

## Postmodern Feminist Amnesia: De-centering Trauma and Re-defining Subalternity in Elizabeth Nunez's Bruised Hibiscus

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### Abstract

In most subaltern narratives, trauma occupies a central position. The subaltern consciousness is often limited to marginal spaces within the hegemonic agency of trauma inflictors. Gendered subalternity, ergo, imposes a further peripheral status for subaltern women. In *Bruised Hibiscus* (2000), Elizabeth Nunez promotes the voicing of the silent subaltern woman to step ahead of her traumatic confines. This article challenges the essentialized definitions of trauma and subalternity by subverting the totalizing enterprise of dominant centers and highlighting the 'slippage' between theory and practice. This movement from centers and back to centers grants the 'new' subaltern female characters in *Bruised Hibiscus* a re-locatable agency that heals neurosis through deliberate amnesiac and mnemonic practices both simultaneously and interchangeably. The women in the novel under study, Rosa and Zuela, become at once the victims and the perpetrators of trauma within a postmodern redefining and de-essentializing narrative of memory and forgetting.

**Keywords:** Trauma, New subalternity, Amnesia, Postmodernism, Elizabeth Nunez.

*Could forgetting then no longer be in every respect an enemy of memory, and could memory have to negotiate with forgetting, groping to find the right measure in its balance with forgetting? –Paul Ricoeur*

The third world woman, who is an African, a creole, an oriental, a native, a colonized, and a postcolonial, is most often brought into peripheral roles through the perpetuation of colonial consciousness even when the phase of colonialism has ended. There is an ongoing postcolonial discourse within the dialogue of cultural relations between the metropolis and its margin. The creation of these female/ colonized margins is not totally based on the exclusion of the masculine/ colonizer centers, for without a process of inclusion, the pleasure of being central, hegemonic, and dominant, loses its value and the same goes for the peripheral beings coming into centers; the other is included and that is how the other is marginalized—that is how the other is fought against. The margin, however, has long been associated with being non-European, third world. The center is always European, first world. Between the first world nucleus and the third world edge lurks a confused semi-central-semi-peripheral world that

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lacks a solid locality; it is neither superior nor inferior, yet it is both central and marginal relatively and ironically.

The subaltern woman is often condemned to silence as she occupies a liminal space in between 'past' trauma and 'present' suffering. Silence becomes the only echo of the disfigured and displaced lower-class woman. Gendered subalternity, like any other subalternity, puts women on the forefront of the postcolonial discourse. Trauma, being the most apparent motive behind subaltern narratives, gives oppressed women an unprecedented agency to transcend male-hegemony together with the societal and global hegemonies that reinforce the inconsequential position that women occupy.

In her "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak stresses the relation between subaltern studies and feminist theory. "Today the 'subaltern' must be rethought. S/he is no longer cut off from lines of access to the center" (Chaturvedi 2000, 326). The subaltern is relocated and the power balance is revised. Spivak calls for 'un pas au-delà' as regards the subaltern consciousness. She calls for a narrative of consciousness and an attempt 'to learn from below' (Chaturvedi 2000, 334).

Spivak revisits Louis Althusser's ideals of power, desire and subjectivity and concludes that submission and subalternity are reproduced in the same way the power balance is reproduced. The relocation of the subaltern necessitates the relocation of the hegemonic power. In her reviewed version of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak deals long with the catachresis that dominates the theory enterprise. In her critique of Marxist, Foucauldian, and Deleuzian thought, she insists on the 'constitutive contradiction' and the double standards within every train of thought. Spivak states that the "unrecognized contradiction within a position that valorizes the concrete experience of the oppressed, while being so uncritical about the historical role of the intellectual is maintained by a verbal slippage." (Morris 2010, 28) This slippage, according to Spivak, happens when the signifiers are not well defined and left to be found and defined by themselves.

This kind of slippage actually leads to another aporia within practice and theorizing, that of a non-totalizing concept turning into a totalizing one. The laborious work of moving away from the oppressing center often leads to an identical practice to that of the hegemonic powers, an imitation that perpetuates the initial 'totalization' instead of escaping it and/or subverting it.

As far as Ghiles Deleuze is concerned, Spivak reflects on his ideas regarding actions and representation and the power of action whether in theory or in practice as regards the signifier (Morris 2010, 28). The signifier, or the subject, is the subaltern woman as far as this study is concerned. Thus, the growing schism between theory and practice enlarges further the ambiguity surrounding the signifier—the female subaltern in this case. Spivak locates the subaltern's space of 'speaking, acting, and knowing for oneself' beyond all the power paradigms imposed both by theory and practice because the subaltern is defined to be in a position of silence and powerlessness where they can only be spoken for or spoken on behalf of them.

For Spivak, class consciousness "remains with the feeling of community that belongs to national links and political organizations, not with that other feeling of community whose structural model is the family" (Morris 2010, 31). This shows the undeniable role class divisions play on the overall subaltern position and the subaltern subject's community and belonging to a certain class, which is the definite

class of silence and powerlessness. This feeling that class engenders creates a communal consciousness and a certain type of collective consciousness and a background for essentialist definition. Subalterns belong together. Subalterns' class consciousness is presumed to be necessarily a unified one. It is the 'Other' of the Hegemonic class.

Within this very subaltern class and class consciousness, there is gendered subalternity which is an ideological construction within both the endless and ever-surviving colonial discourse and the unceasing local patriarchal discourses. A woman desirous of an identity and a voice is therefore subjected and/or subjects herself to what Spivak calls a "contestatory replacement"—which calls for a "radical practice" in dealing with the "totalizing concepts of power and desire" (Morris 2010, 33). Spivak further elaborates:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world-woman" caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development (Morris 2010, 61).

This unfixed position and the flexible ricocheting from one status to another makes the signifier of the subaltern woman hard to locate. This impossibility of locating the gendered subaltern as a fixed subject gives her a re-locatable agency which fulfills or at least undeceives the interest subaltern women have long desired. On the flexibility and ever-deferred totality regarding gender, Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity* (1999), elaborates:

Gender is a complexity, whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure (22).

This would entail the letting go of ontological and historical definitions of feminine identity. Such a letting go of essentialist definitions runs the risk of losing authorial dominance for a new masked subjective identity. Such ideological preferences proclaiming the death of the author are mainly determined within the discourses of Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes –within the indeterminate field of postmodernity. Many feminist critics, however, object to the full application of such views on the feminist discourse arguing that the feminine authorial identity is closely linked to gendered, racial, and class divisions, and thus make it impossible to disembodiment the feminine texts from the female body of identity.

If a sort of agreement is sought in relating postmodernism to feminism, then that relation would be one of alteration and perpetuation. In the same way feminism extends through postmodern theorizing, it is negated by postmodernism's neglecting of the discourses of violence—something that would bring feminism from 'somewhere' to 'now-where'. The postmodern heavy aesthetic experimentation undoes many of feminism's constants that require a touch of humanist essentialism. Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wicke in their article "Feminism and Postmodernism; or, the Way we Live Now", describe the

two movements as discourses on the move “ready to leap over borders and confound boundaries” (*Boundary* 1992, 2). This shows the overlapping relation between feminism and postmodernism as they can be affirmed and at the same time negated by each other.

Within postmodernism’s de-essentializing inclusiveness, the ‘new’ subaltern woman is no longer concerned with resisting subalternity for she is equipped with more powerful tools that allow her to escape any labels attached to her being and to reject domination. Elizabeth Nunez is one of the postmodern Caribbean female writers who prove that subalternity can be transcended and that trauma can be de-romanticized. Through de-centering trauma and using a mnemonic/amnesiac narratives and altering the weight of class, race, and gender, Nunez, in her book *Bruised Hibiscus* (2000) pictures childhood trauma/ amnesia, rape/sex, and the home/exile, wife/daughter, black/white clichéd binarities into a new discourse of possibility and healing. Moving the center away from the ‘Western’ subject toward subaltern dislocated non-Western, non-white, non-male subjects makes it even harder to locate trauma as it is hard to locate the subject in the first place.

Trauma is beyond physical injury. It unearths past inflictions and inflicts future wounds. The wound of the mind is far more corrosive than that of the body for the body heals, but the mind does not. The mind works its injuries both in retrospective and circumspective ways. Trauma has a recurrent capacity in the ‘now’, the ‘before’, and the ‘after’. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud explains how traumatic neuroses are in some cases characterized and triggered by factors of fright and surprise and are in other cases, in themselves, working agents against the development of new neuroses (Freud 1961, 5). In major traumatic neuroses, the victims have a certain fixation on their trauma. A series of reminiscences and repetitions of the moments when trauma happened bring the repressed feelings and materials into the present moments as a freshly happening contemporary experience rather than something that happened in the past (Freud 1961, 12).

Freud further clarifies how most of the reproductions of the past traumas are unwished for and disturbing in that the infantile repressed sexual complexes occupy some portion in the current neuroses. The Oedipus complex plays a major role in perpetuating past traumas through the creation or the replacement of an already existing trauma by a “fresh transference neurosis” (Freud 1961, 1). Between the remembered trauma and the reproduced neurosis, the traumatized subject suffers as they try to find their way out of the neurosis trap. In *Bruised Hibiscus* (2000), Elizabeth Nunez brings to the surface a deeply buried trauma from the infantile lives of two female characters: Rosa and Zuela. The two grown women, in the present time of narration, have both witnessed some terrible event as they were kids playing together. What is more is the sexual nature of the traumatic event as they both notice some other girl of the same age as themselves being raped behind a hibiscus bush. The two girls have committed themselves to secrecy and to the total burial of the traumatic brutal act in their memories until one day the forgotten trauma is awakened by some other brutal news that have brought back to life everything that was once dead and forgotten.

The way the forgotten past is remembered by the two characters is quite tricky and delicate as this remembrance happens simultaneously to both of them even when they have submitted their consciousness to amnesia and have never seen each other since the day of the tragic raping scene they both witnessed.

Freud contends that the re-experiencing of the past inflictions should be done with certain aloofness so the forgotten past does not reappear in the form of a present reality (Freud 1961, 13). The two characters' memories, however, bring back the past in the form of a freshly happening event that recurs throughout their minds ceaselessly opening and reopening closed wounds continually. A transference neurosis brings back the past in the present life of the two characters and makes the future seem more like a continuation of the recurring trauma. Healing, however, requires keeping the transference neurosis within its narrowest limits forcing as much as possible into memory and allowing as little as possible into repetition (Freud 1961, 13).

In their book, *Narrating Our Healing* (2007) Chris N van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela employ Dominick La Capra's model distinguishing between two types of traumas: historical and structural. Historical trauma entails the shattering of a peaceful framework; one major event destroys the course of events and troubles its subject's life turning it into pre and post trauma dependent. As for structural trauma, it is more of a repeated pattern of action; a harmful framework of repeated traumas turn into a lifestyle for the victim (11).

In *Bruised Hibiscus* (2000), Zuela's trauma is structurally re-enacted and reactivated for multiple times because unlike Rosa who enjoyed a normal childhood, Zuela is a 'woman-child'. Zuela is a dislocated child, both from her homeland, Venezuela, and her childhood. She is the child wife of an aging Chinese man. She has lived and relived the raping scene both visually and physically. Zuela's mind is used to taking breaks from reality to live some moments of peace, free of the traumatic reality she endures. The raping scene is Zuela's constant reality. When her husband once travelled and left her for a little while, Zuela's imagination brought her back to being a child again. But once her husband came back, the doubling process ends and Zuela gets back to reality. Zuela induces amnesia to escape the painful reality:

She made herself forget those days with Rosa when she had been a girl again, for to remember them and to know at the same time that there was no escape from the Chinaman's prison was torture far more worse than if she had never known such happiness (Nunez 2000, 69).

In *Who Sings the Nation-State*, Judith Butler stresses the importance of differentiating between imposed 'placelessness', which is "an extreme form of dispossession" and deliberate protocols of power outside of the original state barriers. (Butler and Spivak 2007, 9) Zuela who is taken away from Venezuela and imprisoned in a garage behind her husband's shop is therefore displaced and dislocated. She is condemned to a state of destitution and dependence from which it is hard to escape. Her husband acts like a 'sovereign power'. She becomes his property; his house and rules are her only territory. She inhabits a state of forced statelessness, placelessness, namelessness, and for quite some time a state of amnesiac forgetfulness. Zuela has no name. People call her 'Daughter' and then her husband further cut her off from any roots she once had by taking the last part of her original state 'Venezuela' and using it as her name: Zuela.

Forgetting, according to Paul Ricoeur, is a 'lacuna', a defect, and a weakness that memory struggles against to regain some of its reliability (Ricoeur 2004, 432). Remembering is having images from the past. These images are those impressions caused by lived events that remain in one's mind (Ricoeur 1984, 7). Forgetting is either an effacing of traces or keeping a backup copy of traces. Remembering is 'the presence of the absent', which Ricoeur considers as one authentic aporia of memories and a sort of a riddle within imagination and memory (Ricoeur 1984, 8). In her discussion on Paul Ricoeur's dialogue of memory, identity, and forgetting, Maria Duffy asserts that the suppression of painful memories helps victims in dealing with their past traumas. Duffy reflects on the role that fear plays in the process of remembering. Thus, healing is only possible when certain reconciliation with the past is achieved (Duffy 2009, 2).

Paul Ricoeur makes a notable division between the concordant and discordant personal and narrative identity. In *Oneself as Another* (1992), Ricoeur devises an ontological typology of the person, and thus, identity is divided into *idem* (sameness/*mêmeté*) and *ipse* (selfhood/*ipsiété*) (116). The identity of the 'self' and the identity of the 'same' "overlap and even dissociate entirely from one another, bringing in a sense the selfhood of the self, severed from its base in sameness (Ricoeur 1992, 123). Within the same conversation on the sameness of character as opposed to the constancy of the self, Ricoeur defines an "interval of sense" which has to be filled with 'narrative identity'. This space between 'permanence' and 'constancy' is conditioned by "a lower limit, where permanence in time expresses the confusion of *idem* and *ipse*; and an upper limit, where the *ipse* poses the question of its identity without the aid and support of the *idem* (Ricoeur 1992, 124). Selfhood has properties of permanence and change. These constants and variables allow the flexible and non-totalizing character of the female identity. Ergo, the characters' otherness is never fixed within a static pattern; it rather takes a mobile character that re-defines their subalternity.

In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Julia Kristeva treats otherness in terms of strangeness and foreignness. An important part of Kristeva's study employs Freud's notion of the 'uncanny strangeness', which eventually leads her to conclude that any strangeness or foreignness one feels or experiences is a strangeness to oneself from one's own unconscious. Kristeva affirms that the "foreigner is neither a race nor a nation" (Kristeva 1991, 181). This depersonalization is explicated by Freud in terms of 'anguish', 'shock' and extreme unease. Kristeva defines this effect of uncanniness as "a deconstruction of the self that may either remain as a psychotic symptom or fit in as an opening toward the new" (Kristeva 1991, 188). In fact, Rosa heads toward self-destruction, while Zuela gets the chance to start her life over.

Kristeva explains the play of depersonalization and deconstruction as a mechanism that "takes up again our infantile desires and fears of the other—the other of death, the other of woman, the other of uncontrollable drive" (Kristeva 1991, 191). Thus, being foreign to oneself makes being foreign to the other more bearable as it equips the self with the faculty of recreating its structure and of filling the gaps with and against various interpellations. The flexible making and unmaking of the self within both *idem* and *ipse* would enhance the woman's status as a self-sufficient sovereign subject and thus would redefine the essentialist subaltern definitions of women coming from low class placelessness. The challenge to

gain the renewed placeness that the postmodern discursive practice allows is actually at the heart of feminist postmodernism.

*Bruised Hibiscus's* narrative is ironic for its excessive traumatic nature. All characters without exception go through some extreme traumatic events that render them fragile to renewed traumatic neuroses at any given moment. The Chinese man, Zuela's husband, has witnessed the death of his wife and daughter and seen their blood in front of his eyes without doing anything about it. He uses both opium and Zuela as amnesiac substitutes against the bursts of memories. Zuela becomes both the wife and the child to an oppressive opiated old man escaping his guilty conscience because "he needed opium to chase away the guilt that hounded him like a vengeful tyrant since that night he crawled on his belly, sliding through pools of congealed blood that trickled from the veins of the decapitated necks of his wife and daughter" (Nunez 2000, 64).

Zuela relives her trauma every night and condemns it to forgetting as a survival technique. Her witnessing the raping scene was only a reminder that broke through the shield of her defensive temporary morphine-like forgetting. The raping scene has confirmed and engraved the trauma of childhood loss that Zuela has lived but had not realized until she beheld an act similar to the one she was subjugated to every other night. Zuela who has the body of a child and the sad eyes of a woman laughs at the raping scene and says: "That is nothing. I see that already. China man do that to me already" (Nunez 2000, 41).

Rosa's encounter with the raping act can be classified within the 'historical' pattern of trauma (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 2007, 11). Contrary to Zuela, Rosa sees the sexual abuse for the first time, which distorts her understanding of the entire act. It creates another kind of a traumatic repressed neurosis in that Rosa's sexual urge gets heightened as she interprets the raping event as something fascinating she should aim for. Yet at the same time, Rosa erases the scene from memory because she realizes that it is something a child her age is not supposed to see. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur reflects on the possibility of false judgment as knowledge based on personal perceptions, which could be misleading (Ricoeur 2004, 8). In the novel under study, Rosa misunderstands the raping scene and interprets it in ways different than the truth. Rosa sees the red lipstick and the pearls of the girl being raped and associates them with beauty and attractiveness. The scene is confusing to Rosa; it leaves her with a guilty shame neurosis once she hears the same words of the rapist uttered by her husband, Cedric.

The renewed neurosis has replaced feelings of lust and power Rosa has long associated with the little girl's string of pearls and her seamless face while the rapist commanded her to beg him. Cedric said the same words and "memory threatened to surface through his words: Beg. Beg. You like it so. Beg" (Nunez 2000, 22). Rosa's husband is himself a character who suffers from past traumas and who tries hard to cover up for his black skin insecurity by inflicting pain on his white skinned wife. Cedric tries to bury deep down in memory the truth about his father's obscene adventures and homosexual affair with his wife's father who was one of the white masters in Trinidad.

Trauma's temporality and spatiality are hard to locate as their continuity is broken by the traumatic instance. Trauma is not locatable as it is "re-ignited, re-experienced, in various forms, through unwitting recurrences in the present, thus blurring the boundary between "then" and "now" (Jelaca 2016, 5). Going

back to Ricoeur's theorizing on memory, he sets forward two types of traces: 'mnestic traces' and 'physical traces'. The mnestic traces are the material substratum and the underlying and often dormant pieces in the mind. The physical traces are those left by the actual experience, which is the "pre-representative dimension of living experience" (Ricoeur 2004, 438). These two traces are interrelated as the physical trace necessarily leaves behind a mnestic one. Zuela's experience is a constant overlapping of both mnestic and physical traces. Rosa, however, keeps living the quasi-mnestic trace of what she has once witnessed until she finally endures the materialization of the physical trace through the double rape she submits: once by her husband, and second by a gang of black men.

Rosa, the woman, is raped in the same way that little girl was once raped, except that she is raped by a gang of black men instead of a white man. After discovering that she is not entirely white and that she is the creole daughter and the result of her mother's affair with a Trinidadian man, Rosa embraces her black blood and ventures to appear in all her skin whiteness in the madding rioting black district of Laventille. The most striking irony in the novel is that at the moment Rosa welcomes her subaltern status the black men refute their subalternity against her whiteness. Rosa is raped, kidnapped, and murdered in an image that re-invokes the book's beginning and the news that brought back Rosa and Zuela's memories back from denial. The scene is described as follows:

A woman's head, her face protruding from the brown burlap coconut bag, gnawed open perhaps by the very fish that had nibbled away her eyes, lips and tongue, before trying to make their way past the stranglehold of the cord that secured the rest of the body hidden in the bag (Nunez 2000, 5).

The accident was strong enough to break through the amnesiac shields that both Rosa and Zuela employed to protect themselves from the displeasure of recalling the traumatic event they both witnessed as children. Rosa, the white woman, who in all her superiority of breed and position fails at emerging alive from the healing process that remembering entails. Rosa's so called perfect marriage turns out to be a trap and a revengeful well-planned act by her husband who ignores the truth about her race. Cedric marries Rosa thinking that she is white from both sides aiming to heal his maimed memory of a child seeing his father being sexually used and abused by Rosa's father, the white British master, and then left to lose his mind and commit suicide.

The accident that revives the memories of both women simultaneously is spread through rumors and the traditional Trinidadian rumormongers' tactics. The rumors carry the news together with some overriding and valid explications that people shape to their liking. The most valid tale behind the woman who had her heart removed and then thrown in the ocean is one that is aligned into the category of "crime *passionel*" by the most educated like Cedric, or what is known as "man-woman business" by the illiterate like Chinaman. The male characters consider the accident from the view point of a man who needs to clear his honor by murdering a cheating wife. The women, however, would define "man-woman" business by the possibility of ending their husbands' lives for all the good reasons there could be. Zuela actually plans the death of her husband:

She had never thought of murder. The seed the Chinaman jarred out of its quiet place was not bred out of thoughts of murder. Of death, yes, but not of brutality. Of

wishing he would no longer be there to torment her. But then, at that moment when the slits that were his eyes narrowed to a silver of black light, and spit jettisoned from between his teeth, stained from years of tobacco smoke and much, much more, she conceived it: his murder. The Chinaman's murder. Man-woman business (Nunez 2000, 10).

The irony lies in that both women could use the power of poison to murder their husbands. Zuela actually carries out her plan until the end and uses the opium smoke to choke her husband and end his life after he rapes her eldest daughter. Rosa equally studies the possibility of ending Cedric's life, yet she acts under what Freud calls, in *Totem and Taboo* (2004), the "obsessional prohibitions" against obsessive neuroses. Rosa prays for the death of her husband and cannot wait to get rid of him; however, she acts against her will in a total obsessive manner to prevent his death. She is torn between her deepest desires of freedom and the guilt that sin throws into her unconscious mind. In addition to these death wishes for her husband, Rosa is obsessed with sexuality and is also tormented by the guilt her desires ignite. She confesses her sins at church, and she prays for 'our Lady of Fatima' to ease her soul's malady.

Rosa undergoes the sublimation effect, which is also fully explicated by Lacan who in *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1992) deals with the problem of sublimation. Sublimation is akin to the chemical change in the status of substances; it is mainly, in Freud's terms, the directing of sexual impulses and instinctive drives into a more or less socially acceptable deeds. Lacan states that "Sublimation is, in effect, the other side of the research that Freud pioneered into the roots of ethical feeling, insofar as it imposes itself in the form of prohibitions, of the moral conscience (Lacan 1992, 87). In *Bruised Hibiscus*, Rosa is not the only character who goes through the pains of sublimation. Her husband, Cedric, equally fights hard to tame his complexes about belonging to the subaltern primitive world by obsessively studying languages and straining to join the social elite of the intelligentsia. Cedric tries to alter his inferior and revenge-driven position by degrading his wife. Rosa who is ignorant of her middle name's significance is actually used by her husband as part of his revenge plan.

Rosa's middle name is Nympha, which is derived from nymphomaniac meaning a "woman with an inordinate sexual desire for a man" (Nunez 2000, 131). Part of the superstitious practices in Trinidad is to believe that one's namesake would dictate one's 'drive'. Rosa actually becomes the nympha who is "mad for black meat" (124). Cedric had actually followed the discursive power the sign nympha had over Rosa's narrative of the self. Rosa has become the nympha through her heightened sexuality that made her the easiest of preys to a neurotic husband.

In fact, sublimation is operative on many levels in the novel. The Chinaman tries to experiment with an individual sublimation in that he uses Zuela as a surrogate wife and daughter to quench his unappeased desire for his late daughter and wife. He forces a child to play the role of a child-woman under the use of opium to fight the neurosis that keeps emanating from his obsessive actions and blocked prohibitions; "a daughter and wife who had become so indistinguishable for him in that pool of blood he left behind in China, that when he thought of one, he thought of the other" (Nunez 2000, 82). The Chinaman doesn't

realize his actions and proceeds with the full legitimacy that his being 'sovereign' allows him. Lacan explains the different parameters of sublimation as follows:

Sublimation is represented as distinct from that economy of substitution in which the repressed drive is usually satisfied. A symptom is the return by means of signifying substitution of that which is at the end of the drive in the form of an aim. It is here that the function of the signifier takes on its full meaning, for it is impossible without reference to that function to distinguish the return of the repressed from sublimation as a potential mode of satisfaction of the drive (Miller 992, 110).

The substitution here works in the same parameters of Jacques Derrida's supplementation. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" Derrida states that the "presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain" (Derrida 1970, 12). This is similar to the dynamics of sublimation through which the presence of a new element or drive can lead to the substitution of the old drive that most probably is not congruent with the social order or one that causes an obsessive neurosis. Supplementation doesn't mean total absence of centers and so does sublimation; the drives might always be stored somewhere within memories.

Rosa's 'rememberings' and encounters with the traumatic past events only cause more damage. Rosa has never understood the fatality and the immorality of that raping scene she once witnessed until she herself was submitted to the raping and silently called for a 'mother'. "*Mother*, she had whispered, when he told her to beg. *Beg, say you want it now*. But she said *Mother* again and he had to crash his fist into her temple to quiet her" (Nunez 2000, 277).

The narrative stresses the absence of a mother in relation to the presence of trauma. Both Rosa and Zuela lacked a physical mother figure. Rosa's mother, the white British lady, was present and alive, yet she never cared for her daughter who was the illegitimate child of a black man. Zuela's mother, however, is only present in her childhood memories. Zuela was taken from her mother and given to 'Chinaman'. She never blames her mother. She rather retreats to the memory site where she has long placed her mother along with good memories and finds relief in the limited words and moments she recalls having with her mother.

In *Hatred and Forgiveness* (2010), Kristeva explains the "internalization of the absence of the mother" (181) and the ensuing oedipal triangle (Mother/father/child). The absence of the mother is supplemented by her "répresantance/representation of the dramas of the oedipal" (Kristeva 2010, 181). This explains the incestuous-like relationship of Zuela with her husband. Zuela's mother is dead and her real father sold her as a sex-object to a new father-abuser figure. As for Rosa, her mother's rejection of her 'black blood' origin leaves her with a psychic neurosis in the absence of both the mother and the father. Rosa seeks the erotic pleasure in a black man, in an unconscious search for her black father.

Zuela's constant exposure to trauma in all shapes makes her strong enough against the breaking of the amnesiac shields of her mind. Zuela takes healing to another level because she is a mother herself, a loving one who wants to survive and to save her children. She fails at protecting her eldest daughter who gets raped by her father, Chinaman, when Zuela is absent—a threat of the perpetuation of the neurosis. As

a result, Zuela ends her husband's life and takes all his money. Zuela moves out and gives her children a proper life and a fresh atmosphere for healing.

Zuela subverts her subaltern position by remorselessly murdering the man who subjugated her all along. The writer gives the character the full right and legitimacy to kill the abuser without judicial responsibility, offering Zuela the possibility of a fresh start. Here, the death of the abuser is presented as the only fair and definite route for healing. The incestuous father preys on his children and the mother kills him out of necessity to destroy the center of the neurosis and save her children. Zuela alters the power paradigm and moves from the 'servant', 'wife', 'daughter', nameless woman to the status of a sovereign mother in the new property—her newly owned house, "a pretty blue house where red roses climbed a white trellis a few feet behind a white picket fence" (*Bruised* 281).

Another mother figure that comes associated with love and care is Mary Christophe, the woman with the butterfly on her face. Mary Christophe is Rosa's Trinidadian caretaker who gets fired once she gets a serious illness that leaves a wolf shaped mark on her face which made everyone disgusted with her. The time spent with Mary Christophe is also erased from Rosa and Zuela's memories until she finally gets restored back to remembrance.

The break with Mary Christophe has also been a part of Rosa's attempts at forgetting. Once memory breaks free, Mary Christophe is remembered and called upon to use her 'Obeah' knowledge in healing Rosa's fresh trauma after she gets gang raped. Mary Christophe resorts to the "restorative power of forgetting that allows us humans to erase that which we cannot allow ourselves to remember" (Nunez 2000, 246). Mary Christophe, a subaltern black woman saves Rosa the new subaltern white skinned woman. She fails, however, at saving Rosa further from the man who still wanted to kill her. Rosa gets kidnapped, murdered, and then thrown by the beach. Rosa's death mirrors the accident that revives memory. The narrator states that: "She was the same kind of woman—a white woman, though not a true, true white woman" (Nunez 2000, 279).

Rosa, and despite her willing acceptance of the black blood's second position in society, remains in the eyes of the black community and her husband's a white skinned powerful sovereign who can defy and subjugate her black counterparts. When Rosa closes her eyes and opens them in defiance to her rapists, when she throws up on her husband, and when she remains calm during the raping instance, she infuriates the already enraged black men who wanted to revenge their subaltern position through Rosa. She denies them the pleasure of inflicting pain and projecting their complexes and wounds on her. They, however, fall victims to her superiority as she engraves their wounded psyches' and inflicts more pain upon their injured subalternity. They are reduced to the status of animalistic failures while she remains defiant and powerful. The gang of black men has no centrality even after one of them murders Rosa and dismembers her body; Rosa makes it to the headlines of newspapers while they sink deeper into the dirt of Laventille, marginal as ever.

The use of amnesiac properties Obeah and spirituality occupy a large space within the novel. The characters believe in the overriding power of the spirits. The religious side with the pilgrimage to 'Our lady Of Fatima' shrine, the church, and the character's prayers bring to the forefront this spiritual aspect

of the novel. The sacred obeah is paramount to the lives of Trinidadians. One character, a Scotch doctor, explains: “the spirit could heal the body, or, under different circumstances destroy it, regardless of the most potent interventions of the Western World” (Nunez 2000, 119). This draws on the animistic side that Freud explains in full in *Totem and Taboo*. Freud quotes Wundt’s declaration on animistic ideas in that they are “the necessary psychological product of a mythopoeic imagination” (qtd in Freud 2004, 89). Animism is at the heart of the mysterious and mystical practices of Obeah. Cedric goes to the hospital with a terminal tumor in his stomach only to be healed by the curative powers of Obeah:

It was because she had put the obeahman’s mojo bag under his mattress, his mother told him, but he did not believe her, no more than he credited his recovery now to the candles Rosa has burned to Our Lady. Not that he doubted the efficacy of either. He had never had that much courage that would tempt him to reject beliefs that had been fused into myths in his subconscious, and the subconscious of every man whose childhood was forged, like his in those villages where the sea taught respect for the inexplicable (Nunez 2000, 193).

The Chinaman would agree that Caribbean magic “could lead a man like a beast on a leash to that nothingness, knowing well where he went” (Nunez 200, 85). Freud makes a distinction between sorcery and magic. He defines sorcery as the “the art of influencing spirits” and thus making them work under the power of men while magic “disregards spirits and makes use of special procedures and not of everyday psychological methods” (Freud 2004, 91). Both methods, however, play on the animistic thinking. As far as Obeah is concerned, many obeah practitioners and believers refuse to classify it as a sorcerous act. It is rather conceived of as a protective and curative power with the magic of its potions and mojo bags. Obeah gives the female characters some further agency against their dominant male counterparts by helping them heal and forget.

In *Bruised Hibiscus*, trauma is easy to detect but hard to locate as it lacks a central position. Trauma is subjected to the effects of sublimation and supplementation. It is central in the novel, yet the way it is both inflicted and countered by the characters ricochets from peripheral to central. Trauma moves between victims and perpetrators, shame, guilt, and the search for absolution. Elizabeth Nunez decenters trauma and juggles it between presence and absence in a sublimated narrative of victims turning against their aggressors. Her narrative favors healing and forgetting and allows its female characters to self-define and re-define. The more trauma is faced and forgotten, the more the characters are healed and the more they grow toward self-realizations and constructions. Nunez gives the concept of trauma less agency as it is juxtaposed with healing and self-knowledge. She brings the curative powers of amnesia, Obeah, and feminine hegemony in a narrative of memory against forgetting and forgetting against memory.

Nunez shuffles the roles between victims and perpetrators. She gives the victims power over their trauma inflictors. The power paradigms shift as the oppressor becomes oppressed due to a wide possibility of free play within the narrative. As trauma becomes recurrent and unavoidable, the victimized characters develop some sort of mental shields against traumatic recurrences and change status from victim to perpetrator, both willingly and unwillingly. Zuela, for instance, willingly plans the destruction of her husband. Zuela, the abused child, grows up to become the mother who kills her husband to rescue

her children. Rosa, victim and prisoner to her sexual obsessions, learns the importance of her feminine desires and thus destroys her husband unknowingly.

Rosa learns, ironically through the illiterate Zuela, that *jouissance* and pure feminine sexual pleasure should not be considered a sin. Rosa's own understanding of power has long been erroneous in that she has been stripped of her power all along by her husband who used her acute sexuality as a weapon to debase her. Her husband acts as her aggressor using her namesake (*nympha*) as a justification to accuse her of depending on black flesh for her pleasure. The *nympha*—a siren mad for black meat—inside of Rosa is debased and reduced to a belittling sexual relation that destroyed her self-image throughout her marriage. Cedric projects his inferiority complex on his white wife to appease the belittled status he occupies in the world of the white. The fact that Rosa is not entirely white and that she is the result of an illegitimate affair between her white mother and a black man, breaks Cedric's revenge plan as his whole plan becomes a shameful failure. His quest becomes futile and his revenge loses any significance that could be attached to destroying Rosa's father through destroying her. Rosa's father is not the white man who had a homosexual affair with Cedric's father and caused this latter's death. Rosa's father is yet another black man who lost his battle against the whiteness of Rosa's family.

Being the daughter of a black man, however, gives Rosa an unprecedented hegemony as she relocates her 'self' and place within the narrative. She turns Cedric's tricks against him. His revenge was premised on the ongoing psychological destruction using all sorts of linguistic attacks and mind games. These trickster signs are reversed the moment Rosa uses the same strategy of words against her husband: "White lady? White Lady? You call me white lade, Cedric?" Rosa looked directly into his eyes. "My blood is as black as yours"(Nunez 2000, 225). These words would have the same weight as the word that finally brought Rosa to a final realization vis-à-vis her relation of dependence on her husband. When Cedric uttered the word 'beg', Rosa revolts. 'Beg' totally changes the discursive nature of Rosa's pleasure. Her desires linked to sexuality are redefined by the single instance of being asked to 'beg'.

The discourse shifts from: Rosa, the white woman who burns with desire for her black husband, to: Rosa, *nympha*, the siren with an uncontrollable sex drive for black men, and again to: Rosa, *nympha*, a black blood siren with a 'never again' sexual desire for her black husband who asked her to beg for it. The *nympha* goes on a pilgrimage to the religious shrine and plans to live in the church only to be raped by a group of black men and to be thrown in the ocean in a simulation of the accident that ignited memory and prompted healing. The overdetermined Rosa is destined to receive the same fate of the white woman who was murdered and thrown in the ocean. The feminine Dionysian traits are present in *Bruised Hibiscus* with varying degrees. Rosa portrays mostly the sexual instinct appropriate to Aphrodite while Zuela portrays the instinctual wild motherhood. The trickster qualities are more present in Zuela who succeeds in ending her husband's life through a well-planned death without atrocity. She poisons her husband with his own smoke.

The fleeting presence and overriding absence of the 'mother' is what gives the Dionysian 'mater' a rather dismembered quality. Both Rosa and Zuela cannot re-member their lost mothers: Zuela's mother who is dead in Venezuela and whose memory does not bring much comfort, and Rosa's mother who is

dead in life disowns her daughter for the black blood that runs through her veins. It is the obehwoman, Mary Christophe, a disfigured woman who allows a mythical rebirth of the two characters' mothers. She plays the role of the symbolic and figurative mother that is rescued from the abyss of forgetting. Mary Christophe is remembered and re-membered after being thrown bit by bit and cut into pieces within the forgetting gulf.

*Bruised Hibiscus* inspires a look at Edward S. Casey's 'emptied places' and 'sites'. Rosa and Zuela in the postmodern definition of their places are relocated subjects (Mann 2006). Their positions are emptied of meaning and refilled with new definitions that locate them within the subaltern sphere. Although Zuela is more likely to be an easy site to be pinned (the way her husband wills starting with naming her as the second half of Venezuela), Rosa the white creole is de-classified and re-situated as a nymphomaniac losing the superior status that her skin color and class guarantees her. Within the narrative discourse, Zuela and Rosa are emptied of the matter that sustains their memories. They face the challenge of digging deep into the structures that make their 'selves', and the challenge of re-fashioning their place because the traumatic experiences and neuroses they undergo make of them 'dwellers on the surface' (Mann 2006, 141). This mis-placement is re-placed within the two characters' particular experiences that keep crossing roads in ongoing encounters with the depths of their human nature, the play within their memories, and their eventual separation.

فقدان الذاكرة النسوية في ما بعد الحداثة: قلب مراكز الصدمة وإعادة تعريف التبعية في رواية (الخيز المكدموم)  
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الملخص

في معظم الروايات التابعة تحتل الصدمة موقعاً مركزياً. غالباً ما يقتصر وعي التابعين على المساحات الهامشية داخل المراكز المهيمنة لمسببي الصدمات، وتفرض التبعية الجنسية وضعاً هامشياً للنساء التابعين، ففي رواية (الخيز المكدموم) تروج (إليزابيث نونيز) لدعم صوت المرأة التابعة المسكته لتخطي حدودها المؤلمة، وتتحدى هذه المقالة التعريفات الأساسية للصدمة والتبعية عن طريق قلب المشروع الشامل للمراكز المهيمنة وتسليط الضوء على "الانزلاق" بين النظرية والممارسة، وتمنح هذه الحركة من و إلى المراكز الشخصية النسائية التابعة "الجديدة" في (الخيز المكدموم) قوة متعددة المواقع، قوة تشفي الصدمات من خلال ممارسات فقدان الذاكرة واسترجاعها، إذ أصبحت النساء في الرواية قيد الدراسة (روزا) و(زويلا) ضحايا الصدمات ومرتكباتها في آن واحد ضمن إعادة تعريف ما بعد الحداثة لسرد الذاكرة والنسيان والتخلص منه. الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة، التابعة "الجديدة"، فقدان الذاكرة، ما بعد الحداثة، إليزابيث نونيز.

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