempts to reevaluate traumatic events in order to gain a greater understanding. These techniques are not readily available in prose writing; thus, by presenting this idea in a poem, the speaker is able to create feelings and ideas that may not be as easily presented in a short story or novel.

Many of Coffee's poems are composed of short lines, and these often contain few or no stanza breaks. Presenting poems in this manner creates a sense of urgency, which is appropriate

for the majority of Coffee's poems and subject matter. This urgency is appropriate because many of Coffee's poems are calling for action and empowerment. The urgency creates the sense that changes must be made and we must fight the oppressor before we are wiped out. This creates a feeling of uneasiness that amplifies the urgency further. Furthermore, the uneasy feeling this creates is reinforced by the fact that many of the pages of *A Scar Upon Our Voice* share more than one poem per page, and the poems are forced to share space with other poems, which may or may not be related in subject matter. This is a very important and appropriate technique given the history of reservations and displacement in Native American, and this format would not be feasible for poems with longer lines. Peter Blue Cloud also presents many of his poems with short lines, but he allowed the poems to reside on their own page, unlike Coffee. Because of the repetition of traumatic figurative language used in some of Blue Cloud's poems, along with the technique of placing multiple poems on the same page, as we shall see, would not have been appropriate.

As has been demonstrated, Coffee's poems engage traumatic history in their subject matter, but also do so using traumatic figurative language, abjection, and unhomeliness. The speakers in these poems encourage resistance against the dominant white oppression that originated centuries before and continues to this day. The poetic resistance created here is unique in its use of the warrior image and the undaunted manner in which the warriors fought against the oppressors throughout history. The speaker also demonstrates a play of ambivalences, another aspect unique to Native American trauma poetry compared to the poetry of the African Americans and Japanese Americans that I've discussed. The ambivalence in "Voices in the Water" resides in the play with water and alcohol. The speaker refers to the wine, highly

significant due to the extremely high levels of alcoholism in the Native American community, with water, an essential part of life for an individual and community. Alcohol, for many, is the reason for living and something that is depended on, while also being the cause of destruction and death for thousands. Equally significant is the manner in which the speaker of other Coffee poems calls for resistance through the metaphor and image of the warrior, yet also hints at the inevitable defeat. The call for resistance is part of a warrior spirit that refuses to die, yet is unable to win. Similar calls for resistance and ambivalence reside in the poems of Peter Blue Cloud and Linda Hogan. These calls for resistance are also mixed with traumatic figurative language, abjection, and unhomeliness, just as the poetry of Coffee due to the historical trauma that resides within the Native American culture. As we continue into the poetry of Blue Cloud, this desire to establish power for the Native American culture is palpable, especially when we consider the proximity Blue Cloud's poems were written, especially in subject matter, to the Red Power movement.

Peter Blue Cloud: Reclaiming Alcatraz

The second poet selected for this study is Peter Blue Cloud, who was selected not only because he is a preeminent Native American poet (Mohawk), calls for resistance to the oppression plaguing Native Americans, but also represents trauma and isolation in his poems about Alcatraz. Unlike the trauma metaphor used by Coffee, which compares the current oppression against Native Americans to the battles of the past, Blue Cloud repeatedly states that every tribe is an island in his poem "Alcatraz," which creates many levels of meaning given the history of that particular island. Alcatraz is most commonly known as a former federal prison, but before this, it was used as a military prison for Civil War soldiers. Most importantly, between

1969 and 1971, Native American groups occupied Alcatraz three different times, with the most famous occupation started on November 9, 1969. The occupation of Alcatraz was a major catalyst for what became known as the Red Power Movement. In the following section, I will discuss the impact of the occupation of Alcatraz and the Red Power Movement as the sentiments of empowerment find voice in Blue Cloud's poetry. Richard Oakes planned the occupation for himself and a group of Native American students, and it lasted for nineteen months. According to the U.S. National Parks Service website, Oakes and the students "claimed the island in the name of Indians of all tribes." The island, therefore, has cultural significance for Native Americans in this regard, but as will be discussed, the island also acts as a subject for traumatic figurative language in Blue Cloud's poems. The idea of using the former prison island as the basis for these poems is, like *Coffee*, a call for resistance as well as a play with ambivalence. The island was occupied, as stated above, which was an act of resistance, and to write about the island is to celebrate the event. However, the island, while a move toward freedom for Native Americans is also the site of American incarceration. Furthermore, what is being fought for and prized is the abandoned island used for the incarceration of the worst criminals.

The first of Blue Cloud's poems to be examined with traumatic figurative language is aptly entitled "Alcatraz," blending contemporary imagery like the Golden Gate Bridge with images of Native Americans dancing. The focus of the poem is the idea that "a tribe is an island," which is repeated in several lines throughout the poem. The image of an island is most significant as we take into consideration the island that is presented in the title. In the poem, Alcatraz exists as a metaphor for the unhomeliness Indians faced by means of reservations, which acted more or less as prisons. The speaker makes this known beginning on line six, where

she states, “and a tribe is an island, and a tribe is an island.” This is repeated in lines 11 and 12, where she states “and a tribe is an island, forever, / forever we have been an island” and lastly on line 14, “a tribe is an island.” With the island referred to in the title being Alcatraz and with the repetition of a tribe being an island, the speaker is able to suggest the idea of Native American historical treatment and the relegation of Native Americans to reservations. The tribe as an island repeats in these poems, and thus the tribe is cut off and imprisoned by both physical means from the past and from the past itself. Just as the reservations acted as a type of imprisonment, the destruction of cultural heritage by the United States government and religious zealots made impossible the preservation of culture, which was especially destructive given that most Native American history was preserved orally. As a result, many Native Americans are cut off from a portion of their cultural heritage and exist as “an island, forever” (11).

The event that is being celebrated was also an act of revolutionary resistance as many Native Americans took steps to demand equality and Indian rights. As discussed in “Alcatraz is Not an Island,” the takeover of Alcatraz was an event that propelled the takeover of seventy-four federal facilities by Native American protestors in what became known as the Red Power Movement. These events, initiated by the Alcatraz occupation, brought attention to the forefront of the government and public’s attention, while also changing the way many Native Americans viewed their culture and themselves, and also inspiring a stronger sense of self-determination. The result of these protests forced the congressional passing of over fifty legislative proposals and an increase in the budget for the Bureau of Indian Affairs by 225 percent, as well as many other programs to help Native Americans. Perhaps most significantly for this study, the Alcatraz occupation and Red Power Movement “differed from past movements in that they demanded

inclusion in U.S. institutions while retaining their cultural identity” (“Alcatraz is Not an Island”). This idea, akin to the Black Arts Movement, is somewhat ambivalent itself in that it desired to be included and excluded at the same time. Therefore, it may not be of such great surprise to see the desire for resistance in the poetry of Native Americans, while also containing elements of ambivalence. As such, an island is a perfect metaphor for the Red Power Movement, as an island, when part of a country, is both part of the nation, but also separate onto itself.

Allusions to the past are presented in the poem in the form of dance, which is also repeated throughout the poem. The speaker blends present and past in the first four lines of the poem:

As lightning strikes the Golden Gate
and fire dances the city’s streets,
a Navajo child whimpers the tide’s pull
and Sioux and Cheyenne dance lowly the ground (1-4)

By bringing the Golden Gate bridge and city streets into the first two lines, the reader is given an indication that the setting of the poem is modern. By mixing dancing with modern imagery, the speaker is able to call on cultural history and place it in the present. The people in the poem are given strong cultural identification as to which Nation they belong to, yet their sexes and names are never revealed. This is significant because it allows the persona within the poem to represent nearly anyone belonging to the cultural group. Identity is manifested there and nowhere else, other than the Navajo being a child. What is evident, other than which Indian Nation they belong to, is the elements of sadness, which each of the people in the poem exhibit. The Navajo child is whimpering “the tide’s pull” (3), and this is important considering “a tribe is an island,” which is

repeated throughout the poem. The tide, therefore, reinforces the isolation felt, and the dance performed by the other people performed “lowly” (4). The Navajo child feels a contradictory pull that is placed on many to conform to white society or to cling to the cultural beliefs that reside within the Nation, which is quite similar to DuBois’s idea of “double consciousness.” The strong tide, as it pulls on the island of Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay in an opposing direction every few hours, could be likened to the confusion that resides in identity, especially as the poem repeats, “a tribe is an island.”

It must be noted that many Native American dances are performed low to the ground; however, one cannot dismiss the significance of the word “lowly” considering the whimpering child and traumatic figurative language being used in this poem. The fact that they are dancing is incredibly important to Native American culture because of the important role that dance plays. The dancing allows for a means of expression, just like the art presented during the Black Arts Movement, which was unique to the specific culture and resided outside the Eurocentric scope of art recognized by white America. The fact that people of many Native American Nations are dancing together is highly significant because it signifies a newfound unity that was not as pronounced in the past. This is a united front against the oppression that each nation has faced in the past and continues to face today. The people of the Nations are connected, not only because of this cause, and similar cultures and histories, but through a common trauma. These poems engage massive stressors and trauma by using traumatic figurative language, but do so in a manner that is indirect, suggesting that Native American culture has been “othered,” or placed lower in the cultural hierarchy of the dominant culture, i.e. white. Other poems by Blue Cloud engage trauma more directly, yet they still utilize traumatic figurative language.

Blue Cloud discusses trauma more directly in his poem “For Ace,” but he still utilizes traumatic figurative language in order to discuss the pain of losing a friend. In “For Ace,” the speaker discusses the death of a friend and tells how the death is a loss for him and for everyone. He recounts parts of his friend’s life, but he focuses on Ace’s painting. The speaker is brought into one of Ace’s paintings where he is forced to confront his culture’s traumatic past. Much longer than Blue Cloud’s poem “Alcatraz,” “For Ace” begins with the speaker discussing sadness:

I cannot summon a tear

or feel badly just now,

it’s not my loss so much

as it is all our losing. (1-4)

It is evident, even here, that the speaker is moving the feeling of sadness and loss beyond his own personal loss and into the public sphere. The speaker says of the departed, whom we may presume is the “Ace” mentioned in the title, was different because “he had talent” (22). It is because of this talent that, as the speaker states, “So talented was he that / he was beaten to death / in a Chicago bar” (24-26). The talent Ace has is his ability as a painter, and it is with these paintings that the speaker’s traumatic figurative language begins to take shape.

In order to understand and cope with death of the speaker’s friend, he utilizes traumatic figurative language, which calls upon the history of Native Americans. Ace is a painter, and as the speaker begins discussing one of Ace’s paintings, it is through the painting that the speaker

implements traumatic figurative language. The speaker discusses how, in the painting, there are “buffalo and ghost dancers emerging / alive, moving,” (51-52). These are references to spiritual and cultural elements within the Native American culture, and as we see in the following lines, the speaker is “forced . . . to dance” (61), but dancing is not an activity he commonly partakes in. The speaker states of the Ace’s painting,

his dancers jump at me

with loud cries, grabbing me,

forcing me to dance

and I danced. (59-62)

Dance has played and continues to play a huge part in the culture of Native Americans, and returning to it, as the speaker is doing in this poem, is to face one’s cultural past and the trauma that exists therein. The fact that Ace was painting about dance is similar to what is occurring as Native American poets write to promote resistance against the oppressor by using the medium and language of the oppressor. Ace’s paintings are a similar resistance against the dominate culture while within the dominate culture by using the medium of the oppressor. This is, in itself, a type of ambivalence. The idea that dance forces the speaker to reexamine the past becomes clear a few lines later when the poem makes the traumatic figurative language more obvious:

I danced

as a nation was slaughtered

and lay broken and bleeding

I danced

among angered ghosts

who would not lie down gentle

to death. (70-76)

Evidently, the speaker was forced to examine the traumatic history of Native Americans in these lines as he recounts the slaughter of his ancestors. The dance here, as was often the case of some Native American dances of the past, is performed in order to celebrate the dead, which is not only the ancestors, but now Ace. The dance of the speaker also becomes an act of resistance where he embodies, not only the culture, but resistance against death and the racism that cause his friend to die. This resistance occurs in the fact that the speaker moves when his friend cannot and does so to celebrate a culture, which was the reason his friend was murdered. In addition, the “angered ghosts” (74) who “would not lie down gentle / to death” (75-76) are representative of historical trauma which exists within the Native American culture. The angered ghosts *are* traumatic memories. The ghosts are from those who were slaughtered and continue to haunt the speaker as he dances or embraces his cultural heritage.

As the speaker continues, he thinks back to the shortness of Ace’s life and states, “I am bitter now,” (83) and

at this moment,

I would reach and pull him from his sleep

and make him dance

with his own dancers,

with me. (84-87)

By making Ace one of the dancers, he is forcing him to become part of the cultural trauma of Native Americans, and to celebrate the fact that Ace is now part of that ancestry and spiritual legacy. Ace's death is representative of the continuation of historic trauma and existence of trauma, which continues to affect Native Americans presently. At this point, the poem reaches its crescendo by drawing the reader in and addressing us directly:

tears streaming down faces

limbs jerking with sanity gone fallen,

and falling into the void of space

we would clutch and grasp at

each and every one of you

and force you into the dance,

and rub your faces into the gore

so proudly you helped create. (88-95)

The speaker presents three very important elements in the stanza that need to be addressed. First, as we can see in line 88 and 89 that the dancers cry with their “limbs jerking with sanity gone fallen,” thereby demonstrating the intense emotion they are experiencing through dance. This emotion is complex, and given the other emotions of the poem, we can expect the emotions to be related to mourning and frustration. The speaker’s mention of “sanity gone fallen” (89) and the dancers “falling into the void of space” (90) indicates a feeling of helplessness and isolation. The isolation is not an individual isolation, but the isolation of the group as they are falling in the nothingness. The speaker then turns and pulls the reader directly into the poem and wants to make the reader join in the dance. By doing this, the speaker is attempting to bring the reader in to share the emotions that are being expressed and felt. By doing this, the speaker is attempting to form a community beyond the one that exists. A larger community would be beneficial, as we have seen through the ideas of Hobfoll, and could give a greater opportunity of healing.

The speaker also attempts to force those outside of the culture to experience the feelings of this historical and cultural trauma. This idea is conveyed in lines 94 and 95. In these lines, the speaker is forcing the audience to confront the historical trauma. The speaker also passes blame on to the speaker by telling the audience (presumably not Native American) that it created this trauma. The speaker feels the need for someone to blame for the death of Ace, and by using traumatic figurative language of the atrocities committed against Native Americans historically, the speaker is able to attribute the death to the same people who killed Ace’s ancestors. By using traumatic figurative language, the speaker finds someone to blame and is also better able to cope with the loss of his friend by attributing his death to the same type of hatred and violence committed against Native Americans in the past.

Just as the speaker begins to place the blame upon others, he reverses his position in the final stanza. The speaker repeats the sentiment “what’s the use” twice in line 96 about the idea that “my mind screams to the shadows, / so many of our youth / gone into death,” (97-99). By screaming to the shadows about the killing of youth, given the preceding line, the speaker sees little benefit in placing blame. He continues this thought by saying,

so much dying,

and all the blame and blood

and all the justifications

And explanations

add up

to a loss we all share the deed of. (100-105)

While the previous stanza placed the blame on the reader, in this stanza, the speaker states the blame is on everyone. By doing this, the speaker moves past the idea of pointing blame and encouraging everyone to take responsibility, calling not only for an act of resistance on the part of Native Americans, but for everyone to resist the ignorance of racism and work toward a peaceful community built on equality. Just as he says this, though, he returns back to Native Americans, stating, “it is us, the runaways, / the self-made outcasts,” (107-108). To the Native Americans he states, “it is [due] to our grief / that we are forgetting / the dance” (109-111). By stating this, the speaker is telling the people to confront the historic trauma and to try to work through it rather than run from it and let the traumatic history be forgotten. Therefore, traumatic

figurative language plays two roles in this poem. First, it allows the speaker to cope with the loss of his friend, but it also calls on Native Americans to engage the historic trauma. The speaker is taking an event of racism, and the massive stressors and emotion involved in losing a friend to murder, and directs the anguish toward the unresolved historical grief that resides for some within the Native American culture. The death of Ace is a traumatic metaphor for the treatment of Native Americans currently and historically. This is similar to what occurred in the poems by Japanese Americans as discussed in the third chapter. Much like Yamada's discussion in her poem "Cincinnati," an event is used to examine and discuss traumatic events of the past. A similar idea of engaging the trauma of the past is found in Blue Cloud's poem "Sweat Lodge—The Afterwards" as will be explained further in the next section. Rather than use traumatic figurative language to discuss the trauma within this poem, the speaker utilizes abjection.

Peter Blue Cloud and the Reclaiming of Culture

If we recall Fuchs's discussion of abjection and how "[m]igration, exile, and persecution all involve a loss of the connection with what one might call the 'space of homeliness', commonly considered the locus of identity" (1), and how the speakers in these texts can be compared to a "blinded maze-walker whose experience of the world remains disorientating and fragmented" (1), we can understand how this fits with Blue Cloud's poem "Sweat Lodge-The Afterwards." In Native American tradition, sweat lodges are places that aid in physical, spiritual, and emotional healing. In the poem, the speaker begins by discussing her experience, from the "hiss of steam" (1) to the stream of consciousness she experiences. She discusses different images, sounds, smells, and tactile feelings that she experiences during her time in the sweat

lodge but, starting on line 56, the thoughts become more focused on the emotional feelings of the speaker rather than her tactile feelings. The sweat lodge is a uniquely Native American method of medicine and coping; thus, to focus on a traditional method of coping from traumas of the oppressor is a form of resistance. The poem also focus on a phenomenon experienced within the sweat lodge, which is a cultural tradition being utilized to confront the traumas connected historically to the culture.

Rather than discussing the texture of the bear's fur and turtle's shell that she mentions in the previous stanza, the speaker states,

I reach to feel my chest

my legs,

reaching

with hands and arms

I do not have,

nothing,

I am nothing, no body

nothing. (56-63)

The speaker at this point is struggling with the idea of identity and existence as she experiences the phenomenon of a sweat lodge treatment. Because the experience is one of a traditional ritual, she is struggling with identity and existence as she engages the culture merging with historic

trauma. She is attempting to come to terms with who she is as she meditates within the sweat lodge and is confronted with the idea of being

a thought

a seed in space

a blown and scattered thing

among stars. (64-67)

As the speaker's difficulty with identity is combined with the idea of being "a blown and scattered thing" (66), we find the idea of abjection appearing within the poem. She continues by stating that she is "one of many / one of multitudes, circling / silent," (68-70). She describes herself as a seed, which strikes another larger seed, which also whirls around striking still more. The speaker, therefore, belongs to a culture in which many are in the same situation, of being scattered and circling with no place of belonging, seeds in the wind with no fertile ground to sprout.

This ambivalent feeling of being both nothing and everything continues into the next stanza where she states,

I am nothing, I am all

I am part of

I am part of

a circle within this lodge. (76-79)

In this portion of the poem, the poetic persona is again having difficulty with identity, and she can only identify herself as part of the community within the lodge. She states in these lines that she is nothing without her culture, yet even the culture's identity is one of constant motion. This is reinforced by the next two lines where she states of the circle of the lodge, "a circle / in the Mystery!" (80-81). This is a recognition of the importance that her culture has in her life, where, as she says, she is nothing without her culture. Even the historical trauma and unresolved historical grief that resides with the culture is something to celebrate because it helps to create the culture that the speaker needs. Because the sweat lodge is a historical and cultural place of healing, even the negative aspects of trauma are celebrated because it is part of the community. The repetition of the lines "I am part of" (77-78) expresses the importance that her belonging to the culture and history have in her life. In addition, because her heritage is so important, the fact that she turns to this traditional form of therapy is a type of resistance to the white society and their treatments.

The experience the speaker has had thus far is disrupted:

I hear this and my body jumps

though it is only my neighbor,

coughing,

"Grandfather!" (82-85)

The thoughts she has expressed are what she refers to when saying, "I hear this" (82) before being jolted from her thoughts by the coughing. The sound of the coughing, and later the shouts

and cries are the speaker's acknowledgement of transcending the self and the continued recognition of the importance of heritage. By the inclusion of the cough and grandfather, the speaker acknowledges the past and the grip that the past holds on the present. As the speaker continues, she says the voice "is from within and without / it is a shout / an outcry" (87-89), indicating the exact source of the voice is not certain. By the voice coming from "within and without" (87), the cry may have come from the speaker as well as others within the sweat lodge. The voice is thus transcendent beyond one person and exists as cry from more than one source creating a sense of community. She says of this cry, "it tapers like a flame / to a pleading, / 'Grandfather?'" (90-92). This change become more significant as the poem ends.

On line 93, the speaker states how "all is fading," meaning the experience within the sweat lodge is coming to a conclusion. This "fading" is followed by the lines,

is going

my selfness

fading slowly

through self and into beyond self. (94-97)

The trauma confronted in the sweat lodge has enabled the writer to find a sense of identity beyond herself. She has come to an awakening in her perception of the world, and the trauma has allowed her to find herself as belong to a larger community that transcends time. She embraces her heritage and allows the historic trauma help define her in a positive way. She has reached a mental state where she is "wandering among spirits / among seeds that are thought, / are pure

feeling,” (98-100). This wandering through spirits of pure feeling to “a chanting, a song” (101), is strongly connected to Native American culture. The speaker is thus moving the search for identity into her cultural present and past, thereby calling upon the rich tradition of Native American culture found within song and chant. By calling on these culture modes of expression, she is, much like the presenting of poetry in English and writing, and the painting of the traditional dance, playing with the ambivalence that has been spoken of repeatedly in this chapter. Rather than being expressed in a traditional manner, the presentation of cultural expression is alluded to rather than presented and done so through the language and craft of the oppressor.

The poem ends with a whisper as the speaker indicates, from “far bck [sic] / from a cavern back” (102-103). The whisper says, “Grandfather, ‘I am home,’” (105-106) indicating the voice that has been fading in these last few stanzas is finally home. The idea of home is something that the speaker has been in search of for a great portion of the poem; thus, when the whisper comes while the speaker is wandering through her cultural history, it is evident she believes home and her identity reside in her culture’s history. This is a history filled with much trauma and violence, and the speaker is forced to confront this past in order to find her identity. This struggle is not unique to the speaker in this poem and is similar to the wandering in Coffee’s poems. The spiritual and emotion wandering within this poem, as the speaker strives to find her identity, is characteristic of abjection as an individual attempts to find his/her identity and home. Unlike many poems, the speaker within this poem is able to find her home, which is indicative of healing and the primary function of the sweat lodge.

Linda Hogan: Traumatic Figurative Language and the Reclaiming of a Divided Self

Thus far, traumatic figurative language has presented oppression against Native Americans in the form of battles of the past and by comparing the historic trauma to the oppression and pain that the speakers engage with at the present, which has generated the isolation and unhomeliness some Native Americans feel. By using images from the sweat lodge and the former prison Alcatraz, Blue Cloud was able to demonstrate a sense of empowerment by reclaiming culture and suggested that such reclaiming is beneficial to one's sense of self and overall identity. Linda Hogan was selected for this study because of her discussion of internal conflicts occurring within the mind of people born of different ethnicities who once warred with one another. This is another play of ambivalence that is an overarching theme among the three writers of this chapter. Her internal conflict, as shall be demonstrated, is also a call to resist the conformity with the oppressive culture and to create a stronger tie to her Native American heritage. Her poetry engages the difficulty a person may have with this cultural heritage, and her poems are able to articulate the stress and emotion tied to historic trauma by means of traumatic figurative language. In her poem "The Truth is," the speaker expresses her difficulty with identity as a war and strong distrust between the white and Indian inside her. The speaker identifies herself as partially Chickasaw and partially white in the first stanza stating,

In my left pocket a Chickasaw hand

rests on the hip bone of the pelvis.

In my right pocket

a white hand (1-4)

Although these lines appear to do little more than identify the ethnic heritage of the speaker, it is the second half of line 4 and line 5 that suggests the poem explores ideas surrounding the distrust of whites: “. . . Don’t worry. It’s mine / and not some thief’s” (4-5). These lines set up the speaker’s traumatic figurative language within the poem for a conflict to arise between the two identities. To recall DuBois idea of double conscious, it is evident that this theory is at play in Hogan’s poem. However, the speaker has a divided and ambivalent identity, not as much in her public self, but internally.

In the second stanza, the speaker continues to discuss the idea of belonging to two different races and mentions how she would desire harmony between the two, but such harmony seems impossible. In the first half of the stanza, she presents this hope for harmony stating,

About the hands, I’d like to say

I am a tree, grafted branches

bearing two kinds of fruit,

apricots maybe and pit cherries. (12-15)

This harmony between the races within the speaker is short lived; however, as the stanza continues,

The truth is

we are crowded together

and knock against each other at night.

We want amnesty. (17-19)

Clearly, the speaker is conflicted about her identity and the idea of harboring the history of two groups who warred against one another within herself. This is, as one might imagine, a result, at least partially, of historic trauma, which the speaker must confront when attempting to come to grips with her identity. The trauma is at least partially evident as she demonstrates the distrust for whites, even within her own identity.

The third stanza begins with the speaker addressing herself. This is only evident because the speaker addresses herself again in the fifth stanza. Because the speaker has already identified herself as having a divided existence by being partially white and partially Chickasaw, it should be of no surprise we find her talking to herself. The speaker states in this stanza,

Linda, girl, I keep telling you

this is nonsense

about who loved who

and who killed who. (20-23)

The speaker is trying to move beyond the traumatic history of clashes that existed between the two cultures that once fought and, in her familial history, loved one another. By speaking about the traumatic history, which is evident as the speaker states, “who killed who” (23) is “nonsense” (21), she is trying to minimize the specter of her history and the feelings she continues to

encounter based on this history. She is, in essence, telling the trauma in order to cope.

Furthermore, she is objectifying herself in the third person, which reinforces the idea of loss of identity. As such, we find an ambivalent sense of self who wishes to negotiate the complexities of a bifurcated identity divided between histories of oppressor and oppressed, while also having to face the legacy of trauma. This legacy is one in which her ancestors were both oppressor and oppressed, killer and killed, and she is forced to confront a history that is at constant odds, yet try to find singularity of self within this division. As such, even her sense of self is ambivalent and relegated to an objectified third person.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker refers to the “Civilian Conservation Corps” (25), which is significant, due to its importance in United States and Native American history. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was developed during the Franklin Roosevelt administration to help families earn additional (or an) income. A specialized division was created for Native Americans. This program was significant because Native Americans were given the same rate of pay as their white counterparts and they were given additional freedoms their white counterparts did not share. While whites were forced to live in the camps, Native Americans were given the freedom to return home from the camp, and special projects were set aside strictly to improve the reservations where many Native Americans lived. Although the inclusion of this program in the poem could be to illustrate an historic equality between Native Americans and whites, the speaker’s mention of the CCC is due to the negative impact felt by Native Americans when the program ended. Calvin W. Gower notes in his article, “The CCC Indian Division,” that “the demise of the CCC was a severe setback to the American Indian” (13). The reason for this setback resided in the economic position most Native Americans faced at that time. “CCC

payments, although small, did give poverty-stricken Indian employees and their families a financial boost when they probably needed it most” (Gower 13). What is perhaps equally important is the way the “CCC did not force the Indians to adjust to the white man’s way of living but instead—following the recommendations of Indian Service leaders—deliberately altered the organization, and program to harmonize with the ways of the reservation life” (Gower 13). In addition, it cannot be overlooked that, although whites and Native Americans were paid equally, they were still segregated. This was also the idea that many in the Red Power Movement, occurring many years later, wanted to embrace: equality in representation and treatment with a culture separate from the white oppressor.

As we return to the poem, the speaker describes herself as being

taped together

like some old Civilian Conservation Corps

passed by from the Great Depression

and my pockets are empty. (24-27)

The empty pockets harkens to the setback for post-CCC Native Americans, but is also significant in regards to the mention of pockets in the beginning of the poem that aid in the speaker’s identification of herself. To use reference to the CCC in a metaphorical fashion is to use the distress produced out of extreme poverty felt by Native Americans at that time and compare it to the stress of working through the adversarial identities as outlined by the speaker. The remainder of the stanza focuses on these pockets and says of them, “It’s just as well since they are masks /

for the soul, and since coins and keys / both have the sharp teeth of property” (28-30). By saying pockets are “masks / for the soul” (28-29), the speaker is referencing the idea for which the previous metaphor was being used to discuss identity because the “masks” used for the “soul” could be the identity and physical traits of the human body. The poem takes a turn as it references the idea of “coins and keys” (29) having “the sharp teeth of property” (30). The implication here is that property, identified as coins and keys, is dangerous and could harm the possessor because the question for property was key in the advancement of imperialism, capitalism, and the Native American oppression. Given the context of the previous lines of the stanza, one could read the lines as saying that in the past, wealth, or lack thereof, has had a traumatizing effect on Native Americans. If we take into consideration how nearly everything was taken from Native Americans historically, including the very land they lived on and their culture, the idea of property being dangerous resides in the idea that it can be taken away. This is evident in this stanza alone as the speaker discusses the CCC and the idea of the Great Depression, which affected people worldwide. The historical impact of loss, especially when we consider Hobfoll’s loss-of-resource model, has within the speaker an impact that stems from historical trauma and loss, thus creating anxiety about the idea of having possessions to begin with. To have possessions, therefore, is to be vulnerable to having them taken away, creating further anxiety and distress.

The fifth stanza begins in much the same way the third stanza begins, with the speaker addressing herself, but instead of addressing herself as “Linda,” as she did in line 20, she addresses herself as “girl” (31). She continues by saying, “it is dangerous to be a woman of two countries. / You’ve got your hands in the dark / of two empty pockets” (32-34). These lines

allow the speaker to present herself as having a divided identity. By doing so, she is then able to continue the traumatic figurative language in the lines that follow. She continues line 34 by saying,

Even though

you walk and whistle like you aren't afraid

you know which pocket the enemy lives in

and you remember how to fight. (34-37)

The speaker calls upon the violent past of whites and Native Americans in these lines by writing about fear, calling one pocket the enemy, and about the idea of knowing how to fight. These themes of fear and fighting are developed by the lines previous where she discusses her pockets and her divided identity. As the poem continues, the traumatic history becomes blatantly articulated in line 39 where she states, "And you remember who killed who." The stanza concludes with what could be identified as reoccurring nightmares, which often plague survivors of trauma event. The final two lines of this stanza read, "and there's that knocking at the door / in the middle of the night" (41-42). The implicature of the language suggests the knocking is a reoccurring thing. The speaker does not identify the knocking as a singular event, but she refers to it with the word "that," a demonstrative adjective which indicates repeated action. Because it happens in the "middle of the night" (42), because of the focus on hands as representative of identity and in connection with historic trauma, and because knocking is generated by hands, logic dictates that the knocking is a metaphor for reoccurring nightmares. The existence of these

nightmares in the speaker reinforces the traumatic figurative language by suggesting the existence of trauma manifesting itself in the nightmares is an allied and ancillary symptom of trauma.

As the poem concludes, the speaker tells herself, “Relax, there are other things to think about” (43), in order to move beyond the thoughts she has focused on throughout the poem. She moves her thoughts to

Shoes, for instance.

Now those are the true masks of the soul.

The left shoe

and the right one with its white foot. (44-47)

The speaker has brought us full circle in an attempt to demonstrate how, regardless of what is being thought of, the traces of historical trauma infect every aspect of the speaker’s life. She is unable to find “peace” because she is at war internally with her divided identity and the historical trauma that is associated with her Chickasaw self. The traumatic figurative language used to discuss this struggle helps the speaker show her audience how painful and troubling these aspects of her life are, and she is able to bring the historic past to the reader’s mind so one is forced to remember the past and see how it continues to affect people presently.

As demonstrated, Hogan uses traumatic figurative language and calls on historic elements of our past in order to discuss the difficulties many people with a multicultural heritage may face. By using traumatic figurative language, Hogan allows the reader to gain insight into how

heritages such as this can create difficulties for an individual attempting to formulate his/her own identity. Like much of the poetry of this chapter, Hogan's poem plays a great deal with ambiguity. It is evident that the speaker desires to make peace with the idea of having two cultural backgrounds. She discusses this desire in several locations within the poem, but continues returning to the inability to find the peace she yearns to have within herself. This is also indicative of a suppressed desire for resistance. After the speaker states she needs to think of more important things, the schism appears again when the speaker begins to talk of her feet. This demonstrates that the speaker is resisting the urge to resist; she refuses to answer her own call to supplant her white ancestral heritage and reclaim her Native American heritage. In the section that follows, we shall see how Hogan continues to examine identity and the difficulties that many face by using abjection and unhomeliness within the poem. Like *Blue Cloud*, some of Hogan's poems demonstrate abjection and unhomeliness through the use of travel and displacement while also demonstrating how some individuals choose to maintain their original cultural identities as they are being displaced while others attempt to discard their historic past.

Abjection and the Quest for Cultural Identity in the Poetry of Linda Hogan

As has been demonstrated, Hogan is able to use traumatic figurative language to represent historical trauma in her poetry. Although the utilization of traumatic figurative language is beneficial for presenting trauma, Hogan, like many other poets, is able to present trauma by other means. The final poem examined in this chapter, "Cities behind Glass," focuses on abjection and unhomeliness through the eyes of a woman wandering in a place, which remains unidentified. Nearly everything about the woman remains unsaid as she looks at the

world around her, which seems foreign and is filled with immigrants. As such, not only does the poem discuss the speaker seeing people who appear displaced, but the speaker feels displaced, as well. In addition, both she and the place remain without identity, which follows Fuchs's idea of abjection closely. What is most pronounced with the poem is the quest to reclaim and reestablish a cultural identity. Windows and glass play a key role as shall be seen through the examination of the poem and the quest to establish a cultural identity.

Travel is presented early in the poem as "entire families journey[ing] together, alone" (2). Although it is not clear whether these families are traveling for recreation or because of unhomeliness, we are shown, very early on, the idea of travel. This ambivalence is significant as we read the poem because, as the poem is a discussion of reclaiming or keeping one's heritage, the ambiguity of the families here demonstrates that this is a cross cultural problem. This ambiguity in travel is also significant because in these first lines we are looking at the families from behind glass. We see them as traveling, although we are not told why, thus their ambiguity also resides in their uncertainty of heritage, which will become evident later. As the poem continues, we see "Mothers open the sills and shake the old world / from lace tablecloths" (3-4). People are attempting to lose their original cultural identity by trying to "shake the old world / from their tablecloths" (3-4) with "old world" being a very loaded phrase associated with culture and heritage. The mothers try to discard this identity from an item, which is associated with a strong cultural element: food. This woman, like the people traveling in the streets, does not have this protective glass in front of them, which is metaphoric for the embracing of one's cultural identity.

As the poem continues, we see “Beneath flowered babushkas / immigrant women put[ting] their faith in city buses” (5-6). The speaker identifies the women wearing babushkas, a scarf worn primarily by older Russian women, as being immigrants, yet, unlike the women in the first stanza, these women still cling to their cultural heritage as evident by the resting of their heads, and babushka, against the glass. Besides, “Babushka” is not only head garment, but it is also an endearing term used for an old woman or grandmother. These women

take refuge behind glass,

lay their heads against windows.

Behind veined eyelids

they journey. (7-10)

Unlike the women of the previous stanza who discarded cultural connections by shaking the “old world” (3) from their tablecloths out of an open window, these women sit behind closed windows. Their heads, covered by babushkas, lie against the windows. In opposing stanzas, customs are first being interrupted: the tablecloths are having their cultural character effaced by being shaken in a window, and subsequently, the custom of the babushka is maintained by resting the cultural signifier against a closed window. These women, unlike the women of the first stanza, are traveling rather than residing in a home and are visibly tired. The women appear displaced because of how they maintain their cultural heritage and because of the travel that they are making. This suggests, in part, that maintaining one’s cultural heritage and resisting an oppressive culture has the potential to be a struggle and tiring, especially when one would be

considered an outsider and displaced. The images show elements of displacement and the difficulty some people face when they cling to their cultural heritage, which may be partially due to historical trauma as well as resistance against the oppressive culture. The actions of the women on the bus and the fact their eyelids are “veined” (9) demonstrate the distress they are encountering, especially given their age, regardless of where it stems. We cannot discount the fact these women are journeying as the speaker makes clear at the end of the stanza.

What is not clear is their destination. The first line of the third stanza states, “Brussels, perhaps, is their destination / where older women make lace” (11-12). Brussels is renowned for lace made by the old women who live there; therefore, it is an embedded custom for Belgians. Ironically, the Russian women may be put in a situation where their customs are yielded to that of others; the Russians, those of the “East” who are the “other,” will have their cultural customs assimilated into another set of “Western” customs with them being immigrants in a subaltern position, retaining the nineteenth century paradigm of the superiority of Western European culture. The women on the bus are not only old, but are going to work. The need to work at an older age, as the speaker imagines these women to be doing, would reflect further massive stressors in their lives, especially stress that refers to loss of resources, and this sentiment refers back to Hobfoll. In addition, it is important to note that these women cling to their cultural identity even though the work in a different culture and manufacture culturally crafted goods. Not only do these older women have to work, but they may not be well-paid for their labors. As a result, the stress is intensified.

The fourth stanza returns back to glass, which is the most significant symbol of the poem. The stanza begins by describing “panes of glass [that] are strapped / to the sides of a truck” (16-17). Glass, thus far, has been the symbolic locus of identity for the first two groups of women. The first had tossed her cultural heritage out the glassless window, and the second rests part of her cultural identity against the glass of a moving bus. This stanza reinforces the idea by saying of the glass strapped to the truck that “The world shows through / filled with people, with red horses, / making their departure between streets” (18-20). The glass acts as a mirror in this stanza and focuses on a horse, “Inside that slow horse flesh / behind blinders / the dark animals are running” (21-23). Because the speaker identifies the animals running “inside” the “slow horse flesh” (21) and “behind blinders” (22), we can understand these images as occurring within the horse’s mind, or rather, the speaker’s imagination of the operations of the horse’s mind. The slow moving horse desires to be elsewhere, and given these “red horses” (19) are described as “dark animals” (23), the speaker is suggesting the horse is depressed or maintains a negative mindset. The imagined mental escape for the horse resides in the desire to run, the opposite of its present situation. As the speaker continues, we see “shadow horses, / horses of light / running across American hills” (24-26). Thus, the speaker is showing the horse, as it is reflected through pane of glass, thinking about “running across American hills” (26). The horse is also dislocated as it desires to be back in America running through the hills where it once called home. The speaker sees the horse as maintaining its identity because it is reflected in the glass.

The horse, like the woman on the bus, is traveling for work, but their double identities are reflected in both in the glass and in their descriptions. Although this travel does pertain to their loci of identity, given the horse’s imagined thought of untamed American landscapes and the

Russian woman's babushka, these lines suggest more of a focus on unhomeliness through a forced or necessary removal rather than abjection. If we assume the horse to be in the streets of Europe at work, the horse might represent another double or triple layer of displacement as the wild American horses were descended from Spanish conquistadors' horses brought from Europe. The horses ultimately came from Arabia during the Islamic jihad, which began in the century after the Prophet Mohammed's death, whose caliphates ruled Spain for 600 years. Thus, there is a kind of double/triple displacement across generations with the horses compared to the multiple moves Native Americans were forced to make as treaty after treaty was broken and Nations were pushed and displaced repeatedly. The horse, or "workhorse," is displaced at the whim and need of the stronger force, man, just as the Native American is displaced and unhomed by the oppressor, the European.

Strong indications of abjection do not materialize until the last stanza. The speaker appears to be coping with unhomeliness, and she is also describing elements of abjection. She states, "Everything is foreign here. / No one sees me. / No one sees this woman walking city streets" (27-29). The speaker of the poem is experiencing a distorted world where everything is, as she says, "foreign" (27), and as she experiences this unhomeliness, she is "walking city streets" (29), which is very representative of Fuchs' definition. The world the speaker has described is also very fragmented and jumps from image to image, giving only brief examinations of each. We are unsure where the women on the bus are going, and we are not given the location of where the poem is taking place. What we are given is a movement from families who are journeying in the first stanza to the grandmothers in the second and third stanzas to the horse in the fourth and finally to the speaker herself. All are traveling, and none

appears to have a place to call home. The most telling line of the poem, which demonstrates that trauma is occurring, is when the speaker says, “No one sees the animals running inside my skin,” (30). The speaker is using this metaphor to identify the feeling of flight, which the speaker feels as she travels through a land where everything seems “foreign.” The speaker finishes the poem with threatening images such as the word “dark” in line 32. The darkness presented in “the deep forest” of line 31 makes the previous images more troubling and reinforces the feelings of massive stressors or trauma. She states in the final lines,

No one sees the animals running inside my skin,

the deep forest of southern trees,

the dark grandmothers looking out through my eyes,

taking it in, traveling still. (30-33)

By presenting the feelings in this manner, the speaker is able to use the previous images of the horse and women alongside her travels and her feelings of isolation, presented as no one seeing her, to produce a representation of trauma. The final two lines give the impression that the speaker has been traveling for a long time and does not appear to be stopping soon. Thus, the trauma the speaker is presenting is unresolved, and it is through this constant movement that she is able to cope. The displaced old women in babushkas and the horses stand in as metaphorical representations of the speaker’s plight, but they are also to exist behind the protective glass of cultural heritage.

Images, like those of travel, are brought to the reader's attention by their placement within the poem. Lines such as "where entire families journey together, alone" (2), "they journey" (10), "on the street" (15), and "running across American hills" (26) force the reader to focus on that particular image or idea because it comprises an entire line. This is unique to poetry because the poet has the ability to draw a reader's attention to images or ideas in this manner. Poets also have the ability to focus a reader's attention on certain words by their placement within the poem. In this poem, words such as "windows" (1 and 8) and "glass" (7) are placed at the end of the line to draw the reader's attention and reinforce the image of windows. More significant, however, are words like "alone" (2), "journey" (10), "destination" (11), "street" (15), "streets" (20 and 29), "running" (23), and "traveling still" (33) to reinforce the idea of travel within the poem. The reader is forced to pay special attention to these words, and one confronts the idea of travel within the poem because of the placement of these words. Many of the words are not only indicative of travel, but they are suggesting unhomeliness, which was echoed many times through the stanzas of the poem. Many in the poem are struggling with identity, like the women shaking the old world out of tablecloths, and many are dislocated from their homes.

The speaker is moving outside of the glass, and says that no one sees her and how things are foreign to her. Beneath her skin, like beneath the horse's blinders, there are animals running, and given the horse is said to be displaced from America, she may be as well. Her "dark grandmothers looking out through her eyes" (32) demonstrate a desire to reconnect with her cultural heritage. These ancestors are alive within her, thus she still has ties, yet she is able to find home within the world as she travels. This ambivalence is significant as the speaker knows of her ancestors, as, for her, they still reside inside her, yet she is also unable to find home within

her heritage in that she is both unhomed and unable to cling to or throw away a heritage as the other women in the poem do through the imagery that is presented. She is unseen, while the women discarding their heritage are witnessed, and symbols of their heritage are seen to be discarded while others are clung to in the form of their babushkas. What we see is, like in Hogan's other poem, an ambivalent attempt to resist cultural oppression and establish cultural ties to one's heritage, but restrained in "The Truth Is" and the inability to do so as evident with the invisibility of the speaker in this poem.

As discussed, Hogan uses the form of the poem, particularly lines and line breaks, to focus the reader's attention on specific images and ideas to bring forth the idea and experience of trauma. In addition, Hogan uses abjection and unhomeliness to show influence of massive stressors and trauma that individuals within the narrative of the poem may feel as they cope with displacement. These, as well as the use of traumatic figurative language, are common in poetry confronting and discussing trauma. The use of these techniques, although not unique to Hogan, are utilized very effectively and allow the reader to gain a greater insight into feelings of those who are enduring the affect of massive stressors and trauma. Hogan's poems, like others throughout this chapter, play with ambivalence. While *Blue Cloud* and *Coffee* push toward resistance of the oppressor, it is precisely in this resistance that we find the ambivalence in Hogan's poems. In "The Truth Is," the speaker wishes to make peace with the two cultural heritages that reside within her, but there is ambivalence in that, although she states she wants peace, she is unable to see beyond the struggle. As has been stated, she resists the resistance consciously, but appears to want to resist subconsciously. In "Cities Under Glass," the speaker's ambivalence resides in her need to find her cultural heritage, which is evident in her traveling,

yet her heritage is abundantly apparent as she discusses how her grandmothers look out her eyes. The searching that the speaker needs to undertake is internal rather than external.

Conclusion

As demonstrated, Coffee, Blue Cloud, and Hogan are able to use traumatic figurative language as well as abjection, isolation, and displacement within their poems in order to demonstrate and discuss trauma. Fuchs says about unhomeliness that “[m]igration, exile, and persecution all involve a loss of the connection with what one might call the ‘space of homeliness’, commonly considered the locus of identity.” The speakers in the travel narratives of these texts are more representative of a “blinded maze-walker whose experience of the world remains disorientating and fragmented” (Fuchs 1). Similarly, Fuchs defines abjection as being “misplaced, astray and without identity. Abjection is a terrifying borderline state which estranges the individual from all social relations. It is the stigma of the modern subject that cannot locate itself via another object” (4). To be abject is to be “othered” and to be without identity, which is a direct result of trauma. Abjection and unhomeliness are similar in that individuals are struggling with identity and travel in an attempt to find or regain identity or to escape the pain associated with trauma, which has influenced the identity they do or do not have.

Examples of ambivalence and the need to locate and adhere to one’s cultural heritage, as well as abjection and unhomeliness are found in many of the writings of these Native American writers. Coffee’s poem “Voices in the Water” presented a speaker and stranger turned companion who traveled with no clear destination in mind. Both traveled physically on a bus, and mentally as they drank alcohol while traveling. In the poem, the speaker states, “We rode the

bus / I could not see his face” (16-17). Because the speaker is unable to see Buffalohead’s face, his identity has been stripped. Abjection is reinforced by the next lines of the poem,

Tonight he said

We are

Voices in the water

Strangers in our land. (18-21)

The poem also plays with ambivalence in the duality of the alcohol being considered wine and the essential qualities of water played against the pharmakon of alcohol in sectors of Native American communities. Abjection and unhomeliness also apply to Blue Cloud’s speaker in the poem “Sweat Lodge-The Afterwards.” The speaker identifies herself as “nothing, / I am nothing, no body / nothing (61-63) and as “a seed in space / a blown and scattered thing / among stars” (65-67). The speaker and Buffalohead are strangers in their own land and speak of their own isolation, and the speaker of Blue Cloud’s poem is able to find community within her culture as she uses traditional practices in order to cope with historic trauma. Feelings of unhomeliness and abjection are repeated in Hogan’s poem “Cities behind Glass.” In Hogan’s poem, the speaker states, “Everything is foreign here. / No one sees me. / No one sees this woman walking city streets” (27-29). To the speaker everything is “foreign” (27), and unhomeliness becomes very apparent by the many people in the town that are seen as traveling. Even the horse in the poem yearns to return home. In each poem, the speakers demonstrate a feeling of isolation, difficulty with identity, and a sense of travel to leave or return to a place that is not always identified or maybe no longer exists. The ambivalence is resonant here in the

speaker's need to find her cultural identity via an outward search, yet it is from within that we can see her cultural heritage is already present through her grandmothers.

A second characteristic that demonstrates the manifestation of trauma in writing is the use of traumatic figurative language. Traumatic metaphors are used to articulate traumatic memories. Poets may use certain motifs or signifiers in order to recall or connote a trauma that has occurred in the past. By comparing a current event and/or personal event with a traumatic event that has significant ties to the past, the poet is demonstrating a form of traumatic memory by means of traumatic figurative language. Rather than directly telling of feelings or instances that are stressful, painful, or troubling, the poet will refer to charged images of the past in order to show this pain and connect to the past through metaphor. As has been discussed, Coffee presented Native American warriors of the past and the battles they faced in order to discuss current struggles with historic trauma that he faces. By using this metaphor, the speaker is able to express the distress and frustrations he currently feels and is able to bring forth images of the past, which is where the historical trauma stems. This image of the warrior is also a call of resistance against the oppressor. It is a call to rebellion and empowerment by the utilization of a figure well established in the Native American tradition. Blue Cloud is able to use traumatic figurative language in a similar manner in his poem "For Ace." The speaker in "For Ace" is coping with the death of a friend who painted, among other things, the image of ceremonial dancing. The speaker then begins dancing, a highly significant cultural element of the Native American heritage, with those in the painting and says that he danced "as a nation was slaughtered / and lay broken and bleeding" (71-72) and "among angered ghosts / who would not lie down gentle / to death" (74-76). The speaker is dancing with Native American historical

trauma in mind, is able to discuss the atrocities of the past, and compares it to the pain he now suffers for the loss of his friend. Blue Cloud is also able to present the idea of resistance in this poem, like Coffee, but does so by calling on the tradition of Native American dance. The dance is a reaction to racism that took the life of the speaker's friend, thus he dances to protest the racism, but also dances because his friend is now unable to do so. While the speakers in these poems used traumatic figurative language to draw the reader's attention to historical traumas, and use these metaphors to empower, other poets use traumatic figurative language to demonstrate difficulties with their identities.

Ambivalence resides in the idea of resistance in Hogan's poem "The Truth Is." The speaker discussed the difficulty she faces as someone whose heritage is both Native American and white. As the speaker discusses the two hands in her pockets, identifying one as white and the other as Chickasaw, and her distrust for whites is revealed as she says about the hand, "Don't worry. It's mine / and not some thief's" (4-5). The poem becomes more focused on traumatic figurative language by trying to convince herself later in the poem that "this is nonsense / about who loved who / and who killed who" (21-23). Her difficulty with identity is impacted greatly by the historical trauma that the speaker is reminded of on a daily basis. The speaker is thus ambivalent about resistance, wanting to move forward by resolving the dichotomy of her existence, but subconsciously desires to move toward and embrace her Native American heritage. Each poet discussed in this chapter, as well as the previous chapter, discusses the impact of massive stressors and trauma, either direct or historic, and presents these feelings in poetry by means of traumatic figurative language as well as abjection and unhomeliness. By utilizing these devices in their poems, the poets are able to demonstrate the existence of trauma

within the speaker and are also able to recall the historic past without stating either of these ideas directly.

The poetry of Coffee, Hogan, and Blue Cloud each engages massive stressors and trauma, but, much like the influence of massive stressors and trauma discussed in African American and Japanese American poetry, such distress and trauma stem, at least partially as a manifestation of racism. In some instances, as in the murder of Ace in Blue Cloud's poem "For Ace," racism led the death of the speaker's friend. The speaker connects the racisms that killed his friend to historical trauma that may have not only influenced Ace's killer due to commit the act out of hatred, but Ace has internalized the historical trauma as he presents it in his artwork. Coffee responds to historical trauma and racism that he still experiences in his life as he still considers whites to be the enemy in such poems as "In from the Cold," "No Other Way," "Warriors of Our Time," and the poem "Blood of a Warrior," which was analyzed earlier. Coffee's poem "Voices in the Water," also discuss the feelings of unhomeliness, which is influenced by racism as the speaker and Buffalohead do not feel at home even though the land that they travel is that of their ancestors, and the whites, who murdered their ancestors feel at home, even though they are the historical outsiders. Finally, Hogan engages the complexities of racism as they can exist within people who may have a well-defined ancestry deriving from multiple cultures. The speaker in Hogan's poem "The Truth Is" articulates these difficulties, compounded by the historically traumatic pasts, which divide an individual's identity between colonized and colonizer, and the confusion that can exist with such a dynamic heritage. Racism, as has been established, is the manifestation of historical trauma, felt by the formerly colonized

in the form of continued oppression, violence, and hatred by the former colonizer and the acceptance of white privilege.

Engagements with massive stressors and trauma within the poems of these Native American poets are accompanied with a call for resistance, similar to the poetry discussed in the previous chapter about the Black Arts Movement. The resistance in Coffee's poetry connects to the tenacity of the warrior. Coffee connects to the spirit of the warrior to urge resistance, but also to present this resistance in a symbol that is unique to Native American culture. Blue Cloud also urges resistance in his poetry, and, like Coffee, does so through ceremonial dance, which is another image vested in Native American culture. By engaging in a cultural dance, the speaker is pushing back against the racism that killed Ace, but he is also protesting against death by memorializing his friend and ancestors through movement. The resistance in Hogan's poetry is coupled with ambivalence, which is also common with each of the poets of this chapter. Hogan's poem "The Truth Is" is ambivalent in the speaker's desire to have peace within herself, but also the repetitive discussion of internal conflict within the heritage of the speaker. Because she is of both white and Chickasaw ancestry, she visualizes the two in a continual conflict. She states she desires the conflict to be resolved, but the end of the poem suggests that it never will. This is not only a poem of ambivalence, but one of resistance presented within the subconscious desire of the speaker. Ambivalence also plays a large role in some of Blue Cloud's poetry as we see the celebration of the taking over of Alcatraz, yet freedom is found in a landmark renown for incarceration. Ambivalence is possibly best exemplified in Robin Coffee's poetry. The ambivalence in water and alcohol, and the way the speaker and Buffalohead allow the wine to be a metaphor for water. Therefore, the wine takes on all the value of water, with its essential need

for life, but ambivalence exists in the reality that, for many, alcohol is what their life is based around, yet it is also the cause of destruction of life. The warriors in Coffee's poetry also take on a play of ambivalence as they are well regarded for their strength and tenacity, yet are also described as being pitted against unwinnable odds.

As noted, traces of ambivalence and resistance reside in the poetry of each of the poets discussed in this chapter. Such resistance is akin to that demonstrated in the previous chapter on African American poetry, and such resistance had long term positive political results. As noted, the events at Alcatraz Island set forth legislature that continues to benefit Native Americans. Reading poetry of Blue Cloud brings events like the occupation of Alcatraz to our attention, just as the poetry of Coffee reminds us that there is still much more to do in establishing equality. The resistance in each of the poets' writings challenges readers to cling to, and be proud of, his or her Native American ancestry if it is part of their heritage. Pride in one's heritage and ancestry is apparent in each of the poet's writing, not only in that of the Native American writers, but all poets of this study. This idea brings us back to ambivalence. Having pride within one's culture is very important, but doing so forces many to confront the traumas that have occurred in that culture's past. Therefore, to look back in order to learn about and embrace one's roots also means having to confront the atrocities that have occurred and recognizing that unresolved historical grief may be a part of learning about one's past. Although this is not obviously true for every person, examining trauma of any kind can be difficult and can bring distress to those that study the history of one's culture. However, ignoring one's past may be far more dangerous, for failing to remember where one comes from means the abandonment of one's history as well as one's culture.

ECHO: AN AFTERWORD

As the language may indicate, literary trauma theory borrows a great deal from postcolonial theory and has the ability to further the ideas of postcolonial thought by contributing to psychological aspects of the theory. Literary trauma theory is not reliant on postcolonial thought or subject matter as future endeavors of the theory can be applied to not only to other poets of these respective groups, but other groups that have incurred trauma and continue to incur trauma to this day. It should be evident that, while this study did examine African American, Japanese American, and Native American poetry, there are numerous poets from each culture whose work would readily lend itself to a literary trauma lens. One example well worth studying is the poetry of Yusef Komunyakaa as a poet who engages historical trauma within African American culture as well as direct trauma incurred during his time spent in the Vietnam War. Many speakers within Komunyakaa's poems discuss, not only the conflict and struggle with racism and African American historical trauma, but several poems, especially in his collection *Dien Cai Dau*, discuss what it means to be a black soldier in combat.

Further studies utilizing literary trauma theory would be quite beneficial for study in many different fields of literature from various communities. Poetry from the gay and lesbian community, like that of Frank O'Hara, Rafael Campo, and Adrienne Rich, would lend itself to the examination of literary trauma theory. Given the continued struggle for equality that the gay and lesbian community continue to endure, and the vile hatred that permeates the media and our culture, poetry dealing with massive stressors and trauma from direct exposure to violence and hatred will unfortunately continue for some time. Additionally, poetry from the Chicano/a and Latino/a communities, like that of Martin Espada, Gary Soto, Sonia Sanchez, Jimmy Santiago

Baca, and Lorna Dee Cervantes, would benefit greatly from the application of literary trauma theory. Given the long history of racism against Chicano/a and Latino/a Americans, poetry from this community would benefit, not only from examination of the poetry as it relates to historic trauma, but the currently anti-Mexican (and ultimately anti-Latino/a) climate the pervades the media and society is continuing the perpetuation of massive stressors and trauma associated with racism and hate.

Finally, a third community of poets that benefit from exploration using literary trauma theory is that of Arabic American writers. Poets such as Naomi Shihab Nye and other contemporary Arab American writers would be of great interest because of the post-9/11 racism against Muslims and Arab Americans. By no means does this discount the fact that anti-Arabic sentiments have permeated our culture for hundreds of years, but the influx of hatred driven by the response to 9/11 has greatly impacted the Arabic American community, and the writings that emanate from that community are and will be filled with both direct and historical trauma. Writings from nearly every culture and genre have the potential to be enriched by examination from literary trauma theory. As more texts are examined using the theory, more research needs to be conducted within the theory itself to keep literary trauma theory abreast with contemporary thoughts of psychological ideas of trauma. By doing so, our understanding of trauma may grow, and unlike psychoanalysis, which has fallen out of vogue, trauma theory may continue to grow as an approach to literature.

My contributions to literary trauma theory focuses in areas that have been neglected. Firstly, my focus resides more on poetry than prose. Although other studies have applied literary trauma theory to poetry, there needs to be more studies of this kind. Secondly, my study focused

on minority cultures that have been neglected. Although some studies have engaged African American literature with the application of literary trauma theory, there are relatively few that focus on Japanese American literature or Native American literature. Furthermore, when African American literature is examined through a literary trauma lens, very few discuss poetry. Thirdly, my study hopes to advance motifs inspired by contemporary psychology, by the use of theorists like Hobfoll and traumatic memory. Such endeavors have allowed me to lay the groundwork for the idea and examination of traumatic figurative language. This leads to the fourth contribution which is the use of poetic articulations of massive stressors. Although abjection, isolation, and unhomeliness are motifs discussed in literary studies, they are not prevalent in literary trauma theory. This study did not invent these terms or ideas, but their use in literary trauma theory, outside of isolation, is not common. Fifthly, this study examines the historical traumatic legacies that lead to massive stressors, which are coped with on a community level rather than individually. Finally, and related to this, is perhaps the most significant aspect of this study, which is the discussion of how the poems engage with historical trauma, distress, and massive stressors in order to empower people. In each of the groups examined in this study, poets from these groups used their poems to, not only engage with historical traumas and massive stressors, but did so in order to empower the people of that particular group. The poetry of African American and Native American poets is the best example of this engagement. Furthermore, current understandings of literary trauma theory do not engage revolution or the challenge of power structures as I have. As such, as work continues toward the advancement of literary trauma theory, we must understand that the reactions to the traumatic events and massive stressor

can result in revolutionary engagements with the oppressor's power structure as it exists both politically and artistically.

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