

## Letter from the Issue Editors

The papers selected for this issue of the LINGUACULTURE journal were presented at the *Wounded Bodies – Wounded Minds. Intersections of Memory and Identity* International Conference, held in Iași on April 6-10, 2011. The choice of the title *Trauma and Cultural Memory* is justified by the topics that unite this specific collection of articles, which deal less with visible body marks and physical wounds, and more with psychological or emotional traumas felt by the individual or a whole community. The articles in this collection investigate the effects of trauma and the processes of healing as represented in works by authors from different cultures, brought together by a shared interest in the effects of a traumatic past on individuals and communities alike, on the relationship between colonists and the colonized, oppressors and victims, on the manner in which the silenced find a voice to tell their story and hence to redefine their selves. The journey through different ages, cultures and literatures reveals one important aspect: trauma, either individual or collective, is a terrifying experience and healing is not always possible. Nevertheless, the journey towards partial or complete healing is only possible through revolt and action, which are, eventually, constitutive of identities.

**Ana-Maria Ștefan**'s paper entitled "Heart of Redness: Heartache and Pain in Two Commonwealth Novels" highlights the manner in which literature can shape or twist the identity of a group. For a long time, the only representation of "the other," more specifically of the African other, came from European texts that were deemed more or less accurate. In this context, Joseph Conrad's writings have offered a challenging perspective, profound and in many ways rather unconventional, on the relationship between "the one" and "the other," "the colonizer" and "the colonized." Postmodern writers, however, start revisiting older text and expose their limitations or misrepresentations. Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* is now seen by many African writers as a testimony of the European view of the former colonies as well as of Conrad's patronizing attitude towards the black people. Zakes Mda's *Heart of Redness*, a postmodern rewriting of Conrad's novella, uses as a starting point Conrad's unsettling image of the painted bodies of the Africans, which—as the author shows—is an important part of their cultural heritage. Zakes Mda develops an entire rhetoric of the body, showing how all the marks, from painting to pain, trauma, injury, illness have deeper connotations and are means of cultural identification. As the author of this study points out, the novel traces, through several generations, the terrible conflict between the desire to preserve one's identity and traditions and the pressures of the Western cultures that come with the European colonizer.

Though moving to another continent and to another culture, **Cornelia Vlaicu**'s "Trans-Historical Trauma and Healing via Mapping of History/(-ies) in Leslie Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*" investigates a similar aspect, namely how "the other," more specifically the Native American other, resists erasure. The paper is concerned with trauma and its impact on collective identity, inscribed not as body marks or wounds, but as "space markings" or "maps"—symbols of the colonization of space, conquest, appropriation, of the conflict between a colonizing civilization and the occupied one, striving to preserve its claim on the land, identity and history. Real space (the land of the Native Americans) and textual space (the right to tell one's story) are the battle grounds out of which collective identities either survive or are erased. For Leslie Silko trauma may be seen as a cultural process, and the response to it is not oblivion, but remembering the collective past. The spider-web structure of the novel centered on an old almanac of prophecies, radiating across 500 years of colonialism and two continents, and involving the most eclectic gallery of characters is meant to highlight the importance of (re)writing history as a process of healing the cultural or collective traumas, connecting people in space and time.

**Alina Anton**'s "Betrayed by History: Redressing a Wounded Community in Keri Sakamoto's *The Electrical Field*" is yet another attempt by a marginalized community to heal a collective trauma. In this case, the collective trauma of internment experienced by the Japanese-Canadian community is encoded in the narrative of the murder of a Japanese woman and the disappearance of her husband and children. The story, which superficially appears to be another detective novel, shifts the focus from the specific murder to the effects of war on this community and its members. The narrator of the story, the solitary and enigmatic Asaki Saito, cannot be a passive, objective observer, since she is psychologically and emotionally wounded by her own past and by the experience she shared with the rest of her community. Asaki Saito's gradual retreat into her own mind, her harrowing memories, the ghosts of the past that haunt her, her emotional instability suggest that memory cannot actually heal the wounds of the past, or reorganize them in a more coherent and objective reevaluation of experience. Such a terrible trauma, Keri Sakamoto's novel seems to suggest, eludes any coherent reconstruction or remembrance, and a sense of closure and healing are impossible.

**Michał Różycki**'s paper entitled "Conspiracy Theory as Therapy in Philip Roth's *The Plot against America*?" follows a similar line of investigation, namely how the community experiences a shared traumatic past, but suggests a different solution to collective trauma: healing is possible not through a return to the past in order to understand or make peace with it, but through the fictionalization of experience in the form of conspiracy theories. Focusing on Philip Roth's novel, the author wonders if a conspiracy theory, viewed as an alternative history, may become a viable solution for a traumatic experience. The

popularity of the conspiracy theories suggests that they have the power to alleviate the traumas caused by a specific terrifying historical event. On the other hand, they can provoke unexpected outbursts of fury against different groups of people that come to serve as scapegoats. Roth's novel seems to argue that such theories fail to provide closure and harmony. It is not their content but the discussions they engender that expose the weak points of the society: "unjust political order," "dysfunctional civil society," "exploitative economic system." The problem is that belief in conspiracy theories is not traumatic or destructive in itself, but it can lead to hate crimes, and, as the author concludes, bring more harm than the disease it was meant to cure.

If we move from the collective to the individual, we notice that traumatic events involve, once more, a clash between oppressors and the oppressed. **Anca Beatrice Matei's** "The Meaning of Silence: The Silence of the Oppressed in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*" deals with novels written by two twentieth-century African-American female writers. Though in different manners, these novels suggest that women's silence can be a sign of oppression and submission to the patriarchal authority as well as a gesture of protection from possible pain, violence, even remembrance.

Zora Neale Hurston confines her characters to their communities implying that it was gender, not race that caused the oppression of African-American women, who had to endure the burden of submission to the men in their own communities. The manner in which silence and story define one's destiny is investigated in the two novels that present, as the two faces of a coin, two perspectives on the same reality. Thus, if in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* the writer depicts a woman for whom finding a voice means defining her self, or following the difficult and traumatic path from oppression and submission to freedom, in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* she changes the vantage point. By following the destiny of a male character, this time, Hurston shows how he was influenced by the women in his life, how their silences or words have defined his destiny, how they brought him disaster or rebirth. Maya Angelou offers a different perspective in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* as she implies that African-American women have never actually endured in their own communities the same oppression that white women have been submitted to, and shows that racism, more than sexism, humiliates and silences women. What is interesting in all three novels is their common focus on a crucial dimension of African-American female identity: the road to freedom for African-American women is a road that links them to the other members of the community and their journey is not a solitary one.

Finally, **Nicoleta Petronela Apostol's** analysis of the Huxleyan protagonist in the paper entitled "*Eyeless in Gaza*. Reflecting the Self through Recollection" highlights the fact that trauma is not a visible body mark, but an

emotionally and spiritually painful rediscovery that comes from the examination of the past, especially from the viewpoint of the emotional relationships among people. Thus love, selfishness, hatred, tension, instability leave their traces on relationships as well as on one's self. The memory of past events is closely linked to the emotions that have accompanied those events, but bringing them to mind after a period of time allows for a clearer reevaluation of their significance. For Anthony Beavis, this revisitation of the past is a journey towards inner discovery and self-definition. The apparent fragmentation of the narrative that is in keeping with the elusiveness of memory as well as with the sense of loss and disillusionment of the post-First World War society becomes meaningful through the process of remembering, when the mental wounds of the past can be uncovered and understood from a different perspective and the fragments are rearranged and constructed more harmoniously on a different foundation, which is "the art of loving people," the only dimension capable of healing the wounds and bringing comfort and tranquility.

Though different in approach, angle or cultural context explored, the articles included in this issue of *LINGUACULTURE* all share not only an interest in the different kinds of trauma experienced by the human race—individually or collectively, long ago or until recently—but also a common conclusion: the human being painfully needs a sense of closure and healing, irrespective of how terrifying, destabilizing and oppressive a certain event or situation may be. In this light, the process of healing becomes a major aspect of a very important process: finding or preserving one's identity. In most cases, the narrative, the story, the oral or written transmission of tradition, the fictional escape are ways in which individuals or communities try to reach a sense of harmony and peace.