CHAPTER 5

A Site of Memory: Revisiting (in) Gisèle Pineau's *Mes quatre femmes*

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Guadeloupean writer Gisèle Pineau (born in 1956) asserts: "We carry within ourselves forever the people we have lost, loved" (Pineau qtd. in Veldwachter 2004). These are the voices that made her write, that saved her from the racism, alienation, and isolation that she faced as a young student in France (Pineau 2002, 222). In her 2007 autobiographical narrative *Mes quatre femmes: récit*, Pineau identifies the ghosts of her female relatives whose constant presence she senses, and who are instrumental in shaping her identity: her paternal ancestor Angélique, who was born in 1792, and grandmother Julia; and on the maternal side, her mother Daisy and her aunt Gisèle, after whom the author is named. Representing different generations, historical moments, classes, complexions, life experiences, and comportments over a period of 200 years, they form a distinct female genealogy residing in her memory, in what she calls a "geôle obscure de la mémoire" [dark memory jail], which in this chapter, I read as an oral archive. My analysis of the dark memory jail as an alternative, oral archive, replete with "leur dictée, … la cendre, la boue et le sang" (Pineau 2010,

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171–2) [their words … ash, mud and blood] expands Betty Wilson's assertion that a closed space in Caribbean women's texts can function as both a prison and a refuge.[1] I argue that not only does this inherent paradox operate in *Mes quatre femmes*, but also that inseparable tensions between death/life and official/unofficial histories define Pineau's memory archive and justify her need to reinvent the inner lives of her foremothers through writing.

The Memory Jail

When meditating on the relationship between the living and the dead, some Francophone Caribbean women writers subvert conventional representations of haunting—of which, "the intention [is] to frighten readers by exploiting their fears, both conscious and subconscious: fears of supernatural forces, alien visitations, madness, death, dismemberment, and other terrifying notions,[2] fashioning instead haunting as reconciliatory or as possessing the power of ancestral healing. For instance, Maryse Condé's "invisibles"—Abena, Man Yaya, and Yao—appear several times unexpectedly to offer advice to Tituba in *Moi, Tituba sorcière, Noire de Salem* (1986), before she becomes one herself at the end of the novel.[3] Emma communicates with her enslaved ancestor in Marie-Célie Agnant's *The Book of Emma* (2006): "sometimes I call on Kilima, Cécile, the Emmas before me, then Rosa, all those eternal marrons for help. I invoke their memory; they will know how to guide me, I tell myself; but I don't see them" (Agnant 190). Healer Man Cia, transformed into a faithful dog, greets Télumée in Simone Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972b). In these texts, the authors defy conventional spatio-temporal boundaries so that their characters can offer knowledge, guidance, and companionship to members of the younger generation. What distinguishes *Mes quatre femmes* is that the four women are confined to the author's memory as primary characters co-creating a Caribbean women's archive.[4]

Accordingly, the "geôle obscure de la mémoire" is a dark, windowless four-walled space, reminiscent of the hold of a slave ship on the one hand, or, on the other, a plantation *cachot* in which rebellious enslaved persons, like Solitude, were imprisoned.[5] Though not necessarily revolutionary heroines in the official sense, e.g., the feminist politician Gerty Archimède or the legendary stalwart *femme-matador* (Thomas 2004), Pineau shows that her ancestors can still be considered what Kaiama L. Glover calls "disorderly women," as they navigate life's challenges (Glover 2021, 5–33).

As opposed to enslaved women who were detained in a "geôle de l'oubli où l'histoire les avait emmurées," (Pineau and Abraham 1998, 11) [jail of oblivion where history had confined them], that silenced them and made them invisible to society and history, the four women recuperated by Pineau are unquestionably speaking subjects, claiming their place in the world.

The walls of this *geôle* are permeable, allowing characters conjured up by memory to appear, perform, and then vanish. As Glissant reminds us: "La mémoire dans les oeuvres n'est pas celle du calendrier; notre vécu du temps ne fréquente pas seulement les cadences du mois et de l'an … [la mémoire] parle plus haut et plus loin que les chroniques et les recensements" (Glissant 1990, 86) [memory in texts isn't like a calendar; our experience of time doesn't follow only the cadences of month and year … it speaks louder and farther than chronicles and censuses]. In addition, collective memory in this text operates in its simplest form as the sum of what the four women relate and in its more complex form coalesce as shared intergenerational memory (Halbwachs 1997) and "intergenerational trauma" (Thomas 2010). Pineau suggests that these "transgenerational traumas" (Thomas 2010), including her own, began with Angélique, whose emancipation and marriage did not solve her personal challenges.[6] Julia Roman, born seventy years later in 1898, ironically, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the second abolition, also experiences a form of servitude, when she, a naive nineteen-year-old cane field worker, is chosen as a wife by a handsome, mixed-race, army veteran who is discharged due to a head injury and hired as a plantation guard.

Over the centuries, women from both sides of the family experience the impact of (colonial) patriarchal systems: raised without their fathers in the home, Angélique and Julia lacked reliable and trustworthy role models for partners; Gisèle, Angélique, Julia, and Daisy remain in unhappy, unhealthy relationships and fall into a depression; Julia and Daisy suffer the effects of their husbands' post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from their military service; Angélique and Gisèle become young widows, with the former gaining status, protection, and agency, while the latter succumbs to despair; at one point, Angélique, Gisèle, and Julia even withdraw to become invisible in response to their difficult situations. *Mes quatre femmes*' memory archive therefore shows how "Trauma profoundly disorders one's experience of one's body, creating the sensation of being both out of one's mind and outside of one's body" (Hamilton 2018, 83) but sees women's writing as a means toward psychic-physical reparation.

Through (re)writing these trauma narratives and the women's lives and voices in the singular and plural, Pineau begins to convert the *geôle* into a nurturing, womb-like space of storytelling. Recognizing how "trauma disorders linear and horological time consciousness" (Hamilton 2018, 84) Pineau gives prominence to the gender dimension, illustrating Wilson's contention that a closed space in Caribbean women's novels can indeed function as a refuge: "The closed space can function generally as both a positive and a negative image. In later West Indian novels, it is a trap which forces a confrontation with self, a confrontation often too painful to endure. It is a prison which is accepted and transformed by an effort of the woman's imagination into a refuge from a reality perceived as intolerable" (Wilson 1990, 49).[7] The women share Pineau's memory space as if it were a communal room for them to support each other through talking, listening, questioning each other, singing, sighing, laughing, and sleeping. With the exception of Daisy, who chooses to join the others in this memory prison, the others are deceased.

Family Archive: A Rhizomatic Genealogy

Subtitled "récit," which accentuates the narrative's oral, testimonial core, *Mes quatre femmes* contains numerous autobiographical details—Pineau appears briefly as a young child in Julia's and Daisy's chapters. Pineau admits that the narrative "is about the four women who have made me who I am […]. This book tells my intimate family history." The possessive adjective "mes" further suggests belonging, kinship, and gratitude. The gathering of these female relatives in the memory jail reconstructs a rhizomatic genealogy, one that rejects the notion of a single-root ancestry as well as linear history. For example, the voice of the speaking subject relates past events spanning the late eighteenth to the twenty-first century in the present tense making the text a kind of prequel to and expansion of Pineau's *Un papillon dans la cité* (1992) and *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996), both of which focus on the relationship between Man Ya and her young granddaughter. Space and time coalesce as memories resurface in a tangle of voices; contemporaries Daisy and her sister Gisèle interact with Julia, whom sister Gisèle had never met in life, and Angélique—a witness to slavery, its first abolition in 1794, and its definitive abolition in 1848—shares space with all of them as temporal distinctions are erased. The narrative moves back and forth across several locations and eras, for example, from a colonial plantation in Guadeloupe to the Cité Kremlin-Bicêtre, the

Paris-area housing project where many BUMIDOM families, like the Pineaus, settled, and back to Guadeloupe.

The often-repeated sentence "elles sont quatre" [there are four of them] and the individual accounts—each chapter carries the name of a single character and unfolds in non-chronological order—imply the randomness of memory and its enduring transiency as an archive. While each chapter privileges one person's recollections, it also contains verbatim fragments from the others' stories, creating the effect of a chorus in which each voice has a chance to solo or what could be characterized as a polyphonic call-and-response dynamic. For example, the author traces her surname back to Angélique, who reverses the dispossession of enslavement through wedlock by marrying her owner's son with whom she has had a coercive thirty-year arrangement. Julia, who also married into the Pineau family, survives a hard life, finding happiness back in her hometown, where she makes the decision to stand up to her spouse's abuse. The author's maternal kin, sisters Daisy and Gisèle, who are separated from her by only one generation, are aspirational like Angélique; they conform to gender norms in exchange for social status and financial security. Nevertheless, by naming her daughter in honor of her older sister, Daisy acknowledges her struggle and assures that she will not be forgotten. The convergence of "Gisèle Pineau" then is more than the juxtaposition of two separate family lines coming together; rather its strands intertwine and interlock, like a rhizome, exposing a complex lineage. Furthermore, while the women on her father's side are the ones whose decisions are somewhat more constructive, the generational trajectory is uneven, as upward mobility is accompanied by significant setbacks. Time does improve these women's material lives, but in other ways, their condition regresses.

Thus, Julia endures physical and verbal abuse at the hands of her fear-inspiring husband Astrubal, nicknamed Le Bourreau, who sports a colonial helmet indicative of his past career as an agent of French imperialism and benefits from society's class, gender, and color hierarchy. The inherent social imbalances coupled with Julia's Christian principles render her acquiescent. That she must address both her husband and son as "Monsieur Pineau" illustrates the intransigence of patriarchy across generations. Her son Maréchal, Daisy's husband, in turn imposes his own system of control in the mid-twentieth century. While stationed in French Indochina, he creates another household that, after his tour ends, he moves into the apartment in the Hexagon with his legal family. Neither Daisy nor the unnamed Asian woman has a say in the arrangement; nor does Daisy's

older sister Gisèle have the power or voice to object when her husband engages in adulterous relationships. Deemed property, Gisèle and Daisy suffer the indignities of their spouses' extramarital affairs; in Pineau's memoir, however, they are given an opportunity to break the cycle of silence through narration, and thereby reclaim their agency.

"There, Time Is Abolished": Official and Unofficial Histories

In the dark, confined space of the memory jail, timelessness reigns as memories flow: "La mémoire est une geôle. Là, les temps sont abolis. Là, les morts et les vivants sont ensemble" (7) [Memory is a jail. There, time is abolished. There, the dead and the living are together]. Sometimes the door opens, but no one leaves, as the principal activity—remembering—unfurls. Echoing Zora Neale Hurston's contention that: "Like the dead-seeming, cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their say" (Hurston 1991), Gisèle Pineau's memoir offers an inventive take on memory as a repository, a space in which the living coexist with the dead. At times Daisy reunites with the other women who are deceased in the memory jail, while at other times she joins the author in telling their shared histories as living moments, always present, articulated, and available. Echoing Njelle Hamilton's reading of Marlon James' novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, Pineau frames her foremothers as "untouched by the ravages of human time and positions the narrator … outside of time, able to see past, present and future in sequence and out of order and as an enduring present instant [the text] constructs continued living as a revolt against the teleological imperative of death" (Hamilton 2018, 81). The unfolding of history is likened to memory—it is messy, repetitive, plotless, repressed, spectral yet, living and breathing. The writing process turns Pineau into a kind of archive; her embodied memories are facilitated by a memento that each character brings with her, that defines her, links her to the past, and opens the floodgates to memory: "trésors … [qui] gardent vivant le temps du dehors et ravivent les couleurs de la mémoire" (28) [treasures that keep time alive outside and revive the colors of memory]. Once again, troubling strict delineations between official or unofficial discourses in her memory-archive, Pineau includes and gives equal merit to organic and inorganic items, all derived from plants at various stages of processing:

Julia clings to a guava branch; Gisèle wears a straw hat; Daisy caresses a book; and Angélique folds and unfolds the yellowed page from a newspaper.

Julia's branch from a guava tree is the one she kept close to her body to combat her feelings of exile in Paris. This tropical tree is not only abundant in her native commune Goyave, after which it is named, but on the island in general. Known for its flavor and smell, the fruit also has nutritional and therapeutic properties. She chews on the branch "sans doute pour en tirer quelque sève au goût de son pays" (126) [undoubtedly, to extract a bit of sap with her country's taste], and smelling it makes her remember her son's childhood. At once a weapon ("armée de sa branche de goyavier" [59]) and a product of nature that she tries to replant in the new space, it symbolizes her garden and desire to carry her native land wherever she goes. To cope with homesickness in the memory prison, Julia also draws butterflies on the walls, reproducing the shape of the island, and calls upon her senses to transport her back to her village, which also was the site of a historical maroon camp.

The story stimulated by Julia's guava branch recounts the stages of her development in site-specific spaces. Despondent in France, she carefully prepared dishes from her homeland, leading Brinda Mehta to talk about her "cultural resistance through the dynamics of food in the urban ghetto" (Mehta 2009, 96). She consoled her young granddaughter Gisèle by telling her about her hometown and praying each night that they would return together to Guadeloupe. The language of these intimate moments is Creole, her mother tongue, as opposed to French, the language of her son's household. Creole, which Guadeloupean social scientist Dany Bébel-Gisler posits is the "archive matérielle et symbolique des peuples de la Caraïbe" (Bébel-Gisler 1989, 218) [material and symbolic archive of the Caribbean people], along with Guadeloupean cuisine, then, both embodied by Julia, resist French hegemony. The second step of Julia's evolution is reinvention. Upon her return to Routhiers in 1967, she renounces her previous isolation by joining a local church choir and, no longer fearing her husband Astrubal, a veteran "Démobilisé pour cause de blessure à la tête" (78) [demobilized because of a head wound], she forbids him from battering her ever again. Whereas Astrubal's brain, the site of reasoning and memory, was damaged to the extent that he was discharged from the armed forces, Julia's memories find refuge in her granddaughter's *geôle* and will serve as a resource to shape her own life for the better. Residing in Gisèle's memory jail, Julia: "s'invente une vie en Afrique" (155)

[invented a life in Africa for herself]. Inspired by Daisy's and Angélique's stories about the Congo, she imagines herself growing up among monkeys and lions. While this problematic vision based on misinterpretations, misconceptions, and stereotypes constitutes a setback, the guava branch nevertheless has a twofold function: it prompts her memory and illustrates her desire to connect ties to her ancestral homeland.

While Julia longed to return to Guadeloupe, Daisy imagined a life far from her native (is)land. She spends her time in the memory jail rereading the romance novel she brought with her, identifying with its fictional characters, a tactic that has always helped her cope with adversity. As a young seamstress, she dreamed of a marriage that would take her to France, where "elle va construire sa vie de roman" (74) [she will construct a novel life]. To that end, she, a light-skinned daughter of a former plantation manager and successful small-business owner who went bankrupt, crossed class and color lines and quickly married dark-skinned Maréchal, because he was a French-speaking career military man, a World War II sergeant on leave. Migration to the Hexagon, however, didn't engender the fantasy life depicted in the books she borrowed from the library. Life was difficult; her husband terrorized the household. While he was stationed in Algeria, Daisy was confined in a sanitarium in France due to postpartum depression, while newborn Elie was temporarily placed in foster care and the other children stayed with her sister. Once the family was reunited, they relocated to independent Senegal and Congo, hardly the idyllic locales portrayed in romance novels she devoured. Frustrated as a wife, but fulfilled as a mother, Daisy willingly loses herself in her books: "La lecture lui donne le rêve, l'évasion, l'illusion. […] Elle existe à travers ses personnages d'encre et de papier" (55–56) [reading gives her the space to dream, escape, an illusion. […]. She exists through her characters on ink and paper]. Living vicariously—"Elle lit pour s'évader de son quotidien" (116) [she reads to escape from her daily life]—not only provides a brief respite, but "cette occupation lui est aussi nécessaire que le boire et le manger" (116) [this activity is as necessary as eating and drinking]. The book, then, is a tangible symbol of her vivid imagination, which allows her to escape to a mythological France construed as paradise, where romantic adventures end happily. The reader can assume that the protagonists in these novels are white, rendering her dreams unattainable due to her race. Unlike Julia who refuses assimilation, Daisy, a *bovaryste*, embraces and makes the Hexagon the center of her fantasy world, as well as that of her sister whom she turns into a heroine riding in a white car to the Eiffel Tower on her

honeymoon with her second husband.[8] Furthermore, Daisy is an unwitting accomplice of her husband and father-in-law, who as military men are agents of French post-colonial policy and colonial expansion, respectively, the violence of which they bring into their homes. In the memory jail, however, her thinking evolves somewhat. Admitting to having distanced herself from her African heritage, she is moved to tears reading aloud the list of newly freed individuals in Angélique's newspaper. This is Daisy's pivotal moment of empathy and appreciation for Angélique's achievement and her realization that the distant past is connected to the present. Nevertheless, the historic and historical materiality of the colonial newspaper and its proclamation contrasts sharply with the frivolous nature of the romance novel that stimulates her memories in the "geôle."

Angélique brings into the memory jail her cherished page from the 1831 edition of the *Gazette officielle de la Guadeloupe* that reports the governor's granting freedom to her children, the oldest of whom is twenty-four and the youngest, eight.[9] Until that date, according to the *Code noir*, they were considered property. Just three years earlier her own status had changed to that of a free woman, and in 1837, she would finally persuade Jean-Féréol to marry her, on his deathbed. Her "involvement" with Jean-Féréol Pineau had begun as rape, when his parents, accompanied by her mother Rose, a cook and maid, left the plantation overnight to attend a burial in Grande-Terre. In a dispassionate tone, Angélique provides few details after he, twenty-eight, entered her room when she was fourteen years old: "il prend dans ses mains mes tétés. Et c'est ainsi que tout a commencé avec mon maître" (164) [he took my breasts in his hands. That's how it started with my master]. Listening to Angélique's story, Julia knows what would follow, for it is so similar to the one her grandmother used to tell as a cautionary tale about sexual exploitation during the slavery era: "Elle sait ce qu'il va advenir de la fillette de quatorze ans. Le grand méchant loup va la manger" [she knows what will happen to the young fourteen-year-old girl. The bad wolf is going to eat her]. Knowing the inevitability of rape of young, enslaved girls by white men in the household and her inability to protect her daughter, Rose, overcome with guilt and shame, refuses to speak to Angélique from then on. When Angélique becomes pregnant, Dame Véronique, Jean-Féréol's mother, banishes the couple to the family vacation home in Les Saintes. What renders this situation ironic and more complex is that Dame Véronique, the wife of the elderly plantation owner Jean-Baptiste Pineau, is a slaveholding free woman of color who seeks to maintain the entrenched

race, class, and color hierarchies. Ashamed of her blackness, she "voulait que sa descendance blanchisse et fallait dire adieu aux alliances familiales projetées avec la mulâtraille … Fallait dire adieu à tous les beaux rêves d'une progéniture au teint clair et aux cheveux pas grainés" (165) [wanted her descendants to be light-skinned and would have to give up hopes of family marriages with 'those mulattos' [pej] … had to say goodbye to those beautiful dreams of light-skinned, straight-haired progeny]. Her unwavering objection to her white-identifying son—who has no problem exercising exploitative patriarchal authority—being involved with a black woman is rooted in her desire for her offspring to "pass" in white society in order to fully benefit from its privileges.

Bitter and aware of her powerlessness, Angélique raised her children with no illusions about her arrangement with Jean-Féréol:

> Je le voyais pas comme le père de mes enfants, seulement comme mon maître. Un vieux maître de trente-cinq ans qui avait pris ma virginité et m'avait privée de ma mère pour contenter sa chair. […] Obligée de rester couchée sous lui. Forcée par entraînement à pas lui résister, à ouvrir les cuisses et, sans joie, attendre qu'il en ait terminé (167-8) [I didn't see him as the father of my children, only as my master. An old, thirty-five-year-old master who had taken my virginity and deprived me of my mother in order to satisfy his flesh. […] Forced to lie under him. Forced by training not to resist him, to open my thighs and, joylessly, wait until he had finished].

Her mantra "Toute ma vie j'ai dû me battre" (143–4) echoes Sofia's often-quoted line from the novel and film *The Color Purple*, "all my life I had to fight," rendered in the French translation as "Toute ma vie j'ai été forcée de me battre" (Walker 1992, 39; Meyjes 2007). Whereas Sofia asserts that she will not be a victim of Harpo's brutality, Angélique repeats the line several times to her listeners at the beginning of her stand-alone *récit*, accentuating her struggle against specific individuals who were an integral part of an oppressive and violent system. Although her request for marriage is not granted until a few days before Jean-Féréol's death, the newspaper, whose contents Angélique had memorized, refers to her as "Dame Angélique," the title she finally earned as a free person that encapsulates her achievement of subjectivity. This former enslaved woman, rape survivor, and "concubine" is reinvented further as she advances from Dame Angélique "négresse, libre de couleur" to Dame Angélique Pineau when she marries and quickly becomes a widow, inheriting her husband's

estate—land, homes, shops, sugar cane fields, and enslaved persons. From her early years of sharing a bed with her mother for protection from the men in the household to sleeping in her former owner's bed is an extraordinary trajectory, as she inherits the property from the person who once owned her and her mother. That Angélique's memento is neither her freedom papers nor her marriage certificate is a strong indication that she treasures her children's emancipation, a fundamental legacy that will have a major impact on their and their descendants' lives.

Associated with Aunt Gisèle, the straw hat that she brings into the memory prison has a practical purpose and a psychological function: "la soustraire à la vue des autres et, dans le même temps, la préserver de la vision des laideurs du monde" (42–3). In other words, she wears the hat not only to avoid being the object of the gaze, but to protect her from seeing the ugliness around her. Life for Gisèle is a war and "face aux ennemis" [facing enemies] she needs a combat helmet (43), like the one her future brother-in-law and sister's father-in-law would wear. If theirs, however, could not provide them with adequate protection from physical harm in wartime, how could hers, which was made of straw? Having married for love and delighting in the status of a middle-class, stay-at-home "Madame" (29), Gisèle becomes horrified by the physical changes to her body after giving birth three times in four years and overwhelmed by her household responsibilities. Her unsympathetic husband claims ownership of her body, like Jean-Féréol and Astrubal/Le Bourreau deemed Angélique's and Julia's, respectively, their property.[10] That he insists on sleeping with her when she is unwilling would be considered spousal rape today. Silent, withdrawn, and more fragile after her husband is murdered, poisoned perhaps by a jealous husband, Gisèle falls into a deep depression, stops taking care of herself and her children, and dies at age twenty-seven, "emportée par le chagrin" [dead from grief]. Delicate like her never-used hand-painted porcelain dinnerware set for twelve and in no way "une guerrière, non plus une résistante" (46) [neither a warrior nor a resistor], she does not possess the tools to resist or reinvent herself like Angélique, Julia, and Daisy. In the memory jail, she depends on her seventy-five-year-old "younger" sister Daisy to braid her hair and help her reconstruct her own story. It is Daisy, for instance, who recounts Gisèle's wedding day on September 17, 1942, when she, at age ten, served as her bridesmaid.

Parole de nuit or *parole de la mémoire*

The transgenerational gathering in the "geôle" imitates the traditional Caribbean *parole de nuit* in which people assemble at night to witness a storyteller perform tales that everyone knows. That outdoor space is an important site of memory, according to Glissant: "Un des lieux de la mémoire antillaise a bien été le cercle délimité autour du conteur par les ombres de nuit" (Glissant 1990, 51) [one of the sites of Antillean memory was the circle around the storyteller demarcated by the night shadows]. Pineau's narrators as well as audience in *Mes quatre femmes* are exclusively female, which upends the pervasive image reinforced by Raphaël Confiant's *Les Maîtres de la parole créole* (1995) in which all the twenty-six *conteurs* interviewed are male, thereby rendering their female counterparts silent and invisible. Pineau's *geôle* is a psychic space in which the women storytellers assume the narration one by one, passing the metaphorical baton to the next speaker. Angélique, steeped in the oral tradition and speaking most often in the first person, recognizes the structure and appreciates the content despite the shift to various contemporary settings; she "s'extasie sur ces contes du temps moderne" (103) [is ecstatic over these modern oral stories].

Pineau embraces Fabienne Kanor's declaration regarding her particular responsibility as a writer—"faire savoir, that is, to inform about the past" (Kanor 2016)—and her characters welcome the charge. To that end, Julia, for example, the most experienced *oralituraine*, goes as far as to tie together the threads of the others' stories. Espousing the ethics of Caribbean storytelling, she passes on knowledge, educating her granddaughter about her culture and heritage. Harryette Mullen's concept "resistant orality," which refers to enslaved African American women narrators who were excluded from other discourses (Fulton 2006, 22), is relevant to the characters in this text. Daisy is a gifted oral storyteller as well as an enthusiastic reader: "Daisy raconte si bien qu'Angélique tombe dans ses filets et se laisse prendre à l'histoire de sa vie" (115) [Daisy spoke so well that Angélique fell into her net and let herself be caught up by her life story]. Sharing her story has personal healing benefits in that it seems to lift a burden from her shoulders: "elle se sent légère […] c'est comme si elle s'était lavée de ses années de mariage" (142). While Gisèle isn't as articulate as the others, she joins forces with Daisy to construct a story about their side of the family: "Daisy et Gisèle mettent en branle leurs souvenirs. Elles chicanent sur des détails, ajustent leurs récits et finissent

par s'accorder sur une version consensuelle de l'histoire qu'elles livrent d'une même voix à Julia et à Angélique" (25) [Daisy and Gisèle set their memories in motion. They quibble about the details, adjust their stories, and end up by agreeing on a consensual version of the story that they deliver with the same voice to Julia and Angélique]. At one point, Daisy, who crossed the Atlantic Ocean in a ship with her mother-in-law, picks up her story where she left off: "Julia n'a plus envie de causer. Elle laisse la parole à Daisy qui raconte la vie à bord" (103) [Julia doesn't want to talk anymore. She let Daisy speak, who recounts her life on board]. Angélique, opening her *récit* with "Moi, aussi" (143) [me, too], identifies immediately with the others before sharing her personal experiences. Angélique juxtaposes her memories with excerpts from the *Code noir*, thereby blending *histoire* and *Histoire* and oral and written discourses. The last and the longest uninterrupted piece recounted in the present tense, her *récit* therefore resembles a traditional slave narrative, opening with birth information and closing with the achievement of freedom.

A repository of memories and history, the *geôle* in *Mes quatre femmes* is paradoxically a jail and a sanctuary, a site of trauma, of reflection, of regrets, of solace, of pain, and of healing through storytelling, all of which contribute to an alternative, family archive. A literal *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989), where time and space are reconceptualized, it is where lives are recounted, dreams recalled, and identities reconstructed. By placing four of her blood relatives in that confined space, Pineau retraces and merges their individual stories so that the reader can imagine, anticipate, and understand their impact on her own journey and chart the progress, sometimes limited, made by Guadeloupean women over time. Her admission about her childhood in *Folie, aller simple: Journée ordinaire d'une infirmière*, which chronicles her experiences as a psychiatric nurse, that "J'étais toujours plongée dans des livres, assise à côte de la vraie vie, fuyant de toute mon âme la réalité du quotidien" (Pineau 2010, 108) [I was always deep into books, seated next to real life, fleeing daily reality with all my soul] echoes Daisy's claim, suggesting that her penchant for reading had passed from mother to daughter and with the same objective of escaping the present in order to cope with adversity. With the exception of Aunt Gisèle, the narrators collectively are instrumental in descendant Gisèle's storytelling predisposition and literary endeavors.[11]

Toni Morrison's assessment about the relationship between ghosts, haunting, and writing is relevant to Pineau: "I think of ghosts and haunting as being alert. If you're really alert, then you see the life that exists

beyond the life that is on top" (Montagne 2004). Pineau is attentive: "Ce sont des femmes qui me hantent. C'est aussi pour cela que je les ai placées dans une geôle, qui est une sublimation de la mémoire" (Avignon 2007) [It's women who haunt me. It's also for that reason that I placed them in a jail, which is a sublimation of memory]. Their voices, rendering soothing, auditory images, serenade her as she writes: "J'écris encore avec le ronron de leurs voix et tous leurs ramages." The soft, purring voices ("ronron") and bird songs ("ramages") provide background music for her writing sessions (Pineau 2010, 171–2). Fittingly, "ramages" also denotes the leaf pattern of a tree branch, and thus metaphorically, the foundation of a genealogical tree, whose intricate, intertwining roots form a rhizome. She is comforted by these ghosts lodged in her memory,[12] where their ancestral encounters form an essential part of her being: "Celle-là a dessiné le pays. Celle-ci a légué le nom. La troisième a posé la langue. La quatrième a cédé le prénom" (12) [that one drew the country. This one left her name. The third one gave me language. The fourth one gave me her first name]. She incarnates these disembodied souls, grateful for their eternal presence and storytelling gifts. Inseparable and joined forever across space and time, this "living" legacy residing in her "geôle obscure de la mémoire" establishes a feminist genealogy of survival, agency, and creativity.

Notes

1. All quotations from *Mes quatre femmes* are taken from this edition and page numbers will be cited in parentheses. All translations are mine.
2. Conventional representations of haunting in literature evoke an atmosphere of darkness and gloom, as seen in Gabriele Schwab's *Haunting Legacies*: *Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* (2010), Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren's edited volume *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (2013), and Kathleen Brogan's *Cultural Hauntings: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (1998). Although Martin Munro compiled a broad range of representations for his anthology *The Haunted Tropics: Caribbean Ghost Stories* (2015), it won honorable mention in the Adult Horror category of Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards (Anonymous 2015).
3. Nevertheless, Tituba is figured as a frightening witch on the cover of the 1989 paperback edition of the novel.
4. For a discussion of "traditional" ghosts in other texts by Pineau, see Githire (2005) and Maisier (2012).

5. There are streets named after her, statues erected in her honor in Guadeloupe and France, and UNESCO created a pedagogical unit—including a comic strip—for schools (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000230936). In fiction, there are André Schwartz-Bart's *La Mulatresse Solitude* (1972a) and his and Simone Schwarz-Bart's *L'Ancêtre en Solitude* (2015), which follows three generations of her descendants.
6. On the possibility of trauma inherited from slavery, see Charles-Nicolas (2015), and Carey (2018). In late October 2016, the colloquium L'Esclavage: quel impact sur la psychologie de la population? was held in Guadeloupe: https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/martinique/esclavage-quel-impact-psychologie-populations-410159.html
7. Conversely, Gladys M. Francis analyzes the belly of Gina Bovoir in Pineau's *Cent vies et des poussières* as a symbolic site of powerlessness, alienation, and pain (Francis 2017, 17–19).
8. See Jean Price-Mars (2022) on "bovarysme collectif" in relation to Haitians in *La Vocation de l'élite*.
9. Pineau reveals that it was her father who came across the reference to Angélique (see Avignon 2007).
10. Gisèle's spouse proclaims repeatedly: "Tu es ma femme" but she hears: "Tu es mon esclave … Tu es ma propriété … Tu m'appartiens … Tu es ma jument" (42) [You are my wife; You are my slave … You are my property … You belong to me … You are my mare].
11. Gisèle also credits her father for fostering an atmosphere conducive to education by purchasing hard-covered collections of Balzac, Zola, LaFontaine, Racine, and Corneille, and ordering encyclopedias through the mail (Pineau 2007, 137).
12. "Je vis ici comme avec les fantômes, avec ceux qui ne sont plus là, mais je me sens bien." [I live here like with the ghosts, with those who are no longer with us, but I feel goodl] http://ile-en-ile.org/gisele-pineau-5-questions-pour-ile-en-ile/

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