



Gisèle Pineau's Poetics of Disaster: Trauma and Disability in *Folie, aller simple*

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Abstract

James Berger, in his 2004 article “Trauma without Disability, Disability without Trauma: A Disciplinary Divide,” examines the prominent place of metaphor within the discourse of trauma studies and the conversely problematic reception of metaphor in the field of disability studies. Contemporary Guadeloupian author Gisèle Pineau’s memoir of her parallel careers as a writer and a psychiatric nurse, *Folie, aller simple* (2013), imagines a more fluid coexistence of trauma and disability within the Francophone Caribbean and its diaspora. Her memoir lays the framework for re-imagining representations of psychiatric illness within the context of immigration, displacement and postcolonial relations in France and its overseas Caribbean departments through the metaphor of the natural disasters that shape and potentially devastate Caribbean islands.

Keywords: Trauma, disability, disaster, francophone, postcolonial

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Cycles of trauma lend their rhythm to Franco-Guadeloupian author Gisele Pineau's oeuvre. From volcanic eruptions, to the devastating sweep of cyclones, to the sudden shocks of earthquakes, the events of the narrative universe Pineau creates in her novels are punctuated by the environmental and climatic episodes that shape islands and order geologic time in the Caribbean. In her works, Pineau repeatedly puts these environmental events in dialogue with the psychological traumas that touch and often break down the interior landscape of her protagonists. In her most recent novel, *Les voyages de Merry Sisal*, a disabled, displaced Haitian woman copes with the trauma of the 2010 Haiti earthquake as she attempts to find work and shelter in a neighbouring, affluent Caribbean island that Pineau names Bonne Terre, a fictional composite of Guadeloupe, Martinique and other French Caribbean territories (Pineau 2015). Pineau's critique of the exploitation of her protagonist by an inhospitable Caribbean community exists in tandem with her nuanced portrayal of Merry's grief as she comes to term with the death of her children in the earthquake.

The motivations for Pineau's dedication and meticulous attention to the suffering and the psychological landscape of her characters become clearer when one learns that she has maintained parallel careers as a writer and a psychiatric nurse for most of her adult life. In 2010, Pineau published *Folie, aller simple, Journée ordinaire d'une infirmière*, in which she shares the history of the path that led her to work in a psychiatric hospital (Pineau 2010). As a writer deeply invested in expressing both the environmental and the socio-psychological pressures on women in the overseas French departments and in the broader Caribbean archipelago, her fictional works and her autobiographical essays explore the relationship between figurative languages that express psychological trauma and the material reality of catastrophic events. The present article will adopt its theoretical framework from the scholarship that has emerged since the 2010 earthquake in Haiti on disaster discourse and in the field of literary trauma studies in order to explore what I am calling here Pineau's "Poetics of Disaster" in *Folie, aller simple*. Second, the article will interrogate Pineau's use of "disaster" both as a locally anchored metaphor for mental illness, disability, and trauma, as well as for historically and

materially situated events that mark and alter the bodies and psychological conditions of Caribbean women and the communities they inhabit.

Following the earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010, media representations erupted with references to “crippling” debt, “earthshattering” poverty, “paralytic” government officials, and so on. Scholars of Caribbean Studies have joined together since 2010 to insist upon the necessity for new narratives about Haiti that recount Haitian experiences *without* falling into the metaphoric traps and tropes of disaster and chronic disablement that often characterize the mainstream media’s representations of Haiti’s past, present and future. Anthropologist Gina Ulysse’s *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives* is a rallying cry for new representations that embrace the complexities of Haiti’s economic, political and environmental realities and the imperialist and capitalist complicities, particularly of France and the United States, in Haiti’s thwarted attempts to realize the potential that was marked by Haiti’s 1804 independence. The predominance of language that elides Haiti with disastrousness and disability, as well as its negative--the ubiquitous trope of Haitians as so resilient as to be inoculated to the most abject of living conditions-- isolates Haiti and Haitians within a discourse that forecloses on possibilities of discussing the complexities of lived experiences of Haitians past and present (Ulysse 2015). However, language that engages with the destructive environmental and geologic realities that mark cycles and seasons in the Caribbean, and that mark bodies, psyches and material realities of the members of Caribbean societies, is indeed evitable when discussing the region. As Robert McRuer (2010) points out in his “Reflections on Disability in Haiti,” not all metaphors of disaster are necessarily reductive and marginalizing; some signal “the imagining of embodied forms of resistance, and of impairment and disability themselves as potential sites for collective resistance” (McRuer 331). In concert with McRuer’s revisioning of disablement discourse in regards to Haiti, Gisèle Pineau’s account of her work in psychiatric hospitals in France, as well as her broader oeuvre, engages with the possibility of disaster imagery as a site of resistance and commemoration of collective and individual trauma in the Caribbean and in postcolonial metropolitan France.

In *La santé mentale en Haïti après le 12 janvier 2010*, psychoanalyst Lucie Cantin (2012) defines trauma as “un événement, imprévisible, invraisemblable et inassimilable [qui] marque une rupture avec tout ce qui a précédé. Imprévisible, il surgit; invraisemblable, on n'aurait jamais pu l'imaginer et inassimilable, il demeure comme un corps étranger, sans pouvoir être intégré” [An unforeseeable, unpredictable, unbelievable event (that) marks a rupture with everything that came before it. Unpredictable, it surges up; unbelievable, it was completely unimaginable, and unassimilable, it remains a foreign body, unable to be integrated] (Cantin 89).¹ Scholars of literary trauma studies have made a practice of examining the ways in which individuals have tried to make sense in writing about what Cantin calls the “unforeseeable, unbelievable, and unassimilable.” Drawing on accepted foundational texts of literary trauma studies by scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and Dominick LaCapra, James Berger (2012) asserts that one of the ways that the traumatic rupture occurs is through language. “Trauma theory is, in many ways, ultimately a theory of metaphor; it is a way of thinking about how some extreme event or experience that is radically non-linguistic, that seems even to negate language, is somehow carried across into language” (Berger 564). Haitian writer Dany Laferrière (2012) articulates the rupture of disaster in terms of time in his autobiographical essay about the 2010 earthquake in Haiti: “Le moment fatal—16h53—qui a coupé le temps haïtien en deux. Il y a désormais un avant et un après 12 janvier 2010” [The fatal moment—4:53pm—that cut Haitian time in half. From now on, there is a before and an after January 12, 2010] (Lafferrière 34). The literature of trauma attempts to return to the moment of trauma, a moment that cannot be fully expressed or understood temporally. The moment exists out of time and is always a re-construction through an approximate, metaphoric use of language. As Berger states, “the traumatic event is defined as being so overwhelming that it cannot consciously be apprehended as it occurs; it can only be reconstructed in retrospect, is always belated, at a distance.” (Berger 565). The reconstruction of the event through language and narrative calls for a “new symbolic order,” as Berger puts it. Echoing Laferrière, Berger suggests that “all that preceded it and all that follows after now take meaning from that single moment; the historical rupture now functions also as a distorting-revealing

conduit" (Berger 566). The post-trauma symbolic order becomes a system of representation heavily indebted to figurative language and metaphor as it attempts to transmit both the event, the rupture, and the notion that Dany Laferrière articulates of two realities that coexist—a before and an after, hinged on a moment that sits outside time. As Berger explains, "The posttraumatic world is full of signifiers, but relatively empty of signifieds and referents, for these have been destroyed or transformed past recognition. And yet, a world remains, and continues to take shape. Rupture and continuity coexist, and this coexistence may be both the precondition and the effective mechanism for metaphor. Something is not, but is; something is, but is something else" (Berger 567).

Gisèle Pineau's literary contemplations of trauma both reinforce and expand Berger (2004) and Laferrière's (2012) exploration of rupture and representation. Her fictional works illustrate that the experience of trauma is lived cyclically—through geological and climate cycles, through cycles of colonial and postcolonial exploitation and oppression, and through cycles and patterns of domestic violence. Daniel Derivois, while discussing the extent of the psychological impact of the Haiti earthquake in "Vers un modèle parasismique de la psyche collective haïtienne," argues that the trauma of the Haiti earthquake has reawakened "collective, national, institutional, state, familial, and individual" traumas that reach back into early colonial times (Derivois 2012, 74). This hypothesis has long been explored by Pineau in her fictional works. Her novels often foreground the cyclical violence of Caribbean history (slavery and the plantation economy, colonial and neocolonial oppression and exploitation, suppressed and unexpressed rage of enslaved or formerly enslaved peoples). These traumas are often the hereditary backdrop for contemporary socio-economic obstacles faced by women and other vulnerable segments of the Caribbean population, namely, drug and alcohol addiction, sexual violence and abusive relationships, incest, and social and economic isolation. "Natural" and "unnatural" patterns of behaviour and experience become increasingly difficult to extricate for characters who are socialized in abusive conditions, either historical or familial. In Pineau's works, the "natural" patterns of family violence often mimic the "natural" cycles of disastrous geologic events;

however, such events also create ruptures that allow her characters to break out of patterns of trauma and violence. Like Derivois and Pineau, Laura S. Brown, in her feminist interrogations of trauma theory, discusses the problematic framing within traditional trauma theory of trauma as an “event that is outside the range of human experience” (Brown 1995, 100). Bringing into question the assumed masculinity that underwrites the normative “human” experience, Brown embraces a theory of “insidious trauma” based on the “private, secret experiences that woman encounter in the interpersonal realm and at the hands of those [they] love and depend on” (Brown 102). She defines this concept as one that acknowledges the effects of “oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and the spirit” (Brown 107).

As scholars of postcolonial studies evaluate the usefulness of trauma theory for understanding texts that address the multi-leveled experiences of psychological trauma in postcolonial settings, Brown's (1995) acknowledgement of the problematic nature of a theory developed around one isolated moment or event is germane to the complex collages of trauma that Pineau weaves together in her novels. In the case of *Les voyages de Merry Sisal*, the trauma of loss, grief, destruction, and poverty that ensue from the traumatic moment of the 2010 earthquake joins a constellation of traumatic events that punctuate the eponymous protagonist's life, drawn from historic, economic, political, social, environmental, and gender-related factors. In the telling of Merry Sisal's life, event-based trauma is brought into relation with “ongoing, everyday forms of traumatizing violence” (Rothberg 2008, 226). Pineau's portrayal of trauma vacillates between the universal and the particular, between the isolated event and protracted violence, echoing Rothberg's assertion in “Decolonizing Trauma Studies” that “in the interest of decolonizing trauma studies, we may want to maintain a grasp of ambiguity, hybridity, and complicity” when it comes to theorizing around trauma in the postcolonial setting (Rothberg 233).

Gisèle Pineau's project in *Folie, aller simple*, which interweaves Caribbean weather and geologic patterns with the traumas and illnesses she encounters as a psychiatric nurse in France, illuminates the ways in which representations of trauma, disability and disaster together can challenge the discourses that typically perpetuate oppressive social structures and institutions in the Francophone world. If Haitian studies scholars have critiqued the media's representation of disaster as disabling, scholars in disability studies largely agree that oppressive figurative language often normalizes disability as "disastrous." The Oxford English dictionary reminds us that "disaster" derives from the Italian *disastro* 'ill-starred event', from dis- (expressing negation) + astro 'star' (from Latin *astrum*) "ill-fated" as a disordering of "normal" processes and patterns. For Pineau, imagery that comes closer to representing the cycles, repetitions, and interconnected effects of event-based and prolonged trauma leans heavily on the metaphor of disasters. As we know from disaster studies, the causality of environmental disasters is, as Rothberg (2008) states in relation to trauma, "ambiguous, hybrid, and often complicit" with any number of political, structural, and economic weaknesses in the social fabric. What is more, as "disasters" are endemic to the specificity of the Caribbean landscape, the tautological notion of "natural" and "disaster" should be underscored. These so-called "ill-fated" moments are nothing if not natural to Caribbean geologic and climate patterns and to Caribbean epistemologies. What makes them ill-fated, of course, are the often politicized causes, conditions, suffering, and casualties that ensue. Pineau's work insists upon the necessary inevitability both of the disastrous eruptions, ruptures, and storms in the Caribbean islands, but also of the inevitability of the trauma and disability that result from socio-economic, often gender-based oppression and violence that she contemplates in her novels. Her approach to trauma, then, already distances itself from the Western, events-based trauma theory model. Moreover, her work tests whether trauma is inevitably part and parcel of the postcolonial condition. Disasters, then, often serve as the mediating metaphor that open these questions in Pineau's work.

The social, historical, economic and cultural processes that determine the way that bodies and their abilities are codified, controlled and represented are

largely the focus of Gisèle Pineau's work on disability and mental illness in *Folie, aller simple*. Within the postcolonial setting, both in the Francophone Caribbean and in metropolitan France, Pineau asserts that such processes are often as traumatic as they are potentially psychologically disabling, particularly for Caribbean women, and that situations of trauma and disability often overlap. Pineau's autobiographical reflections in *Folie, aller simple* highlight her own traumatic experiences as a Guadeloupian woman of colour living and working in metropolitan France and her reflections on the treatment of people with psychiatric disabilities by their families, by the national health care system, by their healthcare workers, and by the communities they (unsuccessfully) live in. The central trauma of the narrative revolves around the suicide of one of her long-term patients, who left the clinic one morning and threw herself in front of a subway train. However, the emphasis on trauma and chronic psychiatric disability in her narrative lingers less on the experiences of the clinic's patients and looks more attentively at the reciprocal effects of mental illness, trauma, and discrimination on healthcare worker and patient. Pineau often interrogates the mutual influences of her career as a writer and as a psychiatric nurse. As Pineau the nurse parses her own reaction to the trauma of losing a patient to suicide, Pineau the writer narrates a journey through her own relationship to the racial trauma of living as a woman of colour in contemporary France, both inside and outside the psychiatric hospital. Processing her experiences through writing, she suggests, keeps her just this side of mental illness, grief, and professionally-induced trauma.

While describing her experiences within the French educational system in general and within the medical professions in particular, Pineau describes a series of moments charged with racial discrimination that fall squarely within the notion of trauma as it is understood by the field of trauma studies. She mediates this trauma through her poetics of disaster. Preparing to administer her first shot to a patient, she herself receives a reciprocal injection of racial hatred: "Madame X fait un bond dans son lit et se met à hurler. " "Je veux pas la négresse! Pas la négresse! Pas la négresse !" Il y a un moment de stupeur collective. Dans mon souvenir, le temps se fige soudain. Et puis je crois que les

infirmières me repoussent vers la porte, me demandant à mi-voix de quitter la chambre. Je suis effondrée” [Madame X jumps up in her bed and begins to scream. ‘I don’t want the black one! Not the black one! Not the black one!’ There’s a moment of collective stupor. In my memory, time suddenly freezes. And then I think one of the nurses pushes me towards the door, asking me in a low voice to leave the room. I am devastated] (Pineau 2010, 149). The moment stands fixed in time in her memory, a moment of “collective stupor” and of “devastation.” The narrating individual has undergone foundational shaking, articulated through a discourse of disaster.

The geologic and disaster lexicon that subtly shores up these moments of racial violence is picked up in other more overt moments as Pineau parses her understanding of mental illness and her exposure to it. “Trente ans à fréquenter de si près la folie, la violence, le désespoir aussi. Trente ans au bord des gouffres, au pied des montagnes de douleur, au chevet des corps morcelés. Trente ans à regarder la folie aller et venir [...] se cristalliser, s’endormir, se réveiller, revenir en force, enragée et brulante, volcanique et superbe comme aux premiers jours” [Thirty years spent so close to insanity, violence, hopelessness too. Thirty years at the edge of the abyss, at the foot of mountains of pain, at the bedside of broken bodies. Thirty years watching insanity come and go [...] crystalize, go to sleep, wake up, come back stronger, enraged and burning, volcanic and superb as it was in the beginning] (Pineau 2010, 95). Patterns of natural geologic events and their violent impact on human bodies in their path co-exist in Pineau’s description of shared experience within the psychiatric hospital. While this eliding of disaster and patient, too, falls into the realm of Pineau’s poetics of disaster, one may wonder here if Pineau’s discourse does not adopt a more traditional, Western approach to representing the patients as “disastrous” themselves, in manner similar to the representations of disaster victims of colour in New Orleans or Haiti by the mainstream press. Her repetition of “trente ans” emphasizes the interiorizing of this cycle of anticipation and release in her own life, yet it does not make it clear that her discourse disrupts any eliding of her patients and the “disastrousness” of their existence.

The field of Critical Disability Studies lends important consideration to the potentially dangerous tendencies of narrative metaphor to erase the lived, embodied experiences of individuals living with disabilities, particularly as these experiences intersect with race and gender. As I mentioned in this article's introduction, Pineau places a disabled protagonist at the centre of her 2015 novel about the 2010 earthquake, *Les voyages de Merry Sisal*, a protagonist whose disability predates the events of 2010. The narrative presents the disability as affording Merry particular coping skills that will allow her to negotiate the changed landscape and a changed Haiti in ways that will not be as evident to the Haitians who lost limbs or became disabled during the earthquake and its aftershocks. The character increasingly becomes a vessel for innumerable pre- and post-quake traumas, and the narrative slowly transforms her into a palempstic emblem of chronic Haitian hardship, thrusting her through the complex landscape of the social, political and economic aftershocks of the Haitian state and the exploitation of Haitian refugees in neighbouring Caribbean islands after 2010. As Gorman and Udegbe have discussed in their application of Ato Quayson's typologies of disability to two postcolonial African novels, such representations of disability as metaphor for the nation state can often veer into territory that erases the lived experiences of individuals living with disabilities in postcolonial and neocolonial contexts, particularly the experiences of women (Gorman and Udegbe 2010). Within the specific Haitian context, the veritable avalanche of misfortunes that befall the ever-persevering Merry recall the comments of a number of critics of post-quake discourse, such as Ulysse, who underscore the damage of narratives that celebrate the "ability" of Haitians to endure physical and psychological trauma, foreclosing discussions of the systems of oppression by local and neocolonial forces that perpetuate the exploitation of Haitian people. In Pineau's autobiographical essay *Folie, aller simple*, the treatment of disability-as-lived-experience coexists with the figurative language of disaster (and the metaphoric language that has been discussed above as so central to trauma narratives) to create a portrait of psychiatric disability and distress that bridges the lived and the figurative. While the reader may conclude that her depiction of psychiatric illness in *Folie* (and certainly in *Merry Sisal*) leans dangerously close to problematic, mainstream narratives of

disability, Pineau's narrating perspective as a Caribbean author of colour (writing from and about a European setting that does not face such environmental disasters with nearly as much frequency and urgency) filters the cycles of illness and wellness in the hospital through the lens of Caribbean geopoetics. In so doing, she foregrounds alternative ways of knowing, seeing, and negotiating disastrous events that cause particular trauma and distress to a community's most vulnerable members, women and those living with disabilities especially.

The metaphor of disaster returns often in *Folie* to articulate the particular responsibilities of the psychiatric staff in the hospital—as first responders to an emergency, riding out the storm together: “Nous sommes tous embarqués dans la même galère. [...] les infirmiers doivent garantir la sécurité des patients. Les protéger d'eux-mêmes, de leurs pulsions mortifères. Les suivre dans les zones de turbulences. Les aider à traverser les déserts et les mers. Les porter à bout de bras. Les redresser après la tempête” [We're all in the same miserable boat (...) nurses have to guarantee the safety of their patients. Protect them from themselves, from their death-seeking impulses. Follow them into turbulent zones. Help them cross deserts and seas. Carry them single-handedly. Stand them back up after the storm] (Pineau 2010, 126-7). Turning to a language of first responders and community solidarity, Pineau recalls a current in Caribbean literature that is underscored in Daniel Maximin's *Les fruits du cyclone, une géopoétique de la Caraïbe*, in which Maximin extrapolates an intrinsic sense of community deriving from the omnipresence of destructive forces in the Caribbean. “Personne ne se sent quitte s'il a été épargné cette fois, et la compassion pour l'île voisine est d'autant plus sincèrement vécue que tous connaissent la juste répartition de ces ravages d'une île à l'autre, chacune son tour” [No one feels safe if they've been spared this time, and compassion for the neighbouring island is felt that much more sincerely, since everyone knows that the ravages are shared from one island to the other, each island has its turn] (Maximin 2006, 100). Like Maximin, Pineau insists on the existence of a micro-community within the hospital that is bound together by shared trauma of these tumultuous moments of psychosis: “We're all in the same miserable boat.”

The notion of reciprocity, trauma and community continues to surface throughout *Folie, aller simple*. Her reflections on “folie” extend outward to societal pressures in the metropole and turn inward in an exploration and expression of relationality. As she continues, her personal reflections in the essay explore her questions about her own mental health and its connection to her two professions. Borrowing the potentially dismissive reference to “insanity” in relation to the patients in the hospital, she confesses that, “Quand j’étais petite, je croyais parfois que je pouvais devenir une folle” [When I was little, sometimes I thought that I could become a crazy person] (Pineau 2010, 107). She imagines harming her family, having magical powers, and contemplating suicide—all conditions that are eventually explored in the narrative in relation to the patients who populate the memoir. In a passage in which she contemplates the overlap between her careers as psychiatric nurse and author, Pineau addresses the reader in a meta-reference that underscores the relation between her two vocations: “Je finis par confier à mes lecteurs—et je le pense au plus profond de moi—que si je n’avais pas eu l’écriture, j’aurais pu moi-même être atteinte d’une ‘affection psychiatrique’, comme on dit maintenant pour ne pas éveiller les images des fous, déments, insensés, aliénés d’antan...” [I finally confess to my readers—and I believe this to my core—that if I hadn’t had my writing, I could have been afflicted by a “psychiatric disorder” as they say today in order not to conjure images of the crazy, the demented, the mad, the lunatics of yesteryear] (Pineau 2010, 171). With a vocabulary that employs the same reference to disaster and disability that she employs to explore the conditions of her patients, she explains, “J’écris furieusement comme une rivière creuse son lit. [...] J’écris tel le vent qui souffle sans fin et charrie en vrac les parfums et les pestilences...” [I write furiously like a river digs its bed (...) I write like the wind that blows endlessly and spreads perfumes and pestilence at random] (Pineau 2010, 172). The image of writing as a natural (destructive) force again internalizes the disaster metaphors that simultaneously shape and deconstruct her literary landscape.

In a final passage that reunites the disordering of environmental, physical structures and the “disorder” of psychiatric illness, Pineau displaces the disaster

reference to the words of an experienced nurse in Guadeloupe who declares that “folie” is as natural as any other phenomenon, an expected and natural expression of the “disability” that inhabits the human condition. “En fait, ajoutait le très vieil infirmier, on n’est jamais en paix en ce monde, tout le temps tourmenté et déchiré à l’intérieur par des questions existentielles et des pensées poisseuses, et à l’extérieur par l’enfer des autres et les éléments naturels déchainés : cyclones, tremblements de terre, éruption volcanique, raz de marée...C’est sûr, il faut être complètement inconscient pour supporter tout cela” [In fact, added the very old nurse, we’re never at peace in this world, always tormented and torn up on the inside by existential questions and sticky thoughts and on the outside by the hell that is others and the natural elements unchained: cyclones, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves...No doubt, you’d have to be completely out of it to withstand all that] (Pineau 2010, 230-1). It is tempting to conclude that Pineau borrows the cliché of the insane being the most sane among us as her parting gesture. What I find significant, however, given the metaphors of disaster that have been used throughout the text to articulate the cycles of disturbance and calm that punctuate life in the psychiatric hospital, is that a Guadeloupian voice discussing Caribbean environmental specificities and geologic events, not metaphors, shapes the final image of a text that is set, primarily, in France. Pineau’s poetics of disaster “unchains” itself from the figurative language of catastrophe to join the real causes of grief and trauma that haunt daily life in the Caribbean. In a relational transition reminiscent of Edouard Glissant’s *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), Pineau claims a space for a Caribbean model of interconnectedness between land and inhabitant, between overseas department and metropolitan capital that reverses the model of imposed European systems of interpretation. Caribbean environmental and human dynamics have become the central metaphor that orders the waves and eruptions of episodes of mental illness in her patients. Here, moreover, these environmental, geologic and climate-related events are brought to the fore as a pressure and force that have real, lasting, and complex effects on human lives and psyches—lessons that, in an age of climate deregulation, European citizens are finally coming to know.

Haitian-American novelist Edwidge Danticat, describing post-earthquake Port au Prince, evokes a similarly transformed, disabled post-traumatic landscape. She calls Port-au-Prince:

a city of tremors, tremors that are sometimes felt based on your level of experience with previous tremors, where you might be sitting with someone and that person feels the earth shake and you don't feel a thing. It is a city where sometimes you both feel the tremors and panic equally, especially when others have dashed outside or leaped out of windows in fear. Traumas are sometimes as visible as amputated limbs in Port-au-Prince and sometimes they linger deep beneath the surface, like phantom limbs (Danticat 2017, 13).

As Berger (2004) has asserted, trauma and disability are often direct results of disasters, and separating one from the other denies the disabled the full range of emotion that may be attendant on their experience of disability (Berger 572). As Mark Schuller (2016), Robert McRuer (2010) and many others have pointed out, amputations and disablement, while present before 2010, became highly visible in Haiti following the earthquake (Schuller 327). Pineau and Danticat evoke the enduring effects of disaster, both psychological and physical, while also insisting upon the metaphor of the disaster as a site of resistance, mourning, disability, and survival. The metaphor of the disaster becomes a locus for a multitude of interconnected reflections, critiques, and testimonies—some communal, some solitary, some historic, some contemporary. In the hands of Pineau, as well as Danticat and other writers who have undertaken the task of commemorating Caribbean disaster through literary texts, metaphors of disaster often become the site that allows the enunciation of trauma.

Folie, aller simple marks a deliberate reflection on the continuum of traumas and disability experiences lived by francophone Caribbean women, both in the Caribbean and in metropolitan France. Pineau's portrayal of her interactions with psychiatric illness as a psychiatric nurse explores primarily the social alienation generally associated with psychiatric illness, and the power structures,

cultural models, and economic imbalances that are perpetuated by European healthcare practices. She articulates her unique vantage point as a woman of colour within a Western tradition of psychiatric treatment and as a writer who uses her art to mitigate the effects of the traumas she herself witnesses and experiences as a healthcare practitioner. Only occasionally does the text reflect upon the need for greater awareness of the cultural and ethnic diversity of both staff members and patients; it is clear in Pineau's text that within the metropole, racism as a pathological condition and treatment practices that ignore the trauma lived by persons of colour in postcolonial France, as well as the traumas both inflicted during the colonial and postcolonial era, continue to deserve greater attention within the field of psychiatry.

By using the metaphors of disaster to intervene in such reflections, Pineau inserts a lyrical and political dimension in her text. Pineau's portrayal of Other as Self and this model's connection to mental illness—practitioner as patient—resonate with Glissant's (1990) theory of relation. Rather than create distinct borders between herself and her patients, Pineau identifies the patient within herself, who is cared for by the act of performing her duties as a nurse. Moreover, in Pineau's "poetics of disaster" the episodic cycles of crisis are portrayed through the discourse of the disastrous cycles that shape and lend rhythm to life and death in the Caribbean. Her disaster metaphors advance a distinctly Caribbean and relational means of interrogating, from her Franco-Guadeloupian perspective, the connections between treatment and illness, between practitioner and patient. In Pineau's literary landscape, returning to disaster as lived, traumatic, and psychologically or physically disabling event invites critical reflection on the material and political conditions that exacerbate disaster and perpetuate post-traumatic suffering. At the same time, disaster as metaphor, rather than undermine or stigmatize disability or trauma, lends complexity, nuance, instability and Caribbean specificity to the categories themselves.

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¹ Translations of this and all other texts in the article are my own.



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