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Representations of Girlhood Trauma in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature Written by Women

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Certain ideas and passages contained in Chapter 2 on Life Writing have been partially published as


and will soon be published as


Signed: Marine Berthiot.
This thesis is dedicated to my father, Michel Berthiot, and to my daughter, Bérénice Berthiot Santana.
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Abstract

In “Representations of Girlhood Trauma in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature Written by Women”, I investigate the way literary genres affect trauma-telling and how culturally sensitive forms of trauma-reading allow girl trauma-tellers to be heard and not re-traumatised by a patriarchal and colonial interpretation of their pain. I analyse about twenty texts by women writers of diverse ethnic descents, encompassing Aotearoa’s four main ethnic groups (Pākehā [also called European New Zealanders], Māori, Asian, and Pasifika), to illustrate New Zealand’s contemporary multiculturalism and multilingualism – an approach which contests a Western-imported, male-dominated, and Freudian-inspired reading of minorities’ cultural traumas. Following Dominick LaCapra’s theory, I argue that the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi on 6 February 1840 can be understood as a foundational trauma for the Indigenous people of Aotearoa. This document is at the root of their intergenerational cultural trauma as it led to massive land confiscation, the loss of their sovereignty, and their forced assimilation into a Western way of life. As New Zealand is still a settler colony today, women writers employ feminist and – especially when they are of non-Pākehā descent – decolonial trauma-telling devices to formulate traumatic tales which otherwise would remain unspeakable.

The five chapters of the thesis are each dedicated to a literary genre: life writing, poetry, fictional diaries and the epistolary mode, the female Bildungsroman, and young adult fiction. To analyse the interpersonal, intergenerational, transgenerational, and/or vicarious forms of girlhood trauma expressed in the corpus, I create a dialogue between the literary field of Trauma Studies founded at Yale University in the 1990s and four New Zealand-based trauma-reading traditions: Mason Durie’s theory of te whare tapa whā (the four-walled house) which is a holistic approach to Māori health as physical, mental, spiritual, and familial health are intertwined; David Epston’s and Michael White’s research on Narrative Therapy; Charles Waldegrave’s and Kiwi Tamasese’s work on Just Therapy; as well as Linda and Mark Kopua’s storytelling practices during Mahi a atua (healing with ancestors) sessions.
Lay Summary

This PhD thesis on Aotearoa New Zealand Literature interrogates the literary devices employed by girl and women survivors to tell, read, and make sense of their traumatic tales of childhood trauma. Aotearoa New Zealand has high rates of domestic violence, with one woman out of three and one child out of four, enduring maltreatment at home. Set up in 2019, the New Zealand Royal Inquiry into Children in Care has revealed that, between 1950 and 1999, about 260,000 children were abused while in ‘care’, with Māori being overrepresented in the statistics. I posit that the systematic abuse of women and children in New Zealand is connected to settler colonialism. As New Zealand is still not decolonised today, women writers employ feminist and, when they are of non-Pākehā descent – that is to say: from a non-white and/or non-English speaking background – they use decolonial trauma-telling devices to formulate trauma narratives which otherwise would remain unspeakable. Their choice of literary genres also informs the way they translate girlhood trauma for their audience, acknowledging their age range, gender, cultures, and ethnicity.

My research contributes to the field of Trauma Studies as I create a dialogue between the theories formulated in the 1990s at Yale University, then comprising critics like Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, Geoffrey Hartman, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, and Dominick LaCapra, and New Zealand-based trauma-reading traditions. Mason Durie’s theory of te whare tapa whā (the four-walled house) is a holistic approach to Māori health in which spiritual, physical, mental, and familial forms of health are intertwined. I draw upon his trauma-reading methodologies to analyse the cultural, intergenerational, and interpersonal traumas experienced by girl characters in the female Bildungsroman, Cousins, by Patricia Grace (1992), as well as work by Renée whose autobiography, These Two Hands: A Memoir (2017), recounts the upheavals of growing up during the Great Depression and her experience of racial segregation as a Māori girl from the working-class. Narrative Therapy, founded by David Epston and Michael White in the 1990s, is also drawn upon in analysis of texts by and about Pākehā (anti-) heroines such as Tess Duder’s In Lane Three, Alex Archer (1987) on the notion of mourning, or Kirsty Gunn’s Rain (1994) on the specificities of the grief diary and on the topic of child sexual abuse. Just Therapy, by Charles Waldegrave and Kiwi Tamasese, has been a useful tool to excavate classist, racist, and sexist prejudices behind cultural and interpersonal forms of trauma. These two family therapists aim at decolonising psychology by
shedding light on the white male privileges which abound in this discipline. The techniques they use to reverse dominant discourses and foreground the voices of minorities instead allowed me to question the Western concept of ‘family dysfunction’ in Shonagh Koea’s and Janet Frame’s cases, and emphasise the fact that assigning a gender at birth can be detrimental for children’s construction and perception of themselves, as Kyle Mewburn explains in “Break-Up Day” (2015). The fourth trauma-reading methodology that I apply is Mahi a atua, a form of narrative therapy founded by Linda and Mark Kopua and adapted to Māori storytelling practices as they invoke ancestors and extended family members to heal survivors. Trauma-telling is therefore envisioned in its co-dependence with trauma-reading as both activities necessitate an apprenticeship on the part of the trauma-teller who is always also a trauma-reader. As trauma narratives are multicultural and multilingual in Aotearoa New Zealand, girl survivors and their readers need to work closely together to make sense of mental, physical, social, and spiritual wounds which remain unhealed if left unsaid, unheard, and/or misread.

Reading traumatic tales in culturally sensitive trauma-reading methodologies and through the theoretical frames of literary genres allows me to approach the texts of the corpus with care and respect. As a white Western cisgender researcher, I have tried to avoid relying upon potentially biased Eurocentric theories to my corpus, as, with my words, I would be recolonising the texts and their authors by perpetuating institutional racism and sexism. As the corpus reflects Aotearoa’s contemporary multicultural society, my work draws upon Māori methodologies, giving voice to the three main ethnic minorities (Māori, Kiwi Asians, and Pasifika), while contesting the 1980s neoliberal concept of a bicultural New Zealand dominated by a Pākehā main/malestream discourse.
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CHAPTER 1.

“Introduction”
PART 1: Decolonising Trauma Studies

In his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1950), Aimé Césaire equates colonialism with Nazism, highlighting the genocidal component at the heart of both political enterprises. Settler colonialism has the genocide of Indigenous peoples in its agenda – even though it is most of the time unassumed and denied (Wolfe; Tuck) – and this genocide is motivated by economic greed as Indigenous peoples’ land is targeted by settlers who prey upon it to gain access to its natural resources (Wolfe; Tuck; Tuhiwai Smith). Eve Tuck (Unangax) and K. Wayne Yang argue that “[e]verything within a settler colonial society strains to destroy or assimilate the Native in order to disappear them from the land” (9). Decolonising settler colonies is still ongoing as settlers and Indigenous peoples claim the same land as their home, leaving the other group landless, therefore homeless and illegal. Te tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi, signed on 6 February 1840, is considered as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand as it was signed by British officials and Māori chiefs, and yet it remains highly contested as this treaty has two versions, one in English and one in te reo Māori (the Māori language), which are not faithful translations. Founded in 1975, the Tribunal of Waitangi’s mission is to repair colonial wrongs by legally enforcing the Māori version of te tiriti o Waitangi. The Tribunal has redressed claims of land dispossession and attacks to Māori sovereignty, including Māori women’s rights and mana (power, charisma, authority) (Espiner; Duff; Tracy 30; Te Aho 115).

At the international conference on “Literature and Politics in Oceania” held at The University of French Polynesia in November 2022, Raylene Ramsay explained that there is not one feminism, but several, and that there should be no hierarchy nor any competition between these forms of feminisms. She added that feminist ideas need to be adapted to the needs of the society where they are formulated. Hence, Western feminism cannot be applied on Indigenous women from the Pacific without being challenged as Indigenous feminism is an answer to the social issues Indigenous women and girls encounter. In their “Introduction on Decolonizing Education”, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou), Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang state that “Indigenous feminist scholarship has been especially careful to remind: there is no decolonization without Indigenous presence on Indigenous land and waters” (1). Indigenous women’s rights are deeply entangled with Indigenous land rights, which contests the Western divide between nature and culture. The cultural trauma endured
by the Māori community is inseparable from the colonial exploitation of the land and the patriarchal debasement of women and girls. As Jeffrey Alexander notes, “trauma is not something naturally existing; it is something constructed by society” (2). In this context, girlhood trauma is “constructed” by the settler colonial society in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is imbricated in a colonial structure which is based on the exploitation of natural resources at the expense of Māori (women’s) rights.

This literary studies thesis is unique as it examines the representations of girlhood trauma in Aotearoa in a feminist and decolonial perspective. The trauma-reading methodologies that I apply to analyse girls’ traumas are New Zealand-based and challenge Western ‘universalising’ theories which subjugate women and non-white people (Waldegrave and Tamasese, “Cultural” 30). The focus on girls reflects a societal concern for a part of the New Zealand population who is perceived as being at risk as girls lie at the intersection of child abuse and violence against women. When one woman out of three (2018 United Nations Report) and one child out of four are victims of domestic abuse in Aotearoa New Zealand (Ainge Roy, “Study”), girls’ life narratives can be altered by a series of traumatising events and long-term situations. Girls’ traumas can be both punctual (Caruth) and insidious (Herman; Gibbs 16). Girlhood intergenerational trauma and its intertwinment with cultural trauma is analysed with methodological tools which are respectful of trauma-tellers’ cultures and languages. The corpus is composed of texts which give centre stage to girls and girl characters who (have) endure(d) traumatic experiences. The decolonial and feminist approach I choose to endorse engages with the models of feminism that emerge in the texts themselves. I apply Māori feminism, mana wahine, and Māori approaches to mental health to analyse Māori girls’ trauma narratives. Sharon Toi (Te Mahurehure, Ngāti Korokoro, and Ngāpuhi) defines mana wahine in these terms: “For Indigenous women the discourse and language of decolonisation is about social justice, healing, and reclamation” (213). Mana wahine is an integral part of Māori iwi (tribes), hapū (subtribes), and whānau (extended families) as women’s power has been constructed as complementary to men’s power since pre-colonial times (Toi 213; Pihama 352). Mana wahine contests heteronormative and patriarchal constructs of Indigenous women imposed on them during colonisation. It participates in restoring a social contract in which women share public and leading roles with men, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are accepted (Pihama 360).
My work creates a dialogue between Western and Indigenous feminisms which cohabitate in Aotearoa New Zealand. I highlight first-wave Western feminist thoughts in the historical novel, *The Book of Secrets* (1987), written by Pākehā (European New Zealander) author Fiona Kidman; second-wave feminism in the young adult novel, *Alex Archer: Lane Three* by Pākehā writer Tessa Duder (1987); and third-wave feminist ideas such as intersectionality, a tool created by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Cho et al.) and adapted by Charles Waldegrave (Pākehā) and Kiwi Tamasese (Samoan New Zealander) in Just Therapy, to excavate the subjugating factors which traumatises girls in Aotearoa. The thesis is also inscribed in fourth-wave feminism as it examines the impact sexual assault and sexual abuse have on girls, and incorporates Indigenous feminist frameworks to read Māori girls’ trauma in a culturally sensitive way. However, postfeminism is contested in this thesis for its hyper-sexualisation of girls which (ironically) further contributes to the enforcement of patriarchal control on girls, their behaviours, and their sexuality.

In 2015, Steph Craps, Bryan Cheyette, and Alan Gibbs, at a Round-Table at Ghent University, talked about the necessity to decolonise Trauma Studies. This field was then confronted with cultural and linguistic limitations. Constructed as a universal concept whose post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms had been recognised (and pathologised) in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-4) in 1994, trauma was yet mostly studied in English; in Western nations like the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom; in a Freudian approach; and in relation to the Holocaust, at the exclusion of colonisation (Craps et al., “Decolonizing” 909). Decolonising Trauma Studies is a way to reconnect the Holocaust with colonisation, a perspective first claimed by Frantz Fanon, Hannah Arendt, and Aimé Césaire in the 1950s, in the aftermath of the Second World War and in the midst of decolonisation (Craps et al., “Decolonizing” 909). Even if, today, the experience of trauma is international as we have come to live in “an age of trauma” (L. Gilmore, *The Limits* 16), in which no one is spared the effects of transgenerational, intergenerational, historical, cultural, interpersonal, and/or vicarious trauma, no traumatic experience is lived in the same way. Not every child who has suffered from child abuse systematically develops PTSD as an adult (Frank et al. 2; Prior and Glaser 219). Early interventions into child abuse, coping techniques, and resilience can reverse an alarming prognosis (Zeanah et al.). Culturally sensitive therapies can also help traumatised people “frame” their trauma into the past and rewrite empowering alternative stories for themselves (White and Epston; Waldegrave and Tamasese; Kopua).
Decolonial trauma critics emphasise the inadequacy of the psychoanalytic model of treatment which is not adapted to non-Westerners and can, if applied indiscriminately to Indigenous people, be detrimental to their cultures, their modes of expression, and their identities (Craps et al.; Rothberg, “Decolonizing”; Andernahr; Gorodé, *Graines*). In this sense, despite his pioneering work on trauma, Sigmund Freud’s views have to be read with attention to the historic, geographic, and social context of his time. Freud wrote during the colonial era and his work is imbued with racist theories like social Darwinism or ‘the noble savage’. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), for instance, he applies the racial hierarchy that was implemented in European empires (Arendt). In this text, Freud regards Aboriginal Australians as ‘inferior’ and ‘backward’ when compared to Melanesians and Polynesians (72). He thus reproduced the racist classification invented by Jules Dumont D’Urville (Douglas 6) without questioning its validity. Freud equates ‘savages’ – that is to say, in his frame of thought, colonised people in general – with children. Hence, Indigenous people are described as childish and child-like, as he argues that both groups are guided by their unconscious only (166). This disparaging comment is typical of a patriarchal discourse, and is redolent of the Western arguments which have long denied adult women’s rights (Wollstonecraft). The views Freud held of women, children, and Indigenous people are discriminatory. Studying girlhood trauma in Aotearoa New Zealand with an uncontested Freudian lens would therefore be culturally insensitive and abusive, and it could be interpreted as a form of recolonisation; that is why I will not follow this tradition.

Aotearoa New Zealand has evolved into a creolised multicultural and multilingual society, transcending its legal structure promoting biculturalism and bilingualism. Yet, Melissa Kennedy and Chris Prentice identify an ambivalence (M. Kennedy 1011; Prentice, “Terms”), a dual and inconsistent attitude that successive neoliberal governments have developed in New Zealand. Indeed, from the 1980s, neoliberal policies have officially encouraged and disseminated the national ideal of a bicultural and bilingual society living in harmony. In this utopia, Pākehā (New Zealanders of British descent, sometimes called “European New Zealanders”) and Māori cultures and languages are said to be on an equal footing and equally represented. However, reality is far from this nationalistic myth (M. Kennedy 1012). From the 1980s onwards, social inequalities have kept increasing between the two populations, with Māori suffering more and more from the disappearance of the Welfare State created in the 1930s to provide financial support to those most in need. In 1935, during the Great Depression, the Labour Government who was then in power passed a series
of measures which led to the creation of a Welfare State (Cooper and Molloy; M. King, *Pākehā Now* 27). At the time, secondary education was made free for all, and New Zealanders, even those from the working class, were given access to free healthcare. The Chinese community of New Zealand was yet excluded from these national schemes (J. Lee 59). Today, the most recent statistics show that Māori experience poor housing, low incomes, less access to higher education, high criminality rates, poor health, and early deaths. These statistics show that Māori are systematically made unequal across various socioeconomic indicators in comparison with Pākehā. As one of the targets of the current government led by Pākehā Labour Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, child poverty is decreasing as, between June 2018 and June 2021, it evolved from 16.5 per cent (183,400 children) to 13.6 per cent (156,700 children). However, one in six Māori children (17.8 per cent; 52,600 children) were still living under the poverty line in June 2021 (Stats NZ/Tatāurananga Aotearoa, “Child Poverty”). These figures show that Māori children are more at risk of growing up in deprived socio-economic backgrounds, which perpetuates the inequalities established during colonisation. Moreover, Karen M. McLellan et al. notice that “Māori aged over 35 years are hospitalised with stroke twice as often as non-Māori (Ministry of Health, 2010)” (455). Māori, and especially boys and men, are also particularly affected by suicide with a rate of 23.72 per 100,000 in 2018 (Boyle). On top of that, Māori represented 52.7% of the New Zealand prison population in March 2021 (Department of Corrections). Social injustices persist because New Zealand is a settler colony. Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver defines this form of colonialism as “internal” and thus pervasive: “the native population is swamped by a large mass of colonial settlers who, after generations, no longer have a métropole to which to return. Métropole and colony thus become geographically coextensive” (223) for colonial settlers. The immigration waves of the 1990s and 2000s did not help eradicate the social gap between Māori and Pākehā, despite the fact that New Zealand still has no official multicultural policy, as it is still governed according to the bicultural and bilingual policies established in the 1980s.

Since the bicultural and bilingual policies were implemented, te reo Māori has been considered as one of the three official languages of Aotearoa New Zealand, alongside English and sign language. Although the English word ‘trauma’ originates from the Ancient Greek word for ‘wound’, in te reo Māori the word ‘trauma’ can be translated into four different words. Pāmamae encompasses the meanings of “grief, distress, disappointment, trauma”. Whētuki refers to “shock, trauma, distress”. Tāmitanga means “stress, trauma, hassle”. As for
ngaukino, it is polysemic as well, as it means “trauma, distress, pain (emotional), bitterness (attitude), resentment, animosity” (Te Aka/The Online Māori Dictionary). Trauma as it is understood and defined in the English language has no literal translation in te reo Māori, as four nouns can be used to translate this concept, depending on the context of the trauma. The other grammatical functions these four words perform help specify the type of trauma they each refer to. For example, pāmamae in its stative form means “be hurt, in pain, feel sad, upset”, and in its modifier form: “traumatic, upsetting, distressing, painful”. The notion of pain seems to dominate this vision of trauma, as it conveys the idea of a physical or a mental wound, leading to disappointment, sadness, distress, and grief on the part of the person who experiences it. Whētuki is first a physical action. As a verb, it expresses “to throb, palpitate, flutter”, which is then further developed into a passive reaction: “to be shocked, distressed”. Whētuki highlights the physical response a person can have when facing a traumatic experience: their heartbeats become uncontrolled, irregular, faster than usual, even causing pain. Trauma as whētuki is then a lived experience which is not usual, out of the ordinary, and from which one can suffer. Tāmitanga is no verb but, as a noun, is linked to another series of meanings: “suppression, oppression, repression, subjugation, colonisation”. Tāmitanga as trauma would therefore be linked to a power imbalance, colonial and neo-colonial relationships, patriarchy, and violence in general. Tāmitanga is the recognition that trauma can be the result of colonisation. As for ngaukino, its verb form means “to be traumatised, distressed, in pain, upset, devastated”. This definition would thus be closer to that of pāmamae because of the idea of pain, yet it would go deeper and further than just acknowledging the physical and/or mental pain by adding to it another dimension, that of devastation (i.e. etymologically: destruction, ravage). Hence the anger associated with this form of trauma (i.e. “bitterness”, “resentment”, “animosity”). Te reo Māori therefore communicates the way Māori people experience trauma, and the linguistic implications these words carry have to be taken into account to decolonise Trauma Studies and adapt this field to the context of Aotearoa New Zealand.

PART 2: Aotearoa New Zealand’s Foundational Trauma

Dominick LaCapra questions the construction of archives as a Western, male-dominated, and colonial practice (96). He highlights the way trauma and history are
interwoven, and develops his theory of ‘the founding or foundational trauma’ which he
defines as “the trauma that carries a powerful affective charge and may be transformed or
transvalued in ideological ways” (106). He then gives the example of the French Revolution
which shook the foundations of the French social structure in 1789 and which still has
repercussions on the narration of the French nation. If transposed to Aotearoa New Zealand, I
argue that LaCapra’s concept of a foundational trauma could be applied to the signing of the
Treaty of Waitangi on February 6, 1840. This treaty is regarded as the founding document of
Aotearoa New Zealand as this country does not have a Constitution (Durie 27-28). This
document was signed by about 540 Māori Rangatira (chiefs), including 13 women; Jean-
Baptiste Pompallier, a French missionary who was the first Catholic Bishop of New Zealand;
and the representative of the British Crown, Captain William Hobson, then Consul.

Although many Māori women were chiefs, the British colonists refused to recognise
their roles, which explains why so few women signed the Treaty. The Treaty of Waitangi is
seen as the first step into the erasing of mana wāhine (women’s power) from history
(Espiner). Pre-colonial times were marked by harmonious gender relationships in Māori iwi
(tribes), hapū (subtribes), and whānau (extended families). Gender roles were complementary
and not hierarchical, contrary to the Christian model imposed during colonisation. Women
were not subservient to men as whakapapa (genealogical bonds) were respected as the only
valid hierarchical structure (Te Aho 117; Tracy 30). The Waitangi Tribunal’s Mana Wāhine
kaupapa inquiry has shown that, from 1840 onwards, Māori women have been systematically
subjugated (Duff, “Founding Mothers”). Today, Māori women have an 18% gender pay gap
compared to 9.4% for Pākehā women. They represent 64% of the female carceral population.
They are overrepresented in statistics linked to unemployment (11%) and domestic violence
(57%) (Espiner). Between 2017 and 2019, Māori women’s life expectancy was seven years
shorter than their white counterparts’ (Stats NZ/Tatauranga Aotearoa, “National”). As Patrick
Wolfe argues while describing the life expectancy of Aboriginal Australians, “[w]hat species
of sophistry does it take to separate a quarter ‘part’ of the life of a group from the history of
their elimination?” (399). In a similar way, many Māori women scholars have connected the
series of discriminations experienced by Māori women in contemporary Aotearoa to
colonisation.

Rere-ō-Maki, Kahe Te Rau-o-te-Rangi, Ngāraurekau, Te Kehu, Rangi Topeora, Pari,
Hoana Riutoto, Te Wairākau, Takurua, Te Marama, Ana Hamu, Marama, and Ereonora are
the thirteen women Rangatira who signed the Treaty of Waitangi. They are regarded today as “Aotearoa’s founding mothers” (Duff, “Founding Mothers”). As te reo Māori names are not gendered, and as te reo Māori has no gendered personal pronouns to distinguish men from women (Pihama 357), it is highly possible that more women signed the Treaty, just as it is likely that many Māori women Rangatira were forbidden to sign the Treaty by British officials who could not fathom that those women had the power to lead their people (Duff, “Founding Mothers”; Espiner). Māori cosmology confirms the mana (power, high status, charisma) of women in pre-colonial times. Papatūānuku is the earth mother from whom the sacredness of the land originates as the word whenua refers to both land and placenta, and as Māori call themselves tangata whenua (people of the land). Traditionally, when a Māori child is born, her/his/their placenta is buried in the land of her/his/their ancestors, understood as their turangawaewae (the land where they can always come back if in need) (Grace and Della Valle 132). Papatūānuku and her husband Ranginui, the god of the sky, reared several children in the confined space between their embrace (M. Kopua). One of them, Tāne-mahuta, the god of the forests, separated his parents to gain his independence. His act of emancipation made light shine on earth for the first time. Tāne-mahuta also moulded the first human being who inhabited the earth, a woman named Hineahuone, which means ‘earth-formed woman’ (Te Ahukaramū), thus connecting all women to the earth mother, Papatūānuku. Leonie Pihama deplores the fact that the mythical figure of Hineahuone was desecrated by Christian missionaries with the aim of debasing Māori women into mere “‘receptacle[s]’ and passive receiver[s] of the ‘male seed’” (354), when she is at the origin of Māori matrilineal power.

The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi can be regarded as a foundational trauma for the Māori community as a whole. From February 6, 1840, the British Crown gained sovereignty over New Zealand, destabilising Māori rangatiratanga (sovereignty). The British Crown had acquired the right to sell and buy Māori land; and Māori and British were officially one people, having the same rights as New Zealanders. However, two versions of the Treaty exist as the version signed by all Māori Rangatira but thirty-nine was in Te Reo Māori, and the official version used by the British to govern the country was an approximate translation of the Māori text. Māori people also gave more value to orality than to the written word and they felt betrayed when they realised that the conversations they had had around and about the Treaty meant nothing for the British colonists. After the 1860s, Māori people became a minority in their own country: by 1881, there were 46,000 Māori compared with 470,000 non-Māori (M. King, Penguin History 231), a declining demography which led some British
settlers to formulate the hypothesis that Māori were “a dying race” (Belich, “Myth” 18; M. King, Penguin History 257). They were homogenised as one people, as opposed to the British, and named ‘Māori’ when many still choose not to refer to themselves with this term today (Salesa 23; Tuhiwai-Smith, Decolonizing 38), making the terms ‘Māori’ and ‘Pākehā’ (a Māori word used to designate British New Zealanders) remnants of colonisation. Wars, controversially called ‘Māori Wars’ for years before being renamed ‘New Zealand Wars’ (Belich, “Myth”), were waged between 1843 and 1872. The British Crown aggressively acquired Māori land by all means, sometimes buying land from complicit Māori individuals who claimed to own the land when it collectively belonged to iwi, hapū, and/or whānau (Renée, These Two Hands 170-171); and sometimes stealing or unlawfully confiscating the land as during the Taranaki Wars from March 1860 to March 1861, then from 1863 to 1866. Deprived of their mother land, Māori also found their culture and traditions being eroded and the long process of acculturation, an assimilationist strategy imposed by colonists to subjugate the colonised over a sustained period of time, further eliminated the Indigenous people of Aotearoa (Wolfe).

British New Zealanders implemented a series of measures to forcefully assimilate the Māori into their white and Westernised society. Alongside the land dispossession of Māori communities, the New Zealand Parliament voted a series of Acts to suppress Māori culture. In 1867, the Native Schools Act led to the decline of te reo Māori as Māori children were instructed in English and were physically punished when speaking their native tongue (King, Penguin History 234; Grace, Cousins 160). The 1877 Education Act further reinforced this phenomenon as primary schools became free and compulsory for every child (King, Penguin History 233). The interdiction of te reo as a language of instruction was eventually suppressed in 1982 when the Kohanga Reo Movement reinstated te reo in kindergartens and primary schools around the country (Houkamau 294). Yet despite the revitalisation of te reo, statistics showed that, in 2013, the number of te reo speakers was receding, with 21.3 % of the Māori population considering that they could use this language in everyday life; although, in 2006, 26.1% could speak te reo as a result of Māori language revival initiatives since the 1970s (Stats NZ/Tatauranga Aotearoa, “2013 Quick Stats” 11). The 2018 Census offers more positive prospects for te reo Māori as the age groups who speak te reo fairly well are older than 55, and aged between 15 and 24. Māori young adults therefore feel more confident in their linguistic abilities, which reflects the revitalisation of the language in Māori communities, and in society at large (Stats NZ/Tatauranga Aotearoa, “1 in 5 Māori”).
In the 1950s, the process of urbanisation accelerated in New Zealand, enticing Māori people to leave their ancestral lands for towns where they could find employment more easily. Yet, this rural exodus increased the ethnic, economic, and social disparities between Māori and Pākehā, as Māori social structures which had outlived colonisation were weakened, and as Māori started to experience racism on an everyday basis since they were in constant contact with Pākehā settlers (Houkamau 293). The 1975 Land March from Northland to Wellington started on September 14 and ended on October 13. Led by Māori wahine Dame Whina Cooper, the marchers demanded that land should be given back. This protest movement occurred the same year as the founding of the Waitangi Tribunal, set to redress colonial wrongs, especially connected to land dispossession. The Waitangi Tribunal abides by kaupapa Māori (Māori methodologies) to review the claims of iwi and hapū to retrieve their ancestral land. The British Crown has been compelled to change local names, give back stolen land, and pay iwi back to compensate for the prejudices they suffered over several generations (New Zealand Government). In 2015, 1028 claims – most of them historical, as they occurred before 1992 – had been examined (Waitangi Tribunal).

PART 3: Culturally Sensitive Forms of Trauma Therapy in Aotearoa New Zealand

In 1907, the Tohunga Suppression Act forbade Māori to practice their medicine, imposing Western medicine onto them. The consequences of this decision affected the way Māori perceived themselves. This act was eventually repealed in 1962, which allowed rongoā Māori (healing practices) to be recognised at a State-level from the 1990s onwards following the influential work of Sir Mason Durie (Rangitane, Ngāti Kauwhata, and Ngāti Raukawa). In 1984, Mason Durie developed a culturally sensitive approach to health for Māori people. He named his representation of the Māori health model: te whare tapa whā (the four-cornered house of health). This metaphor, comparing health to a wharenui (meeting house), emphasises notions of strength, solidarity, and interdependence, because, if one of the symbolic walls is crumbling, the other three are affected, and the person falls sick. It also emphasises the bond Māori have with the land of their ancestors as the house is built on whenua (ancestral land). The four walls of the symbolic house of health represent taha tinana (physical health), taha hinengaro (mental health), taha wairua (spiritual health), and taha whānau (the whānau’s
health). A whānau is the family, which is not limited to the nuclear family as in Western cultures. Indeed, a whānau includes the extended family, close friends, and colleagues too (Pistacchi 139-140; NiaNia 93). Durie’s interpretation of the way Māori conceive their health can be regarded as a holistic approach as it overcomes the Western dichotomy between body and mind, includes one’s relationship with one’s ancestors, and constructs human beings as relational beings. Wairua is the load-bearing wall of the house of health. Wiremu NiaNia (NiaNia whānau) argues that the ancestors’ stories are at the root of current diseases, especially if ancestors feel their wrongs have not been redressed (77). Spirituality plays a key part in the healing process, which explains why Western medicine can be an alienating experience for Māori. NiaNia defines intergenerational trauma following Durie’s theory of te whare tapa whā:

[i]f we have unresolved issues about our past relationships, our own unfinished business can transfer onto the next generation. Unless we deal with it ourselves, it tends to flow down. Unless you find some closure to the mamae or pain that you have been through yourself, your own children can be affected. (77)

The mamae (pain) ancestors experience due to colonisation can still be felt by current generations. It is the core of pāmamae, a form of trauma which encompasses physical pain, sadness, and grief in te reo Māori. Kaupapa Māori (Māori methodologies) are therefore essential to understand Māori cultural trauma.

In the 1990s, in both New Zealand and Australia, David Epston (Pākehā) and Michael White (white Australian) founded Narrative Therapy, a branch of Family Therapy. The principle of this culturally sensitive form of therapy is to uncover exceptional events in a patient’s life history which can overturn her/his/their life narrative. It is indeed informed by a narrative conception of life writing and life telling – life being understood as a text. In Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends (1990), White states that:

[i]n regard to family therapy – which has been our area of special interest – the interpretive method (…) would propose that it is the meaning that members attribute to events that determines their behavior. (…) I have been interested in how persons organize their lives around specific meanings and how, in so doing, they inadvertently contribute to the ‘survival’ of, as well as the ‘career’ of the problem. (3)

When a patient feels trapped in a pattern, such as domestic violence, anorexia, child mischief, self-harm, etc., the therapist asks the patient to create an alternative story to the official discourse of her/his/their life. This technique is called “the externalisation of the problem” (4). Through a series of questions, the therapist highlights a potential in her/his/their patient’s
behaviour, the possibility of a different conduct which could help change the settings of a person’s life. With the use of diaries and letters to write down the change operated in the patient’s conduct, the therapist keeps track of the patient’s attempts at formulating alternative stories which can help her/him/them find a way out of an external discourse imposed on them which is alienating and therefore oppressive. Narrative Therapy is therefore particularly effective in patriarchal and in decolonial contexts as it leads the patient towards framing her/his/their experience of trauma in a past narrative, to put an end to the impact trauma could still have while lingering into the present of the patient (46). By allowing the patient to consign her/his/their trauma to the past, ‘forgetting’ and ‘acknowledging’ can thus occur in a safe timeframe, separating the present self of the patient from the effects and impact of past trauma.

Just Therapy is an Aotearoa New Zealand-based form of Family Therapy, founded in the 1990s by Charles Waldegrave (Pākehā) and Kiwi Tamasese (Samoan New Zealander). The ethics of their therapeutic practice aims at decolonising psychology, a discipline which they contest because of its Western, racist, sexist, and homophobic history (“Central Ideas” 96; Pausé et al. 92). Kiwi Tamasese expresses her opinion on psychology in a poem:

> I think of colonization, no longer with the might of the sword, no longer with the decimation through disease, but through the gentle conversation of a therapist assuming the rightness of her/his value system, or, more dangerously, assuming that the discipline is scientific, therefore value-free, therefore intercultural and international. (“Central Ideas” 101)

Just Therapists distance themselves from unchecked discourses on mental health that would universalise everyone’s mental health issues. In Just Therapy sessions, patients are invited to question and investigate the social structures which prevent them from healing, by constantly retraumatising them. This form of therapy makes patients realise that their personal problems (health issues, discriminations, domestic violence, joblessness, etc) stem from power imbalance perpetrated by the status quo, whether under the form of patriarchy or settler colonialism. Taking into account social components to help patients construct a broader understanding of their trauma, Just Therapists allow survivors to take a step away from the context of their traumatisation and re-narrate their lives from a different perspective. Just Therapy therefore empowers patients with the authoring of their own life narratives as they gradually realise to what extent they are at the intersection of several subjugating factors. My usage of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s methodological tool of intersectionality (Cho et al.) is thus inspired by the work of Charles Waldegrave and Kiwi Tamasese.
In 1996, Linda Kopua (Ngāti Porou) developed a new form of Narrative Therapy: Mahi a Atua. This culturally sensitive form of therapy allows Māori patients to be treated within and in the presence of their whānau (i.e. respecting the whānau’s health), and with the mythological stories of their iwi, hapū, and whānau (i.e. respecting the atua’s health). Māori patients who undergo a Mahi a Atua therapy express their relief at not being stigmatised by one more Western-based psychological discourse nor by overmedication (Duff). Indeed, in Mahi a Atua sessions, the practitioner is a mataora (change agent) who works with a patient and her/his/their whānau, telling pūrakau (stories of ancestors) as an empowering and healing tool. Connecting the patients’ illnesses (whether mental, physical, spiritual, and/or familial) to Māori myths and heroes, Mahi a Atua respects Māori’s spiritual connection with their ancestors, and instead of severing these bonds as Western views of medicine and psychology could do, re-enacts them to strengthen the weakened patients. Intergenerational patterns can be read between the patients’ traumatic experiences and their ancestors’ stories, which leads the patients to identify with the misadventures or twists of fortune of their whānau’s heroes. On their webpage, Linda Kopua and her husband, artist Mark Kopua, list the objectives of their therapeutic practice. They explain that they work with their patients’ whakapapa (genealogy). Whakapapa is the oral history of a whānau, hapū, and iwi which “provides us with an understanding of who we are, where we are from, and how our many roles and responsibilities are grounded upon a relational worldview” (Pihama 355). However, whakapapa cannot be recited in every circumstance and in the presence of an undiscerning audience. The mana of the whānau could be weakened and damaged if stories of ancestors are told inappropriately, in hostile contexts, and to an unprepared listener/witness/reader (M. King, “Oral History” 115; Grace, Baby No-Eyes 26). Kopua also aims at fighting against institutional racism and social injustice inherited from colonisation, by emphasising values like aroha (love, compassion, empathy) and solidarity.

The health sector in Aotearoa New Zealand is concerned that ethnic minorities, especially Asian communities, do not have a sufficient access to medical advice and treatment (Ameratunga et al.; A. Wong et al.; Peiris-John et al.). New forms of medical and therapeutic approaches based on cultural awareness are therefore being developed in Aotearoa New Zealand to better help people who do not belong to the Māori/Pākehā bicultural system. For example, the importance of ‘Fa‘a‘afaletui’, a communal decision-making process incorporating the knowledge of the different groups composing Samoan society, is being recognised as a key element in the treatment of Samoan New Zealanders’ mental health. Indeed, the concept
of ‘the Samoan self’ implies that an individual exists ‘as a relational being’ (Tamasese et al. 303), that is to say: as a member of a family and of a community, respecting the etiquette of a group, and performing the roles her/his/their elders have accorded her/him/them (Tamasese et al.). One-to-one sessions between a patient and her/his/their therapist can be detrimental for Samoan New Zealanders who have experienced trauma, as this Western and individualist approach to trauma does not take into account her/his/their cultural and societal customs. Including the community in mental health therapy is therefore seen as an essential component of the healing process by Samoan New Zealander patients.

PART 4: From Childhood Studies to Girlhood Studies

Claudia Mitchell founded Girlhood Studies in the 1990s, as a response to the École Polytechnique massacre which occurred on 6 December 1989 in Montreal and which was a terrorist attack against female science students. This act aimed at deterring girls from entering careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), traditionally reserved for men in Western societies. Despite founding this discipline as a way to highlight the cultural construction of girlhood, Mitchell herself continues to recognise the limitations and contradictions at the heart of this concept. Girlhood Studies are indeed an extension of Women’s Studies and Childhood Studies. Philippe Ariès is recognised as the founder of this discipline with his influential yet controversial book, Centuries of Childhood in France (1960, first edition in French; 1962, first translation in English). Ariès was indeed the first to theorise childhood as a cultural construct, and adults’ attitudes towards children as culturally constructed and connected to history and social classes. However, feminists contested the fact that, in Childhood Studies, the typical child’s development process was normatively based on the development of boys, excluding girls from the field that should have represented them in their age frame. Popular books, like Reviving Ophelia by Mary Pipher in 1994, helped spread the influence of Girlhood Studies in the Western World, even if the limitations of these same books are conspicuous today, especially in their bias towards the victimisation of white girls.

Specialists of Girlhood Trauma continue questioning girlhood as it is both a state and a stage. It refers to being a girl and becoming a woman at the same time, and as such is both a static and fluctuating concept whose boundaries are blurred. Indeed, the very limits of
girlhood are often contested. As a sexual identity is often assigned at birth, girlhood can start from birth in some cultures, but, as gender is performed (Butler, *Gender Trouble*), gendered colours and gendered dress codes distinguishing between baby girls and baby boys can be experienced as discriminatory practices when children do not grow up as cisgender. Vasu Reddy argues that “[a]ge, sex, gender and cultural context in relation to the cultural constructions of girlhood remain at the forefront of inquiry” (81). For him, girlhood is a biological, social, cultural, and legal construct. Girlhood is often explained using its antonyms: womanhood and boyhood, putting therefore an emphasis on sex, age, and physical changes. Yet, girls can be of the female sex by choice; some may be in transition; and others may identify as non-binary. Moreover, the term ‘girl’ can refer to an infant, a toddler, a child, a tween (that is to say: a pre-adolescent girl aged between 9 and 13 (C. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, “Theorizing”)), and a teenager. The term ‘tween girl’ is especially used to describe an economic phenomenon as this age group has been highly targeted by companies and the media since the 2000s. Tweens have received a certain visibility as they have been given the power to consume objects and magazines of their own. As a result, their behaviour has also been coded and censured to conform to a certain image of ‘the good girl’ (C. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, “Theorizing”). The timeframe of girlhood is therefore fluid, depending on cultural, linguistic, economic, and legal factors.

**PART 5: Girlhood Trauma in Aotearoa New Zealand**

The Western conception of girlhood as a succession of steps towards womanhood is not shared by the Indigenous cultures of the Pacific. Adolescence, after all, was recognised in the 1960s only in the Western world, when this age group was marketed in the American consumption society as potential clients for specific goods, such as young adult novels for example (Alsup, “Introduction” 1; Coats 316; McCulloch 41). To this concept of adolescence, many Pacific cultures oppose the idea of a ‘coming-of-age’ which occurs when a youth is thirteen/fourteen and is initiated into manhood or womanhood through a series of rituals. This cultural difference has led Western anthropologists like Margaret Mead to misinterpret the social roles and rules imposed on genders in Pacific Islands. Margaret Mead’s research on female sexuality in Ta’ū, in what is now American Samoa, had been conducted during nine months of ‘observation’ (Keown, *Postcolonial Pacific Writing* 19-20). When published, her
thesis claiming that Samoan girls are sexually freed from patriarchal constraints became a bestseller in the USA. However, Mead trained a colonial gaze upon Samoan female sexuality, re-enacting the European myth of Pacific Islands as paradisal islands where girls and women are sexually available for male concupiscence (Della Valle, “Decolonizing” 145), a myth Comte de Bougainville, Denis Diderot, Paul Gauguin, and Pierre Loti elaborated in their texts and art. Girls’ coming of age is thus culturally freighted.

Domestic violence can be analysed as a remnant of British colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, and, to be more precise, as a result of the settler colonial regime Aotearoa still experiences today. The violence inherent in the colonial process was transferred onto Indigenous people, destabilising their social patterns, and onto women and children as the mainstream Pākehā culture perpetuates patriarchal constructs and toxic masculinity. In contemporary Aotearoa, one woman out of three is the victim of domestic violence and recent studies have revealed the extent of child abuse and neglect. In 2018, a report by the United Nations noted:

[t]he alarmingly high level of gender-based violence against women in the State party, with one in three women being subjected to physical or psychological violence, by an intimate partner during the course of their lifetime, especially domestic and sexual violence, including rape, which disproportionately affects Māori [sic] women, women belonging to ethnic minority groups, transgender women and women with disabilities, who are more likely to be retraumatized under the State party’s current system. (7)

Domestic violence is a pandemic in Aotearoa which decimates the lives of women and children. In early 2018, Auckland’s University of Technology (AUT) published a report revealing that one child out of four in New Zealand is at one point in her/his/their childhood referred to a state agency for having been abused. “By the age of 17, 23.5% of children had had at least one report made regarding their welfare to child protection services, while almost 10% had been subject to substantiated abuse or neglect, and 3% had been put into foster or alternative care, with boys being more affected” (Ainge Roy, “Study” n.pag.). Māori boys are said to be the most represented group in state care, and most neglected children are under 6 years old. Moreover, “by age 17, 3.2% of girls and 0.8% of boys had experienced sexual abuse” (Ainge Roy, “Study” n.pag.). In addition, UNICEF condemned New Zealand for having “one of the worst rates of child abuse in the developed world, with more than 150,000 notifications of child welfare made to the ministry of children every year” (Ainge Roy, “Study” n.pag.). Domestic violence is a blight in Aotearoa, putting children’s life at risk, and especially toddlers’, which reveals a lack of parental support provided by the State during the
early years of a child’s life: “a child is admitted to hospital every two days due to assault, maltreatment or neglect, and nearly half of those admitted are under the age of five” (Ainge Roy, “I Grew Up” n.pag.). Children are allowed to go to school on their first birthday. Kindergartens are not compulsory and day care is not available everywhere, leading families to feel emotionally and financially unsupported in the early years of their children’s lives. Many associations such as “Shine*”, “Atu-Mai”, and “He Are Mataora” (among others), campaign against domestic violence and fight to end this national vicious circle. Yet, despite public awareness, the official data remain appalling.

The United Nations also note that education and schooling do not end the gender gap existing in Aotearoa New Zealand. Girls in the countryside are said to be more at risk of being unable to attend secondary and tertiary education than girls in towns. This geographic discrimination is further emphasised by the higher prevalence of poverty in rural areas and the lack or withdrawal of State support. When pregnant, many teenage girls feel they have no other choice but to drop out of school. New Zealand has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the OECD (Daguerre and Nativel) and pregnant girls’ deschooling has social and economic repercussions on their lives and those of their children. As a result, the United Nations contest the absence of sexual education courses that would be adapted to the age, sex, social class, sexual orientation, and ethnicity of the students in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. In a 2018 report, they stated that:

[t]he lack of inclusion in school curricula of comprehensive, culturally sensitive and age-appropriate sexuality education or education on harmful practices and gender-based violence against women and girls, (…) further exacerbates the high rates of sexual violence and early pregnancy, and the lack of sexuality education that specifically addresses the needs of Maori [sic] young people and communities. (10)

A certain form of social and racial determinism has also been observed in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, due to the systematic channelling of Māori and Pasifika children into vocational fields. Jenny Lee, for example, condemns the way Māori Chinese children have been treated at school over several decades. She explains that Māori Chinese suffer from racial prejudices imagining Māori as undisciplined and uneducated, and Chinese as the ‘teacher’s pets’ (145). Racist stereotypes can still keep children from realising their aspirations, as schools tend to stream children based on their ethnicity (B. Wang and Collins 2786). On top of that, the 2015 PISA Report on the Aotearoa New Zealand school system revealed that “[o]n average in New Zealand boys did slightly better than girls in mathematics
and girls did much better than boys in reading. There was no significant difference between boys and girls in science achievement” (Education Counts, “PISA Counts” n.pag.). Despite their academic achievements, girls are therefore not put on an equal footing with boys everywhere in Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite the excellent comments awarded the New Zealand Education System in the past few years, as, for instance, when the Worldwide Educating for the Future Index ranked New Zealand as the best education system in the world in 2017, Aotearoa New Zealand girls can still experience gender- and ethnic-based discrimination at school.

The New Zealand Royal Inquiry into Abuse in Care, established in 2018, is a legal investigation into systematic child abuse perpetrated by State care and religious organisations. Its aim is to bear witness to the survivors of institutional violence against children which occurred between 1950 and 1999. It replicates the Truth and Reconciliation Commission format, applied in Canada in 2008 to investigate the trauma perpetrated in residential schools on Native American and Inuit children, and in Australia under the name ‘truth-telling’, which began in 1991 and which is still ongoing, in relation to the Aboriginal Australian Stolen Generations. The New Zealand Royal Inquiry respects the Treaty of Waitangi’s principles and acknowledges “the disproportionate representation of Māori, particularly in care” (Abuse in Care), in the past and today. The Commission’s role is therefore to hear the survivors’ testimonies and redress past wrongs towards the Māori community. The results of the New Zealand Royal Inquiry began to be published in early 2021 and revealed that some 255,000 children were abused in the time period investigated. Disabled children, children from the lower classes, and children of Māori and Pasifika descent were especially affected and targeted by discriminatory practices (Ainge Roy, “At Least”; McClure). Electro-convulsive therapy was routinely practised on children as a form of punishment, especially in the 1970s (Cornish). State-run organisations such as schools, psychiatric hospitals, adoptive families, foster families, and welfare homes, as well as several churches including the Catholics, the Anglicans, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, and the Salvation Army, perpetrated physical and sexual abuse on children they had been trusted to take care of. Many survivors described the PTSD symptoms they still suffer from, decades after the assaults (Corlett). The toll of the impact of child abuse on the New Zealand economy has also been calculated as it is estimated that child abuse in care costs NZD $800,000 (£420,000) per survivor (Ainge Roy, “At Least”), in “pain and suffering and premature death (…), healthcare, state costs and productivity losses” (Cornish) – a fine the New Zealand Government is not ready to pay. In a
study on South America, Mary-Louise Pratt argues that residential schools based on the forced institutionalised separation of Indigenous children from their parents are one of the oldest systems colonists implemented to destroy the cultures, societies, and languages of the peoples whom they wanted to subjugate (“Language” 352). Patrick Wolfe, and Aaron Smale after him, regard the State-organised removal of Indigenous children as a genocide, basing their argument on the United Nations’ “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide” (1948) which defines genocides as “[c]ausing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group” (Article IIb) and “[f]orcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (Article IIe) in order to destroy a racialised community. As the New Zealand Royal Inquiry into Abuse in Care has not completed its investigation, the wound is left open. At the time of this research, survivors are still called to testify but many choose to remain silent.

PART 6: A Short History of Trauma Studies

The history of Trauma Studies started in the middle of the nineteenth century in Europe, as male-oriented psychological research on the ‘Other’ (primarily those women deemed ‘hysterical’ within puritan societies), and subsequently expanded to encompass the scope of human sciences at large during a twentieth century marked by its extreme violence. The concept of trauma, first conceived as interpersonal, was gradually applied to social and historical phenomena, and was specified into vicarious, intergenerational, transgenerational, cultural, historical, and foundational forms.

In “A Forgotten History”, the first chapter of Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror (1992), Judith Herman offers an historical overview of Trauma Studies. For her, this discipline is marked by three historical phases. During the Victorian era, the research undertaken on ‘female’ hysteria by Jean-Martin Charcot and his followers, including Sigmund Freud, led male doctors to give centre stage to their female patients. In 1896, Freud published The Aetiology of Hystera in which he argued that “at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood, but which can be reproduced through the work of psychoanalysis in spite of the intervening decades”
(quoted in Herman, “Forgotten History” 20). Herman deplores the fact that Freud’s original definition of trauma, based on his observations of Charcot’s work, was soon reconceptualised to limit and deny girlhood trauma as mere sexual fantasies (21). She claims that Freud was motivated by classist prejudices when he rejected his original theory, as incest could not be fathomed as a norm amidst the European upper class (20). She also notes that Freud’s disciple, Joseph Breuer, eventually turned his back on his own therapeutic methodology, ‘the talking cure’ (24), that he had founded in 1881 (Breuer 59) while working with patient “Anna O.” (in reality: Bertha Pappenheim, an Austrian feminist activist and writer). During her sessions of hypnosis with Dr Breuer, Anna O., in a meta-reading of their therapeutic conversations, named the process of the patient’s verbalisation under hypnosis: “a talking cure” (Breuer 58). In this phrase lies the belief that words can heal when they are applied in a certain therapeutic context, when directed by a psychoanalyst who is trained to decipher a patient’s unconscious. Words could be a medicine of sort for this Austrian young woman, as she gradually recovered the usage of her mother tongue (i.e. German), of her limbs that had been paralysed, and of some repressed memories. Despite being rejected by Breuer himself, the talking cure theory has yet maintained a certain popularity amidst Western trauma study specialists.

The second historical period Herman identifies is the aftermath of the First World War, when it was first recognised that men could also experience hysterical episodes following the trauma of war. Historians note that the First World War left its imprint on Aotearoa New Zealand, as New Zealanders’ involvement was seen as ‘exemplary’, with 14,000 men volunteering to join the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in August 1914 (Jeannier). In total, out of a one million population, 120,000 New Zealanders served during the First World War (Toti). A New Zealand Māori Contingent was formed (Bathurst). 18,500 New Zealand soldiers died during the First World War and 50,000 more were wounded (Jeannier). The Battle of Gallipoli which lasted from 25 April 1915 to 9 January 1916 was the first mission of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) (Department of Veterans’ Affair). Yet, despite their bravery, the eight-month battle led to the deaths of 2,779 New Zealand and 8,709 Australian Anzac soldiers (Jeannier). This military catastrophe led New Zealand and Australia, which were Dominions at the time, to develop a new form of nationalist identification, as ANZAC soldiers were heroically described in the press, making their countries proud of their personal sacrifices as well as critical of Britain’s failures in supporting troops from their settler colonies (Jeannier; Bathurst). As a result, Anzac Day is
celebrated every year on 25 April in both New Zealand and Australia to commemorate their soldiers’ courage under the motto “Lest We Forget”. The soldiers’ trauma was documented in private correspondence and diaries which were then collected by historians and writers, as in *The Penguin Book of New Zealanders at War* edited by Gavin McLean, Ian McGibbon and Kynan Gentry published in 2009 (NZHistory). Some soldiers published their war memoirs, such as Ormond Burton in *The Silent Division: New Zealanders at the Front, 1914-1919* (1935). Their stories also inspired later writers in collecting veterans’ testimonies, such as Jane Tolerton who published *An Awfully Big Adventure: New Zealand World War One Veterans Tell their Stories* in 2013.

The third phase Herman perceives corresponds to the Vietnam War after which veterans reported symptoms that came to be classified as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, leading to the official pathologising and “medicalisation” (Milatovic 246) of this complex phenomenon in the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-4) in 1994, and in its revision in the DSM-5 in 2013.

I argue that a fourth period can be identified in the history of Trauma Studies, as this academic field was founded in the 1990s by a group of researchers at Yale University. Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman, Dominick LaCapra, Dori Laub, and Judith Herman among others started this movement, mostly (though not only as Herman has worked on girlhood trauma following child sexual abuse) as a way to protect the memory of Holocaust survivors and their descendants at a time when, due to their old age, the number of Jewish people who had survived the Shoah was decreasing. Caruth, who is perceived to be the founder of this discipline, offers definitions of trauma with variations, in harmony with the phenomenon of aporia she describes as being at the heart of a traumatic experience. Three definitions Caruth offers are of particular relevance to this thesis:

1. “In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (“Unclaimed” 181).

2. “Trauma (...) does not simply serve as record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned” (“Introduction” 417).
3. “The pathology consists (...) solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (“Trauma and Experience” 4; italics in the original).

In these three definitions of trauma, Caruth invokes dispossession (i.e. absence of ownership), reception, belatedness (a term and idea borrowed from Freud), repetition, possession (in the sense: being possessed, being haunted), pathology, catastrophe, and experience. Trauma is in certain contexts associated specifically with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Its symptoms are multifarious and can take several forms such as dissociation, repetition compulsion, intrusive memories (hallucinations, nightmares, flashbacks), a high level of stress, cardiac acceleration, panic attacks, etc., connecting mental and physical pain together. When traumatic memories resurface, they repeat the same narrative over and over again. As such, they can be construed as rewritings of the same story which aim at translating into words an event deemed ‘unspeakable’ due to the aporia which constitutes its core.

The correlation between trauma and gender has been highlighted in several studies as girls and women are more prone to experience interpersonal traumas in patriarchal societies. Greg Forter argues that “the trauma induced by patriarchal identity formation (...) [has] been thoroughly naturalized in ways that make it necessary to excavate and ‘estrange’ [it] in order to see [it] as [a] social traum[a]” (260). For him, patriarchy traumatises people from childhood onwards as he focuses his research on William Faulkner’s description and construction of ‘Southern manhood’, a form of masculinity which is widespread in the South of the United States and which is marked by “white supremacy and misogyny” (261) in its imbrication in the history of slavery. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Pākehā masculinity, embodied in the myth of ‘Man Alone’ (a myth inspired by John Mulgan’s novel published in 1939), is often associated with a frontier spirit, ingenuity, physical strength, anti-intellectualism, and misogyny (Cooper, “Televisual Memory” 453). This version of settler masculinity was born out of the British colonisation of Aotearoa, when white men far outnumbered white women, as well as the Māori community. The 1893 Women’s Suffrage Act, passed in Wellington following Kate Sheppard’s “monster petition” of 31,872 signatures (Archives New Zealand/Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga), gave the right to vote to every New Zealand woman, whatever their ethnicity, social class, marital status, and level of education. Yet, even if New Zealand was the first country to have given women the right to
vote, at the time, New Zealand women were so demographically underrepresented that their votes could not really affect the political spectrum of the colony. In New Zealand at the turn of the twentieth century, women did not belong to “half of the human race” as Emeline Pankhurst would phrase it during her campaigns for women’s right to vote in the United Kingdom (n.pag.): they were a minority, and they were divided by the colonial social structure into colonists, colonised, and undesired migrants.

As Luce Irigaray notes in “Between Totem and Idol, the Sexuate Other”, “[t]his Western culture is above all masculine” (357), a point which I will further develop when I explain the necessity to decolonise a male-dominated Western reading of trauma. Some researchers like Ana-Rocío Escobar-Chew et al. have developed the idea of ‘complex trauma’ or ‘complex PTSD’ when referring to “women who have been significantly traumatized as children” (47). Their form of PTSD is “chronic” (48) and takes the form of intergenerational grief with a repetitive pattern of loss occurring across several generations (i.e. loss of a parent during childhood; loss of a guardian; loss of a child’s parenting rights, etc.), poor health with symptoms increasing over the years (60), and “overwhelming stress” (61). Girlhood trauma is at the origin of complex trauma, a type of trauma which affects both the survivor and her descendants, and whose symptoms can cause a deterioration in the survivors’ physical health. As girls and women are more often abused by a close relative than their male counterparts, when they experience other forms of trauma, such as vicarious, intergenerational, transgenerational, and/or combat-related trauma, women and girls show a higher level of stress, and their PTSD symptoms are more pronounced than male fellows who have experienced the same external trauma (Frank et al.; Hsu et al.). Neurosciences reveal that women develop different coping techniques in dealing with trauma. For example, they tend to erase traumatic events from their memories (Hsu et al.; Frank et al.). However, when compared to male responses to trauma, researchers have shown that women’s attempts at suppressing traumatic memories increase the risk of seeing them resurface in other forms which are deemed more violent and unpredictable and thus more complex to heal (Hsu et al.). Language can be an ineffective medium to express girls’ traumas in these conditions. This linguistic inefficiency can be connected to Julia Kristeva’s theory that language symbolically belongs to the patriarchy and enforces patriarchal power. Kristeva’s spelling of this patriarchal interpretation of language, “père-version” (the father’s version), is an homonym of “perversion” in French (Pouvoirs 10) – a pun which sheds light on the patriarchal trauma girls
and women suffer as they are trapped in languages which reflect and perpetuate unequal gender power relations.

**PART 7: A Crisis of Representation: A Generic Approach to Girlhood Trauma in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature**

Nerea Arruti warns that Trauma Studies are limited when trauma is regarded as unspeakable. He mentions the work of Andreas Hyssen who “sees trauma studies [as being] locked into the aesthetics of non-representability” (4), debunking the myth according to which trauma is ungraspable and impossible to understand fully. Craps and Buelens also contest the unspeakable nature of trauma, a theory first proffered by Freud and developed by Caruth. For Craps and Buelens, postcolonial trauma novels are “a deliberate eschewal of the Western discourse of unspeakability” (5), as they use “experimental, (post)modernist textual strategies” (5) to counter Eurocentric views in postcolonial – and I argue: decolonial – contexts. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that girls’ trauma narratives are confronted with a crisis of communicability on several layers: due to the nature of trauma; the inadequate coping techniques girls tend to apply; and as girls’ testimonies are confronted with patriarchal censorship which can cast doubt on the credibility of their versions of events (L. Gilmore, *The Limits* 23, “Introduction: Tainted Witness” 9; Gott). Girls are indeed at the intersection of several subjugating factors (Cho et al.), and their testimonies are treated with even more doubt when traumatised girls are disabled, from ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and from lower social classes (L. Gilmore and Marshall, *Witnessing Girlhood* 5). The contexts in which Aotearoa New Zealand girls’ testimonies are delivered, and the format/genre their trauma narratives take, therefore determine the reception of their texts and whether healing can occur.

Trauma narratives can be perceived as a paradox. Roger Luckhurst notes that “[t]rauma, in effect, issues a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge. In its shock impact trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma” (79). This paradox, under which trauma entails both silence and the compulsion to verbalise, creates a challenge for trauma survivors and writers of traumatic experiences. Trauma is inherently linked to literary practices like
storytelling, rewritings, and palimpsests. As trauma tends to be told and told again, survivors and writers can borrow literary devices like comparisons, metaphors, hyperboles, flashbacks, etc. to describe trauma, but in doing so, they also alter trauma, aestheticising it. Some critics warn against the excess of pathos contained in books dismissed as ‘misery memoirs’ (Froud 34), as well as the excessive and putatively kitsch romanticisation in some fiction based on the Holocaust, and which is pejoratively termed ‘rose-colored genocide’ (Nunn 66). The aestheticisation of trauma has led some critics like Michelle Balaev and Christa Schönfelder to conceptualise trauma as a literary genre per se. Yet, I do not subscribe to this theory that trauma novels exist independently and in a homogenising form, as my work shows to what extent literary genres affect the testimonies of girlhood trauma and how girlhood trauma affects literary genres both in their content and their form.

Tzvetan Todorov, in his Introduction à la littérature fantastique (1970), argued that genres are not fixed moulds but anchored in the contexts in which writers use them. Genres can also be constructed retroactively, as his case study on fantasy literature shows. They are useful tools for writers to communicate with readers and play with their expectations. They also allow writers to inscribe their stories in literary history, echoing and referring to previous texts, thus creating a certain complicity with their readers. In the case of trauma writing, the genres studied in this thesis – life writing; poetry; fictional diaries and the epistolary mode; the female Bildungsroman; and young adult fiction – each formulate traumatic experiences in a distinct way. As Stella Bolaki notes, in her study of the Bildungsroman written by ethnic minority American women writers, “genres [are] constructions whose literary and social functions change depending on who defines them and when” (10). Displacing European genres like the fictional diary, the epistolary novel, and the Bildungsroman to Aotearoa New Zealand to express girlhood trauma can thus be understood as a political act for women writers from ethnic minorities. Indeed, Māori Literature is composed of culturally specific genres, such as whakapapa (the telling of genealogy), karakia (opening prayers in a ceremony), and waiata (songs), among others. In their introduction to their collection of Indigenous Oceanic literature entitled Black Marks on the White Page (2017), Tina Makereti (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Ati Awa, Ngāti Rangatahi, Moriori, and Pākehā) and Witi Ihimaera (Te-Aitanga-a-Māhaki) argue that:

[p]erhaps the division between different forms – fiction, creative non-fiction and poetry – doesn’t necessarily make sense to an Indigenous Oceanic world view. Words / stories / art / songs / dance / mythologies / ancestors / films / contemporary life /
poetry – these may all exist in the same moment, in the same space, and none of it is untrue. (n.pag.)

Pacific Literatures do not necessarily follow Western literary models, and construct genres as fluid and malleable formats which do not exclude each other. When Indigenous women writers employ a Western literary genre, their choice cannot be ignored, as the way they play with its form has political repercussions.

English Literature was invented to anglicise people from the colonies as its ‘canon’ was first taught in British India before being taught in the United Kingdom (Te Punga Somerville n.pag.). Western genres have long been used as colonising tools to impose a white male gaze on the colonised. When representing girlhood trauma from Aotearoa New Zealand in this literary context, the word ‘representation’ conveys both meanings Gayatri Spivak highlights in “Does the Subaltern Speak?” (1999). Indeed, in German, ‘Vertretung’ refers to “speaking for” in a political sense while ‘Darstellung’ concerns representation as mimesis, as in art and literature (28). The women writers explored in this thesis construct trauma with reference to Western literary genres that they adapt to express the power imbalance at stake between genders and between ethnicities. Women writers often feel compelled to develop their own literary devices to make an intervention into male-dominated genres like autobiography or the Bildungsroman. I will also demonstrate how genres traditionally associated with women writers can be challenged, like fictional diaries and children’s literature. The fact that Indigenous and migrant people were caricatured during colonial times (Grace, From the Centre n.pag.; Tuhiwai-Smith, Decolonizing 83) further complicates trauma writing for women writers. When they write about girls from minorities, they unearth a HIS-story of misrepresentations, disregard, and violence that reflects the cultural trauma they breathe in. As Sonya Andermahr and Sylvia Pellicer-Ortin note, “[a] feminist approach to trauma enables the recognition that trauma is also a gender differentiated field, which challenges conceived notions of the sociocultural realm” (4). The connections between trauma, genders, genres, and cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature will therefore be explored in this thesis as shown in the chapter summaries below.
PART 8: Self-Positioning

The limitations which I experience as a white female European researcher in Decolonial and Indigenous Studies need to be acknowledged from the outset of this thesis. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou) challenges the very concept of research as a Western practice undertaken at the expense of Indigenous peoples. She warns of unethical approaches to Māori customs which alienate and manipulate Māori people into ethnographic objects of study. To counter the colonising power of academic research, she states that researchers should abide by Indigenous epistemologies adapted to and accepted by the people concerned by the study. I am also aware that, as Alison Ravenscroft (a white Australian researcher) argues in *The Postcolonial Eye* (2012), phenomenology needs to be contextualised as seeing is an action inflected by cultural ideologies. She explains that seeing and reading are activities which select, discriminate, and reject, to construct a new picture which reflects the discourse in which the viewer/reader positions her/him/themselves. She therefore interrogates her own positionality, excavating the stories behind photographs of Aboriginal Australians staged by white colonists, and she shows that photos and testimonies can be the vectors of racist ideologies when they are framed to justify imperial conquest and colonisation. In my case, reading texts on Aotearoa New Zealand girlhood trauma from a Western viewpoint can be deleterious for trauma-tellers as a critic’s interpretations can be perceived as a new form of colonisation. To circumvent this pitfall, I have applied culturally sensitive trauma-reading methodologies to analyse girls’ trauma-telling devices.

In Trauma Studies, researchers are invited to position themselves in their studies as a way to map the impact their research on trauma can have on them, under the shape of vicarious trauma, also known under the terms “secondary trauma” (Kaplan, *Trauma Culture* 37), “secondary victimization, contact victimization, compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress” (Lerias and Byrne 129). Christa Schönfelder concludes her book, *Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction* (2013), by stressing the necessity to “respond with a self-reflexive scholarly approach to the self-reflexive genre of trauma fiction” (321). She indeed notes that trauma “exposes the reader of trauma writing to narratives that tend to be both fascinating and unsettling through their combination of disturbingly alien and uncannily familiar elements” (321). Schönfelder’s
approach to the reception of trauma-reading is reminiscent of the Gothic mode, which corresponds to the subject she studies, Romantic literature, and much criticism about which is deeply indebted to Freudian theories. I show in this thesis to what extent ‘unsettling’ girlhood trauma reading can be in a settler colony like Aotearoa New Zealand, especially when it is expressed in life writing texts, and written by Indigenous women writers.

I recognise that my approach to Aotearoa New Zealand is external, peripheral, and thus contestable, as I am tauwi (foreigner). I am a white able-bodied cisgender female French citizen of Flemish descent from the lower middle class, whose family is affected by girlhood intergenerational trauma, in connection with the Second World War, and with the harsh education my mother and her sisters received in religious boarding schools. The way I envision my culture, languages, ethnicity, gender, social class, political and religious beliefs are deeply ingrained in French traumatic history. I am aware that the diplomatic relationships between France and Aotearoa New Zealand have long been complicated by French colonisation in the Pacific, nuclear neo-imperialism, and rugby feud. The fact that I wrote this thesis from Burgundy because the Covid pandemic prevented me from studying at The University of Otago in the summer of 2020 and at The University of Auckland in Fall 2022 (New Zealand calendar) further alienates my work from its context. Even though I spent ten years of my life with an Asian New Zealander, and have been the main caregiver of our child who is a French and Kiwi Asian girl, under New Zealand law, I am neither a resident, nor do I have any rights as the mother of a New Zealand child. At my daughter’s birth in 2016, I realised that her education as a multilingual and multicultural dual citizen rested on my shoulders. I, who had been mostly trained in Victorian and Modernist British Literature, having written my Master’s thesis at the Sorbonne on the Bildungsroman in the works of Joseph Conrad and E.M. Forster, gradually modified the content of my bookshelves to accommodate Aotearoa New Zealand literature. I had worked as an Honorary Tutor in the French Department at The University of Auckland in 2010-2011. I was then introduced to anglophone and francophone Pacific literatures and cultures by Professor Raylene Ramsay, Associate Professor Deborah Walker-Morrison, and Doctor Trudy Agar, which informed and influenced my subsequent readings of Aotearoa New Zealand literature. The research and teaching methodologies of my main PhD supervisor, Professor Michelle Keown, have also been influential in fashioning my perspective on the topic of my research; as well as Professor David Farrier’s critical stance on my work.
The methodologies that I employ in this thesis are informed by my personal experiences of trauma and my ambivalent position as both a white foreigner and the mother of a New Zealand girl from an ethnic minority. I try to create a dialogue between different traditions in Trauma Studies, choosing to apply Aotearoa New Zealand-based trauma therapies to analyse the traumatic narratives of the corpus so as to better apprehend the cultural component in intergenerational, transgenerational, and historical forms of trauma. I recognise that the structure of this research, divided as it is in literary genres, can be perceived as subjective and as a Western academic approach to Oceanic literature, as some texts could be classified in several genres, other genres could have been included in the research, and the very notion of genre can be contested as too narrow and Eurocentric (Ihimaera and Makereti). Yet, by analysing how trauma-telling, literary genres, and gender intertwine, I shed light on literary devices women writers employ to deliver trauma narratives. The therapeutic effects of writing have been observed (Acton and Potter 246; Hand; K. Holmes; Keil), including the healing powers of calligraphy (Zhu et al.; Xu et al.). Trauma-reading can also be cathartic for survivors’ support group, especially during poetry sessions when victims of sexual abuse are asked to perform their own autobiographical poems in front of other victims (Hand). The very hybridity of the texts selected in the corpus can be read as a mark left by trauma on literary genres. The novel Does This Make Sense to You?, written by Renée (Ngāti Kahungunu, Cape de Verdan, Irish, and Australian Pākehā) in 1994, can be labelled as a female Bildungsroman and an epistolary novel as the anti-heroine is portrayed as an intradiegetic writer, composing a long email to her lost daughter. Both genres are enmeshed, shifting narratorial perspectives, which generates a plurality of voices and points of view which contributes to silencing then re-authorising the Magdalene trauma-teller to express herself with a credible voice. In this thesis, I posit that literary genres are facilitators of trauma-telling. Genres’ expected forms – and the writers’ play with readers’ expectations – are meaningful conduits for trauma narratives, offering them a shape while being shaped by trauma in return. The dynamic interdependence between literary genres and trauma-telling enables women writers to politically represent girlhood trauma in their texts, giving a public platform to scenes otherwise relegated to the private sphere. The corpus that I selected is multicultural and multilingual to reflect the contemporary society of Aotearoa New Zealand, yet I draw upon kaupapa Māori (Māori methodologies) in the way I read issues related to land, identity, and health. I highlight the absence or rare presence of Pasifika and Kiwi Asian characters and
authors in some genres, such as young adult fiction, and I chose to dedicate one chapter to Kiwi Asian poetry to give voice and visibility to my whānau.

PART 9: Summary of the Chapters

CHAPTER 2. Writing Girlhood Trauma on Her Own: When Trauma-Tellers are Life Writers

In the second chapter, I explore the modes of representation women writers employ in life writing texts to express their childhood trauma. To do so, I compare five texts: To the Island (1982), the first volume of the autobiography of Janet Frame (English Pākehā); The Kindness of Strangers: Kitchen Memoirs (2007) by Shonagh Koea (Irish Pākehā); My Katherine Mansfield Project (2015), a notebook written by Kirsty Gunn (Scottish Pākehā); These Two Hands: A Memoir (2017) by Renée (Ngāti Kahungunu, Cape de Verdan, Irish, and white Australian Pākehā); and Mophead (2019), a graphic memoir by Selina Tusitala Marsh (Samoan, Tuvaluan, English, Scottish, and French Pākehā). As the testimonies of trauma survivors are often treated with scepticism, especially when they are women and girls who belong to ethnic minorities and/or the LGBTQIA+ community (L. Gilmore and Marshall, “Introduction: Witnessing Girlhood” 5), life writing can become an ordeal for its authors as their testimonies run the risk of being contested and rejected by readers (L. Gilmore, The Limits 23, “Introduction: Tainted Witness” 9). Women writers often develop rhetorical strategies to circumvent readers’ expectations of their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious beliefs, social class, disabilities, age, and political opinions. Indeed, autobiographical texts are not read from the same perspective as fictional texts as, too often, life writing is equated with testimonies and thus truth-telling whereas fiction is perceived as a figment of the imagination. As Philippe Lejeune claims, “l’autobiographie est une anti-fiction” (“Diary as ‘Antifiction’” 203), that is to say: “autobiography is an anti-fiction” (my own translation). In these circumstances, readers are asked to play the parts of both witnesses and judges in the women writers’ trials of their childhood trauma. I argue that sometimes women writers even give their readers the controversial position of crime accomplices, especially when they reflect on the impact racism has had on their self-development as children.

In early sections of this chapter, I focus on the ways the women writers of the corpus challenge the autobiographical pact which traditionally equates the writer with the narrator
and with the protagonist of the story told, as they all reject an essentialist interpretation of the narrative of their life, and do not hesitate to use autofictional devices to narrate traumatic episodes which occurred in their childhood. In the second part of this chapter, I study the techniques used by women life writers to convince their readers of the veracity of their testimonies. They tend to actively engage with their (imagined) readers to create a bond with them in order that readers trust them and listen to their versions of history, as when Renée, Frame, and Koea give voice to the cultural trauma the working class experienced during the Great Depression, and when Renée testifies to the discrimination that she and her whānau suffered during the period of racial segregation (Bartholomew n.pag.). Renée and Marsh also employ humour to help readers corroborate their versions of events, especially when they recount their experiences of sexism and racism. Humour also empowers female readers as they realise that trauma survivors can ridicule their persecutors. Finally, I explore the ways women writers inscribe their girlhood trauma within the context of New Zealand’s evolving myths of national identity when they tackle the sensitive topic of multiethnicity and multiculturalism, and when they transform their autobiographical texts into *Künstlerromane*, highlighting the importance of their girlhood trauma in their lives as writers and in their poetical art.

CHAPTER 3. Kiwi Asian Poetry and Girlhood Trauma-Reading

In the third chapter, I have chosen to study poems by five Kiwi Asian women poets of Chinese descent: Renee Liang, Nina Mingya Powles, Lily Ng, Vanessa Mei Crofskey, and Wen-Juenn Lee. Powles, Crofskey, and Lee are connected to the Chinese diaspora of Malaysia. The 2018 Census revealed that the Asian New Zealand community is the second largest minority of Aotearoa New Zealand, as they represent 15.1% of the population. Māori compose 16.5% of New Zealanders, and Pasifika 8.1%. Although I am related to the Kiwi Asian community as my daughter is one of its members, the literature written by Kiwi Asian women writers do not necessarily reflect girlhood trauma, except in poems and in life writing, hence their quasi absence from the other chapters of this thesis. I do not engage in detail with Kiwi Asian autobiographical texts, although I mention Helene Wong’s autobiography, *Being Chinese: The Story of a New Zealander* (2016), and K. Emma Ng’s influential life writing essay, *Old Asian, New Asian* (2017), in both Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 as points of comparison. I decided to dedicate the chapter on poetry to Kiwi Asian women’s experiences of trauma
during childhood, especially due to racism and sexism, partly because my own daughter has suffered from racist and sexist comments at kindergarten in France and I connected the rejection she experienced based on her gender and perceived ethnicity to the Kiwi Asian women poets’ texts within this corpus. This chapter is the last chapter that I wrote: it took me two and a half years to convince myself that I was equipped and entitled to write about the representations of Kiwi Asian girlhood trauma in poetry.

In this chapter, I study the extent to which Kiwi Asian women’s poems transform girls’ traumas into archaeological sites to excavate the pain of their communities. At first, I argue that Kiwi Asian women poets explore their historical exclusion from Aotearoa New Zealand’s public sphere by testifying to the anti-Asian HIS-story of New Zealand and by shedding light on the racist AND sexist perceptions of Kiwi Asian girls. I then map the connections between family stories, cultural encounters, and political legacies across the Pacific. To do so, I analyse Kiwi Asian girls’ intergenerational traumas following wars, forced migrations, and xenophobia, and I focus on the concept of ‘home’ for the Chinese diaspora. In the final section of this chapter, I focus on Kiwi Asian women poets’ multilingual encryptions, especially in the way they translate girlhood trauma between languages, and in the way they inscribe themselves in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature as ngā wāhine o tiriti (women allowed to stay in Aotearoa following the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi), positioning themselves in regard to the Treaty of Waitangi, and not as the excluded Other with reference to the dominant Pākehā culture.

CHAPTER 4. Girls as Intradiegetic Diary- and Letter- Writers/Readers or How to Unfold Girlhood Intergenerational Trauma

The fourth chapter explores fictional diaries and the epistolary mode, as fictional diaries and letters mimic life writing techniques explored in Chapter 2, and in Chapter 3 in the lyric (autobiographical) mode. My analysis of the way girlhood trauma is expressed in these fictional life writing genres is focused on three texts: *The Book of Secrets* (1987) by Fiona Kidman (English Pākehā); *Rain* (1994) by Kirsty Gunn (Scottish Pākehā); and *Rich Man Road* (2015) by Ann Glamuzina (Croatian Pākehā). *The Book of Secrets* could be classified as a historical novel but I chose to focus instead on its multimodal texture, analysing the insertion of diary entries and letters from diverse intradiegetic writers. This perspective gives a certain materiality to the intra-diegetic ‘book of secrets’ which the multigenerational plot
composes and preserves as a feminine archival version of HIS-story. I read Rain as a fictional diary although the text exhibits none of the external markers of the private journal. In fact, I argue that Rain is a mourning diary, a text written by an intradiegetic woman narrator to heal from the pain and the guilt she has felt since her younger brother drowned when she was a teenager. As for Rich Man Road, it can be read both as a historical novel and as a family saga as its intergenerational plot intertwines the narrative of a Croatian New Zealand nun with that of a Samoan New Zealander novice, revealing the familial bonds existing between them, through the confessional mode of diary and letter writing and reading.

To analyse the way fictional diaries and the epistolary mode construct girlhood trauma, I challenge two myths associated with letter and diary writing as facilitators of trauma-telling: their spontaneity which gives an impression of privacy, and their artlessness which makes readers believe in the authenticity of the facts described. I then study how (and if) girls with pens find an authorial voice after experiencing trauma, by focusing on girls as writers, then on girls as readers and as Super-Readers, that is to say that intradiegetic traumatised girls are given the power to (re-)assemble disparate texts to make sense of their own stories for extradiegetic readers. Finally, I show that letter and diary editing connects intradiegetic girls’ traumas with Aotearoa New Zealand’s historical traumas, as girls dare to voice herstory, and as women writers explore the sensitive notions of guilt and complicity in relation to the traumatised, therefore questioning the official victimisation of girls.

CHAPTER 5. Displacing Female Bildungsromane to Aotearoa to Voice Girls’ Cultural Traumas

In the fifth chapter, I study the way three women writers from Aotearoa New Zealand appropriate the genre of the Bildungsroman in cultural and gendered ways. Patricia Grace (Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa, and Te Āti Awa iwi) in Cousins (1992), Renée (Ngāti Kahungunu, Cape de Verdan, Irish, and Australian Pākehā) in Does This Make Sense To You? (1995), and Kapka Kassabova (Bulgarian New Zealander then Scot) in Reconnaissance (1999) explore the limits of the female Bildungsroman to describe different forms of trauma experienced by their girl characters. The Bildungsroman is a fictional biographical genre which has a long history of critical analysis, in various countries, epochs, and ideologies, highlighting the malleability of this literary form. To decontextualise the Bildungsroman from its nineteenth-century male-dominated white German origins, numerous feminist critics have
distinguished between nineteenth-century European female ‘novels of formation’ (Hirsh 1979) such as Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847); early twentieth-century female ‘novels of awakening’ which overcome the marriage plot (Felski); and end of the twentieth-century ‘feminist Bildungsroman’ which are inflected by second-wave feminism (Felski). When this genre is transposed to postmodern Aotearoa New Zealand, Patricia Grace and Renée challenge the imperialist, Christian, and patriarchal components of the Bildungsroman, while Kapka Kassabova contests the dystopian nature of New Zealand’s Pākehā capitalist society.

Consequently, I regard the postmodern female Bildungsroman as a literary space which allows Aotearoa New Zealand women writers from minorities to construct several forms of girlhood trauma. I first study the (anti-)heroine’s journey into trauma by exploring the idea of youth and the importance of mentors, as well as the cultural experiences of girls’ innocence. I then analyse the connections between girls’ traumas and national traumas. To do so, I question the notion of mobility, essential in traditional male Bildungsroman, as it stands in opposition to the ideal of girls’ innocence in patriarchal societies. I also explore the ways girls resist being acculturated and assimilated into nationalistic discourses. Finally, I examine the didactic aspect of the Bildungsroman, observing readers’ apprenticeship into Aotearoa New Zealand’s multiculturalism. I show that women writers from minorities enact a linguistic revival, contesting the monopoly of the English language in Aotearoa New Zealand’s public sphere. They also reject closure for their heroines at the end of their journeys to instead invite readers to imagine a multiplicity of endings.

**CHAPTER 6. Young Adult Fiction or How to Train Teenagers in Reading Girlhood Trauma**

In the sixth chapter, I engage with young adult (YA) fiction from Aotearoa New Zealand as ethnic minorities have long been caricatured in children’s literature, which participated in the cultural trauma of their communities (Gilderdale; W. Mills 20; Grace, *From the Centre*; Matuku and Husband). They have often been left out of the main plot, rendered invisible or relegated to the background. *The Kuia and the Spider* (1981) written by Patricia Grace and illustrated by Robyn Kahukiwa (Ngāti Porou and Ngāti Kōnōhi) is regarded as the first published children’s book written by a Māori woman writer and a Māori woman artist about a whānau (extended family). YA fiction appeared in the 1960s as a particular subgenre of children’s literature, focusing on a teenage readership aged between 13
and 18; and sometimes from 15 to 30 as in crossover fiction (Falconer 557; Marcoin 32). In Aotearoa New Zealand, children’s literature in general and YA fiction in particular are awarded numerous literary prizes every year. Aotearoa New Zealand authors of children’s literature have been internationally recognised since the 1950s, especially Margaret Mahy and Elizabeth Knox. In this chapter, I compare the following texts: *The Changeover: A Supernatural Romance* (1984) by Margaret Mahy (English Pākehā); *In Lane Three, Alex Archer* (1987) by Tess Duder (Pākehā); *The Lake at the End of the World* (1988) by Caroline Macdonald (Pākehā); the trilogy: *I am Not Esther* (1998), *I Am Rebecca* (2014), and *Being Magdalene* (2015) by Fleur Beale (Pākehā); *The 10 p.m. Question* (2008) by Kate De Goldi (Pākehā); *Bugs* (2013) by Whiti Hereaka (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Arawa, and Pākehā); “Break Up Day” (2015) by Kyle Mewburn (Australian Pākehā); *Flight of the Fantail* (2018) by Steph Matuku (Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāti Tama, and Te Atiawa); and *Something Alive* (2018) by Jem Yoshioka (Japanese New Zealander).

What matters for me as a former high school teacher, in this chapter, is to analyse the way Aotearoa New Zealand women writers educate teenage readers about trauma. Hence, I study how they write about girlhood interpersonal trauma, focusing on the themes of attachment and separation in connection with parental divorce and death, as well as on patriarchal violence. Subsequently, I examine how girl characters are forced to come of age at an early age, due to racism and to sexual expectations. Finally, I work on the way gender roles are revisited in YA fiction and how women writers adopt traditional boys’ adventure stories for girl characters to express girls’ approach to the contemporary environmental trauma.

**CHAPTER 7. Conclusion: Reading, Witnessing, and Translating Girlhood Trauma Written by Aotearoa New Zealand Women Authors**

In the seventh chapter, I create a dialogue between the Yale School of Trauma Studies and Aotearoa New Zealand-based trauma therapies, using Michael Rothberg’s concept of ‘multidirectional memory’, to give voice and visibility to various cultural traumas which affect New Zealand girls today. I especially reflect on the silencing powers of trauma on both survivors and witnesses, on the way literary genres can be ‘modus operandi’ conveying trauma-telling, and on the fact that trauma-reading is a form of translation.
CHAPTER 2.

“Writing Girlhood Trauma On Her Own: When Trauma-Tellers are Life Writers”.
Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the literary devices Aotearoa New Zealand women life writers employ to express traumatic experiences which occurred when they were children, and especially to the way they play with readers’ expectations. To name their texts ‘autobiographies’ is a political act Janet Frame dared to perform. Indeed, not only is the very existence of autobiography as a genre contested (de Man, “Autobiography” 921); but it has also often been associated with specific authors from predefined genders (male), origins (the Western world), sexual orientations (heterosexuality), and classes (the middle- or upper-classes) (Bergland 77; L. Gilmore, Autobiography and Postmodernism 5; Rippl et al. 5-6). White male heteronormativity is considered as the foundation of autobiographical conventions from the West, among which Saint Augustine’s Confessions (397-400 AD), Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s Les Confessions (1782), and Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography (1771-1790) are often cited. Once applied to Aotearoa New Zealand, a decolonial feminist perspective reveals autobiographical texts to largely be the playground of Pākehā men of influence, such as writers, historians, politicians, artists, or sportsmen.

Three texts in particular seem to stand out. Firstly, John Alexander Lee’s autobiography, Children of the Poor (1934), even if it is fictionalised, is often seen as a landmark in New Zealand’s history as a propagandist tale selling Lee’s Pākehā rags-to-riches story, from working-class despondency to power, when he became an MP for the Labour Party during the Great Depression. However, his fictionalised life was contested by Mary Isabella Lee’s The Not So Poor, his own mother’s autobiography which especially altered the portrait John had drawn of his older sister’s “fall” into prostitution (Cooper and Molloy 43), attacking a morally inflected construction of girls’ sexuality. Secondly, from the 1950s onwards, a distinct ‘New Zealand literature’ was fashioned by a group of male writers and critics who constructed the New Zealand ethos as masculine and white-oriented (Wevers, “New Zealand” 1120). Frank Sargeson is regarded as the leader of this literary and cultural nationalist movement. His memoir, Once is Enough (1973), could therefore be read as a model of the genre (Gibbons 94; Wevers, “Frank Sargeson”). However, contrary to European and American dominant traditions, heterosexuality is not the norm in Sargeson’s life writing (Wevers, “Frank Sargeson” 1866). Homosocial relations take centre stage in his fictional and non-fictional texts (Wevers, “Frank Sargeson” 1873); and misogyny is a common trait of his
male characters, mirroring his own attitude towards women in his lifetime (Frame 267). Later in the twentieth century, Michael King appears as another author fitting with Western autobiographical norms. Being Pākehā (1985) is regarded by Alison Jones as THE text which led European New Zealanders to identify with the label Māori gave them: Pākehā (8), therefore helping forge an ‘imagined’ and culturally anchored identity beyond settlement for descendants of colonists. As he explains in Being Pākehā Now (1999), Michael King actively participated in the creation of a bicultural and bilingual Aotearoa New Zealand as a Pākehā historian and biographer, therefore connecting the writing of his life to the narration of his nation. Moreover, as Lydia Wevers notes (“New Zealand” 1117), the Māori oral literature tradition of whakapapa (i.e. genealogy) can be perceived as a form of autobiography – or of ‘life telling’, to be more precise, as writing down whakapapa is taboo (Waretini-Karena, “Colonial Law” 701). Male autobiographies in Aotearoa New Zealand can therefore differ from Western literary traditions of the genre, as they can be fictional, written from a queer perspective, or belong to Indigenous oral literature.

To circumvent a definition of personal narratives as stemming from white men of power, Leigh Gilmore borrowed the phrase ‘life writing’ from Virginia Woolf’s 1939 notebooks (Leader 1), a term which has become quite popular in the field (Banerjee 336). The study of life writing encompasses personal accounts of women, people of colour, marginalised people, foreigners, disabled people, and victims of trauma. Moreover, these accounts are not necessarily written, as life writing texts can be memoirs, biopics, graphic novels, diaries, letters, oral interviews, case studies, garden designs, and many other forms, depending on what the life writer intends to express. This freedom of form and medium reflects the shift from a nineteenth-century European conception of the self as “essentialist” (Linda Anderson 4) – evolving from infancy to adulthood in its unicity – to a fragmented and fluid understanding of an individual’s identity formation. That is why, from the 1970s onwards, women writers started to publish life writing texts which defied the puritanical, parochial, and heteronormative masculinist status quo of New Zealand society and readership (L. Jones, “The Novel” 146; Wevers, “Autobiography” 230). In this process, women life writers inscribed their personal stories inside the national narrative, constructing the history of Aotearoa New Zealand from perspectives which were previously censored or marginalised by the main/male-stream narrative, notably on account of the writers’ gender, origin, class, sexual orientation, and language. As we will see, women life writers are often at the
intersection of several subjugating forces. As a result, their versions of history challenge and contest the official reports imposed by the press, the media, and the executive power.

In this chapter, I will answer the following questions: to what extent are readers’ expectations of life writing texts resisted by Aotearoa New Zealand women writers when they express their traumatic experiences of childhood? In what ways are trauma-readers led to take part in the testimonial process of writers’ trauma-telling? How do women life writers inscribe their childhood trauma into the narration of Aotearoa New Zealand as a nation? To do so, I intend to study the literary devices used by women life writers to depict and convey the ordeals they encountered while growing up, to “demystify” testimony and the ways in which we [as critics] can approach it” (Kilby 41). For the purpose of this chapter, I have selected five texts, including Janet Frame’s first volume of autobiography, To The Is-Land (1982); Shonagh Koea’s memoir The Kindness of Strangers: Kitchen Memoirs (2007); Kirsty Gunn’s notebook, My Katherine Mansfield Project (2015); Renée’s memoir, These Two Hands: A Memoir (2017); and Selina Tusitala Marsh’s graphic memoir, Mophead (2019).

PART 1: Resisting Readers’ Expectations of Life Writing Texts

a) Defying the Autobiographical Pact

When Aotearoa New Zealand women writers undertake an autobiographical enterprise, they often do so with Katherine Mansfield’s Journal in mind. Not only was her ‘original’ diary (edited by her husband, John Middleton Murry) a scam which participated in the creation of a myth around Mansfield (J. L. Mitchell 5; K. Jones 172); but Mansfield herself came to distrust the autobiographical mode. She preferred to keep some details of her life to herself – despite the profusion of letters and notebooks that were retrieved – and she contested the unicity of her ‘I’: “True to oneself!” Which self? Which of my many – well, really, that’s what it looks like coming to – hundreds of selves” (qtd. in Baisnée, “My many Selves” 183). Mansfield, often considered as a spiritual ancestor of Pākehā New Zealand Literature (Makereti n.pag.; Powles and DeCarlo n.pag.), does not fit Philippe Lejeune’s theory of the autobiographical pact. For him, “[l’autobiographie (récit racontant la vie de l’auteur) suppose qu’il y ait identité de nom entre l’auteur (tel qu’il figure, par son nom, sur la couverture), le narrateur du récit et le personnage dont on parle” (“Pacte” 23-24), that is to
say: “an autobiography (a story telling the life of its writer) is based on a common identity of name between the writer (as he appears on the book cover with his name), the narrator of the story and the character of whom he speaks” (my translation). In this definition, women life writers are excluded as the use of the masculine pronoun suggests, further identifying autobiography as a male preserve (Baisnée, “Introduction” 2). Moreover, because women tend to change names over their lives due to patriarchal laws, the signature of a woman writer can be void if it refers to a patronymic name which she feels uncomfortable with (Miller 116). That is why, of the women life writers studied in this chapter, Shonagh Koea is the only one whose memoir seems to open with a cohesion between her three ‘I’ s. Yet, by the end of the first page, she has already confounded her readers’ expectations by employing a series of understatements through which her ‘I’ appears as a self-invention due to complex childhood trauma:

[b]ecause I was quiet I was mostly ignored and so I was free. No one had any expectation of me. I had no one’s history to embellish nor anything to live up to. (…) My father was a violent man, my mother was a nice woman but hopeless. I was thus quite free to be anything I liked. (n.pag.)

The victim of neglect and various forms of abuse, Koea yet surprises readers with her resilience and her ability to turn a deeply traumatic experience into a personal escape from social determinism. The talent she developed as a writer of fiction was first used to rewrite her own life story when she was a child.

Janet Frame’s first volume of autobiography opens with a chapter entitled “In the Second Place” which cryptically differentiates three timeframes through which human beings travel: the mother’s womb, life on earth, and the kingdom of death. In this riddle, she inscribes doubt as the basis of all knowledge as the after-life is “myth”, but life itself too. Indeed, her autobiography is defined as “the following record with its mixture of fact and truths and memories of truths” (3). Her text claims hybridity at its core, and explodes the concept of truth-telling by associating it with reminiscence and subjectivity. Janet Frame’s early memories have also been distrusted because of the abusive treatment she received when she was confined in mental hospitals during her twenties. The electric shock treatment that she endured damaged a great part of her memory (Frame 249). Due to her medical record, Frame’s very act of life writing is a challenge to Lejeune’s doxa. The autobiographical pact is turned into a play on words where the pronoun ‘I’ only refers to itself, not to the writer who had to reinvent herself after several traumatic experiences (Braun 46; Gambaudo 297).
Frame’s autobiographical ‘I’ can be read in reference to Barthes’ comment debunking autobiography as a mere simulacrum: “the I that writes the text is never, itself, anything more than a paper I” (78-79). Frame’s journey is actually an apprenticeship into language, as a maternal inheritance, as a magical gift transforming “the ordinary world we knew” (5); and as a lure as she learnt at her own expense when one word only, “schizophrenic” (202) defined her and confined her for a decade. Frame’s repeated stays in mental hospitals can work as a red herring for readers who may read the autobiographical account of her life with scepticism and prejudice (Delrez 168). The fact that Frame playfully hinted at the interchangeability of fiction and truth in an interview (Alley 155) further destabilises the frontiers between these two modes of representation, as well as between imagination and reality.

By claiming an impossible equation between the writing ‘I’ and the written ‘I’, Barthes debunks Lejeune’s theory of autobiographical sincerity and truth-telling. Freed from artificial constraints of simulacra, the auto-biographer, for Barthes, writes her/his/their life, and, therefore, reorganises it, constructs it, and gives it meaning or not. In this sense, Kirsty Gunn’s “paper I” navigates between different locations, from Scotland to New Zealand; different temporal eras, back to her childhood then in her adulthood; and different texts, some fictional, other autobiographical, that she wrote herself, or that she quotes from Katherine Mansfield’s portfolio. In her introduction to My Katherine Mansfield Project, Gunn artfully beats around the bush to avoid assuming her ‘I’. The pronoun ‘I’ refers to Gunn as a writer of fiction: “A number of years ago I wrote a collection of short stories called This Place You Return To Is Home” (first sentence, n.pag.), quickly transforming ‘I’ into an alterity: ‘you’. She then comments on her childhood in New Zealand through the voice of Katherine Mansfield, needing the mask of Mansfield to ventriloquise her thoughts:

I’ve been at home in these places for most of my adult life – though I grew up far away on the other side of the world, in Wellington, New Zealand, that was also ‘home’. ‘I hated it’, said Katherine Mansfield, and she left – returning only in the stories and short fiction we count amongst her very best. (n.pag.)

Gunn identifies with Mansfield as both authors live/d in exile in the UK, and yet, paradoxically, if they do not feel homesick for a country Gunn geographically excludes from the centre of the map, relegating it to the margin, they are haunted by New Zealand in their writing. Even from abroad, both authors participate in the creation of Pākehā New Zealand Literature, despite their mixed feelings with their motherland. The difficulty Gunn has to
express herself directly in relation to New Zealand is further developed when she explains her motive for writing this notebook:

[t]hat is why I had to make this story of mine, this book. I needed to try and understand this splitting of self that would take a writer away and would bring her back again, to explore in words what it might be to call this place home, and also that, to carry two powerful ideas of where we might belong in our heads and hearts – and on the page – at the same time. (n.pag.)

Her life writing is relegated to the status of another “story” as if her life was mere fiction. She admits that she is several, and that she is torn by her past. The violence incurred in the act of “splitting” her self reveals a fracture between her past and her present, between her New Zealand childhood, and her adult life spent in the UK. Trauma therefore makes Lejeune’s equation unrealistic.

In the mid-1980s, Lawrence Jones provided an influential yet limited model of New Zealand autobiography. His model, though outdated, is pertinent in the study of Janet Frame’s autobiography. For him, an autobiography in New Zealand can only tell the same story; written either realistically, or impressionistically; and from three possible perspectives: “Late Colonial”, “Provincial”, or “Post-Provincial” (“One Story”). For him, “the story (…) is of the artist’s struggle to find a ‘place’ (often literal as well as figurative) in a hostile provincial environment” (127). He quotes Janet Frame’s as one such autobiography, written in an impressionistic and therefore “feminine” style (128), and from a Provincial perspective as she situates herself with reference to the myth of “Woman Alone” (128) – an adaptation of the masculine myth of ‘Man alone’ which opposes a male writer/artist to New Zealand society perceived as corrupted and philistine (128). However, Koea and Renée, who belong to the same generation as Frame, do not fit Jones’ model and cannot be categorised as adopting any of these three perspectives. Instead, both authors emphasise the ethics of solidarity, care, and generosity throughout their texts. For example, Renée’s memoir starts with her birth but immediately her ‘I’ shifts into the ‘we’ of her childhood (11), as she then shared her life with her siblings and mother, supporting and respecting each other. She then describes the upheavals her mother had to face after her husband’s suicide, as a Māori widow in charge of three little children in the 1930s and 1940s. Renée’s memoir is therefore communal from its inception, insisting on the importance of family and whānau in the construction of herself as a member of a community and as a person with responsibilities for others. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf notes that “one has to keep in mind that the Western notion of autobiography as a written form of self-expression foregrounding the individual cannot automatically be applied
to South Pacific native cultures” (“Introduction: Autobiography” 687). In the case of Renée, Lejeune’s ideal is not applicable as ‘I’ is not limited to an individualistic experience of the self.

With her graphic memoir, Selina Tusitala Marsh adapts an innovative multimodal approach to tackle the telling of traumatic experiences, which allows her to circumvent restrictive definitions of trauma as unspeakable and unrepresentable (Caruth; Laub; LaCapra; Felman). Showing and telling at the same time, graphic memoirs are indeed a form of life writing in which artist-writers defy traditional autobiographical conventions while taking the risk of being excluded from being defined as autobiographies. Reader-viewers are welcome in Mophead by Marsh’s mini avatar, who fools around, and attracts their attention with the cheeky comment: “She also drew me” (n.pag.). Marsh’s mini avatar represents the Tusitala, the story-teller in the Fāgogo tradition. Fāgogo are translated sometimes as “fairy-tales” (McMullin 219), as “fables” (Lilomaiva-Doktor 123), and sometimes as “folktales, myths, legends” (Hayward 108). Told at bedtime (McMullin 220; Moyle 7), fāgogo comprise stories, dances, and songs (Baisnée, “Niu Voices” 114-115; McMullin 220), and are addressed to everyone, whatever their age. Here, Marsh’s mini avatar overtly mocks Philippe Lejeune’s autobiographical pact by establishing a difference of identity between the writer’s ‘I’, the narrating ‘I’, and the drawn characters’ ‘I’. For Valérie Baisnée, “Marsh decentres the ‘I’ by multiplying the imaginary locations of its enunciation and its figures, displacing the centrality of the English language by inscribing alterity in it to avoid mimicking the western ‘I’” (“Niu Voices” 108). From the title page, Marsh decolonises her graphic memoir by exploring her Samoan literary heritage within a comic, a medium imported in New Zealand via the UK and the US (Bollinger 1). The games played by Marsh’s mini avatar to entertain the reader constructs Marsh’s self as a relational being. Tamasese et al. describe the Samoan self:

as having meaning only in relationship with other people, not as an individual. This self could not be separated from the ‘va’ or relational space that occurs between an individual and parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other extended family and community members. (303)

Marsh deliberately erases the borders of her panels to destroy the physical boundaries which would have limited her past self into a frame. By opening the borders of her past to the reader-viewers, she invites them to share her space and her perspective from a place of humility, the size of her mini avatar.
b) Fiction as ‘Authentic’ Facts

The classical distinction between fiction and autobiography, based on the ideal of truth, is contested by Paul de Man who claims that it “is not an either/or polarity but that it is undecidable” (“Autobiography” 921). Life writing cannot be limited to a confessional mode: fictional passages can be read through an autobiographical lens while autobiographical episodes can be challenged as fictional re-creations. This indeterminacy about the validity of facts (did it really happen?) and the value of what is told (did it really happen that way?) can shatter some readers’ expectations and leave space for litigation (L. Gilmore, “Introduction: Tainted Witness” 4). Yet it also allows marginal writers (read: female, non-binary, queer, transgender, disabled, postcolonial, Indigenous, migrant, adults abused when children) to share traumatic or contested perspectives under the mask of fiction, leaving readers with a choice of interpretation. Janet Frame’s fictional account of her years at mental hospitals, *Faces in the Water* (1961), contains more autobiographical elements about this period of her life than her *Autobiography* (Barringer 98; Bazin, “Taboo” 23-24). Embedding fiction in life writing can also recall some definitions of autofiction. Even if, as a French scholar, I distrust the term ‘autofiction’ due to the numerous polemics and scandals it has engendered (Jeannelle 222; Simonet-Tenant, “Approche” 30), and to the various meanings that critics have attached to it over the years (Dix 2; Ferreira-Meyers 30; Jeannelle 225; Martens 52), I understand that research on autofiction in the Anglophone world has a more recent history. Its Anglophone usage reflects former research on “faction”, “factual fiction”, and “autobiografiction” (Ferreira-Meyers 30), as autofiction is not regarded as a genre but as a “modus” (41), as a useful literary tool. Hywel Dix’s definition of autofiction for example links the insertion of fiction inside autobiographical texts to trauma-telling:

autofiction is a project of self-exploration and self-experimentation on the part of an author. This in turn is partly because many works of autofiction have been written in the aftermath of some kind of traumatic experience – real or imagined – so that the process of writing in response to trauma can be seen as a means of situating the self in a new context when other relational constructs have been removed or jeopardized. (4)

Following this definition, the concept of autofiction can prove pertinent in the study of Aotearoa New Zealand women writers whose childhoods were marred by trauma and whose life writing blurs conventional distinctions between fiction and facts to express life-shattering experiences. Colonisation remains one of the sources of traumatisation as New Zealand has an ambivalent status as it is both postcolonial for most Pākehā, and in the process of decolonisation for Māori (Gunew, *Post-Multicultural Writers* 24). Brian Matthews notes that
one recurring pattern which characterises postcolonial life writing is the insertion of fiction inside autobiographical texts. For Brian Matthews, the use of fiction is “a thin disguise” (1) to allow writers to express political thoughts which would be censored otherwise: “[t]he post-colonial autobiographical act is, if not always a revolutionary one, at least essentially political” (2). Although Aotearoa New Zealand is a settler colony, and not in a postcolonial situation, autofiction resonates with political dissidence, especially when writers are Indigenous. At the intersection of several factors, the life writers in this chapter thus intermingle the personal with the political on several levels to counteract the fact that trauma-tellers and survivors are often unheard, distrusted, and contested (L. Gilmore, Witnessing Girlhood 47).

In the case of Selina Tusitala Marsh, who is of Samoan, Tuvaluan, English, Scottish, and French descent, her personal, familial, and communal history experienced forced assimilation into Pākehāness following the 1980s Pākehā/Māori bicultural and bilingual policies. By speaking out against the racial discrimination she experienced at school, she opens up a door towards a multicultural conception of Aotearoa New Zealand’s society. In this context, I posit that Mophead can be read as a ‘limit-case’. Leigh Gilmore defines this form of life writing as “testimonial projects” which “constitute an alternative jurisdiction for self-representation in which writers relocate the grounds of judgment, install there a knowing subject rather than a sovereign or representative self, and produce an alternative jurisprudence about trauma, identity, and the forms both may take” (The Limits 143). Limit-cases “self-consciously sit[t] on the fence between fiction and non-fiction”, clarify Rippl et al. (7), but also Isabelle Somé (229). Mophead selects specific moments, and erases others. Marsh’s drawing style, for example, exaggerates the voluminous mass of her hair. The power of her childhood imagination is also shown as border crossing. Juxtaposing episodes of her life at home with the way she was compelled to behave at school, Marsh highlights the multiplicity of her selves from an early age, insisting on her capacity to adapt, adjust, and survive in a hostile environment thanks to the power of her imagination. The medium of the graphic novel therefore provides her with visual and literary means to testify about the life-shattering experience of school bullying and racism. As Olga Michael notes, graphic autofiction is a device women artists-writers tend to explore in graphic memoirs, as it “visually and verbally capture[s] the often silenced narrative of girls’ working through and surviving different forms of abuse” (121). The childish figure of young Selina indeed tells more about the impact verbal abuse had on her when she is just pulling a face without a word, and she is also a character
young readers can identify with easily. Mophead is intended for a child audience as Marsh prepared teachers’ notes to study her graphic memoir at primary and secondary school levels, and as Mophead’s sequels are dedicated to an audience aged five and more. As a result, playfulness and a balance between fiction and facts are essential ingredients not to traumatise children who are young enough to be impressionable and easily influenced by the identification process (Howard and Jackson II 1).

Renée’s memoir is composed of eighty-eight patches, one for each year of her life (22). Twelve patches are poems; nine are extracts from plays; six are from novels; and three are from short stories; which means that about one third of her autobiography is fiction. By deliberately including previous works inside her memoir, she highlights the themes that have always influenced her: women’s emancipation from patriarchal structures; women’s solidarity against domestic violence and rape; as well as working-class struggles and their severe repression by the State. The extracts also show that she explores the tragedies of her childhood on stage and in novels (14). Her fiction is therefore not free from autobiographical references either. In Patch 9, extracted from Touch of the Sun (1990), she displays a fight between two sisters, Lillibet and Mugro, the victims of their mother’s domestic abuse, to explore the entanglements child abuse can leave in the minds of adult survivors. The former stands by the oppressor and justifies her acts, rehearsing the guilt-inducing discourse her mother repeated then: “[i]f she locked you in the cupboard, it was because it was the only way she could get some peace. (…) You were a trial to her, a daily trial. And you were ugly and nasty, she couldn’t bear to look at you” (51). As a child witness, Lillibet had to side with her abusive mother to avoid the same fate as her sister Mugro. What Lillibet does not want to admit is that she herself obliquely suffered from her mother’s abusive treatment of her sister, being vicariously traumatised (Lerias and Byrne 129). As therapists note, abused children have an ambiguous relationship towards their abusers as they are emotionally attached to them (Cohen et al. 11; Coles 90; Seymour et al. 517): what Lillibet took for love and admiration was in fact sheer terror. Similarly, Renée hints at the physical abuse she experienced as a child while creating a respectful portrait of her mother:

Rose had a dog collar on a hook on the wall, which she used to strap us if we did something wrong. (…) This kind of punishment from Rose didn’t happen often. (…) This makes her sound like a bad mother but she wasn’t. She was a young woman driven to extremes because that’s where she’d been pushed. (19-20)
Renée forgives her mother for her harsh behaviours as she understands that her mother was discriminated against on a daily basis. Renée therefore applies a Just Therapy approach onto her childhood pain. Just Therapy, an Aotearoa New Zealand-based form of family therapy, participates in the decolonising process of people’s minds Linda Tuhiwai Smith has called for in academia (Decolonizing 30; Tuhiwai Smith et al., “Introduction” 7). Just Therapists refuse to apply male Eurocentric theories onto their clients whom they see as “subjugated” by an excluding upper class, male-oriented, and Pākehā-led system (Waldegrave and Tamasese, “Central Ideas” 96). Practitioners offer their patients an alternative discourse in which they have not failed, but in which society has failed them. That way, therapists do not ‘silence’ their patients into accepting the status quo; they help them read and make sense of the hidden structure which systematically oppresses, alienates, and marginalises a part of its population (96). The New Zealand of Renée’s childhood was a segregationist society from which her mother, as a Māori, was excluded, and her children too. Robert Bartholomew explains that a regime of segregation was implemented in several parts of New Zealand from the 1920s to the 1960s. Māori were forcefully separated from Pākehā in transports, restaurants, swimming pools, sports, cinemas, schools, and churches. Its practice was intermingled with the development of white leagues influenced by eugenics theories (Ip; J. Lee; Salesa). Renée recalls the racism of landowners who were allowed to specify on signposts that they accepted “No Dogs, No Maori” (These Two Hands 16. [sic], italics in the original), and the humiliating fact that her mother was forbidden to buy alcohol (20) until after the Second World War – associating Māori with children, not with adults (Meek 38). Renée’s narrating ‘I’, with the distance of old age, can look at her child self with the knowledge of history, and can analyse the abuse she experienced then as being a manifestation of a wider cycle of violence: colonisation. Her writing on childhood, with its noticeable use of fiction as masks, can therefore be read as a political statement on New Zealand’s colonial legacies.

Shonagh Koea and Kirsty Gunn also use fiction as screens to avoid delivering a straightforward account of their childhood abuse, which would be too painful for them. They both let readers guess and interpret what happened. That way, neither of them forces readers to play the part of voyeurs, a role Leigh Gilmore warns against when she denounces the violence autobiographies can have on readers when they mostly deal with trauma (Autobiography and Postmodernism 22). Koea forewarns her readers about her writer’s trick of mixing facts and fiction: “A lady with pale blue eyes once said all the people in my stories are real. She was quite wrong, but I do sometimes put in secrets of a small kind and they sit
within the framework of the fiction like a draught of icy air” (n.pag.). Impossible to speak about in real life, the “secrets” of her childhood haunt her fictional world. She reveals in an extract from *The Wedding at Bueno-Vista* that her husband and herself were “allies, survivors of a violent vernacular of behaviour” (n.pag., italics in the original), as he had also been a pawn in his own mother’s emotional manipulation and father’s physical abuse. Fictional texts thus fill in a void left by trauma, as “trauma often registers as gaps in the narrative structures of autobiographical memory” (Rippl et al. 9). Imagination allows Koea to express the horror of her youth under a verbal format that she can control. She leaves details of her traumatic past in the interstices between fiction and facts, leaving room for interpretation. That is why, at the end of her memoir, Koea explains that “[a]lways I retreat into my own fiction to give an explanation”, quoting from *Sing to Me, Dreamer*: “it is difficult to know what is truth and what is fiction mirrored in the old glass tonight” (n.pag., italics in the original). Koea therefore overtly ignores the truth-telling component expected in autobiography writing, teasing her readers with indeterminacy till the end. Similarly, though with an even more complex structure, Kirsty Gunn mixes fiction and non-fiction, adding reflections on and quotations from Katherine Mansfield’s work to her childhood trauma-telling. Gunn’s childhood was affected by grief after her mother died of cancer, a loss she still mourns at the time of writing. Yet, the story, “The Little House”, situated in the middle of her notebook, creates a claustrophobic setting composed of houses within houses, transforming the main character, young Kassie, into a frozen and terrified doll. In an article to the *Wellington Journal*, Gunn obliquely echoes this story while visiting Mansfield’s birthplace, mixing Mansfield’s childhood with her own, admitting “I was there entirely, in a story of my own” (n.pag.). Is the “story” fictional? Is it autobiographical? Gunn’s ‘I’ shifts to the distancing pronoun ‘she’, referring to an unidentified “woman” who identifies with Mansfield: “The woman says to herself: this is what Katherine Mansfield would have seen when she stood at this kitchen window… These trees, this sky…” (n.pag.). A younger version of herself then appears: “the child”, who is a replacement child - “a ghost, another version of another sister born in this same house who dies days later” (n.pag.). Gunn’s doppelgänger, “the woman”, stands as an eye witness (cf. she “sees”). She is also a guardian of the past as the verb “remember” suggests. Finally, she is someone who testifies as she “writes them down” (n.pag.). She also tries to warn the little girl of the past against potential dangers, yet can’t because she is just remembering past trauma and cannot act upon it to change the course of history. This form of “accompaniment” which Gilmore and Marshall define as “a gesture of
care that insists on the possibility of ethical witness, imagines solidarities in the face of violence, and holds the space for the survivor’s signature: *I am here*” (*Witnessing Girlhood* 111) allows the narrating ‘I’ to care for her lonely traumatised self. This attempt at protecting her younger self is doomed to fail, yet it opens a space for readers to identify with the narrating ‘I’, and to respect the resistance of the text which alludes to, blurs, and mixes several narratives to confuse readers and reveal while concealing past trauma, leaving it in the margin of the text built: outside of home.

PART 2: Readers’ Part in the Testimonial Process of Writers’ Trauma-Telling

a) Creating an Active Readership

As “the age of memoir and the age of trauma have coincided” (L. Gilmore, *The Limits* 16), literary critics tend to compare the acts of reception performed by therapists and by readers. Laura Marcus expresses her concerns regarding this analogy, especially when critics borrow psychoanalytic tools to read autobiographical accounts of trauma (262-263), as it empowers readers with the capacity to formulate diagnoses. Indeed, the analyst and the reader are “both the receivers and the interpreters of the life history” (262-263). Yet, it seems that Janet Frame’s motive in writing her autobiography lies in this very act of reception as a ‘medicalised’ interpretation, positioning readers in therapists’ shoes. Indeed, as in a counter case study, she offers readers the possibility to judge whether she suffers from schizophrenia as Pākehā psychiatrists claimed. *To the Is-Land* deals with the first years of Frame’s life, depicting her family life during the Great Depression, until she left Oamaru for teacher’s training and university in Dunedin. She describes her older brother’s series of uncontrollable epileptic crises, as well as her older sister’s death by drowning, in a detached and rational tone, which leads Susan Ash to note that Frame shows “an anterior but not an interior perspective” in her autobiography (38). What is missing and implicit in Frame’s text is her own experience of accumulated trauma during childhood. She constructs her narrating ‘I’ as unaffected by what occurred in her past life to fulfil readers’ expectations of autobiography, to ensure that her text would not be dismissed as the product of a hysterical and irrational single woman.
To counter a psychoanalytical reading, one could interrogate the social roots of Frame’s trauma. The therapeutic frame of Just Therapy would reject the diagnosis of “family dysfunction” (Waldegrave and Tamasese, “Central Ideas” 96) in the case of Frame’s family, to emphasise instead the part played by unemployment, poor housing, and poverty in the erosion of their self-representations. In a poem, Kiwi Tamasese explains that:

I think of colonization, no longer with the might of the sword, no longer with the decimation through disease, but through the gentle conversation of a therapist assuming the rightness of her/his value system, or, more dangerously, assuming that the discipline is scientific, therefore value-free, therefore intercultural and international. (“Central Ideas” 101)

In this extract, she highlights the ambivalence of counselling and psychology. As they are based on Western notions of mental health, she interprets them as remnants of European colonisation. For her, applying these models without contesting them in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand is to propagate detrimental colonial frames of thoughts onto formerly colonised peoples, including Māori and Pacific Islanders like herself as she is of Samoan descent; and onto women as most psychological models were formulated by white European men – a fate Janet Frame experienced at her own expense.

The ethical model of Just Therapy could be transcribed in terms of readership when it comes to analysing autobiographical accounts of trauma. Practitioners at the Family Centre in Wellington are women and men from Māori, Samoan, and Pākehā origins who work together to decolonise their discipline and provide relief to their clients. As Charles Waldegrave explains, the therapist, like the trauma-reader, is situated as an active witness in the trauma-tellers’ stories: “[t]he therapist listens for the story and helps its articulation. (...) Then in return for the story, the therapist offers a reflection deeply from the family’s belonging. The reflection is designed to inspire resolution and hope” (“Central Ideas” 99). As a witness, the therapist/trauma-reader is accountable for the telling of trauma as she/he/they participate(s) in the production of the testimony by encouraging the trauma-teller to complete her/his/their narrative despite overwhelming emotions. The patient’s story is like a gift, which explains why the trauma-reader offers a counter-gift in return: an analysis of the story. In the context of literary analysis, it is possible to transpose this meaning-making reading process (Ravenscroft), based on the creation of an active reader inside the texts of women life writers.

In *The Kindness of Strangers*, Shonagh Koea often addresses readers directly, as when she gives personal tips on how to improve the recipes that she incorporates in her narrative.
This device entices readers to share kai/food with her so that they experience the generosity she herself encountered when in dire straits. She reciprocates the gifts which were given her, in her writing style, empowering readers with comfort, support, and empathy in the midst of chaos. In exchange, readers are invited to make sense of the bits and pieces of her trauma in a narrative composed of variations as in music. Several themes are discussed in connection with her childhood, like family, school, and sociability. Koea does not tell her story in a chronological order. She changes topic anytime she comes too close to speaking out about the abuse she suffered as a child, and later returns to previous episodes in the body of her text. The written delivery of her traumatic past comes and goes like waves, eradicating her sense of security whenever she has flashbacks and nightmares, even in old age. In chapter 6, she explains that “writing these essays has made me think of things that have not come into my mind for years, and at night I sometimes dream of them again now” (n.pag.). Excavating the past for the purpose of her memoir, Koea experiences flashbacks which blur her representations of time and space. Symptoms signalling a complex post-traumatic stress disorder, flashbacks leave her disorientated as she cannot remember whether she actually screamed or if she heard her past self do so from the distance of old age and of horror, dissociated as she was in her mind from the abuse that she was enduring as a child. Leigh Gilmore claims that:

[a]nxiety over looking back suffuses the history of self-representation. Like Lot’s wife fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah or Orpheus departing Hades with Eurydice, autobiographers who look back sometimes represent themselves as risking their tenuous hold on the present and their hope for a future. (“Witnessing” 158)

When reading Koea’s text, readers understand a subtext of pain which remains ungraspable as the author does not voluntarily express it, running the risk of losing power over the alternative narrative that she has tried all her life to construct with the help of outsiders to her trauma. The border between her childhood trauma and her narrating ‘I’ is tenuous, and ready to break anytime she experiences symptoms of anxiety.

The more we read, the more we are able to identify elements from the text which explain what she suffered from as an only child growing up in a working-class Pākehā family during the Great Depression in the Hastings area. G. Thomas Couser notes that “at its best, life writing does not register preexisting selfhood, but rather somehow creates it. (...) [I]n writing one’s life one may bring a new self into being. If this is true, then in reading life narrative, we witness self-invention” (13-14). Koea constructs her past self not as a victim, as
the resilience of her narrating ‘I’ shows. On the contrary, like architects and artists of the Hawke’s Bay area of her childhood after the earthquake of 1931, she uses art and literature as a renaissance. The portrait she makes of her youth is that of a relational being: she perceives herself through the eyes of her neighbours and her relatives who held out a hand to her when she was most needing it and unable to ask for help. The solidarity she was shown from outsiders showed her a way out, through music, through books, and through food. She recalls her childhood not with the terror she constantly felt back then, but with kindness, claiming no grudge against her brutal father. She even teases her readers’ expectations with Freudian allusions when she writes: “I killed my father once, just on the pages of the novel, in The Lonely Margins of the Sea” (n.pag.), hinting at Freud’s theory on the symbolic assassination of the father as one of the stages of the Oedipus Complex children theoretically go through to grow up. She also admits reading missing persons’ notices when she was a teenager, in case her father would be declared accidentally dead, but this desire to see her abuser dead remained a fantasy. Writing the symbolic murder of her father was not cathartic though, contrary to mentalisation techniques. Indeed, the lessons in mental wellbeing she was taught when she was a young mother are transmitted to her readers, inviting them to apply them in their lives if they need it, as in a self-help manual. Koea therefore empowers her readers with active tips with which to overcome anxiety and past self-shattering experiences.

Renée also writes about growing up in the aftermaths of the Great Depression in the Hawkes’ Bay area like Koea. When the latter was repetitively displaced from one house to the next due to her father’s gambling habits and recurring joblessness, the former records her father’s suicide in the opening of her memoir like a coup de théâtre: “I was born in Napier on Friday, 19 July 1929, and the world went into a deep depression. Then Napier fell down. Two years after that my father shot himself. He was from Gore. Drama didn’t just follow me, it came out and met me with a big tah-dah” (11). Renée connects a world financial crisis, a natural catastrophe and her father’s suicide, to her birth – as if playfully implying she herself could have been responsible for these three tragedies, when she in fact suffered from these three events while growing up. Similarly, the Depression is given centre stage in Frame’s To The Is-Land, as if she, like Koea and Renée, were participating in the construction of a cultural trauma, in emphasising the way the 1930s Depression affected families in New Zealand, disrupting feelings of stability and security, depriving children of school due to a pandemic of polio, and of food due to job shortages. For example, Koea inserts recipes women improvised during this hard time, like the “Drip Stew”, and she repeats several times
that she was constantly on the move as a child, as “[her parents] used to say they had lived in nineteen houses in twenty-one years, or it may have been the other way round – I cannot remember” (n.pag.). She explains this nomadic way of life by her father’s gambling habits and frequent unemployment, but also by the shame her parents must have felt because of her father’s violence. Each writer’s individual tragedy is thus incorporated into a wider perspective, that of the nation’s traumatic experience of the 1930s after the financial crisis and the 1931 earthquake – a period Malcolm McKinnon justly called the Broken Decade for the damage it caused to every aspect of New Zealanders’ lives. Moreover, the three life writers come from the working class. Unlike John Alexander Lee, they did not climb the social ladder. Their lives instead were composed of a series of subjugating events which they felt were necessary to write about, to testify to the impact international and national history had on the lives of women and children of the working class in New Zealand. As Paul Maunder notes, “it is [important] to continue to articulate the story of the contribution that working people made, and continue to make, to the system of social democracy” (142). For him, as for Frame, Koea, and Renée, engaging readers with the story of their working-class families is a counterpoint to the neoliberal thinking of today’s Pākehā-led New Zealand. Renée especially excavates this silenced history met with violence and oppression from the State when it was written. In her memoir, she describes her childhood as follows:

[w]e were the Great Unwashed, the kids with snotty noses, dirty clothes, sores, nits, bare feet, rotten teeth, hungry bellies, staring eyes. We weren’t attractive. Most of us left school at twelve and did the jobs the haves didn’t want to do. We were cheap too. And we needed the work. (134)

The caricatural picture she draws of herself and her siblings echoes contemporary campaigns denouncing the fact that, in 2020 for example, one in seven children lives under the poverty line in New Zealand (Stats NZ/Tataurangā Aotearoa). Renée reads her own 1930s childhood through the filtering lenses of neoliberal political discourses on child poverty, as well as of the 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement which opposed the 99% have nots to the 1% haves. What readers actively make out from this juxtaposition of discourses from two different decades connected by a global financial crisis is that Renée has a cynical perspective on the development of social welfare: the 1930s status quo is somehow comparable to today’s when it comes to children’s State protection. Besides, as a Māori orphan from the lower social classes, Renée experienced social, sexist, and racist determinism at school, a phenomenon described as a form of educational segregation (J. Lee 51; B. Wang and Collins 2786), which prompted her to leave school at age 12 despite her skills and competencies (Renée, These Two
Hands 34). This premature end to her studies led to a life-long feeling of anger (35) as she felt the injustice of a situation compelling her to sacrifice herself for the sake of her family (35). As a result, her memoir is full of memorials to life-long learning alternative systems such as the Workers Educational Association (233), for having helped her satisfy this childhood yearning for knowledge. Readers are thus encouraged to do the same and reinvent their lives, however old they are themselves, and from whichever social background they come from.

Frame, Koea, and Renée all choose to create an active partnership with their trauma-readers as their traumatic testimonies need a witness to be formulated (Caruth; Felman; La Capra; Laub) AND be interpreted, as trauma-readers are no tabula rasa but active meaning makers. Their life writing could be classified as working-class autobiographies, “predicated on work and working life” (Strangleman 151). After all, Sargeson defined Janet Frame as “working class” (Frame 264) – however uncomfortable she felt with this term as she preferred positioning herself not at the bottom of New Zealand’s society, but at its margin, in exile, and from the distance of the “Mirror City” (458). In To The Is-land, she emphasises the creativity and literariness of her family, offering another perspective on the working class, as her family’s habitus was composed of reading and writing poetry and plays modelled on mostly English literary models studied at school (132), and watching Shirley Temple’s movies during the Great Depression (50-51). Her description of their housing in which the three sisters shared the same bed (28), of her father’s verbal and physical violence (44), and of the scarcity of clothes they had while growing up, making her feel ashamed of her body odour and of menstruating, construct a form of class-consciousness which leads her to participate in the representation of a cultural trauma. Indeed, despite the enduring myth of New Zealand being a classless society (Olssen 45; Mauder 139), Frame, Koea, and Renée remind their readers of a counter-story which rehabilitates the memory of their generation who grew up destitute during the 1930s, a narrative that is too often forgotten in the narration of New Zealand’s nation (Bhabha, Nation and Narration 311).

b) Empowering Girls with a Sense of Humour

Women have long been excluded from the art of humour in the Western literary world (Cixous). For women to reappropriate humour after trauma in childhood, a double operation is at stake. First, the distance humour provides to its enunciator empowers former victims of abuse (Reichl and Stein 10) as they are now in charge of what can be laughed at and how. As
Julia Kristeva notes, “rire est une façon de placer ou de déplacer l’abjection” (Pouvoirs 15), that is to say: “laughing is a way to situate or dislodge what is abject” (my own translation). When trauma-tellers laugh at their trauma, they operate a power reversal and take control of their life narrative – even if so briefly. Secondly, by using humour, women life writers adapt a traditionally male rhetorical weapon (Cixous; Reichl and Stein 13). For victims of racist stereotypes, satire, irony, and parody become all the more meaningful as they can be interpreted as role-reversing, allowing the humourist trauma-teller to move from exclusionary margins to the centre of speech, destabilising her oppressors (Reichl and Stein 12). Some consider humour as a therapy (Billig 5). However, in the texts studied, it is not given this power. In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, another aspect has to be taken into account: decolonial humour. Suzanne Reichl and Mark Stein consider that postcolonial humour necessitates an active involvement and complicity on the part of readers/audience:

[w]hether we read laughter or humour in a particular text as subversive or not, in fact, whether we identify it as laughter or humour in the first place, is largely a consequence of the way we read, the way we understand postcolonial literatures, and the way in which we know and view the world. (12)

Women’s humour can decolonise the white patriarchal and heteronormative social structure of Aotearoa New Zealand by destabilising its foundations, forcing readers to see beyond the mainstream frame of thought. Women life writers therefore count on readers to share their sense of humour, implying a common cultural understanding of laughter, or – in the case of readers and writers who are not from the same community – tolerance and acceptance of various cultural forms of laughter as Aotearoa New Zealand is a multicultural society.

In Mophead, Marsh’s empowerment through poetic language and humour surrounds her testimony. Her graphic novel has a circular construction, using the comic device of repetition to alleviate tensions linked to racism and remnants of colonisation. Before the main narrative begins plunging us into what she endured from age ten, reader-viewers encounter adult Selina on paper, in miniature, having run a long distance on an uneven path over a red ochre background. The choice of a bleed – that is to say a drawing which spreads beyond panel frames and, in this case, over two pages – is significant as it is not used as in superhero comics: we would expect the depiction of a spectacular event with this choice of frame. Yet, here, she represents herself as a jogger – not as a poet – and playing with perspectives over a flat reddish background. This intervention around the traumatic telling of her childhood entertains and distracts the audience from the seriousness of the story she is about to tell,
while metaphorically signalling the upheavals she has encountered in her life. At the end of her memoir, Marsh then depicts her encounter with a Pākehā boy of about ten years old, stereotypically wearing a rugby jersey. This rude boy loudly mocks Marsh, rehearsing school bullying chants by naming her tokotoko – the walking stick which honours her position as Poet Laureate of New Zealand – a “mophead”. Yet, in this last scene, Marsh has the advantage of age, knowledge, and social rank with her, and she reverses the attack in a gentle way, by educating the child with her story Mophead. The story comes full circle by having to be repeated over and over again, as in Samoan oral literature (Keown, Postcolonial 41). However, the fact that her story has to be told over and over again because it is constantly re-enacted by diverse actors within contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand is significant of the power remnants of colonial ideologies still have over the young generations. Adult Selina thus acts as a frame, protecting her younger self from further re-traumatisation. Her presence as a witness and as a guardian of the testimony that she protects from the edges shows readers – themselves witnesses in a mirror-effect – that, as in Narrative Therapy, Marsh has formulated an alternative story to cope with the derogatory discourse that was imposed on her (White and Epston). By inserting her funny avatar and her adult self-portrait as caring figures of authority, she shows reader-witnesses the path towards ethical empathy, transforming mockery into self-parody, racism into an ode to difference, and self-pity into self-esteem. Playing with literary conventions and expectations, Marsh highlights the fact that she is now the one in power to make other people laugh, not at her own expense, but to relieve the audience from past and shared trauma. Humour is therefore used as a tool to give agency to her past scapegoated child ‘I’, refusing victimisation.

In These Two Hands, Renée self-portrays as a witty, ironic, and satirical person. As we saw, the opening of the narrative exemplifies her dry humour which can be connected to Caroline Harker’s definition of Kiwi humour: “dry, self-deprecating and anti-authoritarian” (1). Renée indeed does not hesitate to laugh at herself and at women’s lifestyle in general, especially about taboos surrounding menstruation, or about the slavish work of housewives. In her memoir, Renée also mentions the fact that irony is like a second language to New Zealanders: “New Zealanders are very good at subtext, so a lot of our communication is not by what we say but what we convey, the message that lies underneath the words or the expression or the stance” (243). Reading between the lines, deciphering implicit messages, are here made a national trait. Paul De Man notes that irony is difficult to define but that it has to do with “disruption, disillusion” (“Concept of Irony” 182). He further links irony with self-
criticism: “[i]rony is the same distance within a self, duplications of a self, specular structures within the self, within which the self looks at itself from a certain distance” (169). Irony would therefore be a slightly distorted reflection of oneself, using language as a mirror. In this sense, we could read Renée’s rewriting of Pride and Prejudice in Patch 67, extracted from her collection of short stories Yin & Tonic (1988), as a parody of Jane Austen’s romantic plot, but also as an ironic commentary on New Zealand’s systemic discriminations based on class, gender, and ethnic origin. This passage is a fictional letter written by Liz Darcy to a book publisher in New Zealand. She writes in New Zealand English, and with a certain slang revealing her lower social class and lack of education. Bingley’s name is turned into “Bingo” in reference to his fortune (325), and Darcy is referred to as “Darce” (325). The latter comes from the South Island and inherited his parents’ money, presumably derived from colonisation and land confiscation: “[t]he word was he had a big property down south, been in the family for generations apparently. Some people have all the luck, eh” (325). Liz’s comment about the origin of his personal fortune highlights her own family’s lack of land by contrast, making of the Bennetts a Māori family. Her romantic courtship by Darcy is now just sex, ending with “Darce” complaining about Liz’ social and ethnic origins. In this parody, Liz is a teenage Māori girl who is emancipated and opinionated. Her affair ends prematurely due to her Pākehā partner’s racism and snobbery. Renée thus draws through this ironic rewriting of a classic of English Literature the cultural trauma Māori girls have experienced due to colonisation: Pākehā men’s sexual attraction to them as exotic others, complicated by their fear of miscegenation, their feeling of superiority, as well as their desire to exploit them sexually while despising them for being colonised and othered (Pihama 354; Waitere and Johnston 24). Homi K. Bhabha warns that, in narrating a nation, “[t]he ‘other’ is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we think we speak most intimately and indigenously ‘between ourselves’” (Nation and Narration 4). Giving centre stage to the testimony of a Māori girl from the working class, and treating rich Pākehā men as strangers and abnormal therefore as non-Indigenous, Renée reverses the social order of contemporary Aotearoa in a carnivalesque exchange of roles, and re-establishes a feminine and Indigenous viewpoint as the norm. The subversion of the status quo – itself a remnant of British colonisation – provokes laughter as it is grotesquely phrased, with hyperbolic expressions borrowing New Zealand English slang and oral turns, and serious discourses of honour and reputation in the midst of sexual intercourse. The girl’s reaction to Darce’s sexual assault sounds incongruous as she rejects him in the act, not for sexually taking advantage of
her, but for despising her family and origin: “I wasn’t going to have some wanker like Darce slagging off my family. I mean for me to do it is one thing, but he hardly knew them. Well, the long and short of it was that I told him to shove his hook…” (326). In this letter, Renée moves the position of readers from witnesses to voyeurs to accomplices, as female empowerment is enacted within the final signature: “Liz Darcy”. Intertextuality works like a subtext as readers understand that Liz has climbed the social ladder and taken advantage of her husband’s financial situation, reinvesting the centre of Aotearoa New Zealand’s society and language, and establishing new codes from Māori girls’ viewpoints.

Humour is an odd companion to testimonies of trauma, as seen in its absence from the majority of life writing texts studied in this chapter. However, its conspicuous presence in Marsh’s graphic novel and Renée’s memoir cannot be ignored. Humour allows Marsh to offer child readers a certain relief from the tensions triggered by the telling of her girlhood trauma. As for Renée, humour disarms colonial and patriarchal structures which continue to oppress girls from minorities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

PART 3: Inscribing Girlhood Trauma into the Narration of New Zealand’s Nation

a) Multiethnicity

Aotearoa New Zealand’s multiculturalism cannot be denied even if bicultural policies are still practised. The colonial concept of ‘race’ was eradicated from census activities in 1971 (Didham and Rocha 590) and “New Zealand is unique in having methodically measured multiple, self-ascribed ethnic identities since 1986” (590). Despite these social advances which recognise ethnicity as subjective and as multiple, multiethnicity sometimes remains invisible in official data as when individuals belong to several groups within a larger denomination. For example, Pacific Islanders are mostly multi-ethnic yet the diversity of their ancestry is not always perceived as they are included into the generic Pacific ethnic group (593). Racist undertones can still be perceived in some labelling, as when Fijian Indians are classified as Asians, and not as Pasifika despite their own perception of themselves as such; or when New Zealand Chinese are counted as Chinese, disregarding the settlement history of their families (596-598). Mixedness indeed re-enacts colonial fears of miscegenation and genetic experimentations in some people’s minds. Anthony Easthope recalls that “[i]n its etymology [biological hybridity] meant the offspring of a tame sow and a wild boar, *hybrida*”
In the context of colonisation, ‘hybridity’ triggers negative sentiments on the part of colonisers and patriarchal guardians of minorities, as it blurs the boundaries between binary oppositions to enable subversion and multiple ethnic identification instead. It generates fears of miscegenation (J. Lee 10) as colonists construct their identity as opposed to and superior to those they colonise. The binary society which emerges from this segregationist, exploitative, and exclusionary vision of a nation perceives human beings who were born and raised with a mixed heritage as misfits, often called ‘half castes’ in the context of colonial New Zealand (Didham and Rocha 588) – a concept that has been translated into the languages of colonised groups, as in Samoan with the term ‘Afakasi’. Peter J. Aspinall notes that the offensive term “‘half-caste’ had its origins in nineteenth-century British colonial administrations, emerging in the twentieth century as the quotidian label for those whose ancestry comprised multiple ethnic/racial groups, usually encompassing ‘White’” (503). In New Zealand, between 1916 and the 1970s, people’s multiple ethnic identities were fractionalised into halves, quarters, and eighths, which meant that some Māori could see their affiliation with their ethnic group denied (Didham and Rocha 589-590), as Keri Hulme (English, Orkney Scot, Kāi Tahu and Kāti Māmoe) experienced when C.K. Stead denied her the right to write as a Māori author in 1985 (Shaffi). In 1991, iwi (Māori tribes) were eventually recognised as valuable markers of ethnic identification (590).

The sexuality of the colonised and of minorities was policed by the dominant group as in the anti-Asian campaign, organised at the turn of the twentieth century, to stigmatise the Chinese community so that neither white nor Māori girls would marry them (J. Lee 61; Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounters” 235, 242). British women were stripped of their nationality and their right to vote if they married non-Anglophone men (Didham and Rocha 589; Frame 113; J. Lee 77; Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounters” 232; Bozic-Vrbancic 187). Today, after decades of civil rights movements defending Māori and Pasifika communities and the recognition of their cultural particularities, mixedness seems to be still perceived as a problem for ethnic ‘classification’. Many studies in sociology and in psychology are based on the conception that New Zealanders are either Pākehā or Māori or Asians or Pasifika, labels used as if these groups were homogeneous, when these terms actually hide a huge variety of ethnic, cultural, and national origins (Tawake, “Transforming” 161; O’Donnell 3; Wong et al. 282; Peiris-John et al. 36). When lists of ethnicities are more detailed, supposedly more inclusive and culturally sensitive, the last box ‘other’ continues to ostracise those whose ethnicities have not been considered worthy of specification (Didham and Rocha 596). In academia, researchers
often ask people to situate themselves in one origin only, and reject those who specify several ethnic markers as they do not know how to include them in their research (Jose and Schurer 7; Sibley and Ward). However, hyphenated identities are Aotearoa New Zealand’s contemporary reality: excluding individuals for belonging to several communities re-enacts colonial fears of miscegenation and erases them from national statistics and from the ‘imagined nation’.

The five authors whose life writing texts are studied in this chapter reflect the complexity of identifying as ‘New Zealanders’, though each for their own reason. Frame emphasises the importance of her Scottish and English heritage in her childhood. Koea recalls her Irish grandfather. Gunn explains that her Scottish origin prevented her from feeling at home in her hometown, Wellington. Yet, writing the nation for women life writers like Marsh and Renée is all the more significant in the context of exclusionary cultural identities. Marsh claims the diversity of her origins on her academic webpage at the University of Auckland. Her interpretation of nationalism reflects the heterogeneity of her identities. In Mophead for example, only two panels have closed borders, each of which corresponds to her parent’s ethnic origins. Instead of representing her family line with a tree, Marsh pretends a child’s logic to explain the reason why her hair is exuberant: she produces a cartography of her DNA with drawn maps of her maternal and paternal countries of origin, and she creates an equation evaluating the contribution her grandparents’ hairstyles have made to her messy ‘mop’. Marsh attacks borders, frames, and genetic discourses with her playful pseudo-scientific explanation. Her graphic memoir therefore writes what Bhabha defines as “[c]ounter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – [as they] disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (Nation and Narration 302). By writing about her girlhood trauma, Marsh participates in the writing of the New Zealand nation beyond its bicultural frame which trapped non-Māori children within Pākehā dominant discourse in the 1980s, as she herself is from “Dissemi-Nat(ion)ed” descent, from a history of multiple migrations. Mophead can thus be read as a multicultural comic. Indeed, despite Pacific Islanders being the third minority of New Zealand (Census 2018), mainstream perceptions and constructions of Pasifika peoples in the media is often negative in New Zealand, due to “the establishment of stratifications within migrant populations” (Collins 84), associating Pacific Islanders with “low-skilled” jobs (84). In this context, Mophead gives visibility to the prejudices suffered by Marsh’s community.
When Selina Tusitala Marsh insists on the idea of ‘difference’, she asserts herself as a *métisse*, and refuses to deny her Samoan and Tuvaluan heritage; as a member of the Pasifika community, she rejects assimilation into Pākehā culture. When she tried to behave like the “mimic man” (Bhabha), Marsh was putting on the mask of the ‘honorary white’. As Bhabha notes, the mimic man – or in this case the ‘mimic girl’ – “is the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicized is emphatically not to be English” (“Mimicry” 87). In the 1980s, bicultural policies were nascent and children who were neither Pākehā nor Māori had to abide by the dominant Pākehā education system which was adapted from the British school curriculum (J. Lee 50). Cultural and linguistic differences were thus suppressed and socioeconomic divides exacerbated through school ‘streaming’ policies. Wang and Collins explain that “[s]treaming involves placing students in different classes based on academic performance, which often results in ethnic gradients and school-based segregation” (2786). Education is therefore critical in levelling as well as perpetuating social inequalities (Sibley and Ward, “Measuring” 701; Ioane et al. 430). In this system, Pacific Islanders are at the intersection of several discriminating factors, as Janet Wilson notes that “simultaneously perpetuation of the socio-economic and racial inequalities of colonialism through low-skilled labour has led to negative depictions of Pacific diasporas” (“Transnational Movements” 153).

In this context, the testimony Marsh gives of her school bullying years and the assimilating practices performed at school participates in the articulation of a Pasifika cultural trauma. Ron Eyerman defines cultural trauma as “a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (2). Marsh’s childhood trauma can be read as a synecdoche of a wider trauma which affected the Pasifika community as a whole. In her poems “Guys like Gauguin” and “Two Nudes on a Tahitian Beach, 1894”, Marsh especially contests literary and artistic depictions of Polynesian girls during colonisation such as those perpetrated by Comte de Bougainville, Pierre Loti, and Paul Gauguin, and which were inspired by Western sexual fantasies of the exotic ‘other’, and by Christian missionaries’ shaming of female bodies (Sua’ali’i, “Deconstructing” 78; Waitere and Johnston 23). By drawing her younger self as an androgynous stick figure, she challenges the stereotypes surrounding Pasifika girls as lascivious and sensual, and gives credibility to her testimony – a credibility she potentially would not have gained had she drawn herself with curves (L. Gilmore and Marshall, *Witnessing Girlhood* 5). Marsh, like other writers from diverse minorities, therefore participates in the creation of New Zealand’s ‘imagined’ nation and helps children grow up with positive images of themselves.
Renée’s father originated from the South Island, and from European descent. Her great-grandfather had emigrated from the Cape de Verde Islands (These Two Hands 122) and her grandmother was of Scottish and Australian origins (123). Later in her memoir, Renée also recounts how she learnt her whakapapa inherited from her mother’s side. She associates this search for her genealogy with a detective investigation (121, 160, 166). First, her version of her father’s suicide challenges the statement published by the investigative tabloid Truth at the time of the event (119-120). Secondly, her mother’s history blurs the distinction between colonisers and colonised, land owners and land thieves during the land confiscation era. Renée reveals of her great-grandfather: “Porohiwi had mana on the block and it seems that in 1839 – twenty-five years before his murder – he may have been one of the sellers of a large tract of land to the Crown. (...) The big question is whether or not Porohiwi had the right to sell the land in the first place” (170-171). By acknowledging ambivalence and greed in her great-grandfather’s acts and motives – what Hannah Arendt calls a “cooperation” between perpetrators and victims (Felman 21) – Renée rejects a simplistic revisionist interpretation of Māori as mere victims of colonisation. Despite having both Māori and Pakehā ancestry across several generations, Renée was discriminated against on account of her skin colour, at school (17), in society at large during its segregationist era, and in her family: “when Laurie told his family I had agreed to marry him they were aghast. There were three strikes against me: ‘Her mother is Māori or “half-caste” and a Catholic, and Renée goes to dances” (135). In 1949, at the time she married, multi-ethnic heritage and religious nonconformity were perceived by protestant Pākehā as a social disgrace. Multiethnicity is therefore at the core of Renée’s identity, and a claim she expresses explicitly in the very construction of her texts.

b) Trauma as the Foundation Stone of Women’s Ars Poetica

Women’s life writing is often polymorphous, challenging national narratives which exclude women from history (Gibbons 80). The structures of the texts studied are particularly varied and original in their hybridity, as women life writers compose their own Künstlerromane, locating the origin of their talent as writers in childhood. For instance, both Renée and Koea note the therapeutic and autobiographical modes contained in gardening, understood as a form of land writing and a signature of the trauma survivor. Renée notes that:

I came to gardening when I was nearly forty years (...). Whatever the reason, something stirred, and I began what has become a sometimes frustrating, sometimes
disappointing, but mainly happy experience. I’ve grown a few gardens since then, all
different, but with each one I’ve learned. (These Two Hands 73)

Renée’s gardening drive corresponds to the same period of time as her divorce, her coming
out as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, and as her debut as a writer, as if gardening
helped her cope with the major changes in her life. As for Koea, she recognises the value of
gardening when she describes her mother’s habit:

[m]y mother was a very good gardener and always made lovely gardens that people
sometimes walked past in the evenings so they could see the flowers, but my parents
never stayed in a house long enough for her climbing roses to trail right along the
fences, or her grape to fruit. (n.pag.)

Koea’s mother would grow her own garden of Eden as a counterpoint to the hellish
atmosphere of their home. Moving houses constantly meant she had to start from scratch all
the time, but this did not deter her from constructing her own space, away from abuse, even if
she never tasted the fruits of her work. These experiences of gardening as life writing are
confirmed by Alice Walker who, In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens (1972), comments on
the literary and healing power of the personal stories expressed in a garden’s composition. For
Eneken Laanes, language can reside outside of words to help survivors formulate trauma: “[i]f
language lacks modes of representation for helping us make sense of certain events, these
events acquire a traumatic nature” (124). To cope with traumatic events, flower symbolism
and space layout can bring relief to their creators, giving them a power of agency over the
stories they tell to embellish their homes – and themselves – which stands in stark contrast
with the passivity and powerlessness they felt during trauma and in its aftermath. The
multiplicity of genres which women life writers deploy to express their girlhood traumas
therefore hint at the profusion of attempts they have had over the years to share personal
secrets in an audible or visible way. That is why the writers’ ars poetica is often enmeshed in
trauma-telling. When they formulate their personal definitions of literature, many women life
writers tend to incorporate trauma as a component their art has to confront.

These Two Hands is composed of patches to recall the knitting of a quilt – a knitting
technique that Renée defines in the para-text, before her memoir per se starts (9). Her memoir
has thus several functions: it looks like a patchwork, made of odd patterns and colours,
repaired and mended fragments, and different fabrics. These patches can be diary entries,
extracts from plays or novels, letters, poems, shopping lists, cooking recipes, newspaper
articles, etc. Chronology has no room in such a composition, and nor does a cyclical
representation of time. Instead, each patch corresponds to a memory which comes and goes,
in a seemingly uncontrolled manner. John Sundholm warns against the deceptive nature of memories: “[m]emory is fluid and in constant movement. (...) Memories are constantly reshaped and created” (123). Not written in medias res, memoirs can be deceptive as their narrative is a reconstructed and selective reading of the writer’s life. Renée chooses fragmentation and interstices as tools to ostensibly highlight the selection she practiced with her memories, which gives her text an unfinished aspect. Interstices also hint at the potential loss of memory linked to old age, and to omission of information. For Jane Kilby, when in presence of a testimony, “[t]he answer is that we learn to read for what is not and cannot be said: namely we learn to listen to the silence left by violence” (18). Readers need to excavate Renée’s childhood from her aesthetically assembled/patched memoir which, like a broken mirror, reflects the fragmented and damaged aspects of the girl she used to be. Renée highlights the materialistic and ostensibly artless aspect of her memoir writing: “to warm, to comfort, to read under or to read like a book” (9), drawing a comparison between knitting and writing, and healing. Each patch indeed can be interpreted as a new bandage applied on a past wound. In that sense, Renée’s life writing technique recalls the origins of the written word, as “etymologically the text is a cloth: textus, from which text derives, means ‘woven’” (Barthes 76). This Western interpretation of literature connecting writing and weaving is gradually replaced by a Māori arts and crafts technique Renée mentions when she describes how she taught life writing to high school students: “[t]hey worked in groups on their individual projects. Like they were all weaving the same kete” (85-86) (basket). Writing on the theme of tangi (funeral; grief, mourning), the teenagers created their personal stories while being supported by their classmates. This communal aspect to writing a traumatic experience is associated with Māori women’s craft of weaving kete with flax (Waretini-Karena, “Colonial Law” 701). In her behind-the-scenes patches, when Renée describes how she wrote some of her plays, readers understand that she applied this weaving technique too as she was constantly surrounded by her family and friends and colleagues when creating texts. Weaving her memoir, Renée therefore pays a tribute to her whānau without whom she would not have survived her childhood trauma. Mason Durie’s therapeutic model, te whāre tapa whā, can be applied in this instance. This model, translated as “the four-cornered house” (Pistacchi 139-140), is a metaphor comparing Māori health to a house. Its four walls represent taha tinana (physical health), taha hinengaro (mental health), taha wairua (spiritual health), and taha whānau (the whānau’s health), that is to say the wellbeing of the extended family and close friends (NiaNia et al. 93). I stipulate that, due to the series of traumas she experienced as a
child, Renée found healing in the health of her whānau, taking care of her siblings, her children, her partners, and her extended family after several genealogical investigations. Hence, her final quilt/memoir serves as a comforting companion in front of the “night” (9), in front of Te Kore – the void which, in Māori cosmology, is both the origin and the destination of everything and everyone, their birth and their death. Indeed, she does not portray herself as ‘Woman Alone’, but instead asserts her inclusion in various meaning-making groups.

Shonagh Koea’s *ars poetica* could be defined as an art deco literary style, in reference to her hometown, Hastings, and its renaissance, when it was rebuilt in art deco architecture style after the 1931 earthquake; but also as a tribute to her aunt Kateanne’s legacy. Robin Apollo Simon notes that:

Hastings should not be forgotten. It too was rebuilt over the same period, but this time largely in the ‘Spanish Mission’ style. The inspiration here was particularly appropriate: Santa Barbara, California, which had suffered an earthquake in 1925 and which had been rebuilt in this striking manner. (19)

Considered as a luxurious architectural style, worthy of Hollywood stars (Lacey), Californian houses recall Koea’s childhood urban landscape, but also her desire to have a home. This quest for safety stems from her childhood feeling of neglect and homelessness: “[t]he thought of houses has always fascinated me. Or perhaps it is the idea of a home that does that. When I think of the places I lived when I was a little girl and an older sort of girl they were always sad” (n.pag.). Constantly moving from one house to the next, and frightened to stay in, in case her father would harass her, Koea is obsessed with houses, giving more room to their descriptions than to herself in her own memoir. The first feeling of being at home she experienced was at her aunt Kateanne’s in New Plymouth, when she worked as a reporter at age 18. Her mother’s aunt welcomed her and protected her, offering her a shelter from her father’s anger. At her death, Koea inherited a mass of objects her aunt had accumulated over fifty years of shopping. With her husband, they welcomed these vintage items spanning from the 1920s to the 1970s and reflecting New Zealand’s history. Classifying, listing, and recycling these curios became her pastime, and this activity became infused into her writing style. She recalls that she had transcribed this experience into her novel, *Sing to Me, Dreamer*:

[m]y aunt must have shopped a lot in the late 1940s and early 1950s, a period when jewellery was often still very Art Deco in design and is now very collectable. In the novel I made it all much more precious and I used to sit with a Sotheby’s annual review of auctions (…) propped up in front of me, retranslating what I recalled of my aunt’s brooches and necklaces and rings to make them sound much more precious. (n.pag.)
Rare words and attention to details create a literary mannerism which gives the impression of stopping time – so focused Koea appears to be on a curio. Her love for antiques seems to fill in a void that she experienced as a child, without a home, without toys nor books to dream of, and without fitting clothes. Koea also inserts cooking recipes in her memoir, with personal tips to improve them. Lydia Wevers notes that “the domestic and familial implications of the recipes, offering comfort and sustenance in the future of a past where none was to be had” (“New Zealand” 1135), stand in sharp contrast with her “matter of fact narrative tone” (“New Zealand” 1135). When recipes create a dialogism with imagined readers, offering them spiritual kai/food as if in an invitation to share a warm meal with her, her art deco literary style, focused on abandoned objects, builds a pleasant-looking façade over the magnitude of her complex girlhood trauma. Koea’s decision to write a memoir is significant then as this form of life writing does not emphasise the importance of childhood in the development of the authors, preferring to focus instead on the way they played a part in world-making, and in politics (Lahusen 629). Memoir writing can be interpreted in Koea’s case as the record of her attempts to escape from past abuse, minimising its impact by limiting its expression. The scarcity of her childhood memories also stems from the damage trauma performs on the developing brain of children, as systemic abuse impairs the right side of a child’s brain (L. Gilmore, The Limits 144; Siegel 165; Cohen et al. 19). This neurobiological response to repeated trauma is a self defence mechanism children perform to survive (Siegel 166). As a result, when she metaphorically equates trauma with the Hawkes’ Bay earthquake, Koea draws the fault lines girlhood trauma inscribed within her onto the architecture of her text, as well as the possibility for (self) reconstruction and preservation.

Gunn also develops her poetical art on the metaphor of home. Growing up in a Scottish family in Wellington, home meant Scotland, and, as an adult, she is torn between the UK and New Zealand, like Katherine Mansfield before her. Unable to be in two places at once, she claims her real home is that of fiction:

[i]t’s an idea that has always preoccupied me – that notion of creative process as a making, a willed brick-by-brick, word-by-word building of a place on the page that might let a story inhabit it – to create a home of words where I, the writer, may also live. (...) And to be inside the protection of words is to feel safe. (n.pag.)

Not only does she find peace when creating stories, but she already experienced this feeling when her mother read Mansfield’s “Prelude” to her at bedtime. Her life narrative is connected to Mansfield’s nomadic life and fictional world, as the little lamp in “Prelude” illuminates her
memories forever associated with the happiness she enjoyed when her mother was alive. Gunn thus constructs her book on a rhizomatic scheme (Deleuze and Guattari, “Introduction” 13, 32-33), multiplying nodes of various forms, and connecting heterogeneous fragments on the theme of trauma. She explains that “[n]otebooks must contain the most private kind of writing. More secret by far than a journal, or even a diary with its rules laid down to record the business of the day” (n.pag.). In her quest for home, Gunn maps her childhood trauma through quotations from Mansfield and Edward Said; extracts from speeches and fictional stories she herself wrote; and autobiographical fragments. Writing a rhizomatic book, reminiscent of her nomadic ancestry but also of the fern — the emblem of New Zealand — she zig-zags from one place to the next, from the past to the present, and from text to text. This technique allows her to cross different spaces at the same time, like the figure of Persephone whom she mentions in her memoir:

I’d read a review in the London Review of Books before I’d left for Wellington and knew, somehow, that [a book] was necessary reading for me — leaving, as I was, the light for the dark, the summer for the winter, my present for my past. It was called Catabasis: Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind, by Yulia Usinova, a dense, academic work about the cult of Persephone and the history and meanings of darkness and the ritual of descent in Classical life. It seemed to contain perfectly a context for a Wellington that would take me from the top of the zigzag, high above Randell Cottage and drenched in winter sunshine, to the trough of shadow below, the dark streets, massing seas and the Straits out ahead, looming in the darkness. (...) This is the real Wellington, the shadow whispered in the wintry air. You can never escape it. (n.pag.)

Metaphorically, travelling back to New Zealand for the winter season means living in her own inferno, in the void left by her mother. Transposing Greek mythology onto the urban design of her hometown, Gunn transforms the Windy City into the realm of the dead. Her autobiography is therefore a testimony of her attempt at facing her childhood complicated grief, and transcending her past.

As for To The Is-Land, it emphasises the importance of play on words and tongue twisters in Frame’s childhood. The insertion of poems, songs, idioms, but also dialogues, and references to the Bible, highlights the importance of language in childhood development, but also the gradual shift from the veneration of the English literary canon to the creation of a New Zealand Literature (197-198). Claire Bazin comments on the taboos that young Janet faced as a child, taboos which had been constructed and maintained as such by her “conformist religious parents” (“Taboo” 17-18). When a taboo was breached, her father reacted with violence, her mother with “[c]lichés and euphemisms [which] are ready-made systems of thinking which fossilize language” (22). To the Is-Land can be read as Frame’s
testimony of the colonial childhood she had in New Zealand, when the English literary canon was imposed on her impressionable mind, and when racism against Māori and Chinese communities as well as Nazism became a norm (113). She had to model her behaviour and opinion on colonial orthodoxies, as white girls’ bodies and minds were moulded to protect the future of the settler community (Coleborne, “Insanity” 159; Smith et al. 69). As she was shy and had tics, her relatives gave themselves the power to speak on her behalf, reifying her – an experience Frame qualifies as “identity-destroying” (111). This apprenticeship into linguistic codes to survive at home and in society was alienating as it did not reflect her own approach to literature nor her own political views. That is why Tessa Barringer compares Frame’s autobiography to the empty shell of the silk worm Frame had offered to Sargeson (100). Indeed, young Janet was compelled to perform a gender, racial, and classist identity that did not fit in with her dreams and desires as it functioned as a fixed frame. In this sense, I challenge racial assumptions which posit that Frame constructs an age of innocence in To The Is-Land (Dean 50), as physical and mental pain were her constant companion while growing up. Trapped in an uncontrollable body and in the role of the dutiful girl, she found an escape through fiction writing, a place where she was allowed to use language the way she wanted and where her voice was valued. To the Is-Land therefore records her linguistic coming-of-age into the Mirror City and leaves the shell of her past behind.

Conclusion

The five life writing texts studied in this chapter explore a variety of literary devices women writers employ to share their personal experiences of trauma with readers. The hybridity of the texture of their life narratives allows them to counteract autobiographical conventions imposed by heterosexual white males from the West. Chronology is disrupted; a putative unity between the narrating ‘I’, the narrated ‘I’, and the acting ‘I’ is constantly challenged; and fiction is used to convey authentic facts. Trauma-readers are given an active role in detecting and interpreting past trauma, especially in convoluted testimonies like Shonagh Koea’s or Kirsty Gunn’s. Readers are also constructed as accomplices by women life writers as they empower them with the possibility to ridicule the status quo which remains influenced by colonial ideologies in Aotearoa New Zealand. Indeed, the invisibility forced upon people from non-European ethnic origins reveals the difficulties in classifying people under one label in a nation which is still in the process of decolonisation. Racism, sexism, and
classism remain alienating experiences for girls. Stereotypes of girlhood’s innocence, passivity, voicelessness, and a-policitisation have no room in the portraits women life writers construct of their younger traumatised selves as they all reject the trope of female victimhood. Yet, each life writer formulates her depiction of past trauma in a unique way, reflecting the cultural trauma experienced by their social class and/or their ethnic minority. They also intermingle their personal experiences with the creation of a national history, highlighting the struggles of their class, gender, and origins; and with an Aotearoa New Zealand literature which has a multicultural scope.

Homophobia is an issue tackled by Renée in relation to her personal experience but at an older age, although she cheekily mentions that her mother used to tell her: “[i]f you don’t get your head out of a book, you’ll end up on Queer Street” (These Two Hands 20). This ironic hindsight interlaces Renée’s sexual orientation with her love for literature. I wrote about the way Renée pays tribute to the her/his/theirstory of the LGBTQIA+ community in the United States and in Aotearoa New Zealand in an article which is entitled “Life Writing as Quilt and Kete Weaving in Renée’s Memoir, These Two Hands (2017)”. I also chose not to include in this chapter Helene Wong’s autobiography, Being Chinese: The Story of a New Zealander (2016), nor K. Emma Ng’s essay, Old Asian, New Asian (2017), despite my original design. These two life writing texts are chronological and factual, and abide by Western autobiographical conventions to ensure their voices are heard by mainstream Pākehā. Both Kiwi Asian authors reinsert the stories of their families into Aotearoa New Zealand history as the Chinese community has long been excluded from this national narrative (Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounters” 233; H. Wong 2017). These texts also reflect on the way both writers internalised racism when they were children, and refused to practice some aspects of their cultural heritage for fear of being discriminated against. The assimilating process they experienced as children in the public sphere is challenged in their life writing texts as adults, after living abroad, in China, but also in the U.S. It is therefore from exile that Wong and Ng could experience what it means to be bicultural Chinese and New Zealanders.
CHAPTER 3.

“Kiwi Asian Poetry and Girlhood Trauma-Reading”
Introduction

Kiwi Asian poetry is marketed as a new phenomenon in Aotearoa New Zealand. Its first anthology was published in 2021 by the collaborative work of Paula Morris (Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Whatua, and English) and Alison Wong (a fourth generation Chinese New Zealander). Its title, A Clear Dawn: New Asian Voices from Aotearoa New Zealand, emphasises the novelty of this poetry. It also seems to oppose ‘New Asians’ to ‘Old Asians’, a distinction K. Emma Ng describes as a term which separates recent Asian migrants from Asian families who have settled in Aotearoa for several generations. The common point existing between the various poets selected for the anthology is therefore the fact that they are racialised as ‘Asian’ in Aotearoa. As Timothy Yu notes when analysing Asian American poetry,

[Although the writers I discuss are immigrants or descendants of immigrants from Asia, they are linked not through a shared ethnic or national origin – indeed, they hail from a range of ethnic backgrounds – but through the common experience of being racialized as ‘Asian’ in white majority cultures. (Diasporic Poetics 17)]

Othered for their physical appearances, Kiwi Asians experience racism on an everyday basis (Sibley and Ward 708). Like ‘Asian American’, ‘Asian Canadian’, and ‘Asian Australian’, the term ‘Kiwi Asian’ is a label which mostly refers to people originating from East Asia, from countries like Malaysia, China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines, whereas ‘Asian British’, for the most part, stem from South Asian countries such as India and Pakistan (Yu, Diasporic Poetics 21). The fact that one label only covers a variety of ethnicities can be contested as monolithic. Roshini Peiris-John et al (36) and Agnes Wong et al. (282) decry the use of the label ‘Asian’ in national censuses in New Zealand as people from the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia are all encompassed by this term, which effaces their differences and amalgamates them into one fixed and homogenising mould. Due to the settlement history of Aotearoa New Zealand, waves of migrations and the evolution of immigration policies have to be taken into account, particularly in the case of the Chinese community. In a groundbreaking text, Old Asian New Asian, K. Emma Ng explains the paradox suffered by people originating from this geographic area, as Chinese New Zealanders are often mistaken for new migrants, whereas the first Chinese settlers actually arrived in 1866, at the invitation of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce, to work in the Otago goldfields (Li 5-6). This prejudice, which is also at stake in the US, is based on the belief that Asian migrants are “perpetual foreigners” (Yu, Diasporic Poetics 12; Adams 5; Kuo 40; Song 3; Wallinger-
According to Ng’s framework, ‘Old Asians’ settled in Aotearoa at the same time as the British (Makereti n.pag.), while ‘New Asians’ migrated to New Zealand in the 1980s when migration policies were favorable to applicants regardless of their ethnicities, following the passing of the 1987 Migration Act. In such a context, Kiwi Asian poetry can be evaluated within a historical context of loss, silence, and exclusion.

Leon Benade warns against cultural mis-readings: “the critical educator and researcher must be able to acknowledge the role their own cultural positioning plays in shaping their attitudes” (6). As a French trauma-reader of Aotearoa New Zealand poetry and the mother of a second-generation Kiwi Asian daughter of Filipino descent, I am aware of three pitfalls in the scholarship focusing on Asian diasporic literature. Since at least the eighteenth century, European colonists have imagined an entity called the ‘Orient’ that they have understood as their binary opposite (Said). As a result, in the nineteenth century, the West read the Orient as developing a ‘cult of nothingness’, misreading Daoist and Buddhist texts through the binary filter of being/non-being:

the ‘cult of nothingness’ invented by Western commentators can be seen as a predictable reaction to the Buddhist concept of ‘emptiness’, which is difficult if not impossible to understand vis-à-vis binary (or dualistic/dichotomous) constructs like being/non-being, existence/nonexistence, or even the more intuitive binary of fullness/emptiness. (Stalling 9)

As the Western world conceived itself as the realm of being, the East was perceived as dangerous and threatening for its anarchic ontological potential (Wallinger-Schorn 17; Stalling 18). Yet, as Jonathan Stalling argues, the notion of the ‘Orient’ was never characterised by nothingness, but by emptiness (9). Translators have therefore participated in the deformed reflections of Eastern philosophies, and Western (mis)understandings of cultural manifestations stemming from the East need to be questioned (Yu, Diasporic Poetics 16). The second pitfall to avoid is contemporary nationalist readings of diasporic literatures. For instance, Rao Pengzi constructs Chinese literature written from abroad as taking part in the eulogy of the Chinese nation. In such a discourse, China is indeed imagined as protected by walls while being open to the world via its commerce routes (108), reinvesting metaphors such as the historic monument of the Great Wall and the legendary silk roads. Stalling regards these nationalistic interpretations as restrictive and biased as China remains a heterogeneous, multicultural, and multilingual territory whose borders are not stable (6-7). The third point to be wary of is reading contemporary diasporic Asian authors through the lens of an ‘immutable’ ancient verse tradition (Chang 88). This prejudice takes for granted that authors
of Asian descent are well-trained in ancient classical poetry from their respective countries
when most of them have no access to the culture of their ancestors, and it also implies that
Asian literary traditions are fixed and never change, as opposed to the West which is
perceived as constantly evolving (Chang 88).

In this chapter, I intend to study poems by five Kiwi Asian women poets who belong
to the Chinese diaspora. Mostly based in Auckland, Renee Liang is a second-generation
Chinese New Zealander who worked as a paediatrician before she changed career and started
writing poems and plays. I will study her poems “Banana” (2005) and “Crossed Cultures”
(2011). Nina Mingya Powles is a Kiwi Asian poet of Chinese, Malaysian, and Pākehā descent
who grew up in Wellington, and studied in Shanghai for one year, before moving to London.
Her collection of poems, Magnolia (2020), received international acclaim. I will read the
following poems from this collection: “Dreaming in a Language I Can’t Speak”, “The Great
“Alternate word for mixed-race”, “Conversational Chinese”, “Origin Myths”, “Mother
Tongue”, and “Magnolia, jade orchid, she-wolf”. I add one other poem by Powles: “If
Katherine Mansfield Were My Best Friend”, published in Starling in 2016. Lily Ng is a third-
generation Chinese New Zealander who grew up in Wellington and whose grandparents fled
from China during the Cultural Revolution. I will compare her two versions of “Leaves” (one
published in the poetry magazine Starling in 2016, and the other in the New Zealand School
Journal in 2020), and work on “My Ukrainian Friend” (2016). Wen-Juenn Lee is a New
Zealander of Chinese and Malaysian descent who resides in Wellington. I will focus on her
Dawn. As for Vanessa Mei Crofskey, she is a descendant of the Hokkien Chinese diaspora
who live in Malaysia, and is also of Irish and Polish descent. She is based in Wellington and
Auckland. I will analyse her poems “What’s the PH balance of yin + yang?”, “dumplings are
fake”, and “The capital of my mother” from Shopping List of Small Violences (2020).

In this context, I will consider to what extent it is possible to argue that Kiwi Asian
women’s poems transform girls’ traumas into archaeological sites to excavate the pain of their
communities. At first, I intend to study the way women poets express their exclusion from the
public sphere because of racism and sexism. Then, I will focus on families, cultures, and
political legacies, highlighting the impact of women’s migrations in the formation of
intergenerational trauma and in the feeling of home. Finally, I will emphasise how
PART 1: Excluded from the public sphere

a) Testifying to the Anti-Asian HIS-story of New Zealand

Asian New Zealanders represent 15% of Aotearoa New Zealand’s population, which means that they are the second largest minority after Māori people (NZ Census 2018; Galikowski 52); and yet they report the highest rate of hate crimes (Sibley et al. 34; Sibley and Ward 705). Their inclusion in New Zealand society has long been complicated by Orientalist fears (Song 4; J. Lee 59-60; Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounter” 234), as in other settler nations like the United States, Canada, and Australia (Couchman and Bagnall 340; Yu, Diasporic Poetics 72). Although the first Chinese migrants arrived in Otago in 1866 (twenty-six years after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi) following an invitation to work in the goldfields, Asian migrants have been systemically perceived as potential threats to a Westernised conception of a New Zealand nationalist identity. From the mid-nineteenth century until today, they have indeed suffered several waves of discriminating legislation and policies when attempting to settle in New Zealand. The research of Manying Ip and Jenny Lee on Kiwi Asian communities, especially Chinese New Zealanders and Māori Chinese, recall a part of New Zealand history which is too often forgotten in official versions which prefer expanding on the myth of a racially inclusive, class-free, and tolerant nation. These researchers excavate discriminatory practices which reduced New Zealanders of Asian descent to the marginal and precarious status of “sojourners” (Keown, “Sojourners” 4). In 1881, a quota was set to limit the number of migrants from China. From 1881 to 1944, they had to pay a poll tax when entering the country. At the beginning of the twentieth century, many White Leagues were founded out of fear against an imagined Chinese invasion. Like other Western nations, colonial New Zealand participated in the ‘Yellow Peril’ campaign, fabricating Asians as potential threats to the West in an Orientalising reading of Asian cultures (Song 4; J. Lee 59-60; Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounters” 235). Anti-Asian campaigns in New Zealand, as in the United States, corresponded to the development of eugenics in their white societies (Schlund-Vials 197-198; J. Lee 61). Eugenics theories justified the
implementation of segregation in both countries (Schlund-Vials 198) and, therefore, the exclusion of ‘neither whites nor blacks (in the US)/browns (in New Zealand)’ from their public spheres (Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounters” 233), rendering Asian communities ‘invisible’ (Minh Ha 132; Adams 7; Tinkler et al. 1). Anti-miscegenation campaigns raged in New Zealand to prevent mixed-race marriages and children. If a European woman married a Chinese man, she was deprived of her citizenship and her right to vote. In 1907, an English language competency test was imposed on migrants originating from China. Chinese New Zealanders – like Asian Americans – were thus perceived as non-English speakers and their accents were constructed in the collective imagination as barriers preventing them from mixing up with other ethnicities in the Anglosphere (Song 5). From 1908 to 1952, Chinese people were barred from New Zealand citizenship and had no right to vote (Didham and Rocha 589; Frame 113; J. Lee 61-77; Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounters” 232, “Chinese” n.pag.; Bozic-Vrbancic 187). These discriminations are remembered in Alison Wong’s historical novel, As The Earth Turns Silver (2009), which recounts the story of her great grandfather, Joe Kum Yung, who was assassinated by a white supremacist in Wellington in 1905. In the 1990s, following the opening of New Zealand to non-white ethnicities in 1987 (Ip and Friesen, “New Chinese Community” 216) and the development of neo-liberal policies (Levine 578), attacks against Asians abounded in the press and in the political sphere, with campaigns claiming an “Inv-Asian” (Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounters” 242; Crofskey, “PH Balance” Stanza 14). In the 2010s, anti-Asian sentiments rose again, linked to housing inflation (E. Hunt; Braddock; Ng), and in the 2020s due to the Covid pandemic (Morris and Wong; McKibbin).

In 2002, Labour Prime Minister Helen Clark officially apologised to the descendants of Asian migrants who had suffered these racist exclusionary measures, especially the poll tax (J. Lee 66) – a political gesture which Timothy Yu admires as Australia, in comparison, has not formulated any apology for their treatment of the Asian Australian community yet (2021). However, Donna Orange, in her study of South African Reconciliation, wonders: “[w]hat constitutes a ‘sorry’ that truly makes a difference to the people offended and to their descendants?” (xiii). Can a state apology redress past abuse, racism, and cultural trauma? Can it help a long-dominated ethnic group in its political impetus towards recognition and visibility? Aotearoa’s 2002 apology to Chinese New Zealanders can be regarded as a historical landmark as archaeological sites were then restored in Arrowtown and in ‘Canton’ in the South Island to commemorate the work of Chinese gold diggers (Keown, “Sojourners”
11), a “lieu de mémoire” (a memory site) – as Pierre Nora would put it – which is also remembered in Kiwi Asian poetry, as in “Chinese Settlement, Arrowtown” (2002) and “Round Hill” (2006) by Alison Wong, and in “What’s the PH balance of yin + yang?” by Vanessa Mei Crofskey (Stanza 7).

In Asian American literature, a poetry of internment developed to commemorate the quarantines imposed on East Asian migrants in Angel Island from 1910 to 1940 (J. Park 101), and the camps where Japanese Americans were incarcerated during the Second World War (J. Park 101). Kiwi Asian history is also marked by such internment practices as two prisoners of war camps were built during the Second World War: one for Japanese New Zealanders in Featherston in the centre of the North Island; and one for Pacific Island Japanese in Somes Island in Wellington, later moved to Pahiatua in the Hawkes Bay region (Bennett 68-70). The play, *Shuriken* (1983), by Pākehā author Vincent O’Sullivan, explores the killing of about fifty Japanese internees following a strike at Featherston in 1942 (Warrington 99). However, the poems selected in the corpus do not recall these historical traumatic events per se. They often tell instead of a history of racial discrimination which is also internal to the Kiwi Asian community, creating resentment between ‘Old Asians’ (whose families have lived in Aotearoa for several generations) and ‘New Asians’ (who mostly arrived after ethnic quotas were abandoned in the 1980s). This temporal distinction within the Kiwi Asian group, analysed by K. Emma Ng, further alienates an ethnic group which is far from homogeneous as it comprises ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions as geographically diverse as East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East (Didham and Rocha 596-598; Wong et al. 282; Peiris-John et al. 36).

Inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic racism is the topic of Liang’s poem, “Banana”. The opening pronoun “they” (line 1) becomes “you” (line 14) when the speaker eventually addresses her abusers directly (potentially the readers themselves). She lists the insults she has received over the years: “banana” (line 1), “heung-jew” (its Cantonese equivalent) (line 2), and “ching-chong” (line 19). Similar to Native Americans insult those of them who have assimilated to white American ways with the swearword ‘apple’, a fruit which is white (imagined as Westernised) on the inside and red (a colour racially perceived as connected to Native Americans) on the outside (Robbins, “Striving”), New Asians use the banana fruit to decry the assimilation of Asian New Zealanders, criticising them for being white (Pākehānised) on the inside and yellow (a colour racially perceived as connected to Asians)
on the outside, as if betraying their origins (J. Lee 161). Renée Liang feels alienated and exoticised by these insults which distort her physical appearance and associate her with a South American fruit (Stanza 2). Her weapon against racism is rhetorical: she uses reason to oppose racial prejudices. Repetitions of “so” and “But it tells you nothing about me” appear twice each. She reverses verbal abuse, turning it against its promulgators who subscribe to an essentialist and racialised interpretation of human interactions. As a result, she refuses to verbally abuse her abusers, to distinguish herself from them – even those who belong to her own community and attack her for being Pākehānised (Stanza 5). Liang chooses to tease her abusers instead. She challenges them (us readers included) in a violent scene when she invites readers to “peel me” (line 47), “crack my top / and strip me / layer by layer” (lines 49-51). To counter the colonial gaze, Liang forces readers to look beyond the surface of skin colour and consider the person she is within that skin. As for the last stanza, it recalls colonial fantasies of cannibalism which haunted European encounters with Indigenous people whom they perceived as ignoble savages (Tuhiwhai-Smith et al., Decolonizing 4; S. Mills Gender and Colonial 145). Indeed, Liang writes: “Go on. Take a bite. / it may surprise you, / who I am” (lines 60-62). In this final picture, Liang reverses the colonial roles of the savage and the civilised, equating racist perpetrators with man-eaters – a metaphor which dehumanises them.

In Lily Ng’s poem, “My Ukrainian Friend” (Appendix 1, 244), racism is implicitly expressed in the way words are positioned on the page, excluding both foreign-looking best friends – a Ukrainian New Zealander and a Chinese New Zealander – on the margins of the poem/class. Ng does not need words to make trauma-readers understand what she and her friend experienced when they were at school. Racism is contained in the silence of the poem as trauma-readers are invited to see for themselves. By inviting us to look at the structure of the poem, Lily Ng shows us the way foreign-looking children can be rejected from Aotearoa New Zealand’s society. With this visual device, she paradoxically renders racism visible, as she relegates it to the margins, in the blank space around words, in the ‘hors-texte’ of New Zealand social contract – this space outside a text whose very existence Jacques Derrida vehemently disclaimed (Grammatologie 227).

In Nina Mingya Powles’ poem entitled “Dreaming in a Language I can’t Speak”, the speaker recalls a scene when she tried to have her mother’s name tattooed on her skin. The tattoo artist seems to have made her feel uncomfortable as she changed her mind and abandoned the idea of having a tattoo of her mother’s logogram:

I almost got it tattooed on my skin
while explaining over and over
this is not a souvenir
this is not what it looks like
this is what you can’t see” (lines 3-7)
The speaker’s annoyance at being misunderstood is embodied in the use of italics. The interlocutor’s lack of cultural awareness and their insistence on equating Chinese culture with curios and tourism discourages the poet who finds refuge in practicing calligraphy instead. She, who tried to mark her skin with ink, eventually marks paper with ink while composing her poem. In this analogy associating tattoo art with calligraphy, and her body with the body of the poem, Powles gives readers an impression of intimacy and of being in medias res, as she shows herself to her readers in her retreat, writing down letters at the same time as we are reading her poem. The insertion of Chinese characters (or hanzi) in her text transforms the reading experience of Anglophone speakers, introducing silence in the poem as readers look at the drawings/logograms. This experience which transforms the reading process into a visual exploration of letters/characters questions Anglophone readers’ habits of reading. As Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith argue, “[t]he individual story, whether told though oral narrative, fiction, film, testimony, or performance, also serves as a challenge and a counternarrative to official hegemonic history” (“Feminism” 7). With, in this case, a poem, trauma-readers are alerted to the coexistence of two systems of writing exposed as visual symbols, which invites them to wonder to what extent writing – and language more generally – can convey traumatic experiences like the ones triggered by racism.

b) Perceptions of Kiwi Asian girls

“Gender is always racialised”, warn Reina Lewis and Sara Mills in their introduction to *Feminist Postcolonial Theory* (4). Since colonisation, Aotearoa New Zealand has been constructed by a nationalist discourse associated with a white Pākehā heteropatriarchy (Wevers, “Autobiography” 230; Stachurski 23). In this context, women and girls from minorities were doubly colonised and oppressed, due to their ethnicity and their gender, leading Kiwi Tamasese – one of the main figures of Just Therapy, a New Zealand-based culturally sensitive approach to family therapy – to recognise that, “[f]or us as women, we have a long history of being unnamed, cancelled, made extra, and our contribution to humanity taken for granted. These are the faces of pain” (Waldegrave and Tamasese, “Cultural” 40). Perceived by mainstream society as superfluous supplements – rather than as
complementary to men, as used to be the case in Māori iwi and hapū (Simmonds 13-14) – New Zealand women from minorities have too often been exploited, despised, and forgotten by HIS-story. Non-white women’s stories are therefore the expression of a gender-oriented trauma silenced on a national scale. For Homi K. Bhabha, their “counter-narratives” (300) reflect “histories of marginality [that] have been most profoundly enmeshed in the antinomies of law and order – the colonized and women” (Nation and Narration 302). Kiwi Asian poetry, contrary to historical novels and memoirs which can often be read for their ‘ethnographic’ content (Chang 86-87), becomes a political stage from where women poets of Asian descent can formulate the discrimination they experience as women and as non-Māori/non-Pākehā individuals.

The way Pratibha Parmar and Trinh T. Minh Ha describe Asian American poetry could be applied to Kiwi Asian poetry, especially when they write that “poetry is no doubt the major voice of the poor and of people of colour” (69). Since the 1970s, poetry has indeed been a major means of communication for Māori and for Pasifika communities (Ihimaera and Makereti n.pag.), as shown by their regular publication of poetic anthologies, while Kiwi Asians remained on the edge of poetic language. For instance, in her attempt at building a wharenui (communal house) for Aotearoa New Zealand literature, Tina Makereti notes that the literature of Asian New Zealanders is conspicuously absent from collective memory: “[w]e’d have our other migrant storytellers too — including the Chinese ancestors who came to Aotearoa as early as many of our Pākehā forebears. And this is a harder story to tell, because if you can name a New Zealand Asian ancestor writer then I would love to hear of it” (n.pag.). Marked by oblivion and (self-?) censorship, the (apparently) nascent development of a Kiwi Asian literary community in the twenty-first century, marked by the publication of the first anthology of poems in 2021, can corroborate the general public’s prejudice that New Zealanders of Asian descent are but newcomers. By comparison, the first Asian American anthology of poems, Aiiiiiiiieee! An Anthology of Asian-American Writers by Frank Chin, was published in 1974 – although Asian American poetry started at the end of the nineteenth century (H. Park 156) – and the first Asian Australian poetic collection, Contemporary Asian Australian Poets, in 2013. Critics and writers consider the latter’s publication as a belated event, compared to the long-established presence of Asian Australians and their contribution to the construction of contemporary Australia, but they saw in this very belatedness the subjugated position of this community within Australian society (Yu, Diasporic Poetics 72).
This transpacific reading of Asian diasporic literature reveals the extent to which Kiwi Asians have been rendered invisible and unreadable in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature.

For girls and women, this official invisibility is all the more paradoxical as they are imagined (from an Orientalist perspective) as extremely visible in the public sphere. Mitsuye Yamada notes, “the most stereotyped minority of them all [is] the Asian American woman” (31). In settler societies, women and girls of Asian descent are too often perceived in a sexualised way by a male and colonial gaze which categorises them according to two prevalent archetypes: either they are “dragon ladies” or “subdued obedient girls” (Wallinger-Schorn 16-17; Yamada 32; Wang and Yu 34; Adams 14; Sen 61). Either way, they are perceived as sexually available for white men and utterly powerless. Considered as consumable erotic bodies, Kiwi Asian girls are not safe and are unheard in a neo-liberal capitalistic non-decolonised white-male dominated society. Yamada explains that girls from the Asian diaspora are trained and conditioned to accept male dominance both in patriarchal familial upbringings and in patriarchal social contexts (32), which leaves girls oppressed in the private (Price and Parikh 169) and the public spheres.

In Magnolia, Powles constructs racism and sexism as intertwined and indissociable. In “The Great Wall (2016)”, a title referring to an American blockbuster directed by Zhang Yimou and starring Matt Damon and Jing Tian, she expresses feeling sad and alienated by “this particular narrative” (line 28). She needs to write the poem to “exit” its influence (line 28). Indeed, while watching the movie, she realised that:

(...) some things are fixed
in the white-saviour narrative

like the exotic love interest who will risk everything
as ancient cities crumble around her (lines 7-10)

Hollywood perpetuates colonial storylines in which Western men are modern heroes admired and loved by selfless Eastern women in settings often featuring an antiquated or ‘traditional’ Asian décor. Asian supportive female characters abandon their ‘outdated civilisation’ to follow their white knight who embodies progress. Asian girls are in such contexts portrayed as tabula rasa, as foreign lands to conquer and to annex. Powles as a result tries to detach herself from this limiting frame, telling the story of her love for her partner in her own way. In her narrative, she is not subject to but rather equal with him as she describes how, when together, they lose sight of time and space, moving in spacetime instead (lines 19-20, lines 29-
34). In the liminal autobiographical poem, “Girl Warrior: or: watching Mulan (1998) in Chinese with English subtitles”, Powles remembers a ‘compliment’ a Pākehā man gave her: “once a guy told me mixed girls are the most beautiful / because they aren’t really white / but they aren’t really Asian either” (Part 2 line 4). This racialised comment on the beauty canon of Kiwi Asian girls of mixed ancestry is insulting and degrading in the way it sexualises their bodies without their consent while negating them as neither Asian nor Pākehā, as if they were nonentities, mere bodies about which to fantasise: nobodies but just bodies.

In Shopping List of Small Violences, Vanessa Mei Crofskey notes with dismay how her body is turned into a passive sexual object under the gaze of Pākehā men. At the end of the poem entitled “dumplings are fake”, she writes:

my best representation is in a section of pornhub where all the skinny Asian girls and the mixed chicks don’t speak have big tits, and white men cum all over their faces i posted about it on snapchat the other day then a dude screenshotted my next selfie (lines 23-27)

Not herself, but a show; not a thinking being, but a pornographic actress, stigmatised by her Asian physiognomy and Pākehā sexual attributes, Crofskey ironically inscribes her “authentic” self (line 1, line 15, line 32) New Zealanders are looking for in her every move in a dialogic setting in which poetry and social networks are two versions of one text. To pictures of herself watched in a voyeuristic way on the internet, she opposes the verbal description of her habits, mocking Pākehā alienating expectations of herself. In a constant “décalage” between a Pākehā reading of herself as Asian, and an Asian reading of herself as Pākehānified, she defies monolithic interpretations of herself as a Kiwi Asian girl, using irony as her main rhetorical weapon. Because she looks Asian, Pākehā men see her as a perpetual foreigner unable to speak proper English (lines 11-14), which further alienates her from New Zealand mainstream thinking. By deregulating her grammar in these lines as in “he tell me to say something in my language” (line 12), she mocks her interlocutor’s prejudices, reversing his linguistic expectations and making him sound like a racist fool. Crofskey therefore anchors her poetic voice in opposition to a racist Anglosphere which constructs her as an illiterate submissive whore.

Powles further explores the external dispossession of her identity in a poem entitled “Alternate word for mixed-race” (Appendix 3, 246). This poem is composed of twelve lines,
referring to twelve footnotes, the main text existing only with its minor *hors-texte* like two sides of the same coin. It opens with the neologism “Mudblood” (line 1), a reference to the *Harry Potter* magical world and a moment of shared laughter with a friend who used this term to explain their multiethnicity. The second line is “Hapa”, a phonetic approximation of the word ‘half’. This term appeared during colonisation and has been used by Asian communities in the Pacific to refer to those with mixed ‘racial’ heritage (Schlund-Vials 199). The fourth line and fourth footnote are about chrysanthemum flowers whose colours are “always either yellow or white” and which symbolise grief, as if it were impossible to be both colours/ethnicities at the same time, and as if being both Pākehā and Asian could be lethal. Having multiple ethnicities also signifies disappointment in other people’s eyes who expect the Kiwi Asian girl to be able to write Mandarin, when she cannot (line 9), and personal annoyance for having to explain that Mingya is not her family name (line 11). However, Powles associates her dual origins with her access to poetry, mixing both English and Chinese into her own poetic language. Breaking the logogram of her name down into independent drawings (“a sun next to a moon / a tooth next to a bird”, footnote 11), she translates her being in Chinese into the English text: “I try again but I am left holding a bird in one hand and a halved moon in the other” (line 12). Despite representing herself in a balance holding both cultures in each hand, she is the same body in both languages. Cécile Sakai et al. note that literary genres and the way bodies are written are highly connected as “il est des genres axés sur la spectacularisation du corps, sur l’effet dramaturgique en somme (…), et ce à plus forte raison quand ce corps est en souffrance” (11), that is to say: “there are genres which are focused on the spectacularising of bodies, on its dramatic effect in fact (…), and this is even more the case when bodies are in pain” (my own translation). Powles composes her poem as a journey with multiple voices and opinions about herself. Little by little, she transforms the content of the main body of the poem. She opens her poem with verbal abuse directed against her and other multi-ethnic people, as if they were abnormalities in a colonial-inherited frame of mind. She then moves the authority of the voices expressed when she inserts and asserts her own voice (line 11) until then heard from the margin/footnotes. Her voice contains two linguistic codes expressing themselves together in the poetic language. The survivor of ‘insidious trauma’ – defined by Michelle Hand as that “which results from recurrent initial traumatic experiences linked with power imbalances due to sexism” (2133), and, in Powles’ case, racism – poetry thus allows her to translate her own Kiwi Asian girl body and inscribe it
within the public sphere, in her own terms, nuancing clear-cut essentialist assumptions about her personal identity.

PART 2: Of Families, Cultures, and Political Legacies

a) **Girlhood Intergenerational Trauma**

The effects of intergenerational trauma can be observed in many poems by Kiwi Asian poets. This form of trauma is never experienced singularly, as it is often juxtaposed with other traumas like cultural trauma, insidious trauma, vicarious trauma, and interpersonal trauma, among others. Björn Krondorfer, for example, insists on the complex timeline of trauma which can take various forms at the same time:

[s]uch continuities can be traced intergenerationally (traumatic patterns and memories transmitted *within* a family system) as well as transgenerationally (traumatic patterns and memories transmitted *across* unified social identities, independent of personal family histories). (92)

When crossing family lines, younger generations can be affected by “old wounds” (Fenton 7) transmitted via their parents’ and grandparents’ stories of first-hand and/or second-hand contact with trauma. When she studied the impact of the Holocaust on the second and third generations of survivors, Marianne Hirsch formulated the concept of ‘postmemory’. For her, “‘[p]ostmemory’ describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (“Introduction” 5). Descendants of trauma survivors also live with fragments of their parents’ and grandparents’ traumatic experiences, such as war, migration, and exile. For some Kiwi Asian women poets, their girlhood intergenerational trauma is associated with the political repression their grandmothers and mothers fled when they were young. By paying homage to the courage of their female ancestors who escaped from dictatorship, they seek to mitigate the prejudice Pākehā, but also Māori, and Pasifika may have against Asians as economic migrants (Sibley and Ward), as they root their presence in Aotearoa New Zealand as political refugees. Their Kiwi Asian identity thus resonates with the national goal of New Zealand as a peace keeper in the international stage and a protector of human rights (National Army Museum/Te Mata Toa).
Lily Ng, in the two versions of “Leaves”, one published in *Starling Magazine* in 2016 and one in the *School Journal* in May 2020, tells of her grandparents’ escape from the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976). She especially focuses on its impact on her grandmother’s body. She seems haunted by her grandma’s story as the two versions start with the same first stanza which emphasises the material and historical deprivation suffered by her grandparents when Ng focalises her attention on a memento: “a wide-brimmed sunhat” (line 3), a home-made present from her granddad to her grandma. This gift – their only possession – symbolises her dream of a more peaceful past (lines 5-6). Stephen Owen notes that classical Chinese poetry is marked by the use of synecdoche: “[l]a figure maîtresse est alors la synecdoque, la partie qui conduit au tout, un fragment subsistant à partir duquel on essaie de reconstruire la totalité perdue” (6), that is to say: “the main literary device is then the synecdoche, the part which leads to the whole, a remaining fragment from which we try to reconstruct the lost whole” (my own translation). It might therefore be argued that Lily Ng borrows this literary technique from classical Chinese poetry to convey the sense of a cultural loss, as her grandmother’s hat symbolises her husband’s love for her, as well as their past intellectual life, manifested in the imaginary potential conveyed by this object, like a theatre prop. The second stanza starts – and ends (in the second version) – with the line: “The regime was relentless” (line 7), which emphasises the pitilessness of Mao’s dictatorship. What follows are two versions of the same story. In the first text, the speaker compares her grandma’s skin to a leaf, changing colour from a “pallid” hue (line 1) to a “brown-ochre” tint, as if the Revolution had made her age prematurely, forcing her into her autumn years before time. Ng then recounts her grandma’s escape to Hong Kong as a “freedom swimmer” (Guardian Reporter in Hong Kong), without heroising her actions. She highlights instead the dangers she subsequently encountered: “the Dapeng River swallowed her” (line 11). After the grandmother is rescued from drowning (lines 14-17), no transition is offered to the reader who is then transported to Wellington in Stanza 4 at the time when the poet’s father was a baby, then when the baby was the poet herself. Stanza 5 deals with the grandmother’s death from cancer and the pain the poet felt at losing her in a protracted way. In this version of the poem, the cancer could be interpreted as a metaphor for the Chinese Cultural Revolution, affecting as it did the citizens who were deeply modified by it, as well as their descendants who witnessed their internal suffering. In the second version of “Leaves”, Ng has a postmemory of the time her grandmother worked in the fields in Canton as she testifies to the forced displacement and exploitation of the Chinese intelligentsia in agricultural fields (Stanza 3),
connecting her grandmother’s change of skin colour to this era. Stanzas 5, 6, and 7 are located in Wellington, where the family settled in “Lyall Bay” (line 15), focusing on a photo of the poet as a baby and on her memories of her grandmother’s soothing words to her, testifying to the famine she endured while in China (line 22), in contrast with the feasts her descendants can share in Aotearoa New Zealand (lines 24-25). In both versions, it can be argued that Lily Ng participates in the writing of “littérature des cicatrices” (“literature of scars”) (Sakai et al. 13, 16) which appeared in the 1970s in China to convey the trauma triggered by the Cultural Revolution. She thus creates a dialogue between two literary traditions, moving the frontiers of both Chinese and New Zealand literatures to encompass her family story of traumatised Kiwi Asian migrants.

Powles describes her grandmother’s journey from China to Malaysia in “Conversational Chinese”, a poem which takes the form of an ESOL exercise. The first task (posed to readers) is to fill in the blanks of the main text with pre-written answers from a list. The second exercise is to answer questions asked in Chinese, a task the poet fulfilled by writing in English. Having migrated from Shenzhen as a child with her parents at the end of the 1920s, her grandma’s girlhood trauma linked to (political) exile was compounded by the death of her father during their passage to freedom. A self-made girl who learnt English on her own, she had to work the land to survive with her mother. Yet, after founding a family, she decided to protect them by sending her children to Aotearoa New Zealand, following the anti-Chinese measures taken by the Malaysian government in the 1960s, and especially the racial riots which occurred on 13 May 1969 in Kuala Lumpur and which led to the massacre of (officially) 196 Malaysian Chinese, although the number of casualties amounts to several hundred according to some foreign sources (Asia Foundation; Bowie; Tay). In this poem, Powles playfully disguises her family herstory as English language exercises for foreigners, putting readers in the shoes of Chinese migrants having to learn English to settle in Aotearoa New Zealand. Readers are thus compelled to actively engage with the blanks in the poem, moving from Chinese to English, and from China to Malaysia to Aotearoa, travelling between languages and countries, as migrants do. Moreover, the accounts of Powles’ grandmother’s life are vague, defying the chronology, and with differing versions between Task 1 and Task 2, depending on who tells the story, whether it is the poet, her mother, or the family. As a result, the comments formulated by Sophie Couchman and Kate Bagnall on Asian Australians could be applied onto Powles and Ng’s attempts at sharing their girlhood intergenerational trauma through poems: “[b]y recovering family memory, enhancing it through research and
sharing their family histories in public, they offer alternatives to national histories that previously excluded their ancestors” (340). Poems, being rewritten, and retold several times, can therefore convey the fight Kiwi Asians have to endure when excavating their family herstories and rescuing them from oblivion.

Wen-Juenn Lee narrates her family’s journey from Malaysia to Aotearoa in “Love Letter to my Mother: A Work in Progress”. She opens her poem with a comment on the difficulties she has in communicating with her mother: “My mother speaks to me in riddles” (line 1). The latter uses everyday chit chat to actually express her feelings in a covert, indirect way. She is obsessed with her condition as an alien in New Zealand as she keeps reading on “the diaspora trauma and loss” (Stanza 3). Like her daughter, she tries to assimilate in her host country, yet suffers from racist stigmatisation. She adopts the “Inv-Asian” propaganda spread by the media when she states that “there are too many Chinese in Auckland” (Stanza 4). She does not contest the official discourse even if she is well aware of the Kiwi Asian cultural trauma. The poet does not criticise her mother yet, as she herself was prey to “internalised racism” when she was a teenager (Stanza 4). To fit in the Pākehā mould, she grew up trying to modify her facial features, especially the form of her eyes, and the shape of her body to make herself “palatable” (Stanza 4), as if she were a mere sexual object for consumption. Both mother and daughter therefore see each other being othered in Aotearoa New Zealand society. The poem bears witness to the alienating process both endure in their host country where they are perceived and constructed as forever foreigners, however long they have settled in New Zealand. The departure from Malaysia is still experienced as a loss. Poetry classes for migrant women, as the one organised by Chinese New Zealander woman poet Renee Liang, become a shelter where mother and daughter can find solace in words (Stanza 5). As Michelle Hand shows, “autobiographical poetry offers opportunities for closure and new definitions of self, otherwise obscured through trauma” (2130). Survivor poetry can be used as “a therapeutic tool” (Hand 2151; Keil 100) in medicine but also in psychology. The poet accompanies her mother to a poetry workshop dedicated to help women who have experienced the trauma of migration. The poem readers have in front of them could be the poem the daughter wrote during one such session. Entitled “love letter”, it is worth noting that it does not abide by epistolary conventions. Yet, as Susan Onega et al. argue, “trauma literature is essentially dialogic as a point of departure” (9), and this poem foregrounds its dialogism from the beginning, even if no conversation seems to occur. The dialogue between mother and daughter is complicated by intergenerational and girlhood trauma following the loss of their
home in Malaysia, and due to the repeated racist campaigns against Kiwi Asians in Aotearoa. As intergenerational dialogue fails, it is implicitly replaced with a dialogue between the poet and her readers instead, in the hope that testifying to displacement, assimilationist practices, and racist slurs can change New Zealanders’ opinions on their Kiwi Asian compatriots.

b) Mapping the Home of a Diaspora

Critics of Asian American literature distinguish between a diasporic Asian literature of the United States, Canada, Australia, and more recently Aotearoa New Zealand, versus a non-diasporic Asian American literature. For Hyungyi Park, diasporic literature regards Asia and America to be on an equal footing whereas non-diasporic literature includes and sometimes minoritises Asia within the American world (156). She also argues that Hawai’i was the birthplace of Asian American literature in the middle of the nineteenth century (156, 159), connecting Asian diasporic literature to a transpacific network. Three continents, Asia, America, and the Pacific, are encompassed by this transpacific interpretation of diasporic Asian literature connected by migration, commerce, history, languages, and cultures. Timothy Yu also emphasises the diasporic aspect of transpacific Asian literatures, grounding his vision of Asian diasporic literature in Paul Gilroy’s theories of a Transatlantic identity born out of the Middle Passage. In this sense, the notion of a country of origin would be meaningless in his conception of a diasporic Asian identity, not only because a homogenous ‘Asia’ is a Western construct (Gunew, Post-Multicultural Writers 14; Wallinger-Schorn 17), but also because, “[c]onsidered in terms of origins, an ‘Asian diaspora’ would seem almost nonsensical, given the vastness of ‘Asia’ and its status as a Western categorisation that varies in its definition” (Yu, Diasporic Poetics 13). Ethnically, culturally, historically, religiously, and linguistically diverse, the Asian diaspora in Aotearoa New Zealand participates in a wider literary field than a New Zealand literature limited by and to its physical frontiers. As we have seen, girlhood intergenerational trauma often incorporates several (forced) waves of migrations of a given community, as shown in the personal experiences of Powles’ and Crofskey’s families who belonged to the Chinese diaspora of Malaysia until they were expelled for xenophobic motives.

Their testimonies recall Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of migrants as having no motherland: “the immigrant is atopes, has no place, and is displaced and unclassifiable” (3), a feeling probably shared by Lee and her mother. In “The Capital of My Mother”, Crofskey writes:

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They say all rivers flow to sea
I cannot find home except the sense
Of somewhere I can’t reach
I am a migrant’s remembrance
I am a welcome party (Stanza 7)

Eternally displaced, the poet equates the idea of home to an illusion that is beyond her grasp. Continuously moving to get closer to this ideal, she adds that “the first house I live in is a transported container / stolen body, claimed land, white heartbeat” (Stanza 14). Her settlement in Aotearoa gives her the feeling of being a colonist in transit as she inhabits a precarious building positioned on stolen Māori tribal land. She has the impression of participating in Māori land dispossession, thus trespassing the conditions set in the Treaty of Waitangi. Aware that land occupation is but ephemeral, as her dwelling is ethnically problematic in terms of its position on land belonging to he tangata whenua, and polemical for Pākehā as anti-Asian campaigns show, Crofskey alters her definition of home by focusing on water, rather than on land. She explains that, despite language barriers, she communicates with her grandmother, who stayed in Malaysia, via new technologies: “We don’t speak the same language / but we do share the same ocean / when I say noodles she knows exactly what I mean” (Stanza 11). Intergenerational familial cohesion gathers around common cultural markers like the Pacific Ocean and food, and Kiwi Asian poetry inscribes itself in a vaster geographical era including the Pacific Ocean in its self-definition. In this sense, Crofskey’s mention of a shared ocean between Asia and Polynesia recalls Epeli Hau’Ofa’s vision of the Pacific Ocean as “a sea of islands” in which every Pacific Island is culturally, linguistically, and historically connected by the water of the Pacific Ocean (Keown, “Major Authors”). Crofskey therefore envisions her poetry as belonging to a vaster poetic tradition nurtured by the Pacific Ocean and connecting the peoples of Asia and Pacific Islands (including Aotearoa) together as tangata pasifika (people belonging to the Pacific Ocean).

Food is often perceived as a cultural binder, especially in diasporas who are in exile following traumatic experiences. Anna Maria Tomczak argues, for example, that “[f]or a diaspora, food functions as an identity builder and the crystallising force of collective remembrance” (230). In “What’s the PH balance of yin + yang?”, Crofskey makes of water the thread which connects geography, history, biology, ancestry, food, childhood memories, and chemistry, however distant all these fields may be from one another in a Western mind. In Stanza 2, she explains: “It’s not outlandish to say I was raised by the water. Aotearoa is a land mapped in blue pen, each land mass a riverbed”. The composition of the adjective “out-land-
ish” contains the idea of a home without a land, also explored in the previous poem. Mapping the migration routes of her grandmother from China and of her mother from Malaysia, Crofskey traces a journey throughout the Pacific Ocean on the internet, juxtaposing several cartographic means of representations to locate her self in time and space. In Chinese medicine, water is indeed an energy, a vital fluid, directly connected to the North, the winter season, and the cold (Y-W. Chen 53). In Stanza 5, she notes, while describing the landscape around her, that: “From my house you can see the windmills of Mākara, jutting out like acupuncture needles”. Crofskey’s writing of her being-in-the-world reveals the multicultural lens through which she sees nature in Aotearoa New Zealand. Māori presence is recognised in the place name, Mākara. Pākehā colonial imprint occupies the technological transformation of the landscape (“windmills”), and her Chinese heritage is felt in the metaphor transforming windmills into “acupuncture needles”. Crofskey’s autobiographical poem could therefore be read as eco-poetry, as Joanny Moulin reminds us that “le préfixe ‘éco’ provient du grec oïkos, la maison, partant l’habitat” (318), that is to say: “the prefix, ‘eco’ comes from the Greek oïkos, the house, hence the habitat” (my own translation). Settling her self on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, Crofskey ends her poem, identifying with her ancestors as she includes herself in their journey across this wide expanse of water – disregarding chronology, theirstory being herstory too: “Remember how you moved across the world to know you had been here already?” (Stanza 15). The last image is that of Crofskey’s mother preparing a rice dish. Her daughter comments: “My mum says she caught sight of the harbour and it’s why she will never leave. (...) She belongs here” (Stanza 15), rooting her mother in the North Island of New Zealand, like a boat moored to its harbour. The poet therefore envisions her Kiwi Asian identity as fluid, multidimensional, and transcendent of Western binary frames like being/non-being, West/East, and citizen/migrant, as she imagines the borders of New Zealand islands as ‘contact zones’ (Pratt, “Introduction” 7) where cultures and languages can yet meet with respect.

In her poem “Origin Myths” (Appendix 2, 245), written from London, Nina Mingya Powles explores the xenophobic language some ‘locals’ around the world use against migrants, as in paradoxical comments like “Refugees Go Home”, a slogan which can be read on the walls of the train station of her hometown in Burgundy. The poem is set on two pages which answer each other. On the left are listed a series of questions, such as “Where are you from?” (line 1) and “What does this country mean to you?” (line 12). On the right are answers written in between brackets, as if they were not fully audible to the mainstream public. A
décalage can be felt between the questions asked and the answers offered, as if meaning has slightly been diffracted in the space between both interlocutors, creating a crisis of communication. The questions are also factual while answers enter the poetic realm, excavating the poetic power of language from within the administrative discourse English can become in foreigners’ eyes. The poet represents her home as a land of volcanoes (line 10, line 12), situated by the sea (line 3, line 6, line 13), and connected to the English language because of colonisation (line 7, line 14). Her coded description of Aotearoa New Zealand recalls Yang Lian’s poems of exile in Auckland. A dissident Chinese poet who resided in Aotearoa from 1988 to 1993, following Tiananmen, Yang Lian’s New Zealand poetry could be read as Kiwi Asian diasporic poetry written in Chinese. Indeed, Hilary Chung argues that:

[for Yang Lian confronting the trauma of exile in Auckland meant not only confronting the alienating environment of Auckland city with its dead volcanoes, incomprehensible street signs and unfamiliar intimacy with the sea, but developing a new relationship with the language of poetry such that home and identity came to be located in language itself. In this way the experience of exile became embedded within his poetics. (“Ghosts” 11)

The common references to Aotearoa in allusions to volcanoes, the sea, and the English language in both poets’ exilic poems highlight the fact that Powles finds herself at home in London when imagining the landscapes of New Zealand. She presents her self as a seamstress, not as a poet, giving back to language its original materiality, as ‘text’ originally comes from the Latin word for cloth (Barthes 76):

(To complete the scene I sew my own star map in red thread)
(I embroider volcanoes onto horizons)
(I stitch my name into the sea)
(I measure the distance) (lines 11-14)

She fabricates images of home inside her poem written in exile, and finds ways to go back there in her imagination via her poetic language. Poetry as “poiein” (in Ancient Greek: fabricate, create) takes all its meaning in this poem which recreates a vision of New Zealand as home from the other side of the world. As Parmar and Minh-Ha argue,

[the reflexive question asked, (...), is no longer: who am I? but when, where, how am I (so and so)? (...) Here the notion of displacement is also a place of identity: there is no real me to return to, no whole self that synthesizes the woman, the woman of colour and the writer. (72-73)

None of the questions on the left side of the poem actually asks migrants who they are. They are all focused on localising their ‘home’ countries. Powles therefore composes her identity
through her acts as a poet/seamstress, able to connect Britain with Aotearoa in a non-colonial way, by settling in the English language and dwelling in her poetic language.

In “If Katherine Mansfield Were My Best Friend”, Powles welcomes the Pākehā modernist writer into Kiwi Asian literature. Exiled like her in London, although a century later, Powles offers Mansfield a twenty-first century friendship comprising binge-watching, text messages, and emails. At first, both BFFs treat themselves to “Russian fudge” (Part 1 line 12) which is actually a typically New Zealand sweet, before ending up sharing a cup of “chrysanthemum tea” (Part 2 line 3) – a herbal tea known for its medicinal properties in China - and “eating mangoes” together (Part 2 line 7). Powles therefore destabilises the Pākehā way of life from within, replacing its European style food with Chinese ingredients. At first sight, Powles seems to locate her own poems within the Pākehā New Zealand literary heritage. Her fascination for Katherine Mansfield, exhibited in her poem and admitted in an interview, is conspicuous: “Mansfield is a very famous New Zealand writer and her ghost kind of looms annoyingly over New Zealand literary history. At least, that’s the sense I get from the way people talk about her” (Powles and DeCarlo n.pag.). Yet, she soon displaces Mansfield into Chinese art. I quote: “we would climb mountains that look / just like the mountains in Chinese paintings” (Part 2 lines 4-5). These lines reveal the speaker’s refusal to be westernised in her poetic art. In Part 3, the imagined friendship between both authors ends up with distance and silence as both women grow apart. Their travelling patterns diverge and they stop writing, except occasionally: “but sometimes I’d get an email from an unknown address / (subject line: MAGNOLIA FLOWERS)” (lines 2-3). In an interview, Powles explains that the word “Magnolia, 木蘭 is a title that contains layers, which will be obvious to any Chinese speakers: ‘Mǔlán’ (木蘭) means ‘magnolia’, which is also the official flower of the city of Shanghai” (Powles and Forward Arts Foundation n.pag.). Shanghai, like Wellington and London, is one of the cities where Powles feels at home (Powles and Forward Arts Foundation n.pag.). One of her poems inside her collection, Magnolia, is entitled “Girl Warrior, or: Watching Mulan (1998) in Chinese with English subtitles”. Nina Mingya Powles therefore plays with the polysemy of Chinese words to explore echoes in her life and in her poetry. The secret code she shares with Katherine Mansfield in her dream reveals that both authors’ conceptions of home are multifaceted thanks to the power of words.
PART 3: Multilingual Encryptions

a) Translating Between Languages

The Asian diaspora contains a plethora of languages, writing modes, and literary traditions. Renee Liang often inserts phonetically transcribed Cantonese words inside her poems in English. As for Nina Mingya Powles, she often refers to her grandparents’ language, Hakka, and the language she learnt at university, Mandarin. Timothy Yu notes that “[l]anguage learning, and the loss of the ‘mother tongue’, is a frequent theme in Asian American poetry” (“Asian American Poetry” 824). It seems that these two themes are also explored in the poetry of both Liang and Powles. Navigating between their family languages and the English language – itself a language of colonisation in Aotearoa (Pihama 357) – the poets inscribe their multilingual perception of being Kiwi Asian into their own crafted poetic language. Perhaps would it be possible to connect the idea of translation with trauma-telling, as Meena Alexander does when she recalls the etymology of the word ‘translation’: “‘translate’ in the early sense of the word, meaning to transport across a border” (88). She adapts this idea onto her own poetics: “[a]rt in a time of trauma, a necessary translation (…)”. But what if the paste shows, the seams, the fractures? It seemed to me then (…) that the work of art must use the frame of the real, translating a script almost illegible, a code of traumatic recovery” (87-88). For poets who belong to the Asian diaspora, translations occur on several layers: from their mother tongues (if they have kept them over the generations) to English (Galikowski 61; J. Lee 69), and from trauma to poetry. For readers, another operation takes place as reading is sometimes conceived as an act of translation (Crosman 152), which is arguably even more relevant when reading poetry, as poetic meaning typically offers no closure but opens language to polysemy and a multiplicity of interpretations.

In “Banana”, Liang contests the way her community adapts the colonial frame of mind when opposing Pākehā to Māori within the Cantonese language. Members of her community indeed participate in the perpetuation of their own cultural trauma when they appropriate Pākehā abusers’ frame of thought. Bicultural children can thus feel excluded and betrayed by their relatives (Stanza 7). Some Chinese indeed emphasise the dichotomy between Asian and Pākehā by adapting the usual binary set Pākehā/Māori to their own situation, into gwei lo/Asian (line 45). Gwei lo is the Cantonese term for Pākehā. Yet, Renee Liang rejects a binary representation of the New Zealand social order that would comprise abusive whites on the one hand and traumatised Asian people on the other. By rejecting a simplified reading of
Kiwi Asian cultural trauma, she refuses to be victimised. Helene Wong in her memoir, *Being Chinese: A New Zealander’s Story* (2016), and K. Emma Ng in her essay, *Old Asian New Asian* (2017), describe the cultural trauma experienced by the Chinese community in New Zealand in a rational way, using facts and statistics to uncover a part of New Zealand’s history which has long been forgotten. Renee Liang’s approach to the trauma racism triggered in her childhood is also rooted in reason, not emotions. She takes a (seemingly) detached tone to describe her position on racism. She explains what verbal abuse means and how it works, unveiling the mechanism behind racial discriminations. She writes: “Banana is a term / flung by Asians at other Asians / it’s a reproach / a squish in the face / a comment that we have abandoned our culture” (lines 28-32). This definition attempts to rationalise an irrational act and its traumatic response. The reference to “a squish in the face” (line 30) alerts readers to the physical violence racial discourse can approximate. Liang debunks the vicious circle performed by racism and introduces instead her Chinese heritage inside a poem in English, giving space to the Chinese part of her inside her New Zealand poem. Too often, Kiwi Asians, like Asian Americans in the US (Wallinger-Schorn 19), are regarded as ‘honorary whites’ by the white majority who recognise their hard work, social stability, and high level of education as a means by which to be assimilated, but not fully (Sibley and Ward 708; Sibley et al. 32; Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounters” 241). These ethnic expectations make of them a ‘model minority’, a concept coined by William Petersen in 1966. Renee Liang contests this status quo when she mocks “a propensity for being the teacher’s pet” (line 22). She remembers her efforts to blend in at school, hanging out with friends, studying hard, and dreaming of Pākehā boys. Kiwi Asian high school girls are therefore described as bicultural teenagers who “drink pearl milk tea” (line 41) and attend “yum cha” (line 33) as in Asia, while rebelling against their familial duties as Pākehā adolescents do (line 42). The girls are also acutely aware of their fellow students’ disparagement of their Asian food habits which they call “disgusting things to eat for lunch” (line 44). Renee Liang therefore plays with polyphony and sudden changes in perspective to allow her readers/audience to hear both her bicultural version of events, and prejudiced viewpoints on “Kiwi/Asian” girls like herself – prejudices which are formulated from both the Kiwi and the Asian side, in English and in Cantonese.

In “Crossed Cultures”, Renee Liang testifies to the conflict of loyalty she experienced when growing up in a Cantonese-speaking family within New Zealand society. This uncomfortable situation led her to feel dissociated from herself, as expressed by the metaphor “I was the / dark shadow” (lines 4-5) which mimics the internal divide she felt back then,
translated as it is with the visual and audible use of the enjambement. The polysemic phrase “my uniformed body” (line 7), focusing on her exterior shape, expresses the process of assimilation she endured as a schoolgirl. Not only was her school uniform like a mask – her draped body was distinguished from what she was beneath her skin. This allowed her to hide her ethnic and cultural differences in the public sphere – becoming one with New Zealand society. But her uniform also rendered her invisible, since belonging shaped her body to look almost the same, though always different, as she was a member of the model minority. Her mother tongue haunted the girl everywhere she went:

the threads
of my mother tongue reaching out
to furl me in close embrace
her orchid breath

whispering
you are not one of them!  (lines 10-15)

The foreign language spoken at home is associated with the figure of the mother. It is translated to readers directly in English, without any attempt to transcribe Cantonese phonetically, or to write it down with ideograms, as if the poem Liang is writing is part of the public sphere that she crossed into as a child and which is resistant to non-English sounds. The mother is portrayed as a comforting character with her familiar perfume, but also as an excluding factor in the education of her daughter. She is the one who draws a line of demarcation between her child as a Kiwi Asian member (us), and other New Zealand kids (them). The verbal separation she creates is violent for the girl who is yearning to make friends and be equal with other children. The mother’s words are thus remembered as threatening in their racialisation of the child. They are experienced as a mesh keeping the child away from kids’ games. The mother’s love is therefore experienced in an ambiguous way, her “close embrace” denoting both protection and a snare. The girl rebels against her mother’s warning (line 16), then realises that her mother was right as she is not perceived as a New Zealander, but as a foreigner whose English should be faltering (lines 33-34). Her New Zealand English is not ‘authentic’ for Pākehā who reject her for looking foreign. Parmar and Minh-Ha argue that, as Asian Americans, they experience “the fact that one is always marginalized in one’s own language and areas of strength is something that one has to learn to live with” (71). In the racialised context of New Zealand, English cannot be a camouflage to disguise Liang’s non-white facial features. Hence, her attempt at deforming the shape of her eyes in the last stanza – an alienating activity Wen-Juenn Lee also admitted to practising in
her childhood, in “Love Letter to My Mother”. Liang wished to be “blind” (line 40), hurting her eyes, letting them burn by gazing directly at the sunrays. It is worth noting that a poem mostly based on sounds – giving readers access to a polyphonic and multilingual (though translated) scene – should end with sight. English is not the media franca it pretends to be, as the skin colour of the speaker still matters in the New Zealand white-dominated public sphere. As a child, Liang felt reduced to the status of the “mimic girl” (cf. Bhabha), or as Nazli Kibria put it when describing the segregated position held by Asian Americans in the United States: “A Part Yet Apart” (qtd. in Wallinger-Schorn 13).

In “Dreaming in a Language I Can’t Speak”, Powles performs calligraphy to heal from the trauma of racism. Remembering how to write in Chinese is a painful process for her as her grasp of her mother tongue is hesitant. She writes of: “the pieces of language that fell out of my mouth / as a child, the crushed-up words I’m pulling back / from disappearing rooms inside disappearing homes” (lines 8-10). She had erased her ancestral tongue from her memory while growing up, as readers physically experience it in the fall between line 8 and 9, cutting the sentence awkwardly. The change of reading pace is further emphasised when she is drawing the logograms revealing the significance of her name:

\[
\begin{align*}
a \text{ sun 日} & \text{ next to a moon 月} \\
a \text{ tooth 牙} & \text{ next to a bird 雀}
\end{align*}
\] (lines 13-14)

Powles invites readers to draw with her, in their minds, taking the time to imagine the movement her own hand produces on the paper with the brush. Henry Kao argues that “the practitioner [of Chinese calligraphy] experiences relaxation and emotional calmness evident in decelerated respiration, slower heart-rate, decreased blood pressure, and reduced muscular tension” (“Shufa” 282). Practicing calligraphy would therefore provide meditation and therapeutic healing (Xu et al. 4; Zhy et al. 978; Kao et al., “Calligraphy” 51) to the speaker in the poem. Powles therefore inserts Chinese art into her poetry as a cultural marker, but also as a coping mechanism to heal the damage created by racism and loss of culture following several migration journeys.

In “Mother Tongue”, Powles describes a domestic scene in her grandparents’ kitchen in Malaysia (although the scene could also be set in China). She feels surrounded by unknown languages, whether the Arabic of the muezzin (line 2), or her grandparents’ language, Hakka (lines 7-8, lines 12-14). Positioned as an outsider, she yet perceives the emotions conveyed by words she does not understand: the prayers of Muslims evoke pain (line 4), the language of
her ancestors: comfort (lines 7-8). Powles is nostalgic when listening to her grandparents speaking “in a language so familiar but so far away” (line 8). At once close and distant, Hakka is a barrier between herself and her elders, a frontier they cross with body language (lines 17-19). The subtitle of the poem indicates that it is “a poem in two voices”, not ‘with’ two voices/speakers. Composed of two columns, the poem has, on the left, a description of reality, and, on the right, a dream where Powles wonders how the scene on the left would have sounded if she had not been a Kiwi Asian, but a Chinese girl. In the dream section, she rewrites the history of her family, erasing its migration journey to New Zealand (line 20). She imagines how she would be a proficient speaker in Hakka (line 26), close to her grandparents (lines 26-30), and with a different physiognomy (lines 24-25). She ends this evocation by stating that in this dream life she would “not be trapped / in any language” (lines 37-38). Monolingualism would thus be a desired state, for a poet who is constantly lost in between languages and between ways of expressing her unique experience of multilingualism. It is noticeable that, in this poem entitled “Mother tongue”, readers cannot see nor hear Hakka, as it is directly translated in English when it is inserted in the poem (lines 12-13). This paradox is revelatory of the woman poet’s wish to express herself transparently and feel free in one language only. Instead of that, her monolingual poem reveals the presence of non-English sounds in the background, which merely emphasises the gaps into which she finds herself, propelled in-between linguistic systems which do not fit in well together, except in her poetic language. Powles’ carving a voice for herself out of the ghostly presence of non-English languages therefore recalls Homi Bhabha’s definition of ‘the third space’: “as an interstitial moment produced through the negotiation of contradiction and ambivalence [the third space] must now be understood as a site of the witness – the work of witnessing – in the stirrings of a consciousness of justice” (“Neighbors” 6). Powles therefore testifies to the trauma of migration and inserts this forgotten history back into Aotearoa New Zealand poetry.

b) Kiwi Asian Women Poets as ngā wāhine o tiriti

Kiwi Asians have been forged as a ‘model minority’ in the 1980s, during the neoliberal move towards biculturalism. Yet, this nationwide prejudice – seemingly positive, in Pākehā eyes – has been performed at the expense of Māori and Pasifika, creating tensions and resentment between the three largest ethnic minorities of Aotearoa (Sibley and Ward 708; Sibley et al. 32; Ip, “Māori-Chinese Encounters” 241). In the 1960s, the United States had already singularised Asian Americans in the public eye, with a view to decreasing social
funding for African Americans and Hispanics as a result (Wallinger-Schorn 19). The exclusion of Kiwi Asians from Aotearoa New Zealand poetry for almost a hundred and fifty years – with the exception of some women and men poets, some of whom only performed their poems orally and at home (Makereti n.pag.) – can be connected to the ambiguous political position to which this community has been accorded. Politically rejected or manipulated by British colonists then Pākehā, Kiwi Asians have also been perceived as economic threats by Māori. As Morris and Wong note in their introduction to the first anthology, A Clear Dawn, Kiwi Asian poetry could be given a voice in Aotearoa New Zealand if they are not constructed as the ‘Other’ on the national stage, but as part of ngā tangata o tiriti. From this perspective, Kiwi Asians would not have to mimic Pākehā anymore and suffer from being whitened while not looking white enough. They would instead be equal partners with Māori, fully recognised as citizens of Aotearoa New Zealand, alongside other newcomers like Pākehā and Pasifika. Literarily speaking, Kiwi Asian poetry could also be situated alongside Māori literature, te reo Māori, and kaupapa Māori. In this sense, Kiwi Asian women poets could have their texts read as the work of ngā wāhine o tiriti, and their words could benefit the community (Durie 25).

Lily Ng’s entry into Aotearoa New Zealand poetry in “My Ukrainian Friend” is via Māori oral literature and mythology:

We slept in Papatūānuku’s womb,  
woke in darkness.  
We tore the only world we knew in two,  
made a prisoner of the sun and called it Day.  
We slung hooks into the ocean and called it Land. (lines 8-12)

When growing up, Lily and her school friend identified with the heroes of Māori stories, like Māui, the demi-god who fished Aotearoa out of the waters with his legendary hook. As children, they believed in the Māori Creation myths which regard the Earth as a benevolent mother goddess, named Papatūānuku. Papatūānuku and her husband, Ranginui, the god of the sky, were separated by their children who wanted their independence. Among their numerous children, Tangaroa became the god and creator of the seas and fish; Tāne-mahuta: the god and creator of forests and birds; and Tūmatarauenga: the war god and creator of people. In Māori cosmology, everything and everyone is connected to the land, to Papatūānuku, via their ancestors. Recalling the terms inscribed in the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840, Māori are tangata whenua (people of the land), descendants of Papatūānuku to whom they offer every newborn’s placenta, a rite which symbolises the bond between Māori and the land of their
ancestors. Lily Ng includes herself within the other historical category: tangata tiriti (people allowed to stay in Aotearoa because of the Treaty of Waitangi). By acknowledging mātauranga Māori (Māori epistemology) which recognises the sovereignty of the Indigenous people of Aotearoa, Ng restores justice, both for Māori, and for her community. Indeed, by referring to New Zealanders as tangata whenua and tangata tiriti, instead of Māori and Pākehā, Māori people are given precedence over other peoples who migrated as a result of colonisation, and Kiwi Asians are not excluded from the bicultural framework which has been structuring New Zealand society since the 1980s (Levine 177; Skerrett 59). By siding with Māori in Māori terms as stipulated in the Treaty of Waitangi, Lily Ng positions herself as a witness to Māori cultural trauma following British colonisation. She recalls the epidemic brought by Europeans during their first contact with the Indigenous People of Aotearoa in the early nineteenth century: “We cried over smallpox scars” (line 13). She recalls the Musket Wars which took place between 1818 and the early 1830s, and which tore Māori iwi (tribes) apart, killed thousands of Māori, and decimated the Moriori population in Rēkohu, the Chatham Islands (Watters n.pag.): “[we] picked musket balls from our bones” (line 14). She recalls nuclear testing in the Pacific: “and when they split the atom / felt skeletons stir” (lines 15-16). Lily Ng therefore sides with Māori against every form of colonisation, from the British Empire to Western nations’ imposition of their nuclear power. She also contests the Americanisation of contemporary Aotearoa whose “New World” is no more a reference to heaven as in Christian teleology (Pausé et al. 86), than it is to a better world than the metropolis as it was considered during European colonialism (Salesa 12), but to a supermarket where the girls go to probably buy chocolate to celebrate Easter (lines 17-18). Pākehā culture and way of life are thus criticised for being imported from the West, like a mere product to consume. The girls’ joke on New Zealanders at the start (lines 4-5) encapsulates their distrust towards Pākehā-imported traditions, as opposed to Māori customs. Lily Ng’s poem therefore situates Chinese New Zealander habits within a New Zealand literary corpus which respects Māori literary heritage.

In “Magnolia, jade orchid, she-wolf”, Nina Mingya Powles composes variations on the word ‘magnolia’, as a tree, a flower, Mulan, and the symbol of Shanghai. She therefore explores the polysemic potential of this word in Chinese. It also allows her to align China with New Zealand as this tree has different species scattered through these two countries. In the first segment, Powles insists on the fact that, when in contact with magnolia trees, we plunge into Deep Time: “Magnolia: the most ancient flowering tree known to mankind, of the
plant family *Magnoliaceae*, has survived ice ages, continental drifts, mountain formations”. Presented like a dictionary definition, this sentence prompts readers to cross time and languages as Powles moves from English to Latin when referring to its scientific name (although this name actually honours the eighteenth-century French botanist Pierre Magnol). The use of an ancient language to name a tree whose age dates back to earth time highlights the fragility of humankind and the hubristic habit of the West to categorise nature as an accumulation of knowledge. In Segment 3, Powles comments on the cultural quid pro quo Disney created when drawing cherry trees instead of magnolia trees in *Mulan*, conflating the symbolic tree of Japan with that of China. This cultural mistake is revelatory of the power the American film industry has in its perpetuation of Orientalist clichés around the world. In Segment 4, Powles recalls the blooming of magnolia trees in spring, “back home”. She describes them as humans, “blushing”, “open-mouthed”, and “tongues out”, as if according them human-like attitudes could give them feelings. This anthropomorphism could visually transform these trees into lovers. Segment 5 focuses on the two writing modes of the word Múlán, its simplified version being distinguished from its traditional ideogram. The signification of the two characters which compose it are “wood” followed by “orchid”. In a witty tone, Powles notes that “múlán” sounds almost like “múláŋ” which means “she-wolf” – this interpretation is merely playful, given its differing etymology. In Segment 7, the poet represents herself as a student of nature: “I try to study the trees so I can name them, so I can remember them”. She then names three trees: one with a Latin root, “Magnolia”, one issued from the Chinese language: “gingko”, and the last one has an English name: “plane”. Segment 8 associates multilingualism with nature, and posits synaesthesia as a means of translation: “I want to know the names of the trees in all other languages too so that I find out what they taste like to other people”. Words are like food: the poet perceives their flavours when she pronounces them – an experience mixing sound and taste already explored in another poem of the same collection, “Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, 2016”. Revisiting the myth of Babel, Powles positions herself as an oracle who would be able to communicate with flora. In Segment 11, the poet remembers an alienating experience when she was at school in New Zealand. Her teacher regarded her as a token Chinese girl who could read Chinese “to help her pronounce the foreign words”, words which would not have been “foreign” to her if she had been able to read and write in Chinese – a linguistic proficiency she regrets lacking, all throughout *Magnolia*. Segment 12 is the phonetic transcription of three Chinese words – without their translations – while Segment 13 reveals the irony of scientific naming: Latin
words are employed to refer to “[n]ative [trees] of central and eastern China”. Only one species of magnolia has a name which originates from Chinese: “yulan magnolia”, stemming from “yūlán, jade orchid”. The Chinese words, phonetically transcribed, are presented in the same font as English words, whereas Latin words are written in italics, like foreign bodies inserted into the text. Segment 14 invites readers to travel back in time and across space in the New Zealand of her childhood: “In the country where I was born, the trees are a different language”. Trees do not have nor do they speak te reo. They exist in te reo. Their very existence is connected to te reo. As Naomi Simmonds argues, “[w]ithin Te Reo Māori there exists a uniquely Māori way of explaining and relating to the world” (12) as te reo is connected to te āo Māori (the Māori world) in which spiritual ancestors have kept their marks onto the present and especially in natural elements (Winitana 5). Powles presents herself as learning te reo Māori. She writes that it is “[a] language I am trying to learn”. The progressive form of the verb “try” shows that she is humbled by this process as she does not show herself as a master of te reo, which would be taken as an insult and as a form of cultural appropriation by some Māori (McKibbin). She then names three trees whose names are Māori: “Karaka, manuka, kōwhai”, and repeats this ternary rhythm twice. Segments 15 and 16 focus on a jade necklace Powles inherited from her ancestors, which makes her comment on the fact that “[i]n Aotearoa, jade is called pounamu or greenstone. The stones are sacred taonga, found in rivers”. Like Chinese words which are not translated, merely rendered in her poem alongside English, te reo words are inserted as such, “taonga” remaining untranslated, as Powles expect her readers to know its meaning (treasure) without having to formulate it in English. Powles’ poem therefore widens the scope of the English language, playing as she does with the multilingual aspect of this colonial means of communication. As Sneja Gunew argues, “we need to move beyond the (often unacknowledged) monolingual paradigm (an assumed model) that dominates Anglophone literary studies, particularly within settler colonies such as Australia” (Post-Multicultural Writers 3). Transnational woman poet Nina Mingya Powles reveals the linguistic presence of other cultures belonging to Aotearoa by carving their sounds inside English in her poetry. Embroidered in her poetic language, Chinese and te reo words are fully acknowledged as meaning-makers and identity markers.
Conclusion

Racism kills. In a study on the correlation between racism and health issues published in 2018, Harris et al. argue that systemic racist abuse in Aotearoa New Zealand is responsible for a deteriorated mental health, expressed in a poor opinion of oneself, a poor self-esteem, high levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and psychiatric conditions. It also affects people’s physical health, as it can lead to weight issues, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer. Intergenerational relationships within the Asian communities can also be attenuated due to incompatible cultural expectations between their private spheres and the public arena. Being constantly exposed to racism can shorten people’s lives by several years. It can also lead them to commit suicide. When they write poems on the impact racism had on their childhood, Liang, Powles, Lee, Ng, and Crofskey testify to the cultural trauma experienced by their community. Their poems contest Western colonial remnants and a homogenised Pākehāfication of its diverse population. Lily Ng looks for acceptance as a tangata tiriti by posing mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) as the norm. She also honours the courage of her elders who escaped from Communist dictatorship. Wen-Juenn Lee and Vanessa Mei Crofskey bear witness to the intergenerational trauma which affects their respective families following their migration from Malaysia. They also highlight the impact racism and sexism have on Kiwi Asian girls’ perceptions of their own bodies. Renee Liang and Nina Mingya Powles tend to diversify Pākehā literary practices from within, inserting Chinese poetry, languages, customs, and art into a multilingual and multicultural English-speaking poetry from Aotearoa New Zealand.
CHAPTER 4.

“Girls as Intradiegetic Diary- and Letter-Writers/Readers or How to Unfold Girlhood Intergenerational Trauma”
Introduction

This chapter intends to fill in a gap in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature, as no study has ever been written on the impact girlhood trauma has on epistolary modes and fictional diaries, even if a renaissance of letter and diary-forms occurred in many Anglophone countries at the turn of the twenty-first century (Löschnigg and Schuh 1). In his chapter on the New Zealand novel, Lawrence Jones does not mention epistolary novels nor fictional journals, neither does Kirstine Moffat in her annual reviews on Aotearoa New Zealand Literature in The Journal of Commonwealth Literature. This lack of interest for fictional diaries and letter-novels is all the stranger as real diaries and correspondence have long been examined as historical documents to better understand the state of mind of nineteenth-century migrants (Sautter), and of WW1 New Zealand soldiers (Davidson). These first-hand accounts have also inspired writers to compose fictional diaries and letters to illustrate these eras (Grace, Tu; Trafford 2020). Amongst them, the My Story series – entitled “My New Zealand Story” since 2010 – explores historical events under the form of a diary. In this collection, diaries provide a pedagogical approach to history, which allows teenagers to discover historical eras from a fictional, subjective, and more personal perspective.

To illustrate this chapter, I intend to study two novels and a novella: The Book of Secrets by Fiona Kidman (1987), Rich Man Road by Ann Glamuzina (2015), and Rain by Kirsty Gunn (1994). For the purpose of this study, I will use the terms fictional journals and fictional diaries as synonyms, as I consider that the word ‘journal’ is here to be understood as a private journal, and not as an external journal. Valérie Raoul distinguishes between both forms of journals: the former reflects on the (narrator-) writer’s life; the latter depicts historical facts as they are seen from the (narrator-) writer’s perspective. As Raoul already assimilates private journals with diaries, I have decided to follow her terminology. As for the term ‘epistolary mode’, Maria Löschnigg and Rebekka Schuh explain that its usage differentiates letter novels popularised in the eighteenth century from letters inserted as literary devices within a novel or a short story (15-16). The epistolary mode typifies the renaissance of letter writing which developed at the turn of the twenty-first century. This renewed interest in a two-hundred-year-old literary practice that had become out-modish is connected to the development of technological communications such as emails, texts, tweets, posts, chats, and the use of social networks. One trend reproduces those new forms of
communication into the literary text, as can be seen in multimodal novels for example. Another trend gives a new birth to letter and diary writing, out of nostalgia (3), or to serve a historical purpose (3).

Fictional journals and epistolary novels are often rejected as “marginal” writing (Simonet-Tenant, “Enquête” 240), and deprecated under labels like “chick lit” or “second-rate literature” (Raoul vii; Cardell 6). It is worth noting that, even during their renaissance, these two literary genres are still contested as regards their authority, their value, and their very existence. Some critics like Philippe Lejeune still deny the very possibility to write a fictional diary of literary value as diaries are “antifiction” (“Diary as ‘Antifiction’” 203). Others reject these genres for being a caricature of women’s writing, as Françoise Simonet-Tenant warns when she writes that “la pratique épistolaire est sexuellement connotée” (“Enquête” 243), that is to say “letter writing is sexually connoted” (my own translation). As such, letter and diary novels are relegated to minor and unliterary practices as they are classified as women’s literature (240). In this context, Fiona Kidman, Kirsty Gunn, and Ann Glamuzina participate in this renaissance of diary and letter novel writing. In The Book of Secrets, Fiona Kidman uses letters and diaries for historical purposes as the story spans over three generations of female diary and letter writers, from the 1810s to the 1950s, travelling from Scotland to Nova Scotia, then Australia, and finally New Zealand. Similarly, Rich Man Road covers three generations of diary writing and private correspondence between a grandmother, a mother, and a daughter who are alienated from one another. Starting during the Second World War and ending in the 2010s, the female characters move from Croatia to New Zealand, via Egypt and Samoa. Rain can be read as a fictional diary even if it does not exteriorise the traditional hallmarks of the genre as diary entries and dates have been eluded. However, internally, this fictional diary functions as a confession and as a form of therapy for the narrator writer. As such, I consider that Rain can be studied as a diary novella.

In this context, I will focus on three aspects of the texts’ representations of girlhood trauma, by answering the following questions: what is the purpose associated with the use of letters and diary entries in the telling of girls’ traumatic experiences? How do girls with pens find an authorial voice after experiencing trauma? How does letter and diary editing connect girls’ personal stories of trauma with Aotearoa New Zealand’s historical trauma?
PART 1: Purposes Associated with the Use of Letters and Diary Entries in the Telling of Girls’ Traumatic Experiences

a) Privacy and the Myth of Spontaneity

Epistolary novels and fictional diaries, just like their real counterparts, had their heyday in the eighteenth century when the right to privacy was granted, in parallel with the rise of individualism in Western societies (Simonet-Tenant, “Recherche”). These two literary genres belong to the category of fictional life-writing, like fictive memoirs or fake autobiographies (Ferguson 1). Simonet-Tenant (“Recherche” 10) does not separate letters from diaries – contrary to Löschnigg and Schuh (17) or Duyfhuizen (172) – as she sees them through a historical lens. Indeed, the Enlightenment is a time when privacy came to be recognised as an in-between, a space-time for oneself between the public sphere and the private sphere, that is to say: between work and mundanity on the one hand, and family life on the other. In the eighteenth century, a clear generic distinction between letters and diaries was not established as epistolary novels could include diary entries, and vice versa (Simonet-Tenant, “Recherche” 10) – a specificity which is preserved during the twenty-first century renaissance of both genres. Letters and diaries are supposed to reveal their writers’ intimate thoughts, which explains why readers expect these texts to be straightforward, authentic, and genuine (Lejeune, “Composing” 169; Simonet-Tenant, “Recherche” 15). This myth of spontaneity pervades the three texts I study as Kidman, Gunn, and Glamuzina use these literary devices to create an impression of free speech for their fictional girl writers.

Rain was first published in 1994 by Pākehā author, Kirsty Gunn. The genre of this text is unclear as it has the length of a novella, the format of a diary, and the content of a memoir. The difficulties existing when trying to label Rain with one particular genre mirror those arising when defining fictional journals. In Rain, the narrator-writer’s age is left unsaid: she is either a teenage girl, or a more mature woman, named Jane Phelon (58). However, she was twelve during the events that she describes. She writes about her own life, from her point of view, using past and present tenses as she recalls childhood memories and sometimes gives the impression of writing in medias res. This particular perspective nourishes the myth of spontaneity which surrounds diaries and letters (Simonet-Tenant; Lejeune) as the reader imagines that the narrator experiences the scene at the same time as she writes it. Moreover, Gerald Prince who is the first to have theorised the genre of the fictional journal explains that
“it is not a superficial journal shape which particularizes a diary novel” (477). Prince therefore defines fictional diaries not by their exterior looks, but by the themes that overrun their stories. Thereby, the absence of full dates and of scene localisations in _Rain_ does not alter the genre of the text. For the reader though, the lack of time and space-frames can be perceived as unordinary as, in this diary, the narrator tells the story of her younger brother’s death. The fact that Gunn does not date this tragic event blows readers’ expectations. After a brief calculation, readers understand this tragedy occurred in 1972 when Jane was twelve and Jim five, the narrator being born in 1960 (38). The 1970s saw the beginnings of child protection services in New Zealand. The first census on child abuse occurred in 1962 and children’s rights’ campaigns rose in the following decade, alongside campaigns for women’s and for Māori rights (Dalley). Setting the scene in 1972 in a Pākehā family debunks the myth of insouciance, powerfulness, and righteousness attributed to middle-class Pākehā in the pre-bicultural era. Jane’s profile does not correspond to the first findings of the national survey on child abuse, as her social and ethnic backgrounds do not fit the portrait of the statistics’ victims, supposed to be born in a poor and ‘dysfunctional’ Māori family (Dalley). Jane’s diary therefore unveils what can lurk behind the mask of Pākehā respectability.

In _Rich Man Road_ (2015), the main characters are Olga, a New Zealand Carmelite nun originated from Croatia, and Pualele, a Samoan New Zealand novice who happens to be Olga’s granddaughter. They first meet at a convent in Auckland in 2000, when Olga is dying from cancer and Pualele tries to escape from Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). Both women find solace in their seclusion from society. Olga’s life story explores the hardships of post-WW2 Central European migrants to Australasia, as, “[b]etween 1945 and 1954, Australia accepted over 180,000 refugees, primarily Displaced Persons from Eastern and Central Europe” (Kwapisz Williams, “Displaced” 376), while about 3,200 Croats settled in New Zealand from the 40s to the 70s, fleeing from Nazism, and from Tito’s Communist regime (Jelicich 1). A Croatian community – the majority of whom were men - was already present from the second part of the nineteenth century, attracted by gold and gum-digging work (Bozic-Vrbancic 187). Croats were negatively perceived and discriminated against in New Zealand, as in Australia, as they were seen as an economic, linguistic, ethnic, and cultural threat (184; Gunew, _Post-Multicultural Writers_ 25). Olga’s journal illustrates the struggles of her community in the 1940s, but it especially sheds light on its intended reader’s own family history: Pualele’s. Olga’s retrospective diary is in fact her teenage years’ diary, written sixty years after the events occurred. Its telling starts in 1944 in Nazi-occupied Croatia and ends in
1948 in New Zealand when Olga is seventeen. In the space of five years, she experiences “immigrant pain” (Hron 28): she is plunged in a war, witnesses rapes, is exiled, survives a refugee camp, is bullied into an arranged marriage with an older man, before being confined in a ‘home’ for being pregnant out of wedlock. Banished from her family, she ironically notes that “there was something mocking in the fact that we had survived a war but hadn’t survived life” (Glamuzina 244). Her baby girl is snatched away from her at birth, confiscated by the Catholic nuns. As her journal stops short after her decision to enter the Orders – exchanging her past identity for Sister Teresa’s – I can say that Olga’s life ends with the theft of her child. It takes her a lifetime to reveal her complex childhood trauma as her relatives were not ready to hear it. Even the prioress doubts her words when – out of racism – she rejects the possibility that Pualele is Olga’s granddaughter. Olga can finally testify and reconnect with her long-lost descendants while waiting at the hospital, eventually freed from the constant watch of the convent and urged by a terminal disease. Her silence is not uncommon. New Zealand victims of Magdalene Laundries have only been officially asked to testify in 2018 at the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, despite constant appeals from survivors since the 1960s. In Australia, as in Ireland, the scandal surrounding the abuse perpetrated by the Church – whether Protestant or Catholic – on unmarried girls has received a popular, academic, and artistic interest (Franklin) which led to the realisation of films and TV series, exhibitions of paintings such as the work of Rachael Romero, and numerous testimonies as survivors were finally heard. In 2013, the Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, offered an official apology to the survivors of Magdalene Laundries, deploring the planned and compulsory separation of mother and child at birth. In New Zealand, unwed mothers were also used to provide healthy infants for adoption (Tennant 39). Unmarried girls were physically exploited and abused by the nuns (Tennant 32). Olga’s case therefore shows that privacy and spontaneity, these two hallmarks of diary writing, were denied her by her family, the New Zealand society at large, and the Catholic Church.

In The Book of Secrets, Fiona Kidman creates a historical novel using multiple narrative points of view to offer a counterpoint to colonial archives of the nineteenth century in which men’s voices dominate the telling of history (Kidman, “Search” 12; D’Cruz, “Women” 65). She includes letters and diary entries into the flow of the novel to give direct accounts of the migrations of Norman McLeod’s religious colony, from Scotland to New Zealand. Norman McLeod (1778/79?-1866) was a Presbyterian minister who led pauperised Scots away from the Highland Clearances in a forty-year journey round the world (1819-
1854). About 850 Highlanders followed him to settle in the Northland, New Zealand, in 1853 (Gully; Molloy). McLeod was the patriarch of a faithful community, even if his contribution to New Zealand colonial history is defined as “controversial” (Molloy) for his absolutism. In the novel, the self-writing texts are all written by Isabella, the main character’s grandmother. Isabella’s correspondence starts in July 1812 in Ullapool, Scotland, and ends in 1878 from Waipu, New Zealand. When her letters are not received due to “logistical problems” (Bowers 203) – as is the case when she lives in Nova Scotia (75) – Isabella transforms her letters into diary entries. Her diary books follow her round the world as they are found by Maria, her granddaughter, after her death in their house in Waipu. Texts issued from everyday life, Isabella’s letters and diaries are historical testimonies written from the margin. Fiona Kidman chooses to incorporate them into her history novel as “[t]he letter is an ideal means to transmit the aspect of historicity in stories set in a pre-digital time (Löschnigg and Schuh 3). For instance, in her third letter to her sister-in-law in September 1815, Isabella admits that her virginity is turning into spinsterhood (Kidman, Book 59). She is becoming a financial burden for her parents and she is reduced to helping McLeod’s wife with taking care of their numerous children. In McLeod’s company, Isabella is in danger of disappearing into selflessness, as if she were but a tabula rasa for being an unmarried lass. As a consequence, she accepts to marry Duncan MacQuarrie to emigrate with the religious community to the New World of Nova Scotia. Isabella’s letters before her marriage can therefore be read as a counter-discourse to the growing patriarchal society in which she lives. Her letters also make of Isabella a subversive voice who can be heard as a kind of matriarch, as a counterpoint to McLeod’s word. At the root of a transnational history connecting unwanted and dispossessed Scots to Canada, to Australia and to New Zealand, the journey of McLeod’s community belongs to New Zealand’s colonial history. In a manner similar to Michael King’s theory of history as a history of migrations (Penguin History), Fiona Kidman constructs Isabella as a subversive matriarch at the origin of a multicultural and multifaith New Zealand society.

Setting their narrators writing letters and diary entries from a room of their own, whether at home, in a convent, or a hospital, is a strategy Kidman, Gunn, and Glamuzina employ to assure their intradiegetic trauma-writers’ freedom of speech. The readers’ direct access to the narrators’ privacy while writing also reinforces the authentic aspect of these documents, presented as artless first-hand accounts of historical facts, or as authentic testimonies of child abuse.
b) **Artlessness and Authenticity**

In her research on diaries written by Australian housewives during the 1920s and 1930s, Katie Holmes emphasises the importance of dated entries because “[d]iaries are a means of making sense of the world, of imposing order on a day and a world that may otherwise seem to be without shape or structure. A diarist situates herself in her world and writes from her position of subjectivity” (171). Obviously applied here in a different context than the one studied by Holmes, this quotation can yet remind us of the role played by diaries in the application of morals, in the development of self-control, and in the exploration of one’s mind in Protestant communities from the seventeenth century onwards (Cardell 31, 143). Diaries are codified moral tools used to order one’s time by writing the stories which happen in a day. In *Rain*, Jane experienced the events described in her journal in the 1970s, near an unlocated lake in New Zealand. She is not imbued with Protestant self-exploration. The lifestyle she led as a tween was a-religious. Her brother’s death is not recorded on the calendar because Jane’s main purpose in writing her diary is not to ‘order’ events leading to her sibling’s drowning, nor to ‘mak[e] sense of’ his sudden death. She does not even explore her feelings linked to this loss, as the diary stops with the death of the little boy. *Rain* stages instead a twelve-year-old girl’s confession of a series of girlhood traumas. Her journal can be read as a grief diary. Simonet-Tenant defines this subgenre as “écriture-relique participant au processus de symbolisation de la mort” (“Invention” 95), that is to say: “a *memento mori* participating in the process of the symbolisation of death” (my own translation). The narrator is indeed obsessed with her brother’s death. Her story is strewn with metaphoric dead bodies. Near their summer house, by the lake, “[a]ll the trees were drowning” (Gunn, *Rain* 1). Section 3 insists on the high number of children casualties drowned in the lake, falling off fishing boats. The narrator also mentions gruesome details like “[t]he water loved my brother too much” (6), and “[u]nder water he was transparent” (12). The diary therefore resonates with the little boy’s death by drowning as the diarist gradually prepares the reader for the final act of her confession.

*Rain* stages an I-you grammar which does not respect the canons of the genre. For Löschnigg and Schuh (17), for Bower (9), and for Prince (477), diaries are unlike letters as they are directed to oneself and do not address any form of alterity. On the contrary, grief diaries are assertively addressed to the lost one, in an unfinished dialogue. That is why Jane addresses her brother as if he were still alive in the text that she is writing. For Simonet-Tenant, “*[l]e journal de deuil se fait journal adressé, et le disparu est interpellé à la deuxième
personne” (“Invention” 96), that is to say: “a grief journal is addressed to the lost one who is interpellated as ‘you’” (my own translation). In the graphs below, I have inventoried the number of ‘I’, and ‘you’ forms in Rain. With this classification, it becomes obvious that ‘you’ forms explode in Chapter 7, with 182 references (Graph 2). This chapter corresponds to the telling of Jim’s death.

Number of occurrences of ‘I’ and ‘you’ forms in Rain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>Me</th>
<th>My</th>
<th>Myself</th>
<th>Mine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Graph 1. Occurrences of pronouns referring to the 1st person singular.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Your</th>
<th>Yourself</th>
<th>Yours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Graph 2. Occurrences of pronouns referring to the 2nd person.

The first eleven pages of Chapter 7 are composed of instructions from a guidebook on first aid rescue, and of the narrator’s memories of her swimming lessons when she was trained into rescuing dummies. Jane’s ‘I’ disappears as this pronoun is almost absent from this final chapter (Graph 1). In total panic, the twelve-year-old girl tries to rescue Jim, but fails at her task. As she is losing the brother she cherishes, she becomes alienated from herself and from her past. The identities of the persons referred to in the ‘you’ forms are blurred: “you” is her dying brother, the reader of survival manuals – and, by analogy, her journal’s reader – and herself. Indeed, Jane is not the same anymore. Her brother’s death has altered her, drawing a clear delineation between her past and her present (Simonet-Tenant, “Invention”; L. Gilmore, “Witnessing” 158). Submerged by her grief, Jane is left with writing to exorcise her loss, but
her writing style – by transgressing the diary’s traditional I-you grammar – reveals the damage done to herself.

In *Rich Man Road*, Olga’s journal also contradicts the I-you grammar which distinguishes letters from diaries, as it is addressed to Pualele. This stylistic choice makes of her diary a long letter to her granddaughter. Its first entry dates back to “1 April 2012” (13) and is written from a hospital in Auckland. Olga’s literary project is to write a cancer diary to chronicle the evolution of her treatment, her day-to-day experience with cancer, and her last thoughts to her loved ones (Berman 4; Henriksen et al. 278; Deshazer 6-7; Madge 246). At its start, she conventionally draws a pact with her addressed reader (Ferguson 28). She hesitates: “I’m not sure what to tell you or where to start” (Glamuzina 13), before eventually admitting: “I haven’t ever spoken to anyone about what happened, and even now I cannot look you in the eye and tell you what I must say, but instead I will write it down here like a coward, not even sure where to start. But start I must” (14). Olga promises Pualele to tell her the whole truth about her life, while debasing herself for choosing the written word (i.e. a monologue) over a discussion. Her story is shameful as it has the power to hurt those who hear it. Writing her diary is not an act of courage as Olga dreads piercing the silence surrounding her girlhood trauma. She yet feels an obligation towards her reader who feels lost because of a gap in her genealogy. In this context, Olga’s cancer diary “offers opportunities for healing for both writers and readers” (Deshazer 261). Pualele is indeed a “replacement child” (Schwab 121-123) whose role is to replace her dead cousin for her aunt and uncle in New Zealand, after her mother gave her away – as herself had been abandoned by her own mother at birth. Reading Olga’s diary can therefore help Pualele heal from girlhood intergenerational trauma as the journal puts the puzzle pieces of her genealogy back together. Moreover, as a writer, Olga is aware of her limitations. She warns her reader that, when she was a child, “I had no ability to see [events] through any other lens than my own warped view” (Glamuzina 180). The subjective stance she takes is deliberate, just as her non-literary approach. Olga’s style is straightforward, without manners, as is expected from an older nun. Her testimony therefore abides by the canons of the diary, placing authenticity and artlessness at the core of this genre (Woolf 179; Cardell 15-16).

In *The Book of Secrets*, Fiona Kidman inserts letters and diary entries inside her history novel to keep track of the past, to give first-hand accounts of events which occurred in faraway lands, and to give authenticity to her fictional rendering of a real migration which
marked New Zealand colonial history. As only one letter is written by a man, it is clear that Kidman also aims at giving voice to the women who had to live in the patriarchal and intolerant Protestant colony set up by Norman McLeod (D’Cruz, “Women” 70). The voices of Normanist women were silenced in history as these women left no archive behind them (D’Cruz; Kidman), despite the fact that many colonial women of that time wrote diaries and letters (Holmes; Coleborne; Sautter). Even if The Book of Secrets is not a multimodal novel, the fact that readers are given to read letters and diaries from the nineteenth century gives a concrete texture to Kidman’s story (Cardell 143; Löschnigg and Schuh 6). Women’s views in this highly patriarchal society are controlled, just like their bodies are constrained (even confined) within the home. To be heard and read can be challenging, even within their own letters and diaries. That is why girls and women resort to literary devices to express their subversive thoughts. Brackets, for example, come to incarnate the walls which imprison women, or the bars her uncle installs on Maria’s window to make sure that she cannot escape from her attic bedroom (Kidman, Book 196). Yet, brackets can also symbolise Isabella’s cave near Pictou, Nova Scotia, where she found a shelter for herself and her baby boy (203-204); or Maria’s womb in and through which her baby girl tries to communicate with her (208). What lies within brackets in The Book of Secrets therefore represents freedom, hope and love, as it embodies the female space. Writing between brackets is thus a safe way of communicating forbidden and subversive thoughts for women characters. In her second letter to her sister-in-law, Isabella admits that she is attracted to McLeod’s belief in social equality between all men. Yet she employs brackets to insert her dream of gender equality, an idea McLeod strongly represses: “(I should like to say, of women too, but of course I refer to mankind, oh you will see what strain I am under at present)” (52). A feminist before her time, Isabella’s example shows that using literary subterfuges within a diary and a letter can free their writers from a prescribed and imposed patriarchal discourse which otherwise alters and censures girls’ and women’s experiences.

The seemingly artless writing style of the intradiegetic women trauma-tellers gives an air of authenticity to their confessions. Their repressed voices find a passage through diary and letter writing via literary stratagems like autobiographical pacts with their readers, and subversive thoughts expressed between brackets. Kidman, Gunn, and Glamuzina, by duplicating the writer and reader positions in the intradiegetic level of their texts, accentuate the repercussions child sexual abuse have on girls’ development.
PART 2: How Girls with Pens Find an Authorial Voice after Experiencing Trauma

Since the 1990s, Girlhood Studies have emphasised the fact that girls are empowered when given the time and space to write, create, edit, and voice their concerns in their own terms, not according to canons imposed on them by patriarchal media, education norms, and family traditions (Reid-Walsh; Mitchell). Letters and diaries can be such spacetime into which girls can relate and transcribe their emotions following trauma. Often labelled “literature for women” (El Hamamsy; Lejeune), these two genres could offer Kidman, Gunn, and Glamuzina the possibility to transform the trauma-readers’ gaze on their girl characters, as writing their version of events changes their status, from passive victims to active agents taking back the control of their lives.

a) **Girls as Writers**

Diaries, whether real or fictional, are recognisable in their inner workings, with, notably, an insistence on the theme of writing (Prince 479; Lejeune; Raoul; Abbott 9). Diarists stage their performance as writers to create an impression of immediacy, or, on the contrary, of recollection when past events are remembered. For Gerald Prince, seeing the diarist at work on her/his/their diary is a proof of authenticity: “[w]hat makes a diary novel like any other kind of narrative is rather a theme (…), the theme of the diary, the theme of writing a diary and its concomitant themes and motifs” (479). In *The Book of Secrets*, Kidman uses this thematic device to describe Isabella’s letter writing. She is shown physically restrained by McLeod’s patriarchal rules when she writes her second letter in 1813: “[m]y hands shake so much as I write, that I cannot go on…” (53). Isabella cannot control her emotions while confessing her sudden encounter with McLeod in the moors. She is so overwhelmed by this episode that a shift of narrative viewpoint occurs: Isabella moves from the ‘I’ of the letter to the ‘she’ of the third-person narrative linked to the history novel. As if objectified by this chance meeting, Isabella does not see herself through her own eyes anymore but as a creature belonging to McLeod and tied to his fate (53). McLeod’s archaic discourse on women dispossesses Isabella of her free self and of her free speech. As a result, from that moment onwards, young Isabella’s words are colonised by McLeod’s opinion. Paul John Eakin explains that “social constraint” affects life-writing: “we are not left to our own devices when we talk about ourselves, for protocols exist for many of the kinds of self-
narration we may need to engage – in churches, in courtrooms, in meetings of AA, and so forth” (236). Isabella’s original free speech is therefore affected, limited, and conquered by the Men’s ideology. The older girls get, the more their thoughts are censored until trapped by the Father’s Logos. Before Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the first land McLeod intends to colonise is girls’ mind to assert his power over his community. Kidman thus draws a parallelism between imperial ideology and patriarchal discourse, placing girls at the heart of the imperial project as colonised subjects, an opinion shared with Catharine Coleborne (187), Sara Mills (Gender and Colonial 155), Michelle J. Smith et al. (69), and Lilja Mareike Sautter (305-306), among others.

In Rich Man Road, from age nine, exiled Pualele is constructed as entertaining a correspondence with her mother back in Samoa. Extradiegetic trauma-readers are given the chance to peruse just one letter her mother addresses to her. Yet, no letter written by Pualele to her family is transcribed. Pualele’s misfortunes in New Zealand, though innumerable, are never spoken out to her mother, out of fear that she might be seen as a disgrace in Samoa: “Mama would be mortified to know how badly she had behaved since arriving in New Zealand. She would write and tell her that she’d never meant to do anything bad” (149). Pualele dreams of taking a pen to give her version of events to her mother so that she clears herself from false accusations, but instead, she censures herself. The child is in fact lost in translation. The English she learnt as a foreign language at the Catholic school in Samoa is not fluent enough for her to understand New Zealand English, which leads her into cultural, social, and linguistic misunderstandings. Her situation reflects that of her community. After migration laws loosened due to labour shortages after the Second World War, “the Pacific people population increased from around 8,000 in the mid-1950s to around 66,000 in the 1970s” (Grbic et al. 26). Yet, not only were Pacific Islanders given low wages for the low-skilled work they were given, but they were also segregated in neighbourhoods like Ponsonby in Auckland (28). Today, Pacific Islanders are the third minority after Māori and Asians, and they continue to report high levels of poverty, and of discriminations in the workplace, at school, and in the press (Grbic et al. 35; Bauder 156; Harris et al. 7).

Physically abused by her guardians, Pualele is bullied at school by her peers, and renamed “Pauline” in a process of acculturation by the nuns who manage Saint Mary’s School in Ponsonby, Auckland. She faces racism when shopping. She is sexually abused by her boss. Silenced from all sides, Pualele cannot write honestly either. Her words are controlled by
those who oppress and abuse her, leading her to self-censor her letters. The only means left to her is self-harm. The wound that she creates in her palm is the text that she writes on herself:

Pualele is entranced by the dead Jesus on the cross with thorns piercing his temple and nails embedded in his hands and feet. (…) As she looks from her bleeding hand back to the wounds on the statue, the line separating what is real from what is imaginary becomes blurred. (…) Facing the crucifixion, she kneels down. For the first time in weeks, she is at peace. (Glamuzina 103)

Pualele is a stigmatic (Kechichian et al. 886): she reproduces the scene of the Crucifixion on her left palm to resemble Christ and come closer to God (Glamuzina 885) through suffering, as in the medieval tradition of Imitatio Christi (Kuuliala 8). Both ‘stigma’ and ‘trauma’ signified ‘wound’ in Ancient Greek (Kechichian et al. 885), which explains why Pualele expresses her inner pain on the surface of her body. Her self-mutilation becomes the testimony of the series of abuse she experiences, but also of her family’s girlhood intergenerational trauma. Pualele feels relief by exteriorising the text of her trauma outside of language, as if, symbolically, she was writing a crisis diary on her skin. Elio Kechichian, Sander Gilman, and Kesherie Gurung note the healing potential of self-harm. Self-mutilation is understood as “the best or only coping mechanism available” (Gurung 34) as it tells a story of abuse that remains otherwise “uncommunicable” with words (39). Moreover, as in diary writing, the self-cutter/diarist has the impression to control the healing/writing process of her wounds/trauma over the days. Unfortunately, Pualele’s self-harm habit goes unnoticed, just like her swollen eye is unreported to at work and at school. In fact, from 1961 until 2007, Section 59 of the New Zealand Crimes Act stated that physical abuse could be used to discipline a child:

> [e]very parent of a child and every person in the place of a parent of the child is justified in using force if the force used is reasonable in the circumstances and is for the purpose of—
> (a) preventing or minimising harm to the child or another person; or
> (b) preventing the child from engaging or continuing to engage in conduct that amounts to a criminal offence; or
> (c) preventing the child from engaging or continuing to engage in offensive or disruptive behaviour; or
> (d) performing the normal daily tasks that are incidental to good care and parenting.
> (New Zealand Legislation)

Victims of abuse were invisible in the 1970s as the parenting norm was to chastise children. Pualele’s self-destructive behaviour would be considered today as a call for help (Gurung 39). In the 1970s, Pualele’s ‘self-help’ techniques of writing letters and writing on her body were
unread and unreadable because of the society’s denial of physical and sexual abuse of girls. Moreover, Pualele’s self-harm can be linked to Olga’s Magdalene trauma. Indeed, Pualele grew up amidst the oppressing taboo surrounding the origin of her mother, Olina – whose very name means ‘little Olga’ in Croatian and ‘joyful’ in Polynesian cultures as in Samoa and Hawai‘i. Pualele’s mysterious maternal lineage affects her identity construction. Her family’s silence dispossesses the girl of the vocabulary that could express the trauma of her origin. Dori Laub explains that, for third-generation Holocaust survivors, “it is precisely in not knowing, in the utter lack of history, that trauma is transmitted” (“Foreword” 15). This transmission occurs “outside of language” (Gradwohl Pisano 21). I posit that, similarly, the Magdalenes’ granddaughters’ form of trauma is a variation of the double trauma of the first and second generations of Magdalene survivors. As Pualele’s self-mutilation habit ends after she meets Olga, it is possible to say that the very presence of her missing ancestor soothes the girl and heals her from intergenerational pain.

In Rain, writing is Jane’s last device to recover from Jim’s premature death. Jane’s diary becomes Jim’s literary tomb as “[t]o me, he was always five years old – maybe that was part of it” (16). His body reappears in her text as in a still image:

[n]ow he runs towards me and I hold it, that minute. I own it. The silver sheet of water trembles about him as he comes, running back to me through the light air. I cry out – a sound, no words. My youngest, smallest brother… For five years he occupied my life, all his movements, his few words, mine. (9)

Jim’s memory is framed in the present tense of the diary’s writing time. Jane takes a mental picture of their reunion on the beach. She is relieved when he reappears on her blank page. Her love for him is wordless, beyond language, as in the maternal prelinguistic era described by Kristeva: “[u]n représentant de la fonction paternelle prend la place du bon objet maternel manquant. Du langage, au lieu du bon sein. Le discours substitué au soin maternel” (Pouvoirs 56-57), that is to say: “[a] representative of the paternal function replaces the missing maternal good object. Language instead of breastfeeding. Discourse substituting maternal care” (my own translation). In this context, Jane is like a surrogate mother for Jim as she has been his main caregiver since she was seven (Gunn, Rain 49). Jane and Jim are strongly bound together because they both endure neglect and verbal abuse from their parents: “[i]t was almost as if we’d been born unparented” (14). They spend days and nights on their own, as their parents host parties at their place. Home is not synonymous with comfort nor safety. On the reverse, in their children’s imagination, their house at night is full of “monsters” (42)
and “witches” (44). Jane is hypervigilant as she fears someone might kidnap her brother or rape him (43). At the eve of adolescence, Jane feels rebellious against her parents’ authority and decadent way of life (17, 69). Both her parents are alcoholic and her mother is a family tyrant, especially towards Jane whom she uses as a personal slave (24-25, 75). The girl has suicidal thoughts (19), low self-esteem (5, 9, 15, 17, 46, 47, 53), and experiences panic attacks (8, 25). To escape from the adults’ world, she even takes an oath to never grow up so as not to become a sexualised teenage girl.

Jane the diarist therefore sympathises with her younger self, just like Olga does when looking back at the trauma she had to endure when a teenager. Both Gunn and Glamuzina thus construct their older narrators as companions to their past selves. For Leigh Gilmore, one of the distinct features of self-writing texts is this solidarity existing between the writers and their younger selves. Gilmore and Marshall name ‘accompaniment’ the diegetic situation in which a diarist for example “insert[s] their adult authorial selves into their autobiographical work as a way to accompany their younger selves through traumatic experience, disrupt the story written for them, and occupy life narratives in an interventionist mode” (“Introduction: Witnessing” 9). The empathy, formulated by the intradiegetic trauma-writer for her past victimised self, calls for the extradiegetic trauma-readers’ empathy for the child victim of CSA, in a mirror effect connecting the intra-and extra-diegetic levels of the diary. CSA is often unheard and disbelieved (Seymour et al.; L. Gilmore; Brison 15-16). The first obstacle to overcome is the fact that Freudian followers consider that adults’ memories of their childhood are fake due to the concept of “screen memory” (Freud; Ricoeur, *Interprétation*). A second obstacle women have to confront is due to their gender and the coded telling of trauma:

> first-person accounts of trauma by women, for example, are likely to be doubted, not only when they bring forward accounts of sexual trauma but also because their self-representation already is at odds with the account the representative man would produce. (L. Gilmore and Marshall, *Witnessing Girlhood* 23)

Women’s life-writing texts are deviant from the autobiographical norm imposed by white men from the middle class (L. Gilmore; S. Mills, *Gender Matters* 17). This deviation is exemplified in *Rain* as Jane does not accuse her mother or the man who raped her. She has internalised a certain guilt, feeling responsible for her awkward and disobedient behaviour which enraged her mother, and for attracting an older man. Moreover, she emphasises the fact that her memory is vague and unreliable when it comes to describing the abuse she suffered.
from her mother, and from the man who repeatedly raped her. The recurrence of verbal and sexual abuse makes her forget each traumatic event per se, to instead mix them all into a blurred recollection.

None of the girl characters of the three books are freed from their trauma by writing letters and/or diaries. Not taken seriously by their families and communities, the girls’ trauma-telling remains ineffective on the page, until they are rediscovered two generations later as in the cases of Isabella and Olga. Only then, can their texts heal their readers.

b) **Girls as Trauma-Readers and Super-Readers**

In the texts studied, girl characters are given the roles of intradiegetic trauma-readers and sometimes that of ‘Super Reader’, a term which, in Rebekka Schuh’s terminology, refers to the editor figure. In *The Book of Secrets*, Fiona Kidman not only uses the figure of the letter and diary-writer at work, but she also creates a leitmotiv with Maria as an intrusive and unintended trauma-reader of her grandmother’s letters and diaries (114, 183, 200, 203, 208, 210, 218, 256, 271). The insistence placed on Maria as an unintended trauma-reader is all the more significant as, in this activity, Maria can be seen as the extradiegetic trauma-reader’s intradiegetic mirror. Indeed, like Maria, the reader is invited to peruse Isabella’s private writings. Maria’s presence therefore minimises the extradiegetic trauma-reader’s uncomfortable position as Fiona Kidman gives her/him/them the role of a Peeping Tom. Kidman thus constructs Maria as a linking chain between Isabella and McLeod’s time, and the contemporary readers’ world. Maria the reader is therefore conveyed power as she connects different spacetimes together. When Maria is twenty and still considered a minor under the New Zealand law in 1897, she is confined to stay in her house “for the sin of fornication” (21). She then dares to open the trunk where her mother keeps her grandmother’s belongings, only to discover that the forbidden texts Isabella wrote speak to her with an uncanny foresight:

> [w]hat were grandmother’s things? Dusty books that looked like ledgers, and bundles of letters tied up with pieces of black ribbon and twine. The shadows were raking the walls as she opened one of the books. It was not a ledger but a notebook full of close handwriting. A journal; the journal of Isabella Ramsey turned Isabella MacQuarrie turned Isabella McIssac. The letters were in her writing too; they had been sent back to her from England by the daughter of one Louise Ramsey to whom they were written, after her death in a fall at the hunt more than forty years before.
Opening the first book Maria stared at the words. The handwriting was a beautiful copperplate. The candle wavered, dangerously close to the curtain. *I have been betrayed by my own people.*

(…) She moved the candle and picked up the book again. It was on top of the pile, though there appeared not to be any special order. *I have been betrayed by my own people.* Here, then, were the secrets, the mysterious answers. (183)

The materiality of Isabella’s series of journals is emphasised, from its physical appearance to its composition and its handwriting. This climactic scene in which Maria, the recently imprisoned girl, reads her rebellious grandma’s texts for the first time, is staged right in the middle of the novel. At this moment, Maria the sinner becomes Maria the witch because of this act of knowledge. As the reader of her grandmother’s confession, she is dangerous for the men of her community. Indeed, Maria understands that her fate is closely knit with that of her grandmother who turned into a feminist atheist after McLeod had betrayed her. Her fanatic uncle can accuse Maria of witchcraft for the death of three of her family members (her mother, her baby girl Belle, and her second lover James); she is not responsible for their deaths. She casts spells on her community because her version of events contradicts the one imposed by the Men. In this context, Maria the story-keeper does not hesitate to tell how corrupted the Normanists are, even within McLeod’s family. Brandy then rum is smuggled in the community; children are beaten and disfigured for a whim; denunciations are encouraged; boys and girls are physically punished at school under McLeod’s rod; and girls are constantly debased for the few fashionable items they wear. Maria, like Isabella before, refuses to turn a blind eye on these criminal activities which tarnish the all-powerful memory of McLeod’s authority. By mixing past and present stories, Maria stresses inconsistencies in her community’s history. Dispossessed of their land during the Highland Clearances, Scots migrated massively and participated in the construction of the British Empire. Angela McCarthy points out that “approximately two million from Scotland in both the 19th and 20th centuries migrated to the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand” between 1851 and 1930 (*Personal Narratives* 15). However, the descendants of these very landless Scots participated in the expropriation of Māori’s lands after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. In Waipu, contrary to local beliefs (Waipu Museum), the Patuharakeke iwi lost significant amount of land after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. In 2015, the iwi filed a complaint at the Waitangi Tribunal to retrieve their land and repair colonial injustices. While growing up, Maria, like Isabella and their friend Martha, is therefore not complacent with the racism that her family and friends overtly express against Māori (Kidman, *Book* 185), and neither with the land thefts operated by the McLeod’s congregation (186).
Like Maria, Pualele is the reader of her grandmother’s diary, but she is also its Super-Reader. She does not seem to interrupt Olga’s narrative as she does not intervene inside the journal. Yet, the very structure of *Rich Man Road* gives equal importance to Olga and Pualele, by dedicating every two chapters to one of them, creating a balance between both lives until they finally meet at the convent. “Even when they remain silent, fictional readers are virtually inseparable from epistolary fiction because of the form’s organizing pretext: that we are reading communiques not written primarily for us, but for character-readers within the story” (Bowers 196). Pualele is this intradiegetic trauma-reader who remains silent, even in the telling of her own life which is told in the third-person. She holds the same external position as the extradiegetic trauma-reader when she peruses Olga’s diary. The parallelism between both levels of trauma-readers is further developed at the end when Pualele is left with a dilemma: will she stay in the convent or leave for Samoa to confront her family with its past? In a mirror-like effect, the extradiegetic trauma-reader is given the responsibility for Pualele’s choice as the story ends with this unanswered question. It therefore seems that hope resides in the unsaid, outside of the written text, and thus outside of the Church. Pualele can eventually escape from her complex childhood trauma as the reading of her grandmother’s repressed confession heals her.

Reading and editing their elders’ diaries and letters thus give girls like Pualele and Maria a key to their genealogy which can heal them of their childhood trauma. Confronting intergenerational trauma, girls can construct another ending for themselves, and rewrite *herstory* as a counterpoint to official accounts of history.

PART 3: Connecting Girls’ Personal Stories of Trauma with Aotearoa New Zealand’s Historical Trauma via Letter and Diary Editing

In the last part of this chapter, I will develop a cultural, feminist, and decolonial approach to diary and letter writing about girlhood trauma. As Lejeune explains, “every country has their diary culture” (“Surveying” 269-70). Girl and women migrants therefore adapt, upset, and modify the malestream Pākehā tradition of self-writing texts. Belonging to gender and ethnic minorities, women trauma-writers offer new perspectives and new narrative modes in their trauma-telling style. In this context, looking for “the complexity of the
entanglement of complicity, agency, and guilt” (Visser, “Decolonizing” 258) can be astute in decolonising trauma representations, as non-binary interpretations portray the relationship between abused and abuser in a way that debunks the myth of girls’ victimisation.

a) **Voicing Herstory**

Assembling fiction and reality allows Kidman to offer a feminist alternative to the patriarchal and intolerant views of the real Norman McLeod, a plausible interpretation of history that is not recorded in archives (Coleborne, *Insanity* 144; LaCapra 96). For Doreen D’Cruz, in “Women, Time, and Place in Fiona Kidman’s *The Book of Secrets*”:

Kidman’s recognition of women’s inherited exclusion from determining historical processes, as well as the teleology of narratives that may be wedded to linear time, matches the post-structuralist feminist disillusionment with regard to situating female specificity within the linear narrative of progress. (67)

The narrative construction of the novel is circular, with Part One and Part Two as well as the last chapter of Part Five dedicated to Maria’s present time in 1953. However, the narrative viewpoint chosen to tell Maria McClure’s story seems unrealistic at first sight. Maria has indeed lived as a recluse for more than fifty years, from 1897 to 1953, after she was expelled from her religious community for entertaining a sexual relationship outside of the bonds of marriage. Her confinement compels her to utter loneliness, rarely broken here and there by social and family obligations. Maria is staged several times as a journal and letter reader (114, 183, 208, 210, 218, 256, 271), but never as a writer, as she herself states at the end of her life: “she supposed that her life was her own statement. She would have liked to fill in the journal where Isabella had left off, but, although she could still read, she doubted her ability to write intelligibly any more” (269). Despite space left in her grandmother’s diaries, Maria prefers standing in the margin of the text – even if it was left blank on purpose, for her to fill in.

Instead of writing herstory as Isabella did, Maria prefers oral herstory: “For in her head she was telling it. She was telling it how it was” (269) – since the “witch” is ironically the guardian of her community’s past and memories. As the sole living reader of Isabella’s diaries and letters, she reminds all those who cross her path of the old ways. The fact that she is an ageing figure contrasts with the timeline of the book in which every character she knew from her youth dies or leaves Waipu one after the other, due to the First World War, the
Spanish flu pandemic, or the Depression. She tells her rare visitors of the community’s migrations like a mantra learnt in childhood:

[s]o she lay on her back, a little apart from him, and told him of the dark abysses under the Nova Scotian ice (...). She spoke of the wild strawberries that grew there in summer (...). Then she recited the names of the ships again, and the families that had travelled on them, and it was as if she had been there herself. (236)

A storyteller and a story-keeper, Maria McClure is like a historian for the members of her community. Outcast for being a sinner, she is yet the one who remembers the peripeties of their common story, sewing herstory with that of McLeod: “I have come a long way by snow and ice to this land of sunlight. I? Maybe not I, but those I spoke of, the ones who came before” (19). Maria’s identity therefore merges with that of her community, making of her individual self a communal ‘I’: “a reminder. A conscience, perhaps?” (240). As the community’s scapegoat, she is paradoxically essential to her people (Girard, Bouc-émissaire), as she is the central character of their myths of witchcraft justifying female desecration, and because, as a form of revenge, she becomes their living memory.

Contrary to Maria’s, Jane’s herstory cannot be voiced. Her diary is the belated confession that she was never able to formulate out loud. Her written word does not empower her as it would a man (Derrida; Levi-Strauss). It merely replaces her voice, keeping her secrets in the silence of the book – even if for posterity. In the very masculine world Jane grows up in, physical and verbal abuse are the norm. In Chapter Five, Jane describes her apprenticeship at the Swimming Institute aged four. During her first experience with water, she almost drowns, leading to unending nightmares (Gunn, Rain 60). She and other children are forced to repeat “We’re all failures” (66) while training to swim. Collective humiliation is the key to success for the swimming instructor, but also for Jane’s parents who utterly approve of his methods (59). Jane is treated like a boy and feels like one as she is frightened of the mutation of her body. As a child, she revels in her androgynous body which allows her to move freely: “I was ten or eleven at this time. Hands on my hips, I surveyed the miles of water around me and felt so powerful I could have been a boy” (64). Rejected by her mother, Jane becomes her dad’s confidante, collecting his fishing stories. Yet, as her body is metamorphosing into that of a woman, the reader never sees her directly, only through the negative portrait of her brother: “The lovely bend of his fine limbs was the dream I had for my own body, to be light and careless and, with no heaviness of speech and thought, in endless, continuous motion of flight” (9). The trauma-reader deduces that, when she was a
tween, the narrator saw herself as big, self-conscious, awkward, hesitant, constrained, and dull. In this phallogcentric context, Jane’s diary comes as a shock. What she reveals in her private journal is scandalous. *Rain* is not only a grief diary. It is also used to unveil systematic child abuse in Pākehā social circles of post-World War Two New Zealand. Jane experienced what psychologists refer to as “severe CSA [Child Sexual Abuse]”: “attempted or completed vaginal, oral or anal intercourse” (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse 7). At the age of twelve, she was repeatedly raped by a family’s friend, Bill Cady, which concurs with the New Zealand statistics on CSA which show that, before the age of 13, CSA is mostly committed by family members or close relatives to the child’s family (Romans et al. 385). In this context, Jane is no Lolita; a reality that can be unacknowledged by some critics (Grau). In her diary, Jane mentions two proleptic episodes. First, Mr Cady touches her knee while forcing her to perform a dance with her brother (Gunn, *Rain* 26). Secondly, the same abusive man comes to her bedroom to ask for sex (51-52). In the latter passage, tween Jane is depicted as a prey who is hypervigilant at night time, feeling insecure in her bed. Jane’s mother interrupts the man’s scheme. Jane’s self-loathing is evident when she calls herself “[p]oor idiot girl” and “so stupid” (53). She questions her very reasoning, and accuses herself of being bad for believing that Mr Cady is attracted to her. She therefore reverses the situation in her mind, internalising the patriarchal discourse on rape victims which constructs the abused as provocative and somehow ‘deserving’ the abuse they suffer from.

When Jane’s private journal belatedly shatters the foundations of respectable middle-class Pākehā families of the 1970s, Olga’s diary abides by the feminist credo: “the personal is political” (Carter 654). Olga exemplifies this paradox as her private journal belongs to public history. Olga’s herstory contests and confronts New Zealand’s official rewriting of Magdalene Laundries, often called ‘homes for unwed mothers’ (Tennant Appendix; Royal Commission of Inquiry). Despite their notable absence from Belich’s and King’s histories of New Zealand, Magdalene Asylums were built, by Catholic and Protestant Orders alike. For instance, the Catholic Order of the Good Shepherd settled in “Mount Magdala” in Christchurch in 1886 (Special Reporter of the *Lyttelton Times*), and in Auckland in the 1930s. Magdalene Sisters – trained in Angers, France – colonised the world, from Ireland to Australia, from Canada to Tahiti, and New Zealand (Kovesi). Their aim was to take care of girls and women considered to be ‘lost’ by society. Magdalene Laundries were well-known by their contemporaries. In 1886, for example, the Canterbury press published an article entitled “The Christchurch Magdalen Asylum” to present Father Ginaty’s project to save and
educate “fallen” women. To reform them, women were separated and classified. Another building was built to accommodate “small children” (Special Reporter of the Lyttelton Times). The inmates’ work allowed the Order to be self-sufficient. Glamuzina therefore takes risks when she decides to tackle this topic. Her character Olga, as a foreign elder and as a religious recluse, is alien enough to contest the official discourse as “when migrant memories move from private to public arenas, they may both reinforce and challenge dominant narratives of experience” (Darian-Smith and Hamilton 6). Olga’s testimony is all the more urgent as she uses her diary as a pathography that has the power to heal her and her reader Pualele, as in a ‘cripotherapy’ – a term that Suzanne A. Henke defines as “a process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience” (qtd. in Vasvari and Wang 5). With terminal cancer, Olga cannot hide her secret anymore. After a life of seclusion, her memory can survive death as her confession connects her to her grandchild, and to a community of Magdalene survivors. Olga’s life story indeed stopped after her baby girl was snatched away from her by a Catholic nun at the laundry. She was exploited, lied to, forced to give birth without medical assistance, and persuaded that her child had died; a fictional account which echoes testimonies of survivors (Tennant). The cruelty of the Order towards single teenage mothers is bluntly described by a fictional nun herself in Rich Man Road. Olga is indeed an ambiguous character who embodies the grey zone of this domestic tragedy. Forcefully separated from her infant by the Church and herself a victim of a misogynistic religious discourse on girls’ bodies, Olga willingly joins the Catholic Church – this time as a nun – to escape from depression, shame, and ostracism from her family. Like Philomena in Stephen Frears’ eponymous movie, Olga spends a life of expiation and anxiety, constantly looking for her kidnapped child, while having no grudge against the Church per se. A specific therapy for Magdalene survivors – mothers without children, but also their stolen (and often sold for adoption) children – is long-awaited for in Aotearoa New Zealand to listen to their stories of trauma, and provide them with relief.

Letters and diaries thus reveal aspects of girls’ lives that tend to be silenced otherwise by a seemingly fixed masculine discourse. Kidman defies New Zealand’s patriarchal reading of Scottish migration history, fictionalising the life of the real “witch” of Waipu, Kitty Slick, forcefully imprisoned by the Normanist community for fifty-seven years until her death in 1955 (Kidman, “Search” 10). Giving her centre stage in her historical novel, she subversively decentres the Men’s power, offering an alternative version to a disabling, oppressive, and misogynist religious discourse on girls’ and women’s bodies. In the meanwhile, Gunn and
Glamuzina choose to debunk the myth of Pākehā respectability and its official rewriting of history excluding girls’ voices, blowing its bubble with testimonies of CSA and Magdalene survivors.

b) Complicity and Guilt

Complicity and guilt are subversive issues in Trauma Studies, as they contradict the traditional view which victimises the traumatised. Irene Visser, but also Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, call for researchers to analyse these two dubious attitudes in the context of postcolonial trauma. The same could be done in trauma occurring in decolonial settings. In Rain, for example, Gunn/Jane the writer composes the sixth part of the diary as if it were a rewriting of the sixth day of the Genesis. In his analysis of Anne Frank’s diary, Philippe Lejeune explains that “[t]he work of rewriting [a diary] seems to follow principles of composition similar to those of the epistolary novel: calibrating, centering, and pruning” (“Anne Frank” 251). In rewriting and editing her diary, Jane gives another dimension to her story. She makes a collage using vignettes from the innocent Peter Pan’s role plays she performed with Jim on the beach, and glimpses from when Mr Cady raped her. Writer Jane does not name him, but mentions their relationship: “my mother’s friend” (Gunn, Rain 77), implicitly stressing her mother’s complicity in the CSA she still suffers from. A prisoner (i.e. “[h]e put his hand out to detain me”, 78), she is raped in the bush, a place which she has written as tainted with darkness throughout the diary. The rape is premeditated: “[h]e knew a place where we could go” (78), yet the girl feels guilty for years. She sees herself as a new Eve who “cast the first sin” (78) on the Edenic scenic lake her family inhabit in the summer. Susan Brison explains that “women who survive assault often blame themselves” (13), to make sense of the event which occurred to them and would otherwise remain unexplained, illogical, and unreasonable. Transitioning from a tomboy to a femme fatale like her mother, Jane’s brutal coming-of-age sees the last of her innocence. Her narrative is haunted by the man’s words and deeds that harass her memory, and alter her relationship with her brother. Nonetheless, she does not blame him nor victimise herself: “[t]hings just happen, that’s all. And then they’re gone” (78). Tween Jane does not offer resistance. She has no one to confide in, which compels her to silence for years, until she writes her life in a diary. The rapist has even corrupted the meaning of “us” (79), until then uniting Jane and her sibling, but now referring to the paedophilic relationship. In the tween’s mind, by voluntarily joining her
predator, she acts like her neglectful parents towards Jim, which makes her feel responsible for his drowning.

As her life story of abuse enmeshes her mother’s too, I posit that Jane’s diary takes the form of “double-voiced life writing (…) [which] is conceived as an act of translation, wherein the child tells the story that the parent cannot” (Vasvari and Wang 4). Between the lines, Jane articulates her mother’s experience of CSA, muted and denied by the masculine world they live in. This oppressive and normed silence surrounding her abused and abusive mother leads Jane to internalise and normalise the perpetrator’s guilt, a phenomenon observed in children who experience CSA (Seymour et al. 517). She believes that she is responsible for attracting Mr Cady and that having sexual intercourse with him led to her neglecting her younger brother. However, her parents are the ones who neglected their children, leading their daughter to be raped, and their son to drown. Jane is not angry against them though as she shows them compassion and understanding: “I don’t believe she would let any harm come to a child” (Gunn, Rain 44). Jane portrays her mother as unable to deal with the events of her life, as she probably was herself a victim of girlhood trauma. Therefore, even if she suspects her mother’s compliance with Mr Cady, she does not accuse her of complicity, despite remaining ambiguous in her belated judgement: “[n]ow, going back over these events, I think my mother knew it all. Sitting at her dressing-table that night, somewhere under her smooth expression she knew it. That I would take her limbs, her hair. That some day I would become her (…) all the time carrying hooks in my pockets for men” (79-80). Jane is trapped in a family history of abuse. She can but repeat the past. Like her mother before her, she is a femme fatale. Corresponding to what psychologists note in children who have experienced CSA: they are more likely than others to have risky sex behaviours, several sexual partners, as well as low self-esteem (Ferguson et al.). This could explain why as a writer, we cannot see the person Jane has become after being raped and losing her younger brother. We can but infer that she suffers from panic attack, depression, an unstable sex life, and survivor’s guilt. Jane’s mother, Kate, suffers from similar symptoms to her daughter’s, which makes me posit that she herself experienced CSA. Indeed, she is an alcoholic, who suffers from sleeplessness, sudden uncontrolled fits of anger, and depression: “[s]ome slow ticking kept her awake and she used to roam the house at night” (Gunn, Rain 72). In the way she is depicted, Kate seems beyond help: neither her husband’s care, nor her daughter’s obedience, nor alcohol can alleviate her accumulated pain. Without a proper therapy, Kate repeats the abuse she experienced as a child on her own children.
In *Rich Man Road*, Pualele tries to escape from complex trauma by dedicating her life to the Catholic Church. Her parents abandoned her in New Zealand, as a gift to her aunt and uncle after their own daughter had died. In exile from her motherland Samoa, Pualele, aged 9, is a replacement child. Gabriele Schwab explains that “[r]eplacement children are subjected to the no-place and no-time, the ‘nothing’ of trauma. Replacement children often literally know *nothing* about the child they are supposed to replace” (123). Pualele is never told that she is destined to replace her dead cousin. What at the start looked like an adventure soon becomes a nightmare for her when she realises what adults expect from her. She feels debased when she has to wear the dead girl’s old school uniform and fill in her incomplete notebooks (Glamuzina 54, 131). Unloved, she is exploited by her uncle and aunt who use her as a housemaid and abuse her if the chores are not done on time (85). She is so angry at the little girl’s phantom that she sets fire to her shrine (150), which – in a vicious circle – sets fire to the house, and leads to the expulsion of her father and brother from New Zealand (168). Held responsible for this series of events, Pualele feels more and more isolated and depressed in New Zealand. Her self-esteem is further damaged when her school records do not equal her doppelgänger’s. The “‘streaming’ policies” (Wang and Collins 2786) at her school legitimise the Sisters’ decision to discriminate Pualele and other foreign pupils because of their skin colour and their beginner’s grasp of the English language. Her classmates bully her. Pualele is therefore treated as a foreigner and as inferior to the Pākehā students that she continues to call “palagi” (the Samoan word for ‘white people’), thus understanding the New Zealand’ binary society of the 1970s in Samoan terms. The girl internalises the racist discourse figures of authority formulate about her: “At school Pualele is desperate to be friends with the girls and to please the nuns, but she knows she will only achieve this if she leaves her Samoan self at the school gates” (Glamuzina 154). As a result, the word that comes to define her is the preposition “between”, repeated twenty-two times in her story. As an outsider trapped between two cultures and two languages, Pualele suffers from systemic racism. For her, the rules are simple: “Say nothing. Do nothing. Be nothing” (184). Racism participates in the construction of Pualele’s complex trauma as she is negated for being a black foreigner. “Racism is strongly and significantly linked to negative measures of self-rated health, mental health, physical health, and general wellbeing (life satisfaction)” (Harris et al. 9). As a Pacific Islander, Pualele’s experience of New Zealand is one of discrimination and exclusion. She belongs to a minority which New Zealanders perceived as an economic threat in the 1970s (Grbic et al.). When Mr Davison abuses her sexually, he uses her ethnic origin as a threat to
silence her (Glamuzina 202). The little girl feels dirty afterwards, with semen and vomit, and inwardly for being black and feeling guilty (205). As she cannot look, speak, and behave like white children her age, Pualele prefers to disappear in her room, at church, then in a convent. Her traumatic experiences render her invisible to herself and to the male, racist, and classist gaze of New Zealanders, as she hides what remains of her presence in a convent. Olga’s diary therefore frees her from a New Zealand childhood that traumatically denied her Samoan past.

When Jane and Pualele are made to feel guilty for the series of trauma they experience in their youths, the reader’s complicity with Maria’s tragic fate is highlighted as Kidman sets Maria’s testimony in a questionable position. Maria tells her own story as is mentioned in the title of Part Two: “Maria: Telling It 1953” (17) in the first person, and then in the passages in italics in Part 5 in which the present tense is linked to Maria’s ‘I’. Yet, Maria has no audience: “now it is time for me to tell it, for myself. I tell it aloud as I go, here in this house, though no one can hear me while my hands move across the page” (19). Without a recorder, Maria’s words could never have realistically ended up on a page. For the pact with the reader to be agreed upon, I think that the inhabitants of Waipu are the witnesses of Maria’s testimony – as in the tradition of the Greek chorus – and that Fiona Kidman implicitly makes extra-diegetic trauma-readers members of this community. At the start of her confinement, Maria constantly complains that she is being watched by her uncle Hector, while noticing that “[t]here are watchers who watch the watcher” (217). All her movements are spied on as she is on show for her people/audience, her mother’s house being her stage. When Maria believes she speaks out loud for herself only, she is in fact overheard. Those who witness Maria’s unique destiny can therefore write it down, transforming her into a third person as in Part Five. The particular narrative points of view used to relate Maria’s life in the historical novel can be understood only if the reader accepts assimilation as a member of the McLeod’s community. Indeed, as Toni Bowers notes, when reading an epistolary novel, readers must “be at once voyeurs and participants, aliens and doppelgangers, invaders and allies” (199). In this sense, I can claim that the book (as a physical object) itself is a metonym for the house in which Maria is locked down. Indeed, Maria never leaves her imposed prison which has no land adjoined to it, just as she never leaves the book in which her story is told. Maria the reader becomes Maria the book of secrets (the words printed on the pages) herself, as is implied in the following passage: “[s]he had time now to read the journals, all the time in the world. At first, she went over them often, but after a while they were printed in her head and she returned to them without opening the books” (218). Walter Benjamin’s concept of reproduction is worth analysing here
as Isabella’s words are “printed” in Maria’s mind, transforming the ageing girl into another version, a copy, of Isabella’s book. When reproduced, Isabella’s book is given an oral form (Maria’s voice) and a written form (the very text the reader holds into her/his/their hands, mixing different genres and various authorial voices). With this metonym, Fiona Kidman connects and mixes the intradiegetic audience (the Wāipu community, followers of McLeod’s precepts) with extradiegetic readers (us), linking thus past and present, Scotland with New Zealand, and fiction with reality. The complex narrative structures provided by the fictional journal and the epistolary novel within the historical novel thus allow Kidman to play with the reader’s suspension of disbelief and give a fictional account of McLeod’s historic journey.

Conclusion

To conclude, fictional diaries and epistolary modes are simulacra that challenge the New Zealand politics of girlhood trauma. Though expressed from a limited, subjective, and therefore contestable perspective – that of girls themselves, or of women who experienced various forms of trauma while growing up – these two (sub-)genres have nonetheless the power to turn personal memories into collective history (MacCarthy 12; Darian-Smith and Hamilton 6; Cardell 142). Defying statistics, as well as religious and patriarchal authority, girls find in letters and diary entries a space, a forum to testify. I posit that the lack of literariness expected from genres considered as feminine and equated with non-literature – aka: non-writing (Dasgupta and Das 10) – suits trauma survivors best as the unspeakability of their pain remains unworthy of a reading, or even unreadable at times.

When Fiona Kidman includes letters which gradually metamorphose into a travel diary that follows Norman McLeod’s community across oceans and time to counter a nineteenth-century patriarchal writing of history discarding women’s voices, Kirsty Gunn and Ann Glamuzina both compose crisis diaries which can then be classified under the labels ‘grief diary’ and ‘cancer diary’. For their characters, Jane and Olga, writing about the complex trauma they endured is a way to remember their lost ones, whether a dead brother, or a stolen baby. Their final confessions at the end of their diaries correspond to the end of their childhood – even to Olga’s metaphorical and physical death. Guilt is the pervasive motive which runs throughout their journals. Jane feels responsible for her younger brother’s death by drowning and for living through child sexual abuse; an approach which debunks the
pessimistic gender approach usually employed to describe the ordeals of white girls (L. Gilmore and Marshall, *Witnessing Girlhood* 50-51). Despite being a Pākehā girl from the middle-class, Jane does not construct her narrative to be perceived as a victim. Gunn chooses to make her character writer disappear from her (own) text because of shame: she cannot confess her version of events face to face with her reader. She does so obliquely, in the shadow of her dead brother. The writing of Olga’s belated teenage diary is urged by the terminal phase of her cancer. She aims at breaking the silence surrounding her youth in order to heal a novice who happens to be her granddaughter. The diary of a displaced teenage girl from Croatia, her chronological writing sets order back into an early life characterised by chaos, due to war, treason, rapes, refugee camps, ocean crossing, acculturation, segregation, and pregnancy out of wedlock. The reading of her guilt-ridden yet empathetic journal renews lost family bonds and frees her grandchild from a life of sacrifice for the Church. The fictional diaries studied are therefore no antidotes for their intradiieget writers but for their inner readers – at least those who dare follow their point of view till the end. That is why Maria, in *The Book of Secrets*, is empowered by her grandmother’s diaristic confessions. Known as a witch for her sins and confined to a lifetime of loneliness in her childhood house, Maria is perceived as a threat because of her alternative, even subversive, reading of her community’s history. Men fear her because she is a free-thinking woman who dares contradict the decrees of the local Church. She is physically trapped in her house as she is metonymically confined to the book that she edits. As a result, I posit that extradiegetic readers are implicitly invited to become members of her community to follow the meandering of her thoughts and attend her diatribe, as if we were ourselves her judges, her companions in loneliness, and her witnesses.

Witnessing is indeed the key concept of diary and letter reading of girlhood trauma. Confessing one’s guilt and complicity (Duyfhuizen 173; L. Gilmore and Marshall, *Witnessing Girlhood* 23); testifying to the abuse one experienced (Seymour et al. 513); these attempts at expressing trauma are null and void in front of a jury when voiced by girls, as they can be contested, denied, or considered action for libel (L. Gilmore, “Introduction: Tainted Witness” 9). When a girl traumatised by CSA, or by systemic abuse perpetrated by a Church, testifies, her words are not heard. She is disbelieved from the start. The diaries of Isabella and Olga are read posthumously, their words dug out by their granddaughters. Olga and Janet waited several years, even decades, before delivering their stories. In Pualele’s case, racial and classist conceptions of *who* can speak in New Zealand’s mono- then bi-cultural society from the 1970s to the 2010s leave her speechless, in the margin of her grandmother’s text. Girls’
pain is not audible outside of their limited, one-sided, short, and fragmented texts. The writing of their diaries and letters is not cathartic, as critics would expect (Deshazer 264). On the contrary, letter and diary writing is a coping mechanism (Acton and Potter 246) which allows narrator writers to sympathise with their younger selves, and accompany them in the rehearsing of their past traumatic experiences (L. Gilmore and Marshall, *Witnessing Girhood* 9), to avoid re-traumatisation (Straub 227; White and Epston). However, diary and letter reading can have a healing power over their intended (or expected) trauma-readers/witnesses. Isabella’s and Olga’s granddaughters read and edit their grandmothers’ correspondences and diaries. The revelations they witness while reading, and reconstruct while editing, help them understand their own situations, comfort them, and heal them of girlhood intergenerational trauma. When Pualele discovers her genealogical connection with Olga, she ceases to practice self-mutilation, as the open wound of her origin is finally offered a bandage. As a granddaughter of a Magdalene in New Zealand, she was bearing the blunt family trauma her mother suffered as a baby when she was separated from her own mother. This yawning gap in her genealogy weakened her sense of identity. Olga’s confession therefore offers Pualele closure to the intergenerational trauma she was carrying with her, as well as an exit from the Church and from exile. Kidman, Gunn, and Glamuzina show that girls’ intergenerational trauma can be healed by diaries and letters. Yet these two genres are no writing cure to their personal experiences of racism, gender discrimination, verbal abuse, physical abuse, and sexual abuse.
CHAPTER 5.

“Displacing the Female Bildungsroman to Aotearoa
New Zealand to Voice Girls’ Cultural Trauma”
Introduction

In this chapter, I intend to study the generic specificities of female Bildungsromane which allow women writers from Aotearoa New Zealand to express girlhood trauma. The very term ‘Bildungsroman’ was coined by Karl Morgenstern in 1819 (Boes 1). Taking Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-96) as its prototype, Morgenstern explains that this novel could be regarded as the model of a new genre which he calls ‘Bildungsroman’ in reference to the apprenticeship performed by the protagonist Wilhelm Meister, which leads him away from his rebellious youth in accepting the doxa of the bourgeoisie when he becomes a mature German citizen. In the early manifestations of the genre, male individuality develops in parallel with national consciousness and democratic aspirations, and readers are invited to evolve in a similar way (Morgenstern 654-655; Boes 5). As a result, Tobias Boes insists on the performativity of Bildungsromane, operating on three levels: the individual hero, his nation, and the reader (5). Bildungsromane therefore have an educational potential as they give readers access into cultures which are not necessarily their own. Contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand Bildungsromane could ‘teach’ readers how diverse Aotearoa New Zealand society has become.

Considered as a product of the Enlightenment era, the Bildungsroman is sometimes studied within a restrictive frame, highlighting its historical context, but also a certain form of Western masculinity, the bourgeoisie, and German literature. Some critics also consider that the Bildungsroman is a dying genre (Moretti, “The *Bildungsroman*” 9; Jeffers 8; Summerfield and Downward 92). Others deny it ever existed (Redfield 40; Sammons 245; Amrine 6) due to its multifarious definitions, sometimes encompassing autobiography (Japtok 22; Millard 3; Rishoi 19), and sometimes the novel itself (M. Bell 5). Hence, the frequent use of relatively synonymous terms to refer to this ‘genre’, such as apprenticeship novels and novels of formation, to allow critics to expand its realm to other historical eras, to literatures which are not German, to female heroines, to members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and to postcolonial experiences (Hirsch, “Novel” 1; Fraiman 144; Graham 1; Snircová, *Girlhood* 1-2). In this chapter, I will follow Lisa Steiner’s methodology in my use of the term ‘Bildungsroman’ as Steiner explains that ‘Bildung’ can be translated as ‘culture’, a usage the eighteenth-century philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder frequently opted for (Steiner 4) and which was transposed in nineteenth-century English Literature in the literary studies of the
genre via scholars like Thomas Arnold, John Stuart Mill, and Walter Pater (Jeffers 4; Steiner 4). Adding the idea of culture to the study of a narrative associating the main character’s positive evolution with that of the society she/he/they live(s) in makes of this genre an appropriate platform to discuss cultural issues at stake in the formation of a nation like Aotearoa New Zealand. Indeed, the three novels selected to illustrate this chapter highlight the development of heroines from various ethnic groups. Cousins by Patricia Grace (1992) follows the intertwined life narratives of three Māori girl cousins. Does This Make Sense to You? by Renée (1994) focuses on a Pākehā housewife’s recollection of her traumatic experience in a Home for unmarried pregnant girls. Reconnaissance by Kapka Kassabova (1999) explores the (r)evolution of a Bulgarian teenage girl who moved from the USSR to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Definitions of the Bildungsroman as an expression of white masculinity have been contested by feminist critics who consider that, parallel to the development of the male version of the genre, female Bildungsromane have been a prolific medium for women writers, as exemplified by nineteenth-century models such as Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë (1847), Aurora Leigh by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1856), and The Mill on the Floss by George Eliot (1860). Lorna Ellis even claims that the first Bildungsroman ever written was The History of Miss Betty Thoughtless by Eliza Haywood in 1751 (Joannou 200), not Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister, nor Wieland’s History of Agathon (M. Bell 10). She thereby contests a history of literary critique performed by men, focused on male characters, and dedicated to promoting male experience. Julia Kristeva also warns against the “pitfalls” women writers encounter when she notes that “male writers[...] (...) books, nevertheless, often serve as ‘models’ for countless productions by women” (“Women’s Time” 32). By refusing to separate female Bildungsromane from the generic term ‘Bildungsroman’, taken as a universal model, I similarly reject the misleading and unfounded normalisation of masculine ideals and patriarchal norms. As patriarchy fashions girls AND boys into becoming gendered and sexualised subjects and products of a particular society, and as both women AND men suffer from patriarchal dictates in many ways and at different stages of their lives (Waldegrave and Tamasese, “Central Ideas” 98), distinguishing between female/non-binary/male Bildungsromane seems to be an ethical methodological option. As for the term ‘feminist Bildungsroman’, it gained a certain currency in the 1970s to define female Bildungsromane defending ideologies promoted by the second wave of feminism (Felski). However, I posit that this variation is historically grounded and is limited in its representations of time, class,
and ethnic groups, as only novels from the 1970s and 1980s about white middle-class heroines can be classified in this subgenre. This terminology could be applied to *A Breed of Women* by Fiona Kidman (1979), but not to the texts analysed in this chapter.

I intend to address the following questions: to what extent do postmodern female Bildungsromane offer women writers from Aotearoa New Zealand a space to construct girlhood trauma? In what ways do women writers associate their girl characters’ trauma with Aotearoa New Zealand’s ‘coming of age’ as a nation? What are the ideological implications of their constructions of girlhood trauma? How are readers impacted and affected by their readings of traumatic coming-of-age stories?

**PART 1: The Bildungsheldin’s (heroine of a Bildungsroman) Journey into Trauma**

**a) Youth and Mentorship**

Youth is, for Franco Moretti, the key ingredient of the Bildungsroman (“The Bildungsroman” 3). Turned towards the future, youth is both embodied in the main character evolving from childhood/adolescence to maturity, and symbolised in the historical evolution of the hero’s nation (Millard 12-13). Such a definition shows that a male Bildungsroman situates its hero’s individual progress within the trajectory of history, in a linear way. However, not only is women’s time often apprehended outside of history (Kristeva, “Women’s Time” 17), in “cyclical and monumental” patterns (17); but female Bildungsromane do not necessarily focus on a heroine’s youth. Novels of awakening, for example, are regarded as one popular type of female Bildungsromane in the way they follow one mature female protagonist at a turning point in her life, questioning its meaning and re-evaluating her role in the world she lives in (Abel et al.; Felski). Out of the three novels studied in this chapter, two of them can be read as novels of awakening. In *Does This Make Sense to You?*, Renée’s Pākehā Bildungsheldin (the heroine of a Bildungsroman) Flora, is in her fifties when she starts enquiring after the daughter she was violently separated from at birth when she was eighteen. Two plots are then enfolded in two different timeframes: Flora’s escape from her role as a housewife and subsequent self-discovery, hiding in an agnostic shelter for pregnant teens held by her best friend Ka in Dunedin in the 1980s, and Flora’s experience at a Methodist Home for unmarried mothers in Auckland in the 1950s, as she tells
it in an email to her lost daughter, Chloe. The trauma she experienced while pregnant as a teen was perpetrated within her family, society at large, and the Church. Flora spent the rest of her adult life concealing this episode from people’s knowledge but as a result alienated her life experience, annihilating her sense of self in the process. The e-letter she writes in the confessional mode to Chloe under the form of a series of fragmented emails, keeping her readers hanging on her words, frees Flora from the censorship her body, then herself, had been subjected to for thirty years. In *Cousins*, Patricia Grace starts a trinary Bildungsroman following the paths of three Māori girl cousins, with Mata, in her fifties, roaming the streets of Wellington, shoeless, homeless, and hopeless. In the space of a few months, she regains her long-lost place within her whānau thanks to the support of her two cousins, Makareta and Maleme. Each cousin is given equal space in the novel, as chapters intermingle. However, chronology is not respected either as the three heroines recollect their past lives in bits and pieces. *Reconnaissance* by Kapka Kassabova is therefore the only Bildungsroman of this corpus which does not focus on a middle-aged female character, but on a twenty-one-year-old girl from Bulgaria, Nadejda. A migrant in New Zealand, she recalls her last stay in her homeland while it was becoming independent from the USSR. Experiencing flashbacks, hallucinations, self-harm, anxiety crisis, shortness of breath, sleepwalking, and sleeplessness, Nadejda appears to be suffering from a complex post-traumatic stress disorder. Despite their age differences, each heroine’s Bildung is therefore marred by childhood trauma.

In their reconstruction of past memories, *Bildungsheldinen* emphasise the part played by their relatives and friends in their own personal development. Mentors are crucial in the formation of young, innocent, and naïve characters. Michael Bell argues that, in Bildungsromane, “[t]he mentor figure has a special prominence as a focus of [the hero/ine’s] self-consciousness” (5). Indeed, s/he is “mediating” (5) between the hero/ine and society. Marc Redfield also argues mentorship is inscribed in the process of Bildung through its etymology, as ‘Bild’ (‘image’ in German) hints at the idea of ‘exemplarity’. He writes: “[a]n identity must be formed through identification with an example” (49). However, the problem for girls, as Susan Fraiman warns, is that mothers often happen to be unreliable mentors (6). It is certainly the case that Renée’s Flora and Kassabova’s Nadejda cannot count on their mothers who are depicted as abiding by the patriarchal dictates imposed on them either by their husbands, male relatives, or by the Pākehā society they live in. Flora’s mentor is her best friend, Ka, whom she met at the Home in Auckland, when both teenage girls were confined by the Church. Ka, an eighteen-year-old Māori lesbian girl, helped the new recruit in her
everyday tasks at the laundry. She deciphered the social code of the Home, to protect Flora from punishment (Renée, Make Sense 108). She gave her extra food to survive beyond the basic meals they had (98), and shared dreams of escaping their common hell together accompanied by their babies. In their second life, after being separated by the malign Matron while giving birth each on their own, Flora escapes from her domestic hell thanks to Ka who rescues her, hides her, and gives her a second chance to start a new life. Flora could therefore rely on the girls’ solidarity, built on pain and shared trauma as Magdalenes.

In Reconnaissance, three male narrators aim at dominating the discourse on Nadejda, controlling her with their words, and influencing readers’ points of view on the heroine. Nadejda’s life is indeed framed by three father figures: her biological father, Bojan, whose very name means “of God” (Kassabova 271); by her uncle, Vassil, who is a therapist in New Zealand; and by her father (i.e. her mother’s ex-husband who treats her as his daughter), Mladen, a professor of French literature in Sofia who entices Nadejda to go back to New Zealand for her own safety. For example, Bojan who can foresee the future behaves as if he were Nadejda’s puppeteer, as exemplified in the following extract: “Nadejda, you are the future. You don’t know this of course. Funny how only I know it (...). I see you sitting in a taxi (...). Let’s see, what are you saying? (...) I watch your dream too. It is a terrible dream” (154, italics in the original). Bojan describes himself as an omniscient narrator who follows Nadejda’s every move and every thought, and whose intrusions in the text modify its font, as most of his inner thoughts are expressed in italics – a stylistic choice which creates a similarity between Bojan’s words and Nadejda’s nightmares, also printed in italics in the novel. Nonetheless, most of the Bildungsroman is told as a third-person narrative, showing the ‘I’ narrating Nadejda’s story is not Bojan’s, despite his claims. Despite her mentors’ discourses on her, Nadejda starts delineating a boundary between what she used to be, what her family wants her to be, and who she is: “Nadejda has a lot of previous life, twenty-one years of it” (40). In Nadejda’s case, even if mentors intrude with their narratives on her life, they all fail in their attempts at controlling her.

Contrary to female Bildungsromane focusing on Pākehā girl characters, in Cousins, Patricia Grace challenges Pākehā readers’ expectations by inserting the Māori conception of families in the structure of the Bildungsroman, in the way she portrays mother-daughter relationships. I posit that the three cousins, Makareta, Maleme, and Mata, could be renamed “The Beloved, the Unloved One, and the Lost One”. The love Mata received from her mother
Anihera before she died seems to have been in vain. Abandoned by her Pākehā father who rejects her for being a ‘half-caste’, Mata subsequently grows up in an abusive orphanage. Gina M. Colvin-McCluskey argues that “[t]he half-caste child or coloured child is the site that most clearly articulates the racializing discourses of the Pākehā” (6–7) during British colonisation. Yet, most Māori did not reject children on the basis of their skin colour, as the hierarchical structure of hapū and iwi is based on whakapapa (genealogy) (Simmonds 13–14), not on physical appearances (Colvin-McCluskey 6–7; J. Lee 92; Toi 213). Grace emphasises the dichotomous world offered to Mata, who, as the first-born child of the chief’s eldest daughter, is treated with love and respect in her whānau, whereas she is debased and abused in the Pākehā world.

Missy’s real name, Maleme, only appears once in Chapter 32 (Grace, Cousins 161). Maleme’s name was inspired by a Greek village where the Māori battalion fought during the Second World War (Wood 75), and where her father almost died but was rescued by Makareta’s father (Grace, Cousins 158). Yet in French – a language Patricia Grace learnt at school (Della Valle, “Wider Family” 134) – Maleme sounds like ‘mal aimée’, which means ‘unfairly unloved’ or ‘poorly loved’. I argue that this (perhaps unplanned) homonymy is quite revelatory as Maleme herself didn’t feel loved when growing up (Grace, Cousins 174): “[y]ou were their little mother Missy on the days when our mother was too weak to lift or carry. The blood, the blood! Nine of us altogether, if only you could know” (183). Maleme’s twin brother who died at birth is the narrator in this passage, an outside observer of his twin sister’s misfortune and early responsibilities. Despite a childhood comprising poverty, deprivation, despair, grief at losing younger brothers and sisters, physical abuse from her mother (163), verbal abuse from her father (190), self-harm (223-224), and rejection from her grandmother who prefers her cousin Makareta, Maleme agrees to replace Makareta in the arranged marriage organised by the elders to save the iwi. Maleme becomes the leader and true heiress of her iwi in this transaction, reclaiming her mother’s rights of lineage that she had lost when marrying a Pākehā. The rebellious Makareta escapes from a forced marriage by becoming a nurse like her own mentoring mother, Polly, who lives away from her in Wellington. As in the pre-colonial tradition of mana wāhine, Grace constructs girls as holding complementary power to men (Simmonds 13–14): both Maleme and Makareta choose alternative paths which empower them and their cast-aside mothers, thus reinforcing a matriarchal power and history which the elders refused to see as viable (Grace, Cousins 100). Grace therefore feminises and indigenises the genre of the Bildungsroman to formulate a Māori history in which girls and
their mentoring mothers have their say and are willing agents in the renaissance of their culture and language.

b) Cultural Experiences of Girls’ Innocence

The theme of innocence has long been associated with Western female Bildungsromane and coming-of-age novels as it is intricately linked to the construction of childhood and youth, and especially girls’ education, in the Christian West. In Truth and Method, Hans-Georg Gadamer highlights the polysemy of the term ‘Bildung’ whose etymology hints at the image [“Bild”] of God heroes need to reproduce in their journey to self-reflexivity (qtd. in Redfield 47). The sacrality inherent in the hero’s formation, maturing from innocence to knowledge, connects the Bildungsroman to Christian interpretations of man’s spiritual exploration of biblical values. The nickname ‘God’s Own Country’ some New Zealanders give to Aotearoa New Zealand (Pausé et al. 86) recalls the biblical associations inherent in the British colonial project. Indeed, for many colonists, New Zealand, as a white settler colony, was perceived as a New World – echoing in this sense the colonial project of the United States, construed as a Paradisal land freed from the corrupted and “sinful” Old World (Millard 5). Damon Jeremia Salesa argues that, “to many British politicians, businessmen officials and settlers, New Zealand promised to be the ‘Britain of the South’” (14), a better Britain, “a chance for the redemption of empire (…) [and] a place to make atonement” (14). That is why, for Normanists (Kidman, The Book), cultivating girls’ innocence was a crucial facet of their education system as it symbolised the purity and moral superiority of the clan’s project of colonisation (Kidman, “Search” 12). In the Victorian era, the concept of innocence further embodied ideals of girls’ virginity and purity. During the heyday of the British Empire, innocence was the virtue of a specific gender (female), ethnic group (white British), religion (Protestant), sexual orientation (heterosexuality), and class (the upper classes) (Smith et al. 64). In Does This Make Sense to You?, Flora runs away from domestic abuse in the 1980s and is in hiding in Dunedin at her best friend’s house. There, she meets Annie, a pregnant sixteen-year-old Pākehā girl. The latter is reduced to homelessness by her boyfriend’s middle-class Pākehā parents who perceive her as a threat to their son’s future (148-149). They hold a classist view of her, mixed with colonial prejudices on the poor and alcoholism. Catharine Coleborne notes that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, colonists feared hereditary mental diseases and could confine people for life in mental...
hospitals if such a disease was suspected (“Families” 70-71, *Insanity* 150). With Annie, Renée highlights the fact that colonial representations of Pākehā girls’ innocence persisted up until the 1980s in New Zealand in the classist exclusion of the have nots and in their fear of hereditary mental diseases. Girls’ innocence is thus constructed at the expense of other girls’ ‘fall’ (or birth) into a life of dissolution, creating a hierarchy and inequality between girls of the same age.

Through claims for innocence as a birthright – and therefore as an innate quality – aristocratic and bourgeois girls, but also colonial girls overseas by transference of power, were perceived by the dominant group as superior to girls stemming from lower classes, from colonised peoples, as well as from non-Protestant and non-Anglophone backgrounds. White girls were indeed the beacons of civilisation for colonists, and magazines for girls constructed white women as the guardians of the British Empire (Smith et al. 69). Girls’ potential for procreation was targeted by propagandists who fashioned colonial girls as the future mothers of Britishness overseas (50). New Zealand lasses – READ: Pākehā girls – were described in the colonial propagandist discourse as “fair” (48), “hard-working, fun-loving, healthy, natural, dutiful and devoted” (65). Their fairness (aka: whiteness) was emphasised, as well as their innocence (at the expense of Māori girls perceived, by comparison, as corrupted, lascivious, and easy), and their perceived role in the colonial project. That is why, in the main plot of *Does This Make Sense to You?*, Ka, a pregnant eighteen-year-old Māori girl from the Hawke’s Bay area, highlights the irony of her social disgrace. She jokingly verbalises the racial prejudices Pākehā have about Māori girls to explain her pregnancy: “Everyone knows Maori girls are easy, don’t they? I just confirmed it” (103). The Christian discourse controlling girls’ bodies distorts Ka’s personal tragedy to justify Pākehā racial prejudices on the sexuality of Māori girls. Her family confined her to a Madgalene Home after her short romance with a white Australian (103). Naomi Simmonds notes that the “discourses [of Christian missionaries] portrayed Māori women as wanton, immoral, and undisciplined” (15), which demonstrates that colonisation, with the help of the Church, vilified the way Māori girls were perceived in their own land.

Māori girls’ babies were also affected by the discourse denying their mothers’ innocence as they were nicknamed “unadoptables” (Renée, *Make Sense* 101). Renée describes the Methodist Home for unmarried mothers in Auckland as a parallel dystopic world, composed of binary and opposite spaces as if Heaven and Hell met on Earth. A maternity
ward for Christian Pākehā wives was adjoined to a dormitory and a laundry for unwanted mothers-to-be (aka. Magdalenes). The latter worked for the “good mothers” without being seen, as if offstage (95). Magdalenes produced babies for “good parents” as there was also an orphanage for Pākehā babies (READ: Pākehā Madgalenes’ babies) who could be selected by Pākehā couples to adopt, next to an orphanage for “unadoptables” which was run like a pigsty. Māori babies and disabled babies were neglected and left to deteriorate, leading the heroine of the novel, Flora, to compare the racial and ableist discriminations perpetrated by the Church to the scandal surrounding orphanages under Ceausescu (101). In 1989, at the fall of Soviet Romania, about 150,000 institutionalised children were found emotionally and intellectually deprived as well as physically deficient, due to lack of State funding, malnutrition, shortage of staff, and absence of hygiene (Elliott and Aslanian; L. Morrison 168-169; Rus et al. 65; Zeanah et al. 889). Some were so damaged by years of neglect, verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse that they were deemed “irrecuperable” (L. Morrison 168). They were then sent to dystrophic centres. Gypsies were often misdiagnosed and classified as “irrecuperable” due to their ethnicity, even if they did not have mental or physical disabilities (L. Morrison 171). Today, the institutional racism informing settler-colonial religious and educational institutions is held responsible for the social gap remaining between Indigenous peoples and white settlers in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada (Wolfe). In Aotearoa, the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care (2018-2022) argues that Indigenous children while in institutional ‘care’ were in fact systematically separated from their parents and families, neglected, malnourished, unloved, chronically sick, poorly clad, beaten, insulted, and maltreated. In Canada, many Indigenous children died in their early childhood while in residential schools, as revealed in 2021 when unmarked graves were discovered in many schoolyards (R. Gilmore). The complex childhood trauma this abuse triggered is regarded as the root of a series of social disadvantages Indigenous peoples, including Māori, have suffered over several generations in settler colonies.

Colonisation and racism deny non-white girls their innocence. Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall note “[t]he innocence of childhood is a racialized construct” (Witnessing Girlhood 5) as they show that African American girls, but also Latina girls, are systematically perceived as inherently guilty in the United States’ judicial system. Both critics consider that the practice of slavery is at the root of this perception associating non-white girls with sexual “sins”, and lies. In Cousins, Patricia Grace also denounces the abuse perpetrated by the Church and the State in Homes for Māori orphans. While constructing the character of
Mata in a non-linear way, Grace describes the alienating process one of her heroines had to undergo as a child. The novel opens with Mata, roaming like a hobo, and carrying only a few possessions – including a framed photo of her mother which is significant on various levels. The photo has worked as a “talisman” throughout her life (D’Cruz, “Narrative Spiraling” 463), protecting her from adversity; as a door to her memory, allowing Mata to remember positive events from her past, like her encounter with her mother’s sisters; as a memorial to the mother who loved and cherished her until her death; and as a bond with her whānau, cherished like a taonga (treasure). Justine Seran shows that photographs play a major part in Māori communities to remember the dead (“Photography” 441), as photos of ancestors represent a physical manifestation of the departed which emphasises their continuous presence within their iwi after their death. In Mata’s case, her mother’s photo is also a counter-argument to Mata’s alienating belief that her mother is a white angel like those she is shown as examples at the Orphanage. Doreen D’Cruz explains the homonymy “between Mata’s mother’s name, ‘Anihera’, and ‘anahera’, the Māori word for angel” (“Narrative Spiraling” 468). Mata indeed “[had] made up an angel’s face for her mother like the ones in the Sunday school pictures – a pale face with pink cheeks, blue eyes and long gold hair” (Grace, Cousins 54). Mata’s grief for her mother was grotesquely distorted by the Christian liturgy, with its iconography of white angels which not only suggests that Heaven is reserved for Pākehā only, but also alienates the girl from her origins.

By ascribing Pākehā features to her mother, Mata gives her the attributes of ‘goodness’ as they are dictated in the discourse of her guardians, believing that her own flaws stem from being Māori. Her hair is cut short because she is said to have “bad curls” (30) and to look like a “black sheep” (31). The institution thus sadistically experiments with whitening every aspect of her personality and personal history. She is estranged from her mother’s whānau because her guardian’s aim was “[that] my grandparents couldn’t have me, and to keep me away from evil and sin” (72). The racist association between Māoritanga (Māori culture) and the Christian conception of evil was at the heart of her upbringing at the orphanage, prompting her to hate herself (243). The treatment she received in the Home led her to think herself dirty: “[s]he had never wanted to be bad so she’d scrubbed her skin, watered her hair down and prayed to be good” (94). Rockey R. Robbins, a Cherokee/Choctaw psychotherapist, analyses the attitude Indigenous children can have towards the colour of their skins within what he calls “the concept of shame” (“Native American Voice” 96). For him, “[t]oo often ‘education’ has been a part of a mental hygiene and homogenizing process” (102)
which makes colonised people, and especially Indigenous peoples, feel guilty for being non-white, while rendering them invisible. Robbins explains that the skin colour of First Peoples is turned into a source of “anxiety” (97) as a result, prompting them to disguise their differences and assimilate within the mainstream colonial society. With Mata, Patricia Grace opposes two educational traditions: one led by the colonial apparatus, devaluing Māori girls by teaching them how shameful and guilty they are with reference to the Bible; the other experienced within the whānau, situating orphaned Mata within her lineage, making sense of her family history, and offering her aroha (love) for being the first daughter of the first child of the iwi’s chiefs. Girls’ innocence is therefore experienced as a cultural construct as Māori iwi respect their female children, recognising the role they play in the maintenance of the social structure and in their extended families.

As for Nadejda in *Reconnaissance*, Kassabova gives her the sexual freedom protagonists traditionally get in male Bildungsromane. Nadejda can escape from imprisoning patriarchal discourses thanks to Gothic attributes which are conferred upon her because of her geographic origins. Born and raised in Eastern Europe, in the Balkans, I argue that Nadejda is, in a way, a female version of Count Dracula. Polyamorous like him, she looks like a modern vamp with her long dark hair and her series of one-night stands. When a German tourist at a hostel in Lake Taupo labels Bulgarians as “barbarians” (145), Nadejda is at a loss for words to defend herself and her fellow-citizens as she has been acutely aware of Western Europeans’ condescension and spite towards Eastern Europeans since her adolescent years (62). Sneja Gunew warns against Western Europe’s sense of superiority over Eastern Europe. She offers instead a nuanced approach to the term European in her chapter “Who Counts as Human Within (European) Modernity?”. For her,

[t]oo often in postcolonial critiques, European immigrant groups are homogenized and made synonymous with a naturalised ‘whiteness’ or with various imperialisms. But, at the same time, particular nations or groups within Europe had very different histories relating to colonialism and imperialism. (26)

Under the globalising and unifying term ‘Europe’, Eastern Europeans are yet not perceived as equal and as ‘civilised’ as Western Europeans, even from New Zealand, due to high poverty rates, recent and fragile democracies, and non-dominant world languages (unlike English). The Anglophone fear of ‘uncivilised’ Eastern European peoples has traditionally been associated with vampires in British literature. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik explain that “Dracula is a Transylvanian count and thus connected with what the Victorians considered the
regressive superstitious culture of Eastern Europe” (59). Nadejda’s vampiric attributes are further developed when she shamelessly describes her erotic dreams. When she muses about the sexual fantasies she had at age eleven (Kassabova 31), she ostensibly pushes beyond the limits of the Western tolerance for girls’ sexual respectability by claiming control of her own body, desires, and dreams.

PART 2: Girls’ Trauma and the Nation

a) Im/mobility and the Issue of Girls’ Innocence

When young Western men underwent the Grand Tour to discover various cultural sites during the Enlightenment era, they were expected to gain sexual maturity while abroad (Jeffers 53). On the contrary, the social emphasis on girls’ innocence limited nineteenth-century female Bildungsheiden to a circumscribed mobility since travelling was not advised for virtuous girls (Fraiman 6-7); and to the foreseeable ending of marriage which was viewed as the final stage in girls’ development (Bolaki 23). The picaresque is therefore traditionally absent from female Bildungsromane. As Fraiman puts it, “[the heroine’s] paradoxical task is to see the world while avoiding violation by the world’s gaze” (7). In such a context, the female Bildungsroman’s concept of girls’ innocence is involved as a patriarchal device to constrain girls’ movements, actions, and thoughts within the private sphere, traumatising them in the process.

In the context of this study on female Bildungsromane in New Zealand, I argue that women writers fashion girls’ innocence in its dynamic relationship with experience, not as a mere passage from one state to another, but in flux, both concepts being highly fluid, as they are linked to girls’ explorations of the world surrounding them. Northrop Frye’s theory of pre-generic mythoi is useful to analyse the fluctuations at play between innocence and experience in the girl characters’ life journeys. Frye explains that romance, comedy, satire (or irony), and tragedy are present in every literary genre and their interactions affect the narrative structure:

[t]he top half of the natural cycle is the world of romance and the analogy of innocence; the lower half is the world of ‘realism’ and the analogy of experience. Thus there are four main types of mythical movement: within romance, within experience, up and down. The downward movement is the tragic movement, the wheel of fortune, falling from innocence to hamartia, and from hamartia to catastrophe. The upward
movement is the comic movement, from threatening complications to a happy ending and a general assumption of post-dated innocence in which everyone lives happily ever after. (136)

Associating innocence with romance, Frye highlights its instability as it is in constant balance with its opposite, ‘experience’, via the pendular movement of either the comic or the tragic mode. In Does This Make Sense to You?, Renée experiments with the ideal of innocence, pushing its limits, not once, but several times. Indeed, for many Pākehā girls in this novel, the loss of innocence is gradual and not necessarily linked to sexual experience in their own eyes.

The theory of white girls’ innocence was also used in the British Empire to justify the confinement of girls and women accused of promiscuity, prostitution, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy (Coleborne, Insanity 142, 187), in Catholic and Protestant-led convents and institutions, often euphemistically called ‘Homes’. In the colonial discourse constructing girls’ innocence, ‘fallen’ girls were blamed and made responsible for being raped, sexually abused, and the victims of incest (Coleborne, Insanity 153). In Does This Make Sense to You?, Flora’s description of her experience of a Methodist Home for unwed mothers in Auckland in the 1950s sheds light on the way pregnant girls were forced to experience the dystopic side of the white settlers’ society. Male Bildungsromane often incorporate an initiation into utopia, often represented by an initiation into the art world, such as theatre (Amrine 14), so as to develop the hero’s aesthetic education. This trope of the genre is subverted by Renée who denounces through it the theatricality of the Church’s benevolence, and reveals the tragic role imposed on pregnant girls. Inside the Home, girls are submitted to a different timeframe. “Now” is the ultimate commandment the Matron repeats again and again, transforming unsanctioned pregnancy into laundry work symbolically cleansing the girls’ evil doing; girls’ biological reproduction into industrial overexploitation; and the maternal time of pregnancy into an eternity of pain. Trapped in the Home, and forbidden to leave its precinct, the girls all sleep in a dormitory which is cynically designed as a clock: “[e]ach time a girl vanished from the dormitory our beds were moved nearer the door” (138). In this environment built to constantly remind girls of their ‘sin’, Flora yet bitterly admits that she did not lose her innocence when she lost her virginity (31), but when she realised her baby would not be given back to her despite all her work and hopes (144-145). Flora experiences a severe post-partum disorder whose trauma she conceals from her husband and second family for decades, to eventually verbalise it in a letter to her stolen daughter. Kristeva notes that “[p]regnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of
the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of an other, of nature and consciousness of physiology and speech” (“Women’s Time” 31). Flora and Ka experienced this separation even more violently as the Church stole their babies (Renée, Make Sense 144). Renée therefore displaces the frontier of girls’ innocence, focusing not on their virginity, but on their faith and trust in the world in which they grow up. In constructing the Home as a dystopian stage in girls’ Bildungs, the myth of innocence shifts from a social obsession with girls’ bodies to girls’ personal disillusionment.

Reconnaissance is often regarded as an instance of migrant literature by Aotearoa New Zealand critics (Fresno-Calleja, “Migration”). In this Bildungsroman, Nadejda fulfils what the narrator calls “the opposite of an Odyssey” (Kassabova 36) as she travels from Aotearoa New Zealand to Bulgaria (her motherland) and back to Aotearoa New Zealand again. Unlike Ulysses, her exile from home is unending, even if, during the novel, her home country breaks free from its Communist regime. Nadejda is stunned by the irony of her situation, as she is an anti-Communist who is stranded abroad during the revolution in her home country. Refusing to go back to Christchurch where her mother and uncle have settled, Nadejda instead tours the North Island, pretending to be a tourist. Even if she isolates herself from her relatives, Nadejda accomplishes a journey towards the completion of her family history, moving from an individualistic perspective to a communal and familial perception of life. Moreover, her trajectory is not direct and does not lead to social progress. On the contrary, like an anti-Ulysses, Nadejda remains in exile at the end of the novel. She is perceived as a foreigner in her home country as she owns a passport to a Western country, a privilege allowing her to flee from Communism and the Soviet Union. However, Nadejda does not feel at home in New Zealand either. She feels like an alien in this foreign country where her uncle and grandfather found asylum twenty-one years before. Nadejda’s tour of New Zealand therefore allows her to excavate the complexity of her family’s history and ethnicity.

In Cousins, the three heroines are connected to their whenua (land) near Wellington, in which their whenua (placenta) were buried at birth. Each girl travels from this point of origin to other parts of the country, such as Wellington, before coming back home to their whānau. Simmonds notes the importance given to women in Māori cosmology (15), a matriarchal power Patricia Grace highlights in her female Bildungsroman. Indeed, the future of the hapū resides on the chief’s heiress: Anihera, then Gloria, Makareta, and eventually Maleme after all first three pretendents prove ‘unfit’ or unwilling to hold the position. Maleme marries
Hamuera at age fifteen to save her whānau’s mana (power, influence) at a time when Māori culture, societal structure, customs, and language were in jeopardy (Grace, Cousins 196). After the Second World War, Māori left the countryside in huge numbers for big cities where they could find employment (M. King, Penguin History), deserting their ancestral lands. Maleme and her husband, as their people’s representatives, travel the country to defend Māori rights, discuss the Treaty of Waitangi, and Indigenous sovereignty, creating alliances with other hapū and iwi to strengthen Indigenous power in Aotearoa New Zealand. Makareta, who was raised as pūhi (the Chosen One, the bride to be) and was supposed to marry Hamuera, used the traditional knowledge she gained from the elders to decolonise her nursing practice and become a leader for Māori rights in the 1970s. At the Wellington hospital where she worked as a nurse, she sang karakia (incantation, prayer, ritual chant) to respect the dead (Grace, Cousins 204), and she was perceived by Māori patients as a healer: “They would want only me to touch their heads or attend to personal matters” (205). Makareta therefore resisted against the 1907 Tohunga Suppression Act which banned Māori medicine, by applying a culturally sensitive approach to health when in presence of Māori patients as she took their sacredness into account. Moreover, Makareta’s involvement in Māori politics leads her to travel all over the country, like Maleme, evolving as a person in harmony with her community on a national scale. She finally returns home in a coffin after having found Mata, the missing piece in her family’s story. Mata has indeed lived all her life in and around Wellington, and, before Makareta’s tangi (funeral), had visited her whenua and met her whānau but once. Her isolation from her family’s support, set up by the orphanage, is accentuated by her loneliness, as her abusive husband left her childless. Meeting Makareta again leads Mata back home and offers her a way to heal from her complex childhood trauma. As Grace notes in an interview with Paola Della Valle, even isolated Māori are never without a “turangawaewae” (“Wider Family” 132, original italics), a home to come back to, connected to their ancestors.

b) Acculturation, Assimilation, and Resistance to Nationalist Discourses

The Bildungsroman’s historic heritage is tainted by the European imperial partaking of the world, slavery, and racism (Herdt 13; Joannou 206; Redfield 51). In the US, for example, Bildungsromane’s traditional plots tend to attenuate ethnic and class differences to assimilate migrants and coloured people into a mainstream “universalising narrative” (Bolaki 12). In New Zealand, the deleterious consequences of the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 are still a sensitive topic today. Writing a female Bildungsroman is thereby a political act as girl
protagonists’ lives are at the intersection of women’s rights, children’s rights, ethnic nationalism, and/or Indigenous sovereignty. Patricia Grace and Renée, as Māori writers, follow a purpose when they choose to embrace a genre marred by Enlightenment discourses which promote individualistic progress in parallel with a nation’s development at the exclusion of non-white people (Hoagland). As Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver notes, Māori have been experiencing “*internal colonialism*” which he defines in these terms: “the native population is swamped by a large mass of colonial settlers who, after generations, no longer have a *métropole* to which to return. *Métropole* and colony thus become geographically coextensive” (223, italics in the original). Māori heroines run the risk of being acculturated in the allegorical dimension of the Bildungsroman which connects an individual’s fate to that of the nation, especially as New Zealand imposes colonial practices and measures onto Indigenous groups. Indeed, “the *Bildungsroman* narrates the acculturation of a self – the integration of a particular ‘I’ into the general subjectivity of a community, and thus finally into the universal subjectivity of humanity” (Redfield 38). Grace and Renée challenge such a Western vision of the Bildungsroman as the concept of acculturation, when applied in New Zealand by colonial officials, meant the annihilation of Māori identity, culture, language, and customs, with a view to exterminating Māori people over time. As Patrick Wolfe contends, “[w]hatever settlers may say (…) the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory” (388). Since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, all the measures taken by the successive governments to prevent Māori from speaking te reo and practising their customs, religions, and medicine were a way to dismantle their social structure and take away their whenua / ancestral lands.

In *Does This Make Sense to You?*, Ka regularly comments on colonialism and its impact on Māori. During a drive around Dunedin, Annie comments on a mountain Pākehā “locals” call “Tit hill” (110), to which Ka responds: “[f]irst thing you do, change the names” (110). Ka denounces the colonial practice of renaming every topographic site when mapping a ‘new’ territory (Berg 99; J. Pollock 182; Wolfe 388), while hinting at the Matron’s practice of rebaptising every new ‘fallen’ girl entering the premises of the Home. This renaming ritual was practiced in Magdalene Asylums in Ireland too and is contested by survivors as a technique used to rob girls of their identity (Wilmer 104). Earlier in the novel, Flora recalls that “‘Katherine said her name was Katarina and requested to be called Ka’, smiled Matron, as one would at a child who doesn’t understand grown-up niceties, ‘but, as I said to her, we don’t have room for fancy names round here. Katherine is much more suitable’” (Renée, *Make
The only Māori Magdalene girl is demeaned by the representative of the Church who treats her as if she were inferior due to her condition and her ethnicity. Her first name is Christian, but the matron anglicises it to further alienate the teenage girl. Yet, as an act of solidarity, Renée gives her own ancestor’s name to Ka as the girl’s family name is Porohiwi (*Make Sense* 52, *These Two Hands* 170-171). By making readers encounter Ka for the first time through Flora’s naïve eyes, Renée attracts readers’ attention to the accumulation of discriminations the unmarried Māori girl has to face despite the efforts her family made to assimilate into the Pākehā Protestant middle class. Salesa notes that “[m]uch of New Zealand’s colonial history was characterized by attempts to institute a bi-racial code, attempts that were, in some areas, remarkably successful” (22). Autobiographical elements are contained in the character of Ka, who originates from the same region Renée grew up and in which she also suffered from racial segregation (*These Two Hands*). Between the 1920s and the 1960s, segregation was practiced in New Zealand in public transport, schools, restaurants, toilets, and residential areas (Bartholomew n.pag.). What Renée adds in Ka’s portrayal is that, within religious institutions, members were not treated equally because of sexism and racism. Renée positions the *Bildungsheldin* Flora as a mediator between readers and Ka’s conditions of life. Ka was systematically discriminated against by the Pākehā society and the Church, on the basis of her ethnicity and her gender. Renée therefore forces Pākehā readers to take a step away from their own prejudices as she sheds light on the damage colonial acculturation causes to Māori girls.

*Cousins* comprises six chapters – each cousin being dedicated two of them. Narrators are manifold but always belong to the girls’ whānau. The three girls’ childhood experiences are told several times from various points of view, emphasising the part played by the whānau in the development of its members. Mason Durie explains the Māori conception of health, te whare tapa whā, by comparing a person to a house whose four walls are their taha wairua (spiritual health), taha hinengaro (mental health), taha tinana (physical health), and taha whānau (extended family’s health) (Pistacchi 139-140; NiaNia 93). For a person to be well, they need to have their four walls standing strong. Mata and Maleme each experience a death drive in the course of the novel, contrary to what Briar Wood claims when she writes that “*Cousins* is focused on domestic lives that don’t feature extreme and dramatic events such as suicide, rape, incest, pub brawling and wife beating” (75). Indeed, the novel opens with Mata walking in the middle of the road in the dark, talking to her dissociated legs as if they were acting on their own (Grace, *Cousins* 24): she is ready to be run over by a car. As for Maleme,
she is panic-stricken on the eve of her wedding day, because she is “scarry-legged” (224): she practices self-harm which is regarded as one of the signs presaging a suicide attempt (Ministry of Health/Manatū Hauora 4). What saves both girl characters are culturally sensitive forms of therapy. Maleme experiences a metamorphosis which restores her whare tapa whā. When she gets married, she transforms herself into an incarnation of the iwi’s ancestress whose statue dominates the marae (Grace, Cousins 221). She therefore gains in spirituality. As for her role in the whānau’s life, it is crucial as her arranged marriage saves her iwi from further land dispossession. She then feels empowered to act as the leader of her community which, despite some remaining self-doubts, comforts her in her position, her charisma, and her mana. Her mental and physical health are restored as a result and she is no longer vulnerable to suicidal thoughts. By establishing her whare tapa whā, Maleme’s story enters Māori history: with this narrative device, Patricia Grace appropriates Mikhail Bakhtin’s definition of the Bildungsroman in which the hero becomes more realistic as he grows older, leading his story to mingle with history (206), except that Grace’s heroines’ destinies do not fit in with national history, but with the Māori fight for Indigenous sovereignty.

As for Mata, she has the potential to heal (Tawake, “Transforming” 156), despite her complex trauma and the PTSD symptoms that she exhibits. A Freudian talking cure would be inefficient for her as she is silenced, acculturated, exploited, rejected, and systematically discriminated against. What cures her is her whānau’s aroha. Briar Wood explains that the most common meaning ascribed to aroha is love (84). Mata’s aunt, Gloria, is the first character to remind her of this value her mother had offered her prior to her death (Grace, Cousins 46). Gloria showed her the respect due to her as her eldest sister’s child (37), comforting her (54), and sharing grief for Anihera (56). Aroha is also the force that makes Mata speak for the first time with her cousins when they argue over a marble (49; Wood 84), empowering the traumatised girl with a voice of her own within her whānau. Moreover, as Wood notes, Mata Pairama’s very name gives her the healing power that she needs to survive within a destructive Pākehā environment. Indeed, ‘mata’ has several meanings in te reo Māori, including “‘medium of communication with a spirit’, ‘spell, charm’, and ‘prophetic song’” (Wood 87), but also “face, countenance” and “eye” (Te Aka / Māori dictionary). As Doreen D’Cruz notes, Māori regard someone’s head as sacred (“Narrative Spiraling” 465), which highlights the special role Mata was given at her birth as the first-born child. ‘Pai’ means “good, excellent, suitable, pleasant, good-looking, handsome, agreeable, willing”, and the word ‘rama’ refers to “a torch or source of light” (Wood 80). Patricia Grace therefore
creates Māori ethnicity as biologically, culturally, and linguistically coded as Mata’s inner forces resonate with her Māori identity and heritage. Grace uses these strengths to indigenise the Pākehā dominant narrative which debased Mata into a bad and ugly creature. I posit that Grace’s approach to Mata’s recovery is reminiscent of the Māori approach to trauma therapy: Mahi a atua, “tracing the ancestral footsteps of the gods” (Rangihuna et al. 80). Mahi a Atua is defined as

an engagement, an assessment and an intervention based on pūrākau (Maori creation and custom narratives). (…) The stories help individuals to understand the context in which they find themselves and illustrate acceptable pathways forward. They provide snapshots of ‘mental states of being’ and ‘responses to distress and dis-ease’, which are illustrated by the archetypal characters of the Atua (gods) who personify the spectrum of family and social dysfunction as well as resilience, resolution and well-being. (Rangihuna et al. 80)

Mahi a Atua respects the Māori approach to health, te whare tapa whā, and emphasises the communal aspect of healing. At the end of the novel, when Mata comes back to her family’s land to attend Makareta’s tangi, she finds a life narrative for herself (Grace, Cousins 243), a status (252), a family, and a history as she can now see the “shadow people”, her ancestors (255). Mata’s trauma is therefore framed and situated within the past when she reconnects with her whānau’s ancestors and their stories.

As a migrant, Kassabova also challenges Pākehā pressure towards assimilation for her heroine. Nadejda feels powerless and displaced in Aotearoa New Zealand. Before leaving Bulgaria, she and her childhood friend participate in a students’ protest which was violently repressed by the police in Sofia (122). She misses the revolution which overcame the Communist regime by a few days only. This revelation does not trigger a renaissance within her, but increases her feeling of anomie. Nadejda envisions her life via the metaphor of tramping. At the start of the walk, she was a child, accompanied by her parents, and singing a Bulgarian song. At the end, she is on her own, as an adult, and she changed her language for English:

[s]o far down Vitosha Mountain has she walked, all the way through the centre of the Earth where time accelerates, and come out the other end, in the pit of the Echo Crater. Alone. She has lost everyone on the way. (…) She has come out at this end, long-haired, bleeding and speaking another language, a language that none of them understood only a moment ago. (94)

Nadejda imagines herself as a character from a Jules Verne Bildungsroman, walking underground from Bulgaria to New Zealand through the centre of the Earth, through Hell. In
this allegory, her wound (i.e. menstruation), heralding her passage into womanhood, is directly connected to the English language in the text, as if abandoning girlhood was an alienating process and womanhood a foreign country. In exile in Aotearoa New Zealand, this multilingual speaker feels compelled to leave her mother tongue behind her to be understood and be able to testify to her family’s history and her nation’s struggles. During her tour of the North Island, the cynicism with which she looks at New Zealand’s society makes her disparage its international reputation as heaven on earth (Fresno Calleja, “Migration” 20). As her discontent takes centre stage, she reverses the status quo which traditionally marginalises migrants’ voices. Mustafa Kirca and Hywel Dix argue that “the history of literatures of migrants and their reception has unfolded and created a conflicted relationship between national and migrant literatures in which the national literature is perceived as the centre while migrant literature is located on the periphery” (6). Nadejda sees New Zealand through the eyes of the girl she was when she grew up in Communist Bulgaria. She is especially critical of New Zealand’s consumer society and of the way nature is sold, altered, and commodified for touristic purposes (Kassabova 164-165). Nadejda may not be a New Zealander, just a resident. However, her perception of New Zealand as a dystopia reflects the difficulties that she and her family, as political refugees, are facing – uprooted as they are, and traumatised by decades of deprivation, censorship, and repression in their home country (Hron). Nadejda’s family history is affected by repeated migrations, exodus, and exile, and Nadejda herself belongs to the ‘1.5 generation’ of migrants – a term Allen Bartley and Paul Spoonley apply to refer to the specific experience of “children, aged between 6 and 18 years, who migrate as part of a family unit, but who have experienced at least some of their formative socialisation in the country of origin” (68). As she is from a minority in New Zealand, Nadejda feels at odds with the local practices of capitalism and overconsumption. Margarita Alvarez notes that forced migrations, due to political ideologies or economic crises, do not always result in success stories. On the contrary, “[w]ars and economic collapse usually propel immigrations that disrupt the people’s connections with their contexts of significance – that is, their land, language, customs, families, friends, culture, sense of community, and ways of life, among others” (6). Nadejda’s family’s struggle to assimilate into the Pākehā culture of New Zealand makes them feel excluded and estranged from the mainstream consumerist society. Nadejda is thus a “new New Zealander” (Bartley and Spoonley 65) who preserves her hyphenated identity as a Bulgarian-New Zealander.
PART 3: Readers’ Apprenticeship into Aotearoa New Zealand’s Multiculturalism

a) Linguistic Survival

When Morgenstern first defined the Bildungsroman, he showed that this genre has an impact on readers who, like the heroes of the novels they read, undergo a revolution in the way they see the world they live in. Readers become all the more committed when hero/ines experience trauma enmeshed in the history of their country/ies. Indeed, “trauma literature is essentially dialogic as a point of departure” (Onega et al. 9) as trauma telling needs an audience (Laub, “Bearing Witness” 58-59, “Traumatic Shutdown” 315; Waldegrave and Tamasese, “Central Ideas” 99). Readers are therefore given the part of witnesses when attending heroines’ traumatic Bildung. The way testimonies are phrased and formulated, the language(s) chosen by the victims, and the order in which repressed memories reappear all contribute to what Roger Luckhurst paradoxically refers to as “the aesthetics of trauma”: “[t]rauma, in effect, issues a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge. In its shock impact trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma” (79). In this view, trauma provokes both aporia – a symptom which constitutes the core of Freud’s and Caruth’s definitions of trauma as unspeakable – AND palimpsestic rewritings, which affects the composition of the text. Contrary to male Bildungsromane, the three texts studied do not exhibit a linear unfolding of their heroines’ lives, despite following them from youth to middle age in Does It Make Sense To You? and Cousins. Reconnaissance may focus on Nadejda’s maturation process, from her birth to her coming of age into adulthood, yet the narrative is not chronological either.

The form of Cousins has attracted a lot of attention. Briar Wood notes the spiralling form of the novel (72). Chris Prentice compares it to the Māori art of weaving baskets (“Māori Novels” 444), and Doreen D’Cruz argues that the construction of the novel mimics the art of plaiting hair (“Narrative Spiraling” 464) – an activity that is repeated over and over again with Makareta’s hair as a sign of respect to her status as puhí/the chosen bride (Wood 85), because the head is revered in Māori culture (D’Cruz, “Narrative Spiraling” 465). For these four critics, the form they see evolve throughout their readings of Cousins symbolises biculturalism, Māori renaissance, and/or an Indigenous literary device that challenge the European genre of the Bildungsroman. By giving a Māori aesthetic shape to her female Bildungsroman, Grace in fact reappropriates a trope of the genre: Bildungsromane
aesthetically educate their readers (Boes 34; Jeffers 41). Moreover, by focusing on Mata’s journey, Patricia Grace creates a character whose rapport with her family, her culture, and history improves during her apprenticeship into te reo Māori. Mata may not be bilingual nor bicultural, as she has been trapped in the whitening cultural and linguistic process of settler-colonial politics. Mata’s alienation from her own culture is visible when she refers to te reo Māori as “strange sounds” (Cousins 47) and “a silly language” (53). She has developed an “outsider gaze” on her own culture, language, and customs as Sandra Tawake would put it (“Transforming”), appropriating Pākehā racist comments about Māori. Yet, even as a child, Mata did not include an active subject in front of her verbs, as if she had no agency over her own deeds in the English language, as in the following extract: “No brush and couldn’t do her hair. Went into the kitchen” (Grace, Cousins 29). The absence of a personal pronoun where an ‘I’ or a ‘she’ is expected is also Mata’s signature as an adult throughout the novel, the sign of her presence in the very absence of a grammatical subject. Ken Gelder’s notion of an “absent presence” (197) can be applied to Mata’s paradoxical embodiment in the English language. Indeed, even if her disappearance from actions symbolises her victimhood within the Pākehā society, Grace’s syntactical (mis)construction borrows speech patterns from te reo Māori. Ray Harlow explains that, in te reo, verbs often have no visible pronouns to act upon them. By applying a te reo verbal structure onto her usage of the English language, Grace emphasises the fact that, even if Mata’s journey has been a forced disapprenticeship from Māoritanga (Māori culture), she is not fully acculturated as she retains Māori subjecthood in the way she perceives herself in the world.

The borrowed syntactical pattern shows that Mata resists all her life against the annihilation of her Māori sense of self. Grace therefore uses this device to haunt the English language with the presence of the colonised. Kirca and Dix note that, in multilingual and multicultural texts, “each of the very different texts in different languages all ‘teach’ or make visible that alterity is not far away, but that it exists where one might not expect it (at home, in one’s native language)” (6-7). Anglophone readers feel displaced within English – a language they share with Patricia Grace – when they encounter Mata’s Bildung. When reading Mata’s stream of consciousness, readers are invited to explore Māori alterity within the home of the English language as Māori linguistic structures permeate the narrative in English. With Mata, readers also learn the alienating power of the English language when impressed on Māori thoughts. With this reversal of perspective activated from within the colonial language of New Zealand, Grace ‘acculturates’ readers in return and gives them access to the Māori mode
of being in te reo. As Naomi Simmonds argues, “[w]ithin Te Reo Māori there exists a uniquely Māori way of explaining and relating to the world” (12). Thanks to the operation of translation – with te reo Māori working as a ghost language within English – Grace makes readers witness the strength of Māori resistance, unbending, from within Pākehā colonisation.

In Reconnaissance, Kassabova constructs a multilingual text containing several layers, like a matryoshka doll. This image which fashions Nadejda’s Bildung reveals the trauma several generations of her family have been experiencing while resisting Communist repression in Bulgaria. As Mark Redfield notes, “[t]he ‘content’ of the Bildungsroman instantly becomes a question of form, precisely because the content is the forming-of-content, ‘Bildung’ – the formation of the human as the producer of itself as form” (42). Nadejda doesn’t leave her family’s trauma behind her in Bulgaria when she settles in New Zealand. Trauma haunts her in her host country, which makes her mix past and present, her personal history with that of her ancestors. The direction of her Bildung is constantly jeopardised by Nadejda’s childhood memories and hallucinations. Nadejda’s trip across the North Island is a geographic and cultural initiation into her new country, New Zealand, but also an attempt at mastering her family’s past which visits her, consciously and unconsciously – as if Nadejda’s narrative was both composed of and containing the traumatic narratives of other members of her family over several generations. Nadejda, as a matryoshka doll, is both the product and the process of her family’s intergenerational trauma. In Rotorua, Nadejda experiences aporia: “I saw something terrible you know. Just now… I saw something terrible. I can’t… it’s just…” (Kassabova 83). She is unable to communicate the traumatic vision she has just had. An exterior narrator relates this experience for her instead. Nadejda is plunged into another timeframe: Deep Time, and another space as she is in “a petrified sea” (85) at Belogradchik in Bulgaria. In this rocky landscape, she is turned into the heroine of a platform video game in which she feels “someone needs saving” (85). Her mission – and readers’ – is to “decipher” the meaning of her nightmare (86). The metaphor of the video game reveals that Nadejda’s family trauma is endlessly reproduced in her unconscious, leaving her with a feeling of incompleteness as she is unable to access it consciously.

Unable to verbalise her visions, Nadejda is a girl haunted by ghosts. Selma Fraiberg could have said of this character that she grew up with “ghosts in the nursery”. With this phrase, Fraiberg refers to the trauma adults can transmit to children as small as infants. Parents and grandparents are unaware that they are contaminating their (grand-)children with
ghosts from their own past and history. “In every nursery there are ghosts. They are the visitors from the unremembered past of the parents” (165). In Nadejda’s case, her family’s ghosts are invading her dreams, her unconscious, and even her conscious self in moments of epiphany. As in a therapy session, Nadejda physically experiences the metaphor of the tunnel “inside a dark loophole” at Huka Falls (Kassabova 126). Otto Rank explains this metaphor as a reference to the separation from the mother’s body at birth which he sees as the origin of his patients’ liminal trauma, which explains why at the end of a therapy session, when the patient is considered to be cured, she/he/they has/ve the impression of having experienced a metaphorical second birth (19). Following this theory, Nadejda gains access into her unconscious via New Zealand’s geologic features and she witnesses a historical trauma which took place “at Chudnite Mostove, the Wondrous Bridge” (126). In this nightmarish revelation (notably, the passage is in italics like other nightmares related in the novel), she was both a witness – “Nadejda is standing up on the cliffs (...) [and] she distinguishes a long column of women, men and children, moving towards the cliff” (126) – and a victim as she realises afterwards, when commenting on this daydream: “But she doesn’t forget about the green-eyed horseman and the face staring up at her – how could she forget her own dead face?” (129). Present in two bodies at the same time, the boundary between past and present is blurred in Nadejda’s mind. She is overwhelmed by this vision that she does not recognise as her own (129) and tries to consign to distant history (129). Yet, this vision which suddenly appeared in her consciousness is the key to her origins. Kalinna, the lady who proves to be her doppelgänger, is in fact one of her ancestors. She was a ghost in Nadejda’s nursery as “what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (Abraham and Torok, “Topography” 287), and recognising her presence, it is suggested, may help Nadejda come to terms with family secrets. Nadejda’s Bildung may therefore be that of a migrant in New Zealand Literature, leading some critics to consider that Reconnaissance does not belong to New Zealand Literature. However, the trauma she carries around her host country becomes its trauma too, as Kassabova situates it within Nadejda’s physical journey around Aotearoa New Zealand. Giovanna Summerfield and Lisa Downward note that:

[both [the Bildungsroman and the travelogue] involve the reader in the same process of education and development as the main character. Their aim is to affect the reader’s personal growth as well; the reader, (...) in the case of the travelogue, sees with the eyes of the writer the faraway lands with all their treasures, people, and habits. (82)

As a new New Zealander, Nadejda’s existential quest across both islands, in an attempt to escape from her family, paradoxically reveals family secrets deeply buried in her
unconscious. By making her heroine zigzag between multiple cultures, languages, and histories, Kassabova shows readers an alternative route to Pākehā assimilation as Nadejda learns to accept her complex personal, familial, and political journey without having to give up her past and her Bulgarian roots.

In *Does This Make Sense To You?*, Renée projects aspects of herself onto her heroine Flora who becomes an intradiegetic writer whose text, a long and fragmented email to her long lost daughter Chloe, keeps interrupting the telling of her own escape from a life of domestic abuse. The insertions of Flora’s memories of the Home provide a historical background to Flora’s years of anomie as a self-less and self-effacing housewife. The use of the epistolary mode liberates the *Bildungs Heldin*, now the writer of her own autobiographical letter, into taking agency over the course of her own life. Indeed, when her husband forbids her to go to Australia (to unofficially look for Chloe), Flora goes missing, orchestrating her sudden disappearance to make sure no one finds her. Chloe’s answer to her first letter prompts her to act for herself for the first time since her marriage. Chloe bluntly attacks her when she writes: “I just want to know how a woman could give away her baby” (21, italics in the original). The purpose of Flora’s email is therefore to justify herself in her daughter’s eyes, but also on a social level too, as the domestic tragedy she experienced as a Magdalen when she was a teenager becomes a national – even an international – trauma when extradiegetic readers come to read her testimony. Once she has completed her task, Flora stresses how important it is for her that her expected readers – Chloe, but also her own husband and their daughter and son – all read her letter (159). She expects them to change their points of view on her, allowing her to change status within her own family. Her letter is therefore endowed with the power to enact change within familial relationships.

On an extradiegetic level, Flora’s letter is aimed at changing the way readers collectively imagine what happened to pregnant girls once inside Homes. The control State and Church have on girls’ bodies raises concerns as Flora struggles to express the pregnant girls’ everyday life at the Home as she finds no referential element upon which to base her account. The leitmotiv, “Does this make sense to you?” (italics in the original), repeated seven times throughout the Bildungsroman, becomes the mark of Flora’s inability to understand the trauma she experienced as a teenage girl, as it conflicts with her ethics and continues to damage her with the violence of its absurdity. Flora is thus compelled to invent a new language that would incorporate the dystopic social rules girls had to endure while in the care
of the Church. She describes for example how girls were classified according to their due
dates: “I see the various stomachs seated at the table, little high swellings, more prominent
bulges, large low-lying bellies, behind which shelter our babies” (140). The synecdoche
equating a stomach with a pregnant girl gruesomely reduces girls to their procreative function
while denying them the right to be mothers. This device empties pregnancy of its human and
loving potential. Girls are thus trapped in a baby factory in which they are unwilling machines
producing babies for sale for middle-class Pākehā heterosexual couples who are socially
constructed as more deserving people. The girls’ behaviour was constantly observed as the
staff wrote files on them (105). When one of them died while giving birth, the official
explanation was imbued with the concept of the ‘belle mort’ (Kovesi), which can be translated
as ‘death in peace’. To counter this Christian interpretation of death as salvation, Flora
rehabilitates the memory of Freddie as a martyr in her testifying letter. Freddie is thirteen, and
despite being the victim of incest, she is treated as a criminal. Trapped in a vicious circle
between physical exploitation at the Home and inevitable incestuous pregnancies at home
(Renée, Make Sense 140), Freddie suffocates her baby girl at her birth before hanging herself
(141-142). Suicide is the only viable option she finds to end her interrupted girlhood – a tragic
ending commonly found in many female coming-of-age novels (Summerfield and Downward
5-6). Her suicide thus puts an end to her sexual slavery that – I argue – is orchestrated by the
Home’s Matron, as the latter is complicit with Freddie’s father’s abusive treatment. However,
the Matron, with the help of the doctor in charge, falsifies the documents recording Freddie’s
and her baby’s deaths to render them innocuous in archives (143). Flora’s intradiegetic letter
therefore contests official history-making tools by positioning her first-hand account as a
witness and co-victim as a document trauma-readers can trust.

b) Female Bildungsromane’s Absence of Closure

Postmodern female Bildungsromane are often described as refusing closure, a device
which highlights the heroine’s multiplicity of selves throughout her story and allows women
writers not to trap their main character in a finite version of who they can still become
(Snircová, Girlhood 27). Some postmodern female Bildungsromane therefore push Mikhail
Bakhtin’s definition of the genre to its very limits. By leaving their heroines in the process of
becoming at the end of their own story, women writers leave them space for freedom, hope,
and (personal) agency. They also leave space for varying readers’ interpretations. Redfield
argues that “[s]elf-productivity, for Bildung, means the production of selves: in producing itself the genre produces – i.e. educates – readers. The Bildungsroman’s pedagogical power has thus constantly served as the focal point of its self-consciousness and exemplarity” (54). On top of educating readers aesthetically, some female Bildungs conclude without a definitive ending, which gives readers the power to investigate the texts for clues to clarify puzzling conclusions. In Cousins, this pattern is not applicable as the three girl cousins’ Bildungs come full circle when they all come back to their whānau’s land, their point of departure, which respects the aesthetic Māori design of the takarangi. This double spiral pattern separated by a space in between symbolises the Genesis as the two spirals symbolise the Earth Mother, Papatūānuku, and the Sky Father, Ranginui, who created the world when they were forced apart by their many children (Tuwharetoa Bone).

In Does this Make Sense to You?, Flora’s Bildung appropriately ends with her physical, emotional, and financial emancipation as she starts working for a gardening store after separating from her abusive husband. Writing her confessional email to her lost daughter frees her from her past trauma and allows her to move on with her life. Freddie’s Bildung ends with matricide and suicide. However, Ka is a character whose Bildung is not complete at the end of the Bildungsroman. This can be explained by the fact that “Māori women are often intimately entangled in multiple oppressions – those arising from sexism, racism, and colonisation, but others too, such as homophobia” (Simmonds 13). Ka never recovers from her traumatic experience of the Home despite the resourcefulness she shows during that time. An astute analyst of the situation she is trapped in, her sarcasm makes readers see the perversion of the religious system girls have to endure. For instance, she explains that Magdalenenes can escape from imposed starvation by exchanging sex for food with the male caretaker (Renée, Make Sense 133). Forcefully separated from her child at birth, she manages to keep track of him and the family who adopted him. Their accidental deaths however re-open her wound as shown by the complex grief she still carries with her in her 50s (38, 90). Ka dedicates her vocational life to protecting girls who, like her, experience out of wedlock pregnancy. Her work is however the target of public slurs and attacks, such as window smashing (148) and negative propaganda (52). Decried for being a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, a Māori woman, and a harmful influence on girls’ morals, Ka is at odds with the dominant conservative, racist, sexist, and homophobic Pākehā society of the 1980s. Her personal development contradicts Tobias Boes’ comment on the fact that a Bildungsroman educates readers into “national consciousness” (28). Ka’s experience does not
promote the construction of a New Zealand nationalist narrative. At the intersection of several oppressing factors, she on the contrary paves the way for a path away from assimilation. The doubts she still has at the end of the novel, regarding the future of her areligious home for pregnant teens, seem to be given a hopeful ending due to clues disseminated in the text. It seems that she will relocate her workplace to a friend’s house, exchanging buildings, since she is looking for the quiet of the countryside to avoid mob lynching, and her friends need an urban setting as it would be more convenient for their disability (Renée, *Make Sense* 128). Ka also finds a new family, composed of ostracised Annie, her partner Ben, and their baby girl, Ka Flora (157), for whom she plays the role of a grandmother. Renée therefore leaves Ka’s Bildung open by applying the Māori social structure of the whānau, accepting friendship and non-familial bonds into the concept of the family, therefore eschewing the restrictive Pākehā model of the nuclear family. By indigenising the concept of the family, Renée opens the genre of the female Bildungsroman to “mātauranga wāhine (Māori women’s knowledges)” (Simmonds 11), which gives space for working-class lesbian Māori women to become social heroes, recognising their work for various communities, and voicing the needs of minorities.

In a different approach to the absence of closure for the heroine’s Bildung, *Reconnaissance* is a symbolic text which inscribes girlhood trauma within the realm of cryptonymic studies. Cryptonymy was first theorised by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok in the 1970s in France. These two psychoanalysts call ‘cryptophores’ patients who have a crypt deeply buried within themselves. This crypt is responsible for the patients’ distress and disorders. It entombs a taboo – a shameful secret that must not be named. To unlock it, analysts need to decipher the codes that the patients imagined to encrypt their secret when they were children. Abraham and Torok consider that the concealed secret is shameful because it is linked to a crime (incest, rape, and bastardy) and as such cannot be revealed in the light of day (“Topography” 65). To this list, Claude Nachin adds pathological grief as a potential source for the creation of a crypt (*Fantômes* 11). A crypt expresses itself in the interstices of a patient’s testimony, in her/his/their denial of certain acts or words. In this context, denial is not defined as the verbal negation of a situation, but as what is systematically left unsaid and unspoken in a text and which creates a gap of knowledge in the patient’s life story (Nachin, “Malades” 187). The crypt is so well protected that the patient is unaware of its presence and of its impact on her/his/their life, which makes therapists state that a cryptophore “speaks and lives someone else’s words and affects” (Abraham and Torok,
"Lost Object-Me" 227). Cryptonymy is therefore an intergenerational form of trauma which affects a family around a family taboo.

*Reconnaissance* necessitates re-readings as Nadejda is a *cryptophore*, as is revealed by the series of doppelgängers – or matryoshka dolls – she encounters on her path to her biological father’s house. Indeed, when she eventually reaches Nelson where Bojan lives, Nadejda is panic-stricken when she sees a black-and-white photograph of herself, naked: “Nadejda’s heart stops. It’s Nadejda’s face. Nadejda looking at Nadejda. No, impossible” (Kassabova 292-293). Face to face with her mirror image, Nadejda is fascinated and horrified by what she sees, what it means, and what it implies. In this second uncanny encounter (i.e. her vision of Kalinna being the first), the photo is in fact a nude portrait of her mother, Ana, when young, taken by Bojan when they were a couple back in the days. The accumulation of doubles in the novel emphasises the importance of Nadejda’s female lineage whose traumatic experiences are perpetuated from one generation to the next. Nadejda inherited the crypt from her mother, Ana, who suffers from pathological grief following her mother’s mysterious death: “Ana is falling through the hole of her life, like Alice falling in the well. But unlike Alice, her fall does not lead to Wonderland. Nobody can tell just where it leads” (107). This reference to Lewis Carroll’s character shows a parallelism between Ana in her 50s and tweeny Alice while also stressing the discrepancy between both girls: Alice’s adventures are a coming-of-age story, whereas Ana cannot exit her complex childhood trauma.

During her childhood, Ana and her mother were exiled to Deli Orman, a region which was colonised several times by the Ottoman Empire, because they were from a politically dissident family. They were Nestinarki, that is to say: “fire dancers” (132). Dimitris Xygalatas explains that ‘Nestinarki’ is the Bulgarian name given to the Anastenaria in Greece:

[ts]he tradition of the Anastenaria was brought to Greece by refugees from the area of Strandja, at the Black Sea coast, which today is split between Turkey and Bulgaria. Until the nineteenth century, this area was inhabited by Bulgarians, Greeks and Turks. The rituals of the Anastenaria were performed in several villages with either Greek, Bulgarian or mixed population. Fire-walking was performed on various important dates of the Orthodox calendar. (*Burning Saints* 58)

Nestinarki’s barefoot fire-walking ritual is performed in Bulgaria, in the region where Ana grew up, and in Greece. Nestinarki are Christian orthodox who have been persecuted by the Orthodox Church itself and by Turks. Since the nineteenth century, ethnographers, historians, and priests have associated their ritual with the Ancient Greek cult of Dyonisos (59), therefore with Thracian pagan rites. Right up until the 1970s, the Church considered that Nestinarki
were superstitious people possessed by the devil. However, Nestinarki and Anastenaria explain that their ritual is Christian as it honours two saints: Constantine and Helen. Not everyone can pretend to be a Nestinarki, as it is a hereditary role. Some members of their Church can also find solace for their troubles by participating in the fire-dancing rituals. “In the past, the Nestinarstvo rite would only be practised by nestinari families, but sometimes people present at the ritual would also fall into a trance” (Unesco n.d.). Ana and her mother were therefore involved in the local religious rites of Deli Orman, not as political refugees, but as full members of this community. I posit that Nadejda’s PTSD symptoms revealed throughout the novel might therefore be a reference to the Nestinarki’s ritual of fire-dancing. Xygalatas explains that “[e]xtreme somatosensory arousal can effectively alter consciousness and modulate perceptions and attitudes. Among its potential effects are hallucinations, conversion experiences and a sense of divine revelation” (Burning Saints 11). A cultural aspect could therefore be added to the reading of Nadejda’s trauma. What looks like traditional Gothic elements at first sight can in fact be read as culturally sensitive practices of the Nestinarki’s ritual therapy. Kassabova subverts the codes of the British Gothic by turning its tropes such as ghosts and hallucinations into supernatural phenomena associated with the Christian fire-dancing rituals of the Nestinarki. That could be posited as a reason why Ana is a cryptophore who named her daughter Nadejda, which means “hope” (Kassabova 205), so that she would find a cure to their transgenerational trauma. Claude Nachin explains that “[l]e Fantôme au sens métapsychologique est donc une CONTRUCTION PSYCHIQUE DE L’ENFANT, le produit de son travail psychique pour comprendre et soigner son parent” (Fantômes 12; original emphasis), that is to say: “[t]he Phantom in the metapsychological sense is a PSYCHIC CONSTRUCTION OF A CHILD, the product of her/his psychic work to understand and cure her/his parent” (my own translation). This theory of the child as therapist would explain why Nadejda’s ghost in the nursery, Kalinna, is represented as her doppelgänger, like her mother in the photograph. Ana could be the descendent of the child Kalinna had after having been raped by the Turkish mass murderer of Nadejda’s vision. Ana’s expectations for her daughter are therefore quite clear in her choice of first name. Born in a Thracian family on her mother’s side, Nadejda is indeed a Nestinarki and as such is believed to have the ability to interpret dreams, help overcome illness, and foretell the future (Xygalatas, “Ethnography” 59). At the end of her Bildungsroman, Nadejda is yet unable to unlock the crypt which haunts her family’s history. Trauma-readers have to do it for her. Neither Nadejda nor Ana are cured by Bojan’s revelations regarding Nadejda’s paternity and
the fact that his own father was tortured to death by Communists for helping Ana’s father and brother escape to Greece. Nadejda sadly summarises her Bildung: “she has sleep-tumbled through life” (Kassabova 291) until now. Nadejda’s response is thus counter-cathartic (306) as her Bildung leaves her with scars. Nadejda’s trauma is therefore the result of an intergenerational trauma linked to the history of a religious minority in Bulgaria, regularly repressed by Turkish colonisers, and ostracised by the Orthodox Church and the Communist regime. By bringing this complex historical background to New Zealand, Kassabova mingles Nadejda’s personal story with the history of her community seen from a mitochondrial perspective and fashioned by migration, persecution, and colonisation. She thus invites readers (from New Zealand especially) to develop a more subtle perspective on Eastern European political refugees and their cultural practices.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, the three female Bildungsromane studied, *Cousins* by Patricia Grace, *Does This Make Sense to You?* by Renée, and *Reconnaissance* by Kapka Kassabova, challenge the heritage of the genre, whether with regard to its Western individualistic construction of a hero/ine’s development, its patriarchal control of girls’ bodies, its nationalist ambitions, or its colonial background depicting colonies as an adventure playground for Westerners and colonised people as a mass to conquer and dominate. The three women writers experiment with the tropes of the genre. Girl characters, their communities, and intra- and extra-diegetic readers all experience a Bildung, an evolution, an education. New Zealand’s complex political situation is not idealised into a nationalist and idyllic discourse. On the contrary, Grace, Renée, and Kassabova question the very existence of a New Zealand nation that would be homogenous, inviting their readers to see instead the damage such a colonial discourse causes to Māori girls, but also to girls who come from backgrounds of forced migration due to war and dictatorship.

The *Bildungshelden*’s traumas explored in this chapter reflect cultural traumas the girls’ communities suffered under various forms of colonisation. In *Cousins*, the personal journeys of Mata, Makareta, and Maleme are inflected by the confiscation of their iwi’s land and by the forced process of assimilation the Māori community experienced during British
colonisation and beyond, jeopardising their epistemology, their language, their art, and their customs. Grace also emphasises mana wāhine, giving girl characters power to participate in the impetus towards Māori sovereignty. In Does This Make Sense to You?, Renée pays tribute to the victims of the Christian ideology enforcing the institutionalisation of unmarried pregnant girls as Magdalenes. She denounces the collaboration of Church and State in the confinement of mothers-to-be, their forced labour in laundries, and the dubious ethics of the adoption services applying a racist and ableist distinction between babies that were either sold to Pākehā heterosexual married couples or discarded. The politics of segregation Renée herself suffered as a child are denounced in the way Māori girls, like Ka, are discriminated against in the Pākehā world. In Reconnaissance, Nadejda’s feeling of anomie makes her see through the illusion of New Zealand’s myth of heaven on earth. Her excavation of her Bulgarian family’s past while touring her host country allows her to uncover an intergenerational trauma which affects the women of her family following wars, authoritarianism, colonisation, deportation, and rapes. By inserting alterity within the homogenising concept of Pākehāness, Kassabova forces readers to recognise the existence of hyphenated identities in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as the chaos historical traumas brought to Europe, exploding the idea of a unified European origin for Pākehā.

Female Bildungsroman’s influence over the way their readers perceive the world is another aspect Grace, Renée, and Kassabova explore. In Cousins, Grace educates readers into Māori art, lore, and language. The form of her novel reflects Māori visual symbols; familial relationships mirror the roles members have within their whānau; and the insertion of speech patterns borrowed from te reo Māori decolonises the English language. In Does This Make Sense to You?, Renée empowers Flora, her Bildungsheldin, by giving her agency over her life as she becomes the intradiegetic trauma-writer of her experience in a Magdalene Home. Flora’s email to her long-lost daughter enlightens readers about the lifestyle endured by penitents, and contradicts official archives written by representatives of the Church which erased the horrors girls and their babies suffered in the dystopic world in which they were incarcerated. As for Reconnaissance, it is often read as an example of migrant literature, yet Kassabova destabilises Pākehā norms by positioning her heroine’s defamiliarising viewpoint on New Zealand at the centre of her text. Readers thus confront their cultural and literary preconceptions about Eastern Europe as Nadejda proves to be the member of a singular minority, the Nestinarki, whose rituals – though decried as superstitious by the Church, the
Ottoman Empire, Western Europe, and the Soviets – defy readers’ expectations of Gothic literature as they are instead accorded a healing power in the face of intergenerational trauma.
CHAPTER 6.
“Young Adult Fiction or How to Train Teenagers in Reading Girlhood Trauma”
Introduction

Numerous critics and writers have commented on the trauma minorities in Aotearoa New Zealand have experienced over the years as a result of not being represented in children’s books (Gilderdale; Mahy; W. Mills 20; Grace, From the Centre; Matuku and Husband). The invisibility of some communities in children’s literature is revelatory of their lack of power and agency in Aotearoa New Zealand’s society and politics as a whole (Layfield 218). For instance, Patricia Grace notes that, when she was a child, “I never found myself in a book. (...) No one was brown or black unless there was something wrong with them or they held a lowly position in society” (From the Centre, n.pag.). To the trauma triggered by their invisibility in mainstream published children’s literature, was added the dearth of publications by Māori authors for children. Hence, Patricia Grace is hailed as the first Māori woman to have been published in the field of children’s literature with her short story, The Kuia and the Spider (1981), illustrated by Māori artist, Robyn Kahukiwa. However, Māori literature has a long-established tradition of mythical narratives for children (Matuku, “What the Heck” npag.). Colonial trauma also affects Māori communities and their representations in New Zealand children’s literature as Māori were often regarded and represented as children, or adults with infantile minds, in colonial literature for children published in New Zealand during the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Bradford, “Reading” 331; Postman, “Disappearing”). Social Darwinist theories construed Indigenous people as ‘primitive’, and at the bottom of a (fictitious) evolutionary scale, which situated the European Man at the top in the seat of Progress, and colonised peoples in the past as forms of regress (Froud 52-53). Māori writers for children therefore confront in their works the collective imagination of New Zealanders shaped by two centuries of colonisation, and which often preconceives Māori people in racist, pejorative, and demeaning images.

For Pākehā children, until the 1950s, the only children’s books available were colonial literature for children from Britain and superhero comics from the United States. Betty Gilderdale argues that texts written by Edith Howes and Esther Glen for New Zealand children between the 1910s and the 1930s had been forgotten after the Great Depression and the Second World War (“New Zealand” 1150). Margaret Mahy notes the difficulty Pākehā, Māori, and migrant children had, as a result, in identifying themselves as ‘New Zealanders’ per se (“Finding Your Reflection”). Children’s literature has often been connected with the development of nations, and New Zealand’s case seems to repeat this pattern on the surface.
Although New Zealand’s founding document as a settler colony is the Treaty of Waitangi signed in February 1840, New Zealanders started to develop a national sentiment, and perceive New Zealand as a nation distinct from the British Empire, as a result of the Battle of Gallipoli fought between April 1915 and January 1916. The British entry into the European Union in 1973 further amplified the separation with New Zealand as the latter was subsequently compelled to open its economic markets to Asia and the Pacific to survive, given the loss of British economic support. For Wayne Mills, the 1970s saw the real birth of a distinct New Zealand children’s literature (20), a birth he associates with social movements for Māori sovereignty, women’s rights, and civil rights. Even if the very existence of a New Zealand identity seems debatable to many (Moon; Roberts 386), some critics claim that New Zealand children’s literature is distinctive due to four themes: “the New Zealand environment, Maori [sic] language and culture, New Zealand’s history, and diversity” (Daly 75). New Zealand children’s literature thus illustrates the local fauna and flora, highlighting its specificity and uniqueness. It also appropriates te reo Māori (the Māori language) and Māoritanga (Māori customs). A study shows that te reo Māori is more present in children’s books than in any other literary genres (Daly 74-75), although a study in gender and ethnic inclusiveness in Aotearoa New Zealand children’s literature in 2017 revealed that only 7 novels out of 100 had a Māori character (Heritage n.pag.). The insertion of te reo Māori words in children’s literature can be seen as positive if it reflects a growing commitment to speak te reo, the development of a distinct New Zealand English, and the increasing agency and visibility of Māori communities. However, the appropriation of te reo Māori words into the English language is also perceived as a threat, another attempt at colonising what remains of Māori languages, and as one more way to consume Māori culture for capitalistic purposes.

The fact that the teaching of ‘Aotearoa New Zealand history’ has long been optional in schools around New Zealand has contributed to the dissemination of discriminations, as many New Zealanders imagine their nation as raceless and class-free, turning a blind eye on the intergenerational, historical, and cultural trauma suffered by the Māori, Pacific Islanders, and the Asian communities (O’Malley). The current Labour government announced in 2019 that a new curriculum including a non-Eurocentric version of Aotearoa New Zealand history will be implemented from 2023 in every school in the country (Rowe, “History Curriculum”). The diversity of the New Zealand population can yet conceal a certain communitarianism within society, which can complicate people’s identification with one shared New Zealand national identity. Nicola Daly notices that the diversity of New Zealand’s society is often left untold in
children’s literature as representations of migrants, refugees, and families composed of same sex parents are quite rare (77-78). Moreover, despite the four criteria highlighted earlier as evidence of a distinct New Zealand children’s literature, Scots were not deterred from attempting to claim Hairy MacLairy, one of the most famous heroes of Aotearoa New Zealand children’s literature, as theirs (Woulfe n.pag.). Lynley Dodd, the creator of this hairy canine character, when interviewed on the subject, attempted to circumvent this cultural theft by highlighting the uniqueness of New Zealand’s landscape in her picture books, with Pōhutukawa trees, ponga trees, and Wellington Botanic Garden drawn for a New Zealand child audience (Woulfe n.pag.). This example reveals that New Zealand’s so-called specificities in children’s books can sometimes remain invisible from abroad.

Young adult (YA) fiction emerged in the 1960s and is now considered as a genre in its own right (Alsup, “Introduction” 1; Coats 316; McCulloch 41). Addressed to a readership aged between 8 and 18 (and sometimes more, as in ‘crossover fiction’ read by both young and old (Falconer 557; Marcoin 32)), YA novels often feature a teenage protagonist whose role is to solve problems or conflicts with friends. During the course of their adventures, the hero/ine usually comes of age, constructing teenagehood as a rite of passage between childhood and adulthood. YA fiction is often built on a circular narrative as the youth leave their homes to discover the ‘real’ world of adults before coming back home with more knowledge, experience, and self-understanding (McCulloch 174). As “[i]deas about children’s books are inextricably bound up with cultural constructs of childhood” (Immel 19), representations of Aotearoa New Zealand’s multicultural society in children’s literature can (ideally) educate New Zealand teenage readers about their real-life friends’ and schoolfellows’ cultures and create a more tolerant society as these books reveal a wide spectrum of cultural expectations of children. In this context, I intend to compare and contrast several young adult fictional texts which reflect the creativity of this genre. This research includes novels like The Changeover: A Supernatural Romance by Margaret Mahy (1984); In Lane Three, Alex Archer by Tess Duder (1987); The Lake at the End of the World by Caroline Macdonald (1988); Fleur Beale’s trilogy I am Not Esther (1998), I Am Rebecca (2014), and Being Magdalene (2015); The 10 p.m. Question by Kate De Goldi (2008); Bugs by Whiti Hereaka (2013); Flight of the Fantail by Steph Matuku (2018); but also one short story: “Break Up Day” by Kyle Mewburn (2015); and one graphic narrative: Something Alive by Jem Yoshioka (2018). This corpus comprises women writers of various ethnicities: five Pākehā, two Māori – Whiti Hereaka is Ngāti Tūwharetoa and Te Arawa, while Steph Matuku is Ngāti Tama, Ngāti Mutunga, and Te
Atiawa – and one Japanese New Zealander. For the purpose of this study, I will consider to what extent women writers of YA fiction seek to educate their young readers about girlhood trauma. At first, I will focus on the way girls’ interpersonal and cultural trauma is approached for a young audience. I will then examine the way trauma forces girl characters and their readers to come of age. Finally, I will consider girls in the wild or girls gone wild, studying the impact of environmental trauma in the development of girl characters.

PART 1: Girl Characters and Interpersonal Trauma

Trauma is a gendered experience which can affect girls and women in a different way from boys and men (Andermahr and Pellicer-Ortin, “Trauma Narratives” 4; Escobar-Chew, Carolan and Burns-Jager 47). Behind this argument lies a difference in the forms of traumatisation experienced by the survivors, depending on whether they are male, female, or non-binary. For a long time, girls and women were denied the medical diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as it was exclusively reserved for (male) soldiers. Yet, recent research into PTSD following armed combat shows that women are more deeply traumatised than men and for a longer period (Frank et al. 2). Specialists argue that women tend to develop complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) as the trauma they experience in time of war is combined with earlier traumatising factors which were experienced during childhood in the form of interpersonal trauma (Courtois 413). Interpersonal trauma is classified under two categories according to the degree of acquaintance between the trauma survivor and her/his/their abuser. ‘High-betrayal trauma’ refers to “sexual, emotional, or physical abuse perpetrated by someone close to the victim (e.g. a romantic partner or friend)” whereas “medium-betrayal traumatic events are these same traumatic experiences perpetrated by someone not close to the victim (e.g. an acquaintance or a stranger)” (Frank et al. 2). People who survive interpersonal trauma, whatever its degree, often report PTSD symptoms. Bronwyn Dalley argues that, in Aotearoa New Zealand, girls are more commonly subjected to sexual abuse than boys, which is confirmed by UNICEF who notes that, in 2015, 20% of girls had been reported as submitted to sexual abuse, compared to 9% of boys. How do women writers tackle sensitive topics such as attachment and separation, or domestic violence, when books are addressed to a young audience who may experience these forms of interpersonal trauma themselves?
a) **Attachment and Separation**

Early childhood is a time when attachments are formed with ideally reliable parental figures (Escobar-Chew et al. 47; Bowlby and Holmes, “Caring” 12). The trust and love between parent and child are essential for the child to develop fully and feel safe in the world she/he/they explore(s) little by little. Severed attachments or the failure to build bonds with a young child can be damaging in the long term, as studies on neglect and abuse have revealed (Courtois 414; Escobar-Chew et al. 48; Coles 90; Amacher 17). Yet, some YA critics argue that separation from home, friends, and family is a necessary step young hero/ines need to take to embark on an adventure before coming back home (Bradford, “Reading” 334; McCulloch 42; Kuo 34). In this formulation of the young hero/ine’s journey, trauma can be the trigger that forces children to leave their homes. From this perspective, childhood trauma would be a necessary evil! This ready-made formulation is yet not evident in most stories within my corpus, even if the theme of separation is often tackled, especially in the context of divorce and death.

Divorce has been a popular theme in YA fiction since the 1970s-80s in parallel with the rise of divorce rate in Western countries, as authors often choose to tackle this painful topic which can affect young readers’ personal lives (Coats 321). Margaret Mahy labels these texts “divorce books” (*Changeover* ch. 3 n.pag.), making of them a subgenre per se. Laura Chant, the heroine of *The Changeover*, contests the putative healing power of divorce YA fiction. Laura is a fourteen-year-old Pākehā girl who lives in Christchurch in the 1980s with her three-year-old brother Jonathan, nicknamed Jacko, and their mother, Kate, who works as a bookseller. When her parents divorced, Kate offered divorce-themed YA stories to Laura to help her cope with her parents’ separation and the break-up of her family nucleus. However, Laura rejected them on the principle that these books increased her pain instead of showing her how to deal with it. In Chapter 3, we can read: “[s]he had been given such [divorce] books to read and despised them, because they tried to be kind and sensible and Laura thought it was like being kind and sensible to a sacrificed Aztec whose living heart was being held up for all to see” (n.pag.). Margaret Mahy offers readers an ironic metafictional commentary on her own inclusion of a divorce plot within her magic realist novel. She alerts her teenage readers to the domestic drama included in her story, as if satirising her own unoriginal attempt at writing about a trope of YA Fiction. However, when Laura eventually admits feeling pain following her parents’ divorce which was traumatising for her, Mahy approaches the issue with tact, in a
thoughtful way, and without didacticism. For example, she notes that Laura and Kate became closer due to the drama they lived: “[t]heir feelings had grown around the sharp, wounding edges which didn’t hurt any more but were still there, fossils of pain laid down in the mixed-up strata of memory” (ch. 3 n.pag.). The neat nuclear family is for them pre-history, as they believe its pain is locked up in a stable frame relegated to the past. In Chapter 7, Laura associates her father’s departure from home with “mourning” (n.pag.). This metaphor reveals that she had grieved her father’s absence and buried it deeply within her.

It seems that, due to the genre of the fantasy to which The Changeover belongs, the trauma experienced by Laura’s family can only be healed with a symbolic sacrifice: the risk of losing Jacko to a sudden, strange, and fatal illness. Jacko indeed was preyed upon by a paedophilic supernatural creature, a lemur or larvae, called Mr Carmody Braque, which takes possession of young human bodies to take shape and administer its/their curses (ch. 7). Jacko’s body becomes the recipient of this ancient spirit which haunts and absorbs his life and energy, illustrating the divide between signifier and signified (Saussure). His body therefore becomes uncanny for his close relatives who distinguish the features of Mr Braque inside the figure of their loved child: “[Jacko] was smiling dreadfully, his teeth unnaturally large, his face in retreat around the smile, but his eyes – at least his eyes were still his own” (ch. 4 n.pag.). Beside his death bed at the hospital, Laura’s parents are reunited for the first time in three years, old arguments having weakened at the prospect of their innocent child’s premature death. Laura’s chance encounter with her father comes as a shock: she does not recognise him, but she recognises the pain he caused her when he left home. His presence reawakens past wounds within her. As Julia Eccleshare argues, “[t]o acknowledge parental failing is an extraordinarily difficult thing and many stories have served as valuable conduits for analysing the pain and trauma that can be caused” (547). To do so effectively, Margaret Mahy’s narrator focalises on Laura’s thoughts and feelings, giving readers an insider’s perspective into the impact parental divorce can have on teenage children. Unable to cope with a return of repressed emotions, Laura decides to perform a changeover and become a witch like her boyfriend Sorensen Carlisle to save her brother from spiritual vampirism. When she succeeds in her magic task and annihilates the lemur, her brother miraculously recovers.

When she comes back home, Laura is metamorphosed into an experienced young woman who is able to take agency over her life to protect her loved ones. Her household is also healed from the traumatic memory of her parents’ divorce and both her parents can move
on to their respective new love lives. Laura and Jacko have also gained a father in the figure of a Canadian librarian, Chris Holly. Andrea Immel argues that “[f]antasy needs the child as mediator” (“Fantasy” 239), and this statement proves true in *The Changeover*. Indeed, Jacko is the mediator between two worlds, one natural and the other supernatural; between his divorced parents, as his terminal illness enables a truce between them; and between his mother and her new partner, Chris, who becomes his new father figure. At the intersection of seemingly irreconcilable forces (reality/fiction, divorced parents, love/parenthood), the innocent boy’s internal journey into illness and evil offers a bridge for opposites to meet on common grounds. Mark Froud notes that:

> [t]he concept of ‘progress’ is also troubled in its meaning of ‘development’ and ‘advancement’: if a vulnerable child can be lost (abducted, murdered, abused or simply neglected) then claims that society has grown more civilised and enlightened are shown to be premature at best. (58)

Even if Margaret Mahy’s depiction of ‘social progress’ is full of scepticism when she describes the rapid spread of urbanisation in the countryside of a constantly growing Christchurch, no toddler should be sacrificed for the loss of spirituality and culture felt by the Pākehā population. The witchcraft which remains in the nascent consumer society in New Zealand is represented as a protective and caring magic which came from the British shores via the Carlisle witches:

> [o]nce upon a time the Carlisle family had lived on a farm on the edge of the city and had owned the whole Gardendale Valley, though they called it by another name. But the city crept out and out, an industrious amoeba, extending itself, engulfing all it encountered. The value of the land changed, it was re-zoned and, when the old farmer died, his brothers, city men themselves, subdivided and sold the fields where horses and sheep had grazed, turned away the cows and the bull, and sent in the bulldozer. For a little while the terrain became spectral as roads and street lighting went in ahead of any houses. (ch. 5 n.pag.)

In this passage, Margaret Mahy justifies the presence of witches in New Zealand as a result of British colonisation. The Carlisle family are colonists who own large areas of land in Aotearoa, although they lost a part of their property when they invested in ‘progress’: real estate, malls, and urbanisation. The transformation of the New Zealand landscape to accommodate the American consumer way of life is encapsulated in the metaphor of the blob, aka. *physarum polycephalum*, whose brainless “amoeba” – gigantic cell – invades the land with its ramifications, as in the American horror movie, *Blob*, by Irvin S. Yeaworth Jr. (1958) in which it attacks a town in Pennsylvania. Having experienced several waves of colonisation, New Zealand is described as forgetting its past. Māori presence is not acknowledged – except
once, briefly, when it is mentioned that “one of [Laura’s] eight great-great-grandfathers was a Polynesian” (ch. 1 n.pag.). British occupation is relegated to the past, to a fictional past to be precise, when Mahy employs the fairy-tale opening: “[o]nce upon a time”. Laura’s traumatic experience of her parents’ divorce could consequently reflect a cultural divorce on the national scale felt by Pākehā at large during the Cold War, when the bonds with Britain and its “daughter” New Zealand (Smith et al. 98) were attenuated by the saturation of New Zealand culture with American cultural products and values. The inclusion of British magic folklore into New Zealand YA fiction is therefore revelatory of a nascent nationalist feeling linked to the historical bonds between New Zealand and its former British coloniser, but also to a certain nostalgia towards Britishness, at the expense of Māori culture.

Separation is further explored in the corpus that I examine in this chapter in its relation to death, under the polysemic form of tangi (death; funeral; grief) (Māori dictionary/Te Aka). This theme is particularly significant in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature as it recalls Witi Ihimaera’ first novella, Tangi (1973), which is regarded as the first extended fictional narrative written by a Māori male author, and which is often studied in English Literature classes in New Zealand high schools (Renée, These Two Hands 85-86). Tangi also plays an important part in Māori culture. As a social, cultural, and linguistic ceremony of initiation celebrating the journey of a member of a whānau onto the ancestral land, tangi is also a long process for those who remain and are left with their grief. The liminal scene in Flight of the Fantail is a road accident which leads to the deaths of three quarters of a class, the teacher, and the bus driver. The teenage survivors are left in the wilderness, on their own. Eva, Devin, and Rocky compose one group; Idelle and Theo a second group; Jahmin and Ian a third one; and Awhina roams between all the groups. The bodies of the victims are not buried but left to rot, and Idelle scavenges the remains of her schoolfellows to find food, but also jewellery, phones, clothes, tents, and other electronic devices. Left on her own, Idelle proves unethical and lethal towards other survivors. She eventually kills Theo because he could not contact rescue services (ch. 19). She is a sadistic murderer and thief whose behaviour recalls that of Nazi officers (Berge et al.). In contact with nature – and with sci fi elements which manipulate her mind – this girl character loses her humanity and breaks every rule of the social contract, illustrating Social Darwinist theories which justified colonisation claiming that the strongest only could survive. Theo’s body is so mutilated that, when Eva, Devin, Rocky, and Jahmin, find him, they struggle to identify him, so grotesque it looks: “[i]t didn’t look like a person. It looked like a prosthetic model from a horror film” (ch. 29 n.pag.). Idelle
cut off Theo’s head and replaced it with a cell phone. This first encounter with death is therefore imbued with cinematic references, which creates a distance between the object – a masqueraded cadaver – and the viewers. The spectacle of death in this instance is both abject and parodic. Julia Kristeva defines the abject as “pervers car il n’abandonne ni n’assume un interdit, une règle ou une loi ; mais les détourne, fourvoie, corrompt ; s’en sert, s’en use, pour mieux les dénier” (Pouvoirs 23), that is to say that the abject is “pervasive as it does not give up nor respect any interdiction, rule or law; but it circumvents, misguides, and corrupts them; it exploits and uses them to better negate them” (my own translation). To see a cadaver is the most notable expression of the abject for Kristeva as death is here a statement, not an abstraction anymore. Yet, in this case, young readers can find it hard not to laugh at the exaggeration of the montage which turns the body of a teenage boy into a gory prop for a B-movie.

The second encounter with death highlights the cultural dimensions of one’s approach to death. Philippe Ariès, who (in a way) founded Childhood Studies in the 1960s, later focused his research on the cultural aspects of death, emphasising the fact that death, though a biological event, is also a social, cultural, and historical phenomenon due to the variation of rituals and significations attached to it around the world. In Flight of the Fantail, a medical diagnosis would prove that Jahmin is clinically dead when he finds Devin, Eva, and Rocky in the bush. Indeed, he has no heartbeat; he does not need to breathe, nor eat, nor sleep, and his body is cold. Yet, because he is ‘alive’, speaks, thinks, and moves, his team regards this diagnosis with disbelief. Rocky is the only one who insists on the fact that Jahmin is a spirit. He bases his argument on the observation of (super)natural signs:

Rocky waved his hand for attention, eyes wide. ‘You had a fantail stalking you?’ Jahmin turned away, palms pressing randomly over his chest area. ‘Yeah, so?’ ‘That’s a tohu. A sign. Fantails are messengers of death.’ ‘I’m not really interested in ancient Māori wisdom right now, okay?’ ‘No wait, listen. Māui, the trickster, the mischievous demigod, tried to cheat death and live forever crawling through the vagina of Hine-nui-te-pō, the Goddess of the Underworld. But a fantail who was watching burst out laughing, and the Goddess woke up and crushed Māui to death between her thighs.’ When nobody had anything to say to this, Rocky added solemnly, ‘If Māui had succeeded, we’d all be immortal.’

‘Awesome, bro. But my Māori blood is, like, minimal as. I don’t think it counts.’ (…) ‘If a fantail flied into your house,’ Rocky persisted, ‘it means that you or someone you know is going to die. And it’s true. It happened to me when my uncle Pete passed.’ (ch. 39 n.pag.)
In this passage, Rocky reads Jahmin’s story through the prism of mātauranga Māori (the Māori system of knowledge). The flight of a fantail above Jahmin is a tohu (sign, mark, symbol) of death (Te Aka/Māori Dictionary). The origin of this bad omen stems from oral literature recounting Māui’s exploits. The fantail is described as a mischievous bird which betrays Māui in his attempt to become immortal. The fantail is made responsible for Māui’s death because its song woke Hine-nui-te-Pō who is the guardian of the dead’s souls (New Zealand Electronic Text Collection/Te Pūhikotuwi o Aotearoa). Rocky’s interpretation is met with a certain reticence, and yet the teenage boy remains faithful to his knowledge, refusing to hongi Jahmin as this greeting is a sacred act involving the living (ch. 53). As Clare Bradford notes, Indigenous authors write for two audiences: their own community, and other readers who are not versed in (here, in *Flight of the Fantail*) Māori epistemology (“Reading”). Pākehā’s dismissive attitude towards mātauranga Māori is expressed in their treatment of this non-Western knowledge as belonging to the past. Yet, (intra- and extra-diegetic) Pākehā gradually come to admit that Rocky is right and that his epistemological framework is valid.

As Philippe Ariès argued, childhood but also death are social and cultural constructs. Steph Matuku consequently educates teenage readers with a Māori construction of death, while playing with the codes of teenage horror movies as Jahmin calls himself “Zombie-Man”!

In Western communities, death is an event which often disrupts the social and familial fabric in which children (ideally) are supposed to safely come of age. In *Alex Archer, Lane Three*, the eponymous heroine loses her boyfriend, Andy, in a car accident in the middle of the novel. Readers who were following their burgeoning romance are shocked with Alex when the news of his death breaks. Accidental deaths by car belong to Freud’s list of single traumatic events (Caruth). In this context, it is worth considering how Tessa Duder conveys the pain of Andy’s death without traumatising her young (female) readers. Several techniques are used, from dialogism to empathy, to defuse the impact of trauma. Duder orchestrates a tension between knowing and not-knowing, preparing her readers for a drama: “[w]hich brings me, reluctantly, dreadfully, to the morning of 2 December, a date which is for ever carved into my heart. (…) I knew from the minute I walked in the back door something was odd” (ch. 12 n.pag.). After initial disbelief at the news, Alex crumples into her mother’s arms, positioning herself like a foetus, cradled like a baby, and losing the memories associated with this crucial moment. Then Duder accompanies her main character until she overcomes her grief. Alex gives herself stepping stones to fulfil in Andy’s memory. The first promise is to perform a song by Noel Coward on stage, dressed up as a man; the second one, be qualified
for the Olympic Games. In the grieving process, Alex starts communicating with her dead lover in her mind, which gives her strength and confidence. As Karen Coates notes,

[t]he trauma of facing your own mortality requires some working through, and many teens do this work by seeking out books where the characters face the death of a loved one or a sibling. By repeatedly facing this trauma in fiction, they fortify their mental defences against its occurrence in real life. (323)

When reading *Alex Archer*, young readers experience grief by proxy, through the identification process. Like the heroine, they feel pain at the loss of a loved one, sadness, isolation, loneliness, but they also learn coping techniques to continue living with/out the beloved. Duder shows teenage readers that personal challenges (like singing in public to commemorate a lost one) and internal dialogism (keeping the dialogue alive despite death) can strengthen survivors and help them recover from the trauma of losing someone.

In *The 10 p.m. Question*, Kate de Goldi tackles the topic of girlhood trauma by focusing on its ripple effects on the second generation, thus as a form of intergenerational trauma. Francie Parsons is a baker who lives in Wellington with her husband (nicknamed “Uncle George”), their three teenage kids (Louie, Gordana, and Frankie), their cat (the Fat Controller), and her three aunts who visit them very frequently. Yet the story is not about her, but about her youngest son whose thought processes are accessible to readers via free indirect speech. As Michael Fitzgerald et al. note, “[t]he theoretical concept of the intergenerational transmission of trauma suggests that mothers with histories of trauma are at increased risk of passing on their traumatic experiences to their own children” (406). At age twelve, Frankie is damaged by his mother’s childhood trauma, though he does not recognise his pain which is constantly diffracted onto other symptoms and objects. Young readers explore the world through Frankie’s subjective and biased viewpoint and gradually change perspective on his condition as he excavates his family’s past. In Chapter 1, Frankie appears to have developed obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD): “he stood very still and mentally perused the school day. This was his habit each morning. It was so he wouldn’t forget anything. He was really very organised” (n.pag.). The pre-adolescent boy, about to enter his rebellion phase, keeps making lists to get a grip on reality. He also repeats the same gestures and takes the same route every day. Yet, he also has fits of depression: “this morning his litany of worries was causing an irretrievable gloom to settle on him, heavy as a saturated beach towel” (ch. 1 n.pag.). The metaphor comparing worries to sand reveals the erosion occurring within the boy. Against his will, he feels a prey to cataclysms, which explains why he suffers from
hypochondria as well. Frankie’s encounter with Sydney, a white Australian girl, pushes him out of his comfort zone. As she constantly asks questions, the boy realises that some of them need to be dodged because answering would awaken unpleasant memories and disrupt the status quo of his family. Yet, slowly but surely, he starts questioning the way things are as a result: his mother cannot leave the premises of their home without breaking down; he is a parentified child who is in charge of most of the family’s chores; his father spends all his time working and is rarely present; his sister escapes from home to avoid her responsibilities; and his brother, though a young adult, cannot really leave the family’s nest. His quest leads him to his great aunts’ house where he confronts his memories from his early years. Aunt Alma explains that she became Francie’s surrogate mother when Francie’s parents died in a car accident. She describes the orphan girl as bereft and rendered fragile by her loss (ch. 8). She also reveals to Frankie that she was his surrogate mother too when Francie broke down twice, when Frankie was four and when he was six. At that time, the latter was unable to take care of herself, bedridden as she was. When Frankie recalls these days, he feels like he is “about a hundred and five (…), and heavy with the weight of memory and experience” (ch. 3 n.pag.), as if he had developed a form of the Hutchinson-Gifford syndrome, a genetic disease which prematurely ages children. Alma shows drawings as proofs (ch. 8). Seeing the pictures he had drawn, Frankie’s repressed memories come back to him. Francie’s separation from her youngest child had affected every member of the family, as Gordana recalls that she did not fathom why her baby brother did not live with them (ch. 6). Girlhood trauma and complex grief can therefore have long-term repercussions on women but also on their children who vicariously bear their mother’s trauma (Escobar-Chew et al.). De Goldi brings her young readers to realise that parents’ mental health issues can affect the whole household.

b) Patriarchal Violence

Children’s literature and young adult fiction could be regarded as acts of ventriloquism in which adult writers give voice to children and teenage characters. As Tison Pugh notes, “[b]ecause adults write most children’s literature, (…) it is a unique genre in that its authors create their fictions for an audience of whom they are by definition no longer a part” (2). Addressed to non-adult readers – although parents accompany young children in the stories by reading them aloud (Immel et al. 24-25) or helping them out with the reading process; and although parents also read YA fiction sometimes to bond with their teenage
children or simply survey their readings – literature for children and teenagers remains a paradox as it is written by adults, published by adults, selected for prizes by adults, and academically critiqued by adults. Froud, when talking about Western societies, explains that “[o]ur culture is almost entirely written by adults, and therefore the voices of children, when they do appear, are filtered through, if not completely imagined by adults” (7). In this statement, children seem to be mere figments of adults’ imagination, and yet they are also real human beings. In fact, children – however old (or young) they are – are socially, culturally, and linguistically constructed. Some critics even comment on the fact that Western societies tend to ‘segregate’ children from the adult world, protecting them from the worries and hardships of everyday life, but also taking their agency away from them (Immel et al. 21-22).

The limit of this theory perceiving Childhood as being a different country from Adulthood is that the border between both zones is actually fluid and that many children, even in Western societies, have adult responsibilities at home, like Laura who must look after her brother when her single mother is at work in The Changeover, or Sydney who babysits her sisters in The 10 p.m. Question. Conversely, Steph Matuku exaggerates this impression of quarantine when she revisits the trope of adventure stories in The Flight of the Fantail. As no research crews come to rescue, a bunch of teenagers test their limits and survivor skills in the bush without adult surveillance and advice. It is worth noting that the children who thrive outside of ‘civilisation’ – aka. adults’ control – are those who were perceived as social failures at school and in New Zealand society at large, due to their social class or their ethnicity. Indeed, Devin, a Pākehā girl from the lower classes, and Rocky, of Māori descent, are perceived by their peers as oddities. Yet, their respective upbringings give them resources to stay alive in uncharted territory. This reversal of situation highlights the biases behind social constructs of success stories in contemporary capitalist New Zealand. The poor and the Māori may be excluded from the spheres of power, yet, in (fictional) apocalyptic situations, they are the fittest to survive. Steph Matuku therefore emphasises the superficiality of Pākehā-led liberal New Zealand when she draws a Terra Incognita within the North Island to test the limits of children’s behaviours as if they were guinea pigs in a psychological study on teenagers. By doing so, Matuku parodies adventure stories written for boys during colonisation. Indeed, Flight of the Fantail puts into practice Linda Tuhīwai-Smith’s defiance of Western knowledge when she argues that “research exists within a system of power. What this means for indigenous researchers as well as indigenous activists and their communities is that indigenous work has to ‘talk back to’ or ‘talk up to’ power” (Decolonizing 357).
Mātauranga Māori as well as bush skills eventually save the group from starvation – not Western academic erudition.

The impact education and upbringing have on children’s development is explored in many YA novels, especially in the context of abuse. Froud argues that “[a] child’s position of vulnerability as the weakest in society means their ill-treatment shows cruelty in sharper focus” (32). When adults’ interference into children’s lives is authoritative, young readers thus learn about tyranny and its opposite, democracy, vicariously. Fleur Beale unveils a parallel world located within New Zealand society, first in Whangarei in *I Am Not Esther*, then in Nelson in *I am Rebecca* and *Being Magdalene*. The Pilgrim family belongs to a Christian cult, the Children of the Faith, who live outside of contemporary mainstream New Zealand society, refusing its consumerism, its technology, and its multiculturalism. The members of the cult have no exchange nor any communication with the rest of the society whom they perceive as sinners for not applying the strict rules of the (male) Leader. Girls cannot run; they have to wear a scarf to hide their hair; their hair is worn braided; and they have to wear long skirts and cover every inch of their body to avoid tempting men. Girls are trained to be obedient wives after their menarche and their marriages are arranged with older boys from the community. At sixteen, they start their families as no contraception is allowed. Young children who were born in this model believe it to be the norm. Yet, teenagers find the rules oppressive and many try to rebel against them. The situation becomes stricter, on the verge of tyranny, when the community moves to Nelson to strengthen themselves against the depraved ‘outside world’. There, seventy-six-year-old Father Steven proves to be a dictator. The school he runs only teaches the Bible in the way he interprets the sacred text. Children can barely read and write, and are frequently violently punished. Magdalene is a weak child who dreads school because her teacher canes her publicly. She performs ritual cuttings in her palms to relieve her stress (*Magdalene* ch. 6 n.pag.). She regrets the ‘normal’ school she attended in Whangarei, when she could learn about physics and biology and these topics were not censured. For instance, Father Stephen explains that earthquakes are the manifestation of God’s wrath, and education is gendered, with girls learning domestic skills like sewing and cooking while boys can learn mechanics (*Magdalene* ch. 14 n.pag.). At home, their mother, Naomi, is so indoctrinated that she turns into an abusive parent, especially towards her two younger daughters whom she uses as slaves in her kitchen. Victims of neglect and verbal abuse, Magdalene and Zillah suffer without a word, wishing their mother would not be so hard on them. The very names the girls were given are yet connotated with hope in the Bible,
as Magdalene is a prostitute whose soul is saved by Jesus, and Zillah, in the Old Testament, gives birth to a lineage of humans deemed ‘civilised’ for practising arts like music (Meyers). Blinded and brainwashed by the Leader’s words, the mother is transformed into a monstrous figure, a villainous archetype, as in a Western fairy-tale. References to European children’s literature thus warn young trauma-readers against domestic abuse performed by women within patriarchy. Uncaring, she has internalised the patriarchal discourse on girls’ impurity. Transmitting the Leader’s words to her children is her only power in the community as she is deprived of her civic rights and confined at home. I make here an analogy between the girls’ education in this fictional Christian Pākehā community and the treatment of Magdalenes in Ireland, on the way women can be complicit with patriarchal structures perpetuating gendered violence. Specialists of Magdalene history in Ireland argue that ‘wayward’ girls were often locked down by their own female relatives as the latter’s role was to maintain the reputation of their family and nation by controlling girls’ bodies and sexuality (Haughton et al. 9). The patriarchal domination Father Stephen has over his community, epitomised in the character of Naomi Pilgrim, reveals to what extent it can pervert – as in the pun on “perversion/père version” (perversion/the father’s version) (Kristeva, Pouvoirs 10) – the attachment a mother can have with her children. Julia Kristeva’s concept of a prehistoric maternal time (Pouvoirs 56-57) is all but forgotten and destroyed within this female character who, lacking a critical mind, comes to embody and enact the male leader’s propaganda within her own home. Magdalene and her siblings rediscover maternal a-chronicity when in exile from their community, in the character of their aunt, Nina. It is in her presence in Wellington and with her accompaniment that all the girls actually escape from the burden of their patriarchal upbringing.

Patriarchal oppression can also be considered a contributing factor to suicide. Bugs by Whiti Hereaka can be read as a ‘crossover fiction’ whose intended readers are between 15 and 25 years-old and can be termed “kiddult” fiction (Falconer 556). Its anticipated readership can be extended to those aged between 18 and 30 (Marcoin 32). Rachel Falconer notes that:

[w]hat worries parents, teachers and journalists is the extent to which contemporary literature for children or teenagers deals explicitly with ‘adult’ themes: racism, class warfare, mental illness, drug abuse, sexual practices, violence and crime. The crossover is in the material, which then stimulates (it is feared, damaging) changes in perspective in the reader. (564)

To this list of adult themes considered dangerous for young readers, I would add: suicide. In Aotearoa New Zealand, suicide has been deemed an ‘epidemic’. In 2013, the year Bugs was
published, 508 people committed suicide (Ministry of Health/Manatū Hauora). The communities who are most affected by this social phenomenon are the Māori and Pasifika. Statistics show that boys and men aged between 15 and 24 are more at risk than girls and women, and yet women’s and girls’ suicide rate does not decrease. Suicidal thoughts pervade the narrative of Bugs. The eponymous anti-heroine herself, through indirect speech and stream of consciousness techniques, invites young readers into her dark thoughts. In the opening chapter, she explains the origin of her nickname referring to Bugs Bunny, then recalls a hunting scene when she shot a rabbit which she perceives as a reflection of herself: “[t]he blood is warm on my hand and I’m sort of high, like really happy. I have this thought, this weird idea that I’ve killed myself. And I could do it again, and again. Ding-dong, the Bugs is dead!” (ch. 1 n.pag.). The cruelty of the scene is doubled up by the pleasure the teenage girl feels at having killed an animal considered as “a pest” in New Zealand (ch. 1 n.pag.). By analogy, she perceives herself to be a useless disgusting creature. Young readers who attend the killing/suicide are left ill-at-ease with the erasing of boundaries between predators and prey, killers and victims, humans and animals, pain and pleasure, love and death. The grey zone created in and by the text recalls Sigmund Freud’s theory of the death drive, articulated with reference to the battle between Thanatos (the Greek god of death) and Eros (the Greek god of love) in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920). Intradiegetically, the anti-heroine admits being tempted to kill herself, and this thought generates a sense of exhilaration, as if her symbolic death would cleanse her body from the pain triggered by social discrimination. Bugs feels indeed stigmatised by her nickname which imprisons her within the realm of childhood and colonises her with its reference to an American cartoon, when she wishes she could be seen, heard, and respected for being Māori. Even translated in te reo Māori, her nickname, Rāpeti (rabbit), would better afford her these rights and powers (ch. 1 n.pag.). Extradiegetically, young trauma-readers are warned that, during their reading of Bugs, they will experience pleasure even though they will read painful and traumatic stories. Peter Ramadanovic notes the paradoxical power of trauma-reading when he argues that “a work of art can be a means of having pleasure while working through trauma” (13). Not only does Hereaka erode the boundary between experiencing and witnessing trauma, but she also excavates a certain ambiguity at the heart of the traumatic experience, that trauma can sometimes cause both pain and pleasure.

The pleasure young readers feel when reading Bugs could be connected to a certain fascination with the heroine’s thought process as her storytelling skills address readers
directly, including them in her narrative, in the very fabric of her story. Trapped in her words and forced to see through her eyes, readers experience empathy for Bugs – with whom we share emotions – and for her best friends, Jez and Cold Stone. In Chapter 5, Bugs reflects on teenage suicide and forewarning signs. She distinguishes between three types of students: those who are balanced emotionally, those who show off suicidal signs like scars, and those who remain silent and whose silence is heavy with death: “[t]he teachers should really keep their eye on that other kid. You know the one, the quiet one. There’s one every year. The one with ‘life = nil’. That’s the serious suicidal mo-fo; that’s the one with the real ‘issues’, I reckon. That’s the one who’s rocky roads” (n.pag.). For Bugs, this student is Jez, on whom she keeps an eye. Like her, Jez is Māori, but he lives in a violent home environment, due to the presence of an abusive drug dealing stepfather. When Jez tries to rebel against this situation, the latter beats him to concussion (ch. 6). Bugs’ grandmother saves him from suicide when she tells Jez the story of his family name, Muka, connecting the disillusioned young man with his ancestors: “[i]t’s the stuff in flax. If you peel away the outside, it’s what’s inside. They use it for weaving because it’s strong. It binds things together. It’s what Māui’s ropes were made of when he fished up the North Island and when he tamed the sun” (ch. 8 n.pag.). Muka can be found in different types of flax, such as harakeke (Baker). Harakeke’s hard exterior can be cut then peeled by a mussel shell to extract the flexible muka which is inside. Female weavers split the raw muka in halves then cross the two halves before rolling them together to transform them into a rope. Muka is an essential element in the art of Māori weaving and it has a mythical aura due to its mentioning in the Māui’s myth-cycle. Bugs’ grandmother connects Jez to his past, which leads him to admit his cultural role within contemporary Aotearoa. Indeed, the boy subsequently trains as a tattoo artist and leaves Taupo for Auckland to establish his workshop. Māori storytelling therefore saves Jez from committing suicide, giving him back a meaning and a role within his community.

At the end of the novel, Bugs’ theories on suicide are disrupted when Cold Stone calls her, asking for help. Bugs then discovers her Pāhehā female friend drunk and desperate. By attending her friend in dire straits, the anti-heroine realises that suicide also hits the most privileged class as well. She then holds the position extradienegetic young readers were forced to take in Chapter 1 when Bugs herself was considering suicide:

[w]hat do you say to someone on the edge? I’ve got to say something: this silence feels, I don’t know, dangerous. These are the ‘life skills’ I actually need: not a five-year plan. In this moment, a five-minute plan seems optimistic. So I say the only thing
I can think of, dumb and bland and nothing. ‘No, it would be easier…’ Not for me, not for them. (ch. 12 n.pag.)

Bugs feels powerless as she struggles to comfort her friend. Choosing words becomes a fraught strategic enterprise when a trauma-reader can give life or death by intervening in the telling of the traumatic tale in a dialogical way. In this tragedy, the teenage girl wonders why schools do not train students in life support skills, instead of turning a blind eye to the suicide epidemic which hits the country. She also sees how hard life would be for her if her friend commits suicide despite her help. The feeling of guilt is creeping in her mind alongside the full realisation of her powerlessness in the face of despair. She feels no pleasure in her interpretation of Cold Stone’s suicide story. She only reads her own responsibility. Suicide literature can be viewed in this context as educating (intra- and extra-diegetic) teenage trauma-readers as they witness the pain of (fictional) friends, revising the original Freudian idea that suicide could procure pleasure in its completion. As a result, Bugs refuses to commit a social suicide by following her friends in their career dreams. She stays at school instead to study law and become a resource for her own people.

PART 2: Girls’ Forced Coming of Age or How to Train Teenagers in Trauma-Reading

Fiction primarily addressed to young adults takes into account the fact that teenagers are in an unstable time in their life as they are in constant metamorphosis, in a temporal and legal transition between childhood and adulthood. Children no more, and not yet adults, teenage readers can identify with teenage characters which abound in this genre. Karen Coats argues that, “[a]s a body of literature, YA Fiction is organized around the same sorts of tensions that preoccupy the physical bodies and emotional lives of its intended audience” (315-316). The protagonists’ Bildungsroman could therefore reflect the young readers’ own Bildungsroman, or at least open young readers’ eyes to other ways of life and ways of being. In its choice of topics, YA fiction can be quite realistic, especially when it deals with ‘adult’ social issues (Falconer 564). Wayne Mills notes that, in New Zealand, children’s literature has evolved with society at large. For him, “[t]he 1980s was a time when titles appeared that explored social issues in ways that had not previously occurred” (22), like anorexia and incest. As this chapter encompasses texts from the 1980s to the 2020s, the YA texts under consideration explore social issues like racism, but also sexual orientation and sexual abuse,
which directly affect teenagers in their everyday life and in the way they perceive themselves to be in Aotearoa New Zealand.

a) Racism

Teenagers can identify with teenage characters of YA fiction up to a point. As Bugs ironically points out when she criticises her English teacher’s choice for making them read vampire stories, “[l]ike half of us can relate to a white chick with a thing for dogs and dead dudes” (Hereaka ch. 2 n.pag.). Probably reading Twilight for their assignment, Bugs, who is Māori, refuses to identify with a white heroine. The mirror effect expected by the Pākehā teacher is a deformed reflection, because, if Bugs agrees with mimicking Pākehā, she would end up as a mere Mimic Girl (Bhabha), and YA fiction would be used as a colonising tool. Many critics have noted the power of children’s literature in shaping and controlling children’s behaviours (McCulloch 37). British children’s literature is argued to have indeed been used to suppress social unrest in the nineteenth century when authors idealised working-class children in the hope that real life working-class children would mimic their paper heroes, and not revolt against their status as an exploited labour force (McCulloch 39; L. Andrew 11). Whiti Hereaka aims at decolonising YA literature in Aotearoa New Zealand by showing that her anti-heroine is not a dupe to institutional racism. Children’s literature, including YA fiction, has long been criticised for being a realm of white male authors. The Guardian investigated the British publishing world of picture books in 2018 and confirmed the trend, noting that girl characters and BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) characters were extremely marginal in books for young children (Ferguson n.pag.). In the US, comparable research is also concerning as non-white characters were represented in only 10% of children’s books published in 2013 (Layfield 218). In Aotearoa New Zealand, Janis Freegard kept a record of the fiction published in 2015, based on gender and ethnicity. She found that women had written more fictional books (understood in the wide sense of the term, not just YA fiction) than men that year. Yet, 91% of all fiction had been written by Pākehā authors, regardless of their gender, while 3.4% had been written by Māori writers, 3.4% by Kiwi Asian authors, and 1.1% by one member of the Pasifika community (in this case: Albert Wendt). These figures cast a doubt on the fairness of the representations of minorities in New Zealand fiction as a result.
Racism can also be seen in the conspicuous absence of non-Pākehā characters in books. I argue that Caroline MacDonald’s *The Lake at the End of the World*, for example, is a segregationist text because the New Zealand society it portrays is all-white, without any exception. Racism can also be seen in the publishing market of children’s literature, in its selection of authors and illustrators, but also in book advice offered by libraries. Christchurch City Libraries for instance list YA novels starring a Māori hero/ine or written by a Māori author (Christchurch City Council Libraries). I was surprised to see *The Changeover* as book number 8, after *Oku Moe Moea* by Shona Hammond Boys (1995), and before *Ghosts of Parihaka* by David Hair (2013), as there is exactly one anecdotal mention only of Laura Chant having one great-great-grandfather who was “a Polynesian” (ch. 1 n.pag.) – without specifying whether this ancestor was Māori or Pasifika, and from which iwi or Pacific Island he originated. Mahy does not make any cultural nor linguistic references to Māori culture either. Advertising *The Changeover* for Māori young readers expecting them to identify with the heroine seems far-fetched since the Pākehā setting of the story is unchallenged and the literary references to fairy tales and fantasy are clearly derived from British culture.

*The Changeover* would definitely not fit in with Steph Matuku’s broad definition of Māori Literature when she states: “[w]e are Māori, and the narrative inside us is Māori too. Ever changing, ever evolving, never-ending” (“What the Heck” n.pag.). For her, Māori literature is not limited to the use of te reo and Māori mythology as these can be appropriated by non-Māori authors. Her inscription of Māori characters in sci fi can be daring to some conservative readers who imagine Māori in a limited set of roles only (“What the Heck” n.pag.), and yet this genre is another way to think about colonisation, conquest, and survival. In an interview for *e-tangata*, Matuku explains that “[w]e can have science fiction. We can be on other planets. Especially other planets. I always think Māori are such survivors. If we ever go to another planet, we’re going to win because we’ve been through so much already” (Matuku and Husband n.pag.). She thus justifies her use of science fiction in a YA novel as a way to challenge prejudices about Māori literature. Matuku therefore participates in the Indigenous Futuristic movement which positions Indigenous peoples as active agents and writers of science and climate fictions (Dillon). Sci fi and colonialism are deeply linked due to the colonial context of the birth of sci fi as a genre (Rieder 3), and as aliens have often replaced Indigenous people as inhabitants of hostile territories to conquer in sci fi plots (Stableford 136). Indigenous Futurism highlights the sci fi components of Indigenous ancestral stories and the creativity of contemporary Indigenous authors who contest the
passive portraits made of their ‘conquest’. Indigenous Futurist authors indeed abide by Gerald Vizenor’s concept of ‘survivance’ which he defines as “an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimization” (15). Just as Cliff Curtis (Te Arawa and Ngāti Hauiti) can star in Hollywood movies like Avatar, Māori authors like Steph Matuku can challenge the status quo, especially in the genre of YA fiction which is addressed to teenagers, a readership drawn to fantasy and speculative fiction.

In Flight of the Fantail, mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) is repeatedly dismissed as “ancient Māori wisdom” by Pākehā teens (ch. 39 and 57 n.pag.), as if this mode of knowledge was inferior to Western science and relegated to the past. As they have to survive in the wild, some Pākehā students, used to living in urban areas, enact a colonial attitude towards their surroundings, as if they themselves were newly arrived colonists in a ‘terra incognita’. The persistence of the ‘heart of darkness’ myth is audible in Eva’s comments: “We’ll be sweet. Big game hunters us, conquering the Congo, what, what.” Eva tried to smile, but her lips trembled and it came out a bit wrong” (ch. 35 n.pag.). The reference to the Congo recalls Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1899) and compares Aotearoa to a land perceived as ‘primitive’ and ‘savage’. The distorted syntax also reveals deep contempt for non-British people – in this context: Māori – as they are portrayed as ‘uncivilised’. Eva’s colonial joke is experienced by her friends as offensive. Rocky and Jahmin are indeed of Māori descent, and Devin has long been scapegoated because of her social class and her father’s survivalist values, which makes her sensitive to all forms of discriminations.

Racism also pervades the company which owns the land where the teenagers are trapped. Seddon Corporation is managed by Griff Seddon, a capitalist Pākehā CEO who is a landowner without scruples. He does not hesitate to order his staff to lie to the population about the rescue mission, and to kill survivors and witnesses (even from his own family). He does not hide his racial prejudices against Māori, as revealed by the transcription of the way he refers to them generically, with a Pākehā suffix: “Are there any Maoris in camp?” (ch. 71 n.pag.). He then denies his colleague’s heritage because he looks “[t]oo white. See if there’s a brown one around” (ch. 71 n.pag.). Griff is a flat character whose power stems from his ethnicity, gender, and class. His privileged situation gives him a feeling of superiority which is based on skin colour. When he looks for a stereotypically ‘brown’ Māori to communicate with the media, he merely ticks a box on the diversity criteria imposed on him by society. On the other hand, Rocky is constructed as a cliché at the start of the novel but his experience
surviving in the bush makes him stronger and more confident in his cultural landmarks. When Griff meets him, he barely recognises the young man from his photo:

>[t]he picture on the front had been taken the day before they’d left for camp. Rocky, with a cheesy grin on his face, was twirling a rugby ball on one finger.

He looked like a tosser, Rocky thought. A know-nothing, arrogant, naïve little tosser. It had only been a week ago. He felt a million years older. (ch. 76 n.pag.)

Rocky feels alienated from the photo representing the person he was before the tragedy. The trauma he experienced has made him enter another timeframe: that of Deep Time. He feels as old as earth itself, in tune with Papatūānuku. Throughout the novel, he has indeed learnt to read through class, gender, and ethnic prejudices, as he has discovered the real personality of Devin, a poor Pākehā girl constructed as a social pariah by her schoolmates until she saved those who were still alive from the catastrophe. He has also put mātauranga Māori to the test, such as his grandmother’s stories about Māui and the fantail, or the hongi, a greeting reserved for the living; and his ancestors’ knowledge proved true. Janet Alsup notes that:

>the study of literature, and perhaps especially young adult literature, has the potential to change students’ lives, particularly those who might be disenfranchised by dominant society. (...) [T]he power of reading young adult literature not only help[s] teens grow individually but help[s] them understand how they can gain agency in a culture which too often discriminates against those who are un-white, un-Protestant, and un-heterosexual. (12-13)

In the novel, Rocky changes path from a clichéd Māori success story – the high school ‘hot brown dude’ destined for a career in the All Blacks – to a wiser version of himself accepting his cultural heritage and New Zealand’s biculturalism. Māori teenage readers can therefore look up to him as a model to follow. Rocky’s example also undermines the Pākehā construction of Māori masculinity, emphasising as he does his intelligence rather than his warrior-like attributes. Angela Hubler notes that “literature allows readers – even very young readers – to cognitively map social reality: to begin to understand the way in which race, class, and sex structure social inequality” (ix). Matuku participates in helping boy and girl readers from Aotearoa to cognitively map the way racial prejudices and social expectations affect Māori teens in their self-representation.

In Bugs, Whiti Hereaka contests school practices which segregate and debase Māori students, regardless of their individual potentials. Bugs explains that Pākehā teachers see Māori students as “enemies” (ch. 2 n.pag.), as if the school were a battlefield replaying the Colonial Wars. Some teachers are overtly racist towards students, as when the chemistry
teacher compares the students’ noise to “a powwow” (ch. 13 n.pag.), demeaning the Native American ceremony as mere childish noise, while conflating Indigenous cultures as if they were one and the same. Bugs also notices that Pākehā teachers and students do not know how to relate to her as she does not fit the expected mould for Māori students. Jenny Lee explains that schooling segregation includes the stereotype of Māori as school leavers, difficult students, and failing students (49-50). Whiti Hereaka attacks this prejudice by setting a scene in which Pākehā teachers stage a meeting for newcomer Māori students, presented by older Māori students who are compelled to parrot Pākehā statistics on “Māori ‘achievement’” (ch. 2 n.pag.). Bugs sees through the official discourse and compares the dystopia in which she is living, in which New Zealand society systematically debases Māori, to 1984 by George Orwell:

[e]veryone else was slouching in their chair; they had this look in their eyes – defeat. See, if they’d read 1984, they would have known that it was Big Brother just trying to keep them down. Then maybe more of us would feel the urge to push against their stats because we would see that it is all about control. Them controlling us. (ch. 2 n.pag.)

Bugs’ interpretation of New Zealand as an authoritarian state for its Indigenous people is amplified by the dichotomy between ‘us’ and ‘them’, Māori and Pākehā, conceived as two opposing and unequal entities. The Education System is shown as destroying its students before they are given the chance to develop their abilities. Jenny Ritchie and Mere Skerrett have shown that the disparities between Māori and Pākehā scholarly outcomes stem from the imposition of a British-inflected education model which is not flexible and open to Māori educational practices (11). Kindergartens and elementary schools can be Māori-led in Kohanga Reo (schools where te reo Māori and mātauranga Māori are taught); but in secondary education, Māori schools are rare, which often leads students who thrived in the Māori system to fail the English standards when they get older because they haven’t been trained to think and work in the English mould. In this context, Bugs is an oddity as she is a brilliant student, even if few admit it.

The teenage girl also learns to distinguish other forms of segregation around her, especially residential segregation. Despite being friend with a Pākehā girl, she is perceived as an outsider in the upper-class district where her friend lives. In Chapter 12, she thinks: “I pick up my pace but try to keep it as a fast walk. A sixteen-year-old Māori running in this neighbourhood? Probably not out for a jog. Why make the cops pick me up here?” (n.pag.). Bugs is aware that, for Pākehā residing in this privileged area of Taupo, she looks like a thief!
Her ethnicity, her age, and her social class count against her, criminalising her in the eyes of rich white adults. Even if segregation officially ended in the 1960s in New Zealand, remnants of this practice can still be found, connecting ethnicity with power and wealth (Bartholomew n.pag.; Grbic 35; Salesa 22; Morris and Wong n.pag.). To fight against the various forms of discrimination Māori experience in the twenty-first century, Bugs decides to become a lawyer, like “Atticus Finch” (ch. 5) in *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee, who, though white, fought against segregation in the United States. Clare Bradford explains that “Indigenous fiction always implies two audiences: Indigenous children, for whom the world of the text may offer a sense of narrative subjectivity; and non-Indigenous children who are, in Linton’s (1999) terms, ‘cultural outsiders’ (p.42)” (“Reading” 336). Whītī Hereaka therefore excavates heavily loaded social discriminatory practices which affect today’s New Zealand society by referring to Anglophone literary canons, so that Pākehā readers can understand, by comparison, the impact racism has on Māori teenagers’ way of life, mode of being, and self-esteem.

*Something Alive* by Jem Yoshioka is a “graphic narrative” (Bourreille 12) composed of seven pages. It is an autobiographical and visually poetic text addressed to Year 8 readers and published in *The School Journal*. Yoshioka is a Japanese New Zealander. She explains how she blends into contemporary New Zealand society because of her Kiwi accent. Yet she also describes forms of racism which she experiences in her everyday life. Her Japanese heritage is targeted as both a source of fascination and fear for Pākehā: “But still, there is this part of me that people misunderstand. / They want to dress me up in armour and swords and blood... / or cast me in chrome as the product of some imaginary superfuture” (43). New Zealanders’ stereotypes of Japanese culture mix up history with fiction, fantasising Jem in the costume of either a Samurai imagined as a gory warrior, or of the superhero Astro Boy saving the world with new technologies. Westerners perceive Japanese men to be on both extremities of the masculinity spectrum: either they are extremely violent and pitiless, or smart and geeky emasculated boys. The West imagines no nuance between these two distorted portraits of ‘Asian’ (or should I say: ‘Oriental’?) masculinity (Adams 14; Wang and Yu 34; Price and Parikh 175). In both cases, Japanese culture is constructed from the West as a male world in which Jem as a girl does not fit (Yamada 31). Ready-made masculine images are imposed on her, as shown by the use of the plural ‘they’ opposed to the singular ‘me’, reinforcing the stereotype Westerners have of Asian girls “as weak and without voice” (Kuo 39). In this series of panels, Jem is actually speechless as she is represented without speech bubbles to
counteract the power of the narrative bubbles. Moreover, the phrase “[t]hey want me to dress up… and cast me” amplifies the fetishising aspect behind New Zealanders’ desire to put a girl of Japanese descent into a stereotypical costume against her will. This experience is all the more alienating as she is asked to give up her sex and gender to satisfy Westerners’ orientalising sexual fantasies. What Yoshioka, as a Kiwi Asian, describes is similar to what Nai-Hua Kuo explains regarding the treatment of Asian Americans in the United States: “[b]eing different from the typical ‘American’ look, Asian Americans are often seen as exotic and foreign, no matter how long they have resided in the United States” (40). Pākehā often consider themselves as the norm in New Zealand, failing to recognise that many European migrants arrived at the same time or after the first Asian migrants in Aotearoa (Makereti n.pag.). In such a historical context, Yoshioka should not be regarded as an oddity.

Despite being a third-generation migrant, Jem still feels misunderstood in her motherland: “I feel like a badly translated haiku that doesn’t mean the same in English” (43). Haiku have come to epitomise Japanese poetry in the Western world. Yet, John Cage has noted how imprecise their translations are because of syntactic incompatibilities between the Japanese and the English languages (Alfandary 108). This situation is all the more painful for Yoshioka who is highly aware of this cultural gap. Haiku are perceived as liminal spaces between a poet and their audience. They are construed as a gift (Akiba 52-53). When misunderstood, haiku leave their poet amidst loneliness. Conceived as a social contact, mistranslated haiku only bring sadness to their enunciator, which is the feeling Yoshioka experiences. In the panel accompanying these words, she is indeed shown alone on one side of the room where she is sitting at home, visually separated by vertical wooden beams from Japanese objects such as kokeshi dolls. Looking directly at her reader-viewers, her facial expression reveals sadness, a feeling further explored visually in the next panel. This splash – a whole-page drawing – represents Jem looking at a Japanese painting entitled “The Monkey Bridge in Kai Province (1841-42)” by Utagawa Hiroshige, as it is written in the caption. A haiku is superimposed on this image: “No one travels / Along this way but I, / This autumn evening” by Matsuo Basho, a seventeenth-century Japanese poet. Both the painting and the poem reveal Jem’s state of mind: solitude, loneliness, melancholia, and isolation. Like the lonely tiny figure crossing the bridge in the painting, her path is difficult, deceptive, and treacherous like the strong current of the river underneath and the high altitude of the bridge dangling between two cliffs symbolising New Zealand and Japan. Yoshioka’s analogy with a non-translatable haiku highlights the cultural gap she experiences as haiku are supposed to be
delivered to an audience of connoisseurs who analyse poems to appreciate their aesthetics and participate in the creation of their meaning (Détrie 91; Akiba 48). Trapped in ready-made images, Yoshioka is deprived of the happiness haiku writers feel when their readers/audience understand them through the brief encounter provided by a seventeen-syllabled poem (Alfandary 108; Akiba 54-55). However, the end of the graphic narrative reveals the protagonist’s power of resilience given to her by her supportive family, and especially her grandmother who very last portrait in the graphic narrative is that of a mischievous accomplice. Yoshioka’s testimony is aimed at rendering the younger generation of Pākehā New Zealanders more tolerant, able to confront their own prejudices against Kiwi Asians, and (hopefully) check their behaviour when in presence of other ethnicities. It is also intended to give a visual and literary representation of Kiwi Asian teenagers in YA fiction, as their systemic absence from this genre remains disturbing.

b) Sexual Expectations: Navigating between Orientation and Abuse

The sexuality of children has long been a subject of taboo and of wonder in the Western world ever since Sigmund Freud developed his theory of the Oedipus Complex (1899; Zeuthen and Gammelgaard 3). Children’s behaviours are often surveyed and constrained by adults, especially in gendering practices found in selection of clothes and toys, but also activities and occupations for either boys or girls. Adults’ control over children’s sexuality is perceived by some critics as a form of perversion since children are educated to be heterosexual and asexual. As Tison Pugh states, “[e]ven when segregated into same-sex groups, children are assumed to be learning to be straight” (5). Heteronormativity is therefore expected from children whom their parents construct as gendered and asexualised creatures. Until recently, until same-sex marriage was legalised in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2013, teenagers’ and adults’ sexuality were similarly controlled to align with a societal norm focused on sexual reproduction. Yet, in Flight of the Fantail, Steph Matuku describes the difficulties teenage lesbians can encounter when they come out as gay. Jahmin recalls the disbelief of Eva’s mother when Eva publicly came out in front of the school: “[a] memory surfaced, of the day Eva had declared to the whole world that she was gay and anyone who didn’t like it could stuff it. Her mother, red-faced and furious, had arrived to pick her up from school, but Eva refused to get in the car” (ch. 70 n.pag.). Eva’s love for her schoolmate, Mandy, is not accepted by her family, but the homophobic attitude Eva experiences from
adults is also visible in her schoolfellows’ comments, as when Liam insists on the fact that Eva will fall for him eventually (ch. 32 n.pag.). Younger generations are not always more tolerant towards non-heterosexuality than their elders. Despite legal reforms, some New Zealanders still abide by a heteronormativity and construct homosexuality as a temporary phase or an initiation rite. Matuku therefore warns her young readers against some remaining homophobic and patriarchal attitudes towards lesbianism which dismiss non-heterosexual relationships as ‘abnormal’ and ‘fixable’.

The legal construct of children’s asexuality also aims at protecting children from adults’ sexual desires. In New Zealand, the age of consent has been 16 for girls since 1896 (before 1896, it was 12), and yet, paradoxically, it does not protect girls from rapists who can claim that girls under 16 ‘consented’ to have sex with them (McClure 2022). Paedophilia is a threat which is often tackled in the novels of the corpus analysed in this chapter. In Alex Archer, Tessa Duder opposes her heroine’s platonic love with Andy, emphasising emotions, respect, and dialogue in a couple, to paedophilic desire, based on a power imbalance at the expense of the teenage girl. Indeed, when Alex is at a ball, she becomes the prey of an older English man, Christopher Allardyce, who has lewd ideas of her, and especially fetishises her legs (ch. 4 and 5). Alex fakes her identity in order to evade the man’s advances, and runs away with her partner. Tessa Duder then provides a second scene in which Julia, Alex’s best friend, strikes a deal with her father so that he eventually accepts financing her medical studies in exchange for her silence on incest. When Julia recalls the scene to Alex, the narrative point of view shifts from the third person to reported free speech: “he went skiing too, with the family, and he kept getting on the tow bars with her and putting a protective arm around her (…). Mum was out shopping in the car, and he tried to kiss her and had actually started undoing his fly” (ch. 11 n.pag.). This testimony of sexual abuse mixes both teenage girls’ voices, since Alex, as an intradiegetic trauma-reader, shares the trauma-teller’s story with empathy. Girls are exposed at the bottom of the familial and social hierarchy as Julia’s father, who is present at the scene, stands with his cousin and silences his own daughter. Duder gives the victim her power back in the way she blackmails patriarchy, outwitting her father who, until then, had denied her the right to study because she was a girl. Now that he was her abuser’s accomplice, she could manipulate him into financing her medical studies. In a third scene, Alex is accused of having lured an older married man into having sex. The mother of Maggie, Alex’s swimming competitor for the Olympic Games, saw Alex leave the swimming pool late at night and she saw the director of the pool signal to Alex. She deduced
that Alex had had sex with the pool director and that she was the one who had tempted him. The press calls this a “midnight escapade” and “gallivanting” (ch. 16 n.pag.). As a result, Alex is forbidden to swim, attacked by slander. Her reaction is shock and anger, as she realises that, for adults, if she had been raped by a paedophile, adults would have considered that she had looked for it and deserved her lot! Tessa Duder therefore offers a feminist reading of rape to her (female) teenage readers, warning them against a patriarchal perspective on rape, incest, and paedophilia which justifies and bolsters male overarching power over girls. Alex’s victory over false accusations shows girl readers (who know the truth since we had attended the scene prior to the scandal, contrary to Maggie’s ill-intended mother) that girls can fight for their rights and restore their honour.

Fleur Beale also denounces the trauma paedophilia triggers in the life of its victims. In *I Am Not Esther*, when Kirby Greenland is forcibly sent to live with family members who belong to a cult in Whangarei, the sixteen-year-old girl feels betrayed by her mother who abandons her in a dire situation where she feels oppressed and manipulated. Only at the end does she understand her mother’s motivation. Ellen (called ‘Martha’ in the cult) was experiencing depression and could not cope with her duties at work and at home anymore. After her (abandoned) first born child, now an adult, contacted her, she decided to undergo a therapy to help her address her girlhood trauma. She herself had grown up in the very community where she sends her daughter; until she was raped by an elder – one of the leaders of the cult respected for their old age and wisdom – when she was sixteen. When she became pregnant, she was subsequently beaten severely by her own father for breaking her vows of chastity before marriage (*Esther* ch. 9 n.pag.). In the next two volumes of the trilogy, Ellen is shown as supportive towards her nieces and nephews who manage to escape from the cult. Her own experience of recovery via therapy is constructed as a positive model for younger victims, as a possible path towards well-being despite girlhood trauma. Suzanne Egan warns against a simplistic view of sexual assault which would consider that medicalisation can cure a patient of the symptoms she/he/they has/have developed following trauma:

> [e]choing the more general critiques of the medicalisation of women’s distress, [feminist] concern focuses on the way the imposition of diagnostic frameworks, tools and techniques cast survivors’ reactions as deficits that require treatment in order to be ‘fixed’. PTSD ‘individualises the problem so that survivors are held accountable for their recovery, and societal forces contributing to sexual violence are ignored’ (Peters, 2019, p.77). (9)
As Ellen is a minor character in the story, her recovery from sexual abuse in childhood can appear peripheral to the plot. Indeed, even if she escaped from the patriarchal society she lived in, other girls could still be raped since justice did not prevail there, as Ellen is the one who was excluded for bearing the blame. By contrast, ‘normal’ society in New Zealand – not the parallel dystopia of the cult – is depicted as a utopia in which traumatised teenagers who left the community eventually grow up healthily, in a loving foster family, and in a well-meaning school environment. This idyllic portrait of New Zealand society was refused by Margaret Mahy in *The Changeover* when she mentioned that Pākehā girls could fall preys to rapists and paedophiles (ch. 5), stressing the fact that the Pākehā society is predicated on violence due to a power imbalance between men and women. The Pākehā world Fleur Beale thus constructs outside of the cult is problematically presented as an idyllic and open-minded world – though Māori people and their culture are invisible (apart from brief references to Māori students attending school), and so are Asian and Pasifika communities. New Zealand society in this novel is represented as Pākehā-led and Pākehā-occupied, without contesting the colonial aspect of this ‘perfect’ society, nor its patriarchal dimensions.

What Fleur Beale does instead is cast doubts on the patriarchal structure of the dystopic cult. She stages another paedophilic scene in *I Am Rebecca*, in which, this time, the eponymous heroine manages to escape. At age 15, Rebecca learns that she is to marry the leader of the cult, Father Stephen, a seventy-six-year-old “goat” (ch. 26 n.pag.), and nobody objects to this abject union. Rebecca is ready to sacrifice herself for the common good when, on the wedding day, she is separated from her family and falls prey to an old man who humiliates her, abuses her physically, and wants to control her every gesture (ch. 30 n.pag.). Feeling violated, Rebecca runs away from the religious community to a ‘normal’ family who cannot believe what they are witnessing (ch. 30 n.pag.). Rebecca’s escape from rape awakens a social change within the cult. This episode destabilises the social foundations of the community as some families choose to leave to offer a better future to their daughters, and those who stay decide to reform their commune with more tolerant principles. Fleur Beale therefore uses this traumatic experience to challenge the patriarchal regime of the dystopia. Not only is Rebecca a feminist rebel as she stood up for her rights as a girl to control her own body, but she is also a revolutionary figure as her heroic action triggered a wave of democratic reforms within this closed society (Hubler xvii). In this way, Beale empowers her (Pākehā) girl readers to undertake social change within New Zealand society, to transform
their patriarchal society into a haven for gender equality and women’s rights – unfortunately, for whites only apparently.

PART 3: Girls Gone Wild and Girls in the Wild

I intend now to analyse two traumatic situations YA heroines often confront. The first subsection focuses on gender expectations and how girls are perceived as ‘wild’ or ‘mad’ due to the ways they inhabit gender roles. The second subsection explores environmental trauma and focuses on teenagers’ responses to climate change, also interrogating the role played by children’s literature at large in the development of a New Zealand national consciousness.

a) Girls Gone Wild: Revisiting Gender Roles

Children’s literature and young adult fiction have long been deemed a sexist field as more male heroes pervade in these two genres than female heroines do. Since the 1970s, researchers have shown that male heroes are predominant in children’s literature, which bespeaks a form of sexism, as girl characters are not often shown as primary actors in their own stories. They tend to remain in the background as second leads or as supporting characters (Angelot et al. 111-112; Heritage n.pag.). The representations of gender roles are therefore crucial because they reflect wider societal issues. Angelot et al. argue that sexism also takes the form of “spatial segregations” (113, my own translation): ”[l]es femmes et les filles sont plus souvent représentées à l’intérieur plutôt qu’à l’extérieur, dans un lieu privé plutôt que public, dans des attitudes plus passives qu’actives” (113). That is to say: “[w]omen and girls are more often represented in indoor than outdoor settings, in a private rather than a public space, and in attitudes which are more passive than active” (my own translation). Feminist critics lament the conservative representations of girl characters in books dedicated to children as these images perpetuate an inferior position of women within Western societies. As a consequence, it is feared that girl readers can limit their self-exploration to fixed gender roles like princess (aka. maid awaiting her prince/knight/husband), mother, and housewife.

Whiti Hereaka critiques the ways in which passive princess archetypes are foisted upon Pākehā girls, and Māori girls too to a certain extent:
[a]ll those princesses in fairy tales, waiting in a tower, waiting in a glass coffin, waiting to be kissed like their lives mean nothing without a prince. Waiting to live happily ever after. Worse still are the princesses who give up their lives for him (…). This is what we’re fed; this is what we’re supposed to aspire to. It’s not my life; it’s not hers. It’s bullshit. (ch. 12, n.pag.)

Bugs, the anti-heroine, and her Pākehā friend, Charmaine (aka: Cold Stone), feel repressed by fairy tale stories, finding the role of the princess alienating as it does not correspond in any way to their stressful way of life at high school, with exams to prepare for and future plans to succeed at university. And yet, Charmaine is tortured by her father’s dream of her as a future spouse. For him, her only job is to find a husband, like her mother did before her. Charmaine wonders: “I don’t even know if there was a Shelley before there was a Mrs Fox. She never talks about what she wanted to be. Just a wife and mother (…). She’s just his shadow” (ch. 12 n.pag.). The portrait she makes of her mother is antithetical to Bugs’ mother whom she imagines as a powerful woman who is able to think for herself and live on her own. This vision is spurious as Charmaine is unable to understand the implications of the fact that her friend is from a lower income background and grows up fatherless. As a result, she idealises Bugs’ mother because she works and is financially independent. Bugs sees through the gimmicks of her friend and ironically muses: “[e]xcuse me? I’m Cinder-fucking-rella; did you not see the cast list? The obvious plot progression?” (ch. 12 n.pag., italics in the original).

With this comment, Hereaka mocks her own plot which constructs Bugs as a smart girl whose sex, gender, ethnicity, and social class intersect against her intelligence. Invisible to most teachers because she is Māori, she is punished by her mother for a crime (drug dealing) that she did not commit but against which she did not fight as she did not want to inform on her best friends. During the holidays, she has to work as a cleaning lady at the hotel her mother manages and donate her salary to a charity (ch. 11). Her mother could be interpreted as a version of Cinderella’s villainous mother-in-law who overcharges the young woman with chores, and her best friend Jez could be the prince she is waiting for. Except that, when the situation arises and Jez asks her to elope with him and Charmaine to Auckland before their final year exams, Bugs recollects herself and rejects his offer: “[a]nd me… what will I be doing in their lives? In the audience, clapping, cheering them on?” (ch. 16 n.pag.). Bugs refuses to be passive and relegated to the background of her ‘prince’s’ life. At the last minute, she changes a centuries-old fairy tale script to do her exams and go to university. By making this decision, she does not repeat her own mother’s mistake which entrapped her in a life of misery and poverty. She gives herself a chance to not be the expected statistic on Māori
students as school-leavers (ch. 14). Janet Alsup notes that “exposure to certain female images affects young girls’ conceptions of what they can be” (“Female Reader” 212). In the case of Bugs, Māori girl readers are shown that they have a choice. They can either follow a (colonising) Western conception of girls as princesses and let themselves be directed by a boy’s decisions, or they can resist the Pākehā-led government’s ethnocentric education system and decolonise the system from within – like Bugs who chooses to become a lawyer to defend Māori people with reference to Māori legal frameworks. Whiti Hereaka’s ending is therefore optimistic for Māori girl readers as it encourages them to defy mainstream gender and ethnic expectations.

In Pākehā YA novels like The Changeover and Alex Archer, which emerged within the context of second-wave feminism, Mahy and Duder create gender relationships which are supportive of each other and which reject gender hierarchy. Mahy creates two male characters who, despite their age difference, are willing to share chores with their respective partners. Indeed, Chris is shown cooking in the household while his partner, Kate, is shown relaxing on the sofa after a day of work; and Sorensen does not hesitate to peel potatoes and play with Jacko to ease Laura’s duties (ch. 11). Moreover, when she was initiated into becoming a witch during her changeover, and even after, when she confronts again and again the ancient spirit who vampirised her baby brother, Laura is the protagonist of the story and Sorensen remains in the background to help her and support her actions, thus reversing Western traditional gender roles. Duder also represents Alex’s family as supportive of their swimming heroine. Her father works extra hours; her grandmother sells customised children’s clothes at the market; her brothers participate in the household chores to help their mother; while Alex prepares for the Olympics. Her boyfriend, Andy, also ensures they are both on an equal footing and that she dedicates her energy to swimming without having to worry about everyday life practicalities. Duder therefore invites her girl readers to realise that they can perform exploits, go beyond what is expected of them, and break records just like boys would do, which fits with Judy Simons’ (156) and Julia Eccleshare’s (546) comments on girl characters being smarter and stronger in children’s literature since the 1980s. Duder however also emphasises the importance of family and friends’ moral and practical support. This communal route to success challenges Western individualistic accounts of heroism, to introduce values which are often more found in Māori communities, such as love/aroha and the family/whānau’s strength.
Yet, not all YA texts in my corpus represent gender relationships as supportive and equalising. Boy and girl characters can experience very different lives and can be raised and educated differently in patriarchal families. In The 10 p.m. Question, Kate de Goldi focalises the narrative through Frankie’s (prejudiced) eyes. He perceives Sydney, a thirteen-year-old white Australian girl, as a revolution in his life. She is talkative; she is chaotic in the way she works; she has dreadlocks; and her attire is vibrantly colourful for him. Nonetheless, when he has a glimpse into her family life, Frankie is appalled by the conditions in which she has to live. She is indeed cast as a parentified child by her mother who refuses to take any responsibilities and imagines herself as a fertile goddess from Nordic mythology (ch. 5 n.pag.). Sydney is thus compelled to look after her younger sisters while her mother spends time with rich men who pay the bills for her and offer her extravagant gifts. Frankie and his friend Gigs are so shocked by what Sydney experiences that they want to alert the children’s protection offices to this context of “child labour” (ch. 5 n.pag., italics in the original): “[t]hey knew about child labour. They’d done a project on it in Year Six, but all the child labour had been in other countries” (ch. 5 n.pag.). Both boys are stunned by their discovery, as they realise that theory learnt at school can actually apply to a context next door in Aotearoa New Zealand, not in distant countries. A surrogate mother, Sydney cannot take part in school camp as she must care for her siblings instead. Even if she regrets not having fun with schoolfellows, Sydney also accepts the responsibilities she has within her family and rejects Frankie’s limited viewpoint on her role and love for her sisters. Ironically, Frankie declines going to Camp because of similar responsibilities within his own household. As his mother cannot leave the premises of their home following girlhood trauma, he is in charge of food shopping so that she can work as a baker from home. It therefore appears as though Sydney’s personal situation offers an epiphany on Frankie’s own way of life. Household labour is similarly unpaid and his parents should arguably be reprimanded for exploiting him too. De Goldi invites young readers to contest the hero’s opinion on girls and think for themselves, beyond codified gender expectations. She allows girl characters of all ages – and their girl readers – to imagine more complex roles for themselves.

Finally, I would like to complete this reflection on gender as a societal, cultural, and linguistic experience by studying the way YA authors deal with gender crossing and transgender experience. Although Judy Simons claims that “a feminine boyishness is still not widely countenanced in male characters, as it is still perceived as sissiness” (156), Margaret Mahy constructs Sorensen as a ‘witch’, not as a wizard. The gender assignation of his magical
role is debated several times during the novel, first between Laura and her mother in Chapter 1, then between Laura and Sorensen’s mother in Chapter 5. Kate jokes about the fact that Sorensen is a witch although he is a boy, even though she recognises that his mother and grandmother were witches before him (ch. 1). Myriam, Sorensen’s mother, explains that her son has an “ambiguous nature” (ch. 5 n.pag.) as he inherited his maternal craft:

[i]t’s very much a feminine magic – or so we think,’ Myriam said. ‘And Sorensen sometimes resents it. He doesn’t like being called a witch, although of course that is really what he is. Sometimes he feels that he’s not completely a man or a witch but some hybrid, and he struggles too hard to be entirely one thing or the other. But he can’t give up either nature. (ch. 5 n.pag.)

Sorensen is depicted as having internal conflicts due to the tension between his sex (male) and his assigned gender (female), magic making him experience the reverse of transgenders for whom sex is assigned and perceived as alienating. Sorensen may practise “feminine magic” and comply with female gender expectations; he is yet never described as a “sissy” as Simons suggests. On the contrary, his inner understanding of girls’ gender roles gives him empathy and makes of him a better male companion for Laura. Clare Bradford’s comment on Mahy’s fiction as “positioning readers as active participants in narratives which encourage anticipation, empathy, and surprise” (“Made” 112) shows that girl readers can identify with her female heroine, Laura Chant, but boy readers can also identify with Sorensen and develop their sociable skills, especially towards real-life girls whom they could support and empathetically connect with.

In “Break-Up Day”, Kyle Mewburn offers Year 8 New Zealand school students an autobiographical account of their elementary school days in Australia. Kyle Mewburn is a prolific writer of children’s fiction who first wrote as a man, then as a woman after they experienced surgery following their transition to womanhood. Mewburn explains that when they were a boy, they felt like “a fraud”, like “a fake boy” (4). They had to assert their masculinity at school and overplay masculine attributes like violence to the extent that some parents saw them as a troubled child (6). They also explain that, because a teacher they had in Year 8 had confidence in their intellectual abilities and offered them a book on Break-Up Day, the final day of the school year, they started reading extensively and eventually became a writer. Mewburn therefore tells young readers that they were aware of their gender difference early in their life and that, at their readers’ age, they knew they were not meant to be a boy. Their assigned sex did not reflect their chosen gender which led them to change sex as an adult: “I was in the wrong body. A girl in a boy-shaped box” (5). Mewburn’s childhood
experience of gender highlights its performativity in an Australian society where a binary and heterosexual interpretation of gender was the norm. As Judith Butler explains, “[t]hat the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality” (“Bodily Inscription” 173). As a life writing text addressed to a teenage readership, “Break-Up Day” testifies to the homophobic atmosphere gay and trans children have had to survive in settler nations like Australia and New Zealand. This short theirstory therefore illustrates Karen Coats’ argument that “Young Adult literature exerts a powerful influence over its readers at a particularly malleable time in their identity formation” (315-316). Indeed, in their life writing text addressed to secondary school children, Mewburn not only invites parents to let their children choose their gender for themselves, but they also invite children to choose who and how they want to be without familial and societal constraints.

b) Feminising Boys’ Adventure Stories: Girls in the Wild

In Northern Europe, in the Romantic era, childhood was imagined as flourishing best when children were in direct contact with nature (Ørjasaeter 40; McCulloch 179; Kelen and Sundmark 4). As children were believed to live in a state of innocence, only a natural environment could make them flourish as towns were construed as dens of iniquity and as sources of pollution with their numerous factories. The idyllic representation of the countryside versus urban settings also affected the representations of children and adults who were perceived as opposites on a spectrum moving from innocence to experience, thus from good to evil. Fiona McCulloch notes that:

[w]hile children’s literature has persistently been linked to nature since the influence of Romantic discourses upon childhood innocence, nevertheless the child was often in a position of dominance over its environment, as in the case of boys’ adventure stories, where there is a colonial impetus at play. (179)

Contrary to Romantic literature from Britain and Northern Europe, in the colonies, nature was perceived as an enemy to conquer and master. Colonial literature for children amplified the necessity for the young generation of colonists to explore the wild so that they could dominate it just as they were expected to dominate colonised peoples. Boys and girls were assigned specific roles depending on their gender (Simons 144). Michelle J. Smith et al. argue that “[c]olonial environments had a metaphoric relationship with girlhood, most obviously because newly explored and conquered territories tended to be regarded as female, especially
in literature” (98). Despite imagining colonies as female bodies to penetrate, and, in the case of settler nations like New Zealand, as “daughters” of the British metropolis (98), white women and girls were often confined to the domestic sphere in these ‘wild’ territories. White boys, conversely, were invited to physically explore uncharted lands, especially in boys’ adventure stories. The foundation of the Boy Scout movement by Sir Robert Baden-Powell in 1907 had an influential effect on the education of colonial boys who were taught how to survive in “un hospitable” lands, a pedagogical impetus that adventure stories for boys also promoted (L. Andrew 4). Even if New Zealand was perceived as geographically less alienating than the extreme climates of Canada and Australia (M. Smith et al. 102), it was still construed by colonists as an exotic land to conquer alongside its Indigenous people. Betty Gilderdale reminds us that the first children’s book published in New Zealand was actually a story describing the local fauna and flora to a Pākehā boy. *Stories about Many Things: Founded on Facts* (anonymous author, 1833) was aimed at domesticating the New Zealand landscapes for a British male child (“New Zealand” 1149). The colonial enterprise in New Zealand was mixed with Christian teleology whose main pastoral advice to its disciples was to be a good companion to the environment by performing ‘husbandry’. The colonial imposition of the British culture, Christian thoughts, and the English language onto Māori iwi and hāpu was enmeshed with agricultural principles and with the sale/theft of land (Stachurski 3). Culture and agriculture went hand in hand as shown in *Distant Homes or The Graham Family in New Zealand* by Isabella E. Aylmer (1862) which depicts the adventures of six Swiss city children in the South Island, demonstrating how working in the fields makes true New Zealanders of them. M. Smith et al. also note that this children’s novel highlights the connection between taming the land and “civilizing” Māori (102-103). Food, from its production mode to its cooking methods, is thus ingrained in cultural practices.

*The Lake at the End of the World* by Caroline Macdonald, written in 1988, belongs to the realm of speculative fiction as it is a climate fiction (cli fi). As Maria Lindgren Leavenworth and Annika Manni argue, “speculative fiction in particular can function as a safe space in which to negotiate fears and anxieties stemming from climate change” (729). The story takes place in 2025 in a post-apocalyptic New Zealand, near a lake named the McGregor Lake, then the Redfern Lake, in reference to the Pākehā ornithologist Evan Redfern who lives on its bank with his Pākehā wife, Beth, and their fifteen-year-old daughter, Diana. They have survived a global pandemic triggered by a highly pathogenic respiratory disease, called “the illness” throughout the novel, and by the poisoning of drinkable water due to the
overexploitation of agricultural lands with pesticides, fertilisers, and other chemical products (38, 95). In this New Zealand of the future, nuclear bombs are no more a threat as world leaders signed treaties to denuclearise the earth in the 1990s, putting an end to the Cold War era (105). Yet, capitalism is held responsible for the pollution of natural resources. Indeed, in the 1970s and 1980s, New Zealand had been transformed into a “gigantic market garden” (101) to feed the world population before the pandemic started. No one knows if there are other survivors apart from the Redfern settlement (of three) and a mountain nearby under which a hundred and two people live in a sort of unending lockdown. One theory claims that a human settlement survives on the moon (99). While Evan has preserved hundreds of birds on the verge of extinction – of which only one species is mentioned: “ducks” (110) – Beth and Diana are in charge of gardening and cooking the vegetables they grow, using rain to water plants. Lykke Guanio-Uluru argues that, ever since Aristotle’s scala naturae classification (4th century B.C.), flora has been considered as inferior to animals, even negligible, and yet, she notes that in cli-fi, plants are represented as essential to survival (413). In Macdonald’s novel, the Redfews survive on carrots, spinach, rice, milk, eggs, apples, honey, dried mushrooms, blackberries, tomatoes, rice biscuits, dried soup, red wine, and coffee. Some of these ingredients are grown at home. Others have been preserved from the pre-apocalyptic era. They do not eat meat nor fish. It is interesting to note that, apart from mushrooms, the vegetables grown in this fictional post-apocalyptic New Zealand are not endemic to this country. They were brought to New Zealand by British colonisers, which corroborates Zane Ma Rhea’s argument regarding the early days of Oceanic colonisation by the British: “[a]s quickly as possible, the newcomers began to establish foodways that were familiar to them, bringing their exogenous foods to new lands and waterways” (3). The Redfews’ food habits highlight their colonial attitude towards the land. In the underground colony, the survivors’ diet is not based on endogenous food either as inhabitants eat the same vegetables as the Redfews, except that they grow their own fresh mushrooms and they breed rabbits for consumption.

One might have expected taro, yam, and kūmara to be the vegetables cultivated, as these three edible plants were brought by Māori ancestors to Aotearoa. Taro and yam can be found in all the steps of their journey throughout the Pacific, from Asia to Polynesia. Scientists have debated the origin of kūmara since the 1960s, speculating as to whether Polynesians brought it to South America, or vice versa, or if birds transported the seeds, island-hopping (Yen 373). The choice of colonial plants in Macdonald’s survivor story is
therefore connected to the conspicuous absence of Māori people in her fictional New Zealand’s past and future. Jan Keane states that the erasure of Indigenous people in Australian and New Zealand’s children’s literatures is revelatory of institutional racism (134). By negating Māori history and Māoritanga from the past and the future of New Zealand, Macdonald perpetuates the colonial enterprise which represented the Māori as ‘a dying race’, insisting on their eventual disappearance from the settler colony (Wolfe 388), when the British themselves were orchestrating their genocide. Moreover, as New Zealand was turned into a huge market garden, the absence of Chinese New Zealanders and Māori Chinese New Zealanders from the plot is all the more visible as, historically, they were the ones working in Wellington and Pūkekohe’s garden markets from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards (J. Lee 72; Ip). The futuristic New Zealand Macdonald offers to young readers is therefore composed of a whitewashed society whose multicultural heritage is negated.

Ironically, the democratic world she designs at the end of her novel seems as tyrannical as the society she imagined trapped under a mountain for several decades under the yoke of a leader named “the Counsellor” (91). Indeed, the latter took control of ingenious and clever minds to establish a colony within New Zealand. In the 1960s, he lured engineers and doctors into creating a utopic society away from nuclear threats (85). Yet, his authoritarianism soon terrorised all the members of his cult. He segregated children from their parents so that no child would know their own mother nor their own father (63, 153). By separating children from their parents from birth, the Counsellor positioned himself as a spiritual father of the children of his community and had absolute power over them – a practice, Hitler (154), but also Stalin and Ceausescu performed in Nazi Germany, USSR, and Romania respectively. The Mountain’s leader effaced history by accepting neither visitors, nor any news, nor books from the outside world (68), thus manipulating his people with fabricated facts. He fashioned a new nation for his disciples, with its own children’s literature to praise its ideologies. Hector recalls how he grew up with the adventures of Astrid and Dagan within the Mountain and how he identified with these heroes:

[as a special treat when they’ve been good, [Dagan and Astrid] are taken to see the kind Counsellor and allowed to sit quietly and listen to his record player. There are no other books than books like these. So this was my childhood. The world is carefully filtered so I’d know of no other but this. (158-159)

The production of a local children’s literature indoctrinated children into accepting the Counsellor’s cult. Researchers have connected the development of children’s literature with
the birth of modern nations at the end of the eighteenth century (Kelen and Sundmark 1). The creation of a national children’s literature can therefore be dangerous when it celebrates a dictatorial regime as it is a propagandist apparatus. As Macdonald wrote this YA novel before the Fall of the Berlin Wall, the Slavic names of the fictional children of a utopia-turned-dystopia are at odds with New Zealand and invites young readers to read the dictatorial settlement of the Mountain as a metaphor for the USSR. By contrast, the settlement by the lake with its democratic ideals is redolent of the USA. Hector and Diana who embody the democratic hopes of future New Zealand(USA) symbolically bear the names of a Trojan hero who escaped from the destruction of his city, and of the hunting goddess in the Roman mythology. Their very names consequently westernise New Zealand’s future and make no provision for a multicultural society who would include Māori and Chinese and more ethnic groups.

In Flight of the Fantail, Steph Matuku offers young readers an Indigenous and feminist science fiction text which tests teenagers in a techless world, contradicting Victoria Flanagan’s statement that new technologies empower teenage characters in YA fiction (Goga et al. 9). Raised by her father alone since her mother’s death, Devin is the one who shows others fishing and foraging techniques, while Jahmin is the hunter of the group. Here is a list of the food they eat during their adventure: eel (ch. 32), “biscuits and chocolates and muesli bars and little bags of chips” (ch. 43), a pheasant (ch. 49), a trout (ch. 56), “pikopiko shoots” (ch. 57), a chocolate bar (ch. 57), and a kiwi bird (ch. 58). Contrary to The Lake at the End of the World, the protagonists of Flight of the Fantail eat food endogenous to Aotearoa, an ethical approach to food consumption that Monique Fiso (a Ngā Rauru and Ngāti Ruanui chef), in her book Hiakai: Modern Māori Cuisine (2020), celebrates when she writes about the sacredness of kai (food) in Māori culture as its ingredients stem from Papatūānuku. For example, pikopiko are New Zealand ferns used in Māori cuisine and are known as “bush asparagus” (100% New Zealand n.pag.). Eels are also a staple in Māori cuisine. As for roasting a kiwi bird, the survivors felt guilty because this animal is an endangered species: “it had been stingy and tasted gamey, and everyone had felt like they were breaking some kind of sacrilegious code eating their national bird” (ch. 58 n.pag.). Young readers might feel the horror of the situation too as kiwis only exist in New Zealand and are S.H.I.E.L.D. animals, which means that protecting them actually preserves the whole habitat (fauna and flora) where they live. As for savoury and sweet snacks, the children rescued them from their fellows’ backpacks and these are a symbol of the consumer society which is creeping its way into the
wild. The heroes may thus be products of a highly modern society but they can adapt quickly to their natural environment, despite earthquakes and sudden floods associated with the sci fi elements of the plot.

Natural catastrophes linked to climate change are in fact the result of alien activity in *Flight of The Fantail*. The narrative sets up a spaceship that deregulates electronic devices like GPS and phones, but also interferes with people’s cognitive processes, giving them massive headaches, bleeding noses, and visions. As Jesse, a guard, explains to the teenagers when he finally locates them, “[t]he electromagnetic waves may cause you to lash out and hurt people” (ch. 76 n.pag.). The UFO unleashes extreme violence in those who come too close to its radiating power. According to Awhina Thomas, one of the Māori schoolfellows who had survived the crash before committing suicide, the spaceship’s inhabitants are Patupaiarehe (fairies in Māori mythology) who intend to leave earth. They need human sacrifice to fuel their vehicle. The first fairy wakes up from a long sleep in Chapter 34, after the crash of the bus. Then the whole colony wakes up one by one, until the ship starts off in the last paragraph of the novel. As Eva explains to Jahmin in Chapter 70, “[Awhina] heard them talking to her. She said they wanted to leave and need our energy, our life force, to do it. She tried to kill us to help them, and when it didn’t work, she killed herself instead” (n.pag.). What started as disbelief in Chapter 57 when Rocky explained that Patupaiarehe could be watching the survivors and stealing their food, slowly becomes a plausible hypothesis in the teenagers’ minds. Steph Matuku blends Māori metaphysics with extra-terrestrial lore, mixing Indigenous and Western sci fi elements, as young readers are given access to the mind of a Patupaiarehe in Chapter 72:

> [a]t the far end of the ship lay the remainder of the Colonists. The ones who had disembarked centuries before were long dead. They’d mated with the original inhabitants of the land, and their life force had been absorbed and diluted through the generations. The Designer could feel a few of them close by, with the remnants of that shared blood. The ship’s signals would affect them too, but in a different way to the others. It was strange, knowing they were out there. Strange, but comforting. Like having a living ancestor watch over them. (n.pag., original italics)

Amidst the cast present near the spaceship, Rocky, Awhina, but also Jahmin, and Moses could have Patupaiarehe ancestors according to this metaphysical explanation. Indeed, both Rocky and Awhina are trained to read tohu (signs), and are knowledgeable in Māori lore and oral literature. Jahmin recognises that he has a Māori ancestor (ch. 39) despite his paleness and his ginger hair – which actually give him the attributes of a descendant of a Māori fairy
As for Moses who works for Seddon Corporation – the company which delays the rescue of the students because they undertake research on the spaceship – he admits his fascination for extra-terrestrial life, and he is a “mind-reader” of Māori ancestry (ch. 71). These four characters unconsciously work as guardians to the Patupaiarehe, helping them escape from the inquisitive eye of the company which owns the land where they landed. By escaping from a scientific gaze, Māori fairies remain a myth that cannot be fathomed nor grasped. No intergalactic diplomatic crisis needs to be resolved (ch. 70), nor any tourism be deployed around the spaceship to compete with the US market (ch. 38). Patupaiarehe are not commodified for Pākehā scientific, colonial, and touristic ambitions. Like the teenagers, they free themselves from the bonds which tied them to greed, and disappear into another time-zone: teenagers move into adulthood and its imposed silence on the adventure experienced; and fairies travel back into infinite space.

In Bugs, Whiti Hereaka satirises the habits of tourists in Taupo through the eyes of two Māori local teenagers, Jez and Bugs, but also through the eyes of Māori women who are cleaners in a hotel. Tourists visit Taupo to see the lake and the local mountains. Yet, when Bugs goes to her Pākehā friend’s luxurious house for the first time, she realises that she had been blind to some aspects of Taupo, so focused she was on her own life:

I know this is going to sound strange but you know when you shake up a can of drink heaps and then hand it to someone and wait and wait until they open it and – whoosh! – as soon as they pull the tab, the drink comes rushing out? That’s me. This house has pulled my tab and whoosh, I’m bubbling over. Because if this is here, what else have we missed? We’ve been walking around and never turning our heads; we’ve only seen what’s straight ahead. (ch. 1 n.pag.)

Bugs’ encounter with Charmaine starts her transition from unconcerned childhood to purposeful adulthood. At sixteen, she sees her situation as ambiguous, as “in limbo” (ch. 6), waiting to acquire adult rights. Bugs is a country girl whose life is paradoxically lived indoors between her mother’s townhouse, high school, visits to Jez’s council flat and to Charmaine’s upper-class villa, and her grandparents’ farm. Her Bildungsroman leads her to learn from both the Pākehā education system and from her Māori family, especially from her grandmother who is a storyteller. Throughout the novel, she learns how to read the landscape, through clichés, and behind hedges. At the end, when Bugs comforts a suicidal Charmaine, she notices that “I think that Shelley would be pleased that she managed to trick me; managed to make me believe that this place was perfect – that they were perfect” (ch. 12 n.pag.). Bugs eventually reads through the strategies of privileged Pākehā who hide misery behind a mask.
of happiness, and young Māori readers are invited to read that way too alongside Bugs’ discoveries. Fiona McCulloch notes that “[i]n turn, the intended reader of children’s and YA fiction is induced towards emulating this process of self-development with a view to socialising or readying them for their place as future citizens” (174). Bugs sees New Zealand society as a dystopia – even if, as a YA genre, dystopia is seen as unfashionable (Falconer 560). She sees herself as powerless (ch. 1), as the intersection of her ethnicity, gender, class, and age accumulate to subordinate her within New Zealand’s social hierarchy. To her mind, nature is tamed and domesticated to meet Pākehā desires for commodification. Conversely, the wild is to be found in social relationships for people who, like her, Jez, and their respective mothers, are trapped in a series of subjugating circumstances:

[w]hat I’ve figured out about dystopias is this: if you wake up and find yourself in the middle of one, the first thing you need to do is figure out if it was written for kids or adults. If it’s for kids, then an overlooked ordinary person, probably you, will be able to rise and change the world. If it’s for adults…

then we’re all fucked. (ch. 1 n.pag.)

The Education System stigmatises Māori students as failed statistics, a discourse most Māori students believe in the novel. Bugs distinguishes herself by refusing to abide by the status quo imposed by the Pākehā government. By addressing her thoughts directly to her readers, Bugs invites them to rebel against social determinism too. As they are young, they can afford to hope for change and advocate for the Māori community.

In *The 10 p.m. Question*, Frankie has always tried to master his surroundings, including New Zealand’s natural world. His movements are limited in his routine: he travels from home to the bus stop, to the bus, to his classroom, to the library, to the food store, and back home. Once he changes his route to visit Sydney’s house on her birthday and leaves horror-stricken. Sometimes, he visits Gigs’ house and they go together to the swimming pool. We learn later in the novel that he also spent a certain amount of time at his great aunts’ house when he was little because his mother had fits of depression. When he is given the opportunity to spend a week in the bush, Frankie manages to avoid going to camp with his school, despite dreaming about such a trip for years previously. Frankie is worried that he looks too much like his mother, “timorous and beset” (ch. 6 n.pag.), being the same kind of bird: “a dabchick” (ch. 8 n.pag.). To cope with unpredictability, the boy collects lists: to do lists, shopping lists, lists classifying birds or gems, lists to fall asleep, lists to help him relax and breathe again. Umberto Eco explained in a conference at the Ecole du Louvre in 2009
that, during the Enlightenment, scholars were intellectually drawn to classify nature with a view to mastering its diversity and diminishing the value of some of its specimens. Yet, Eco noted the superficiality of such an enterprise, taking the example of Buffon’s classification of animals according to mammals, insects, bird species, and fish, which was nullified when European colonists came across the platypus. It seems that Frankie can be compared to Enlightenment thinkers with his writing and mental enunciation of lists, as he tries to categorise and control life in this exercise. Frankie’s flawed attempts at storytelling his traumatic childhood haunts his writing as well, as he cannot draft a portrait of his family members with words. In Chapter 5, he explains that “the more he tried to capture them in words, the more they seemed to recede from him” (n.pag.). The boy’s linguistic abilities fail him in his task to describe his family for a school project. He prefers imagining them as birds: his father would be a puffin, his brother a sparrow, and his sister a crane or a screech owl. Yet no one can fathom what kind of bird his mother could be. This game reawakens painful memories for Frankie’s siblings too, which forces Frankie to question the status quo of his family. For his brother, their mother is “a caged bird” (ch. 4); for his sister: “a stagnant pond” (ch. 6). The two of them are aware that their mother is imprisoned by her thoughts and that she can descend into deep depression without warning. These external perspectives on their mother helps Frankie disassociate himself from her. In Chapter 7, he eventually rejects his identification with his mother when Sydney teases him for refusing to read unhappy endings: “‘We’re not the same!’ he spat out. ‘I’m me and she’s her! Hear that? I’m ME and she’s HER!’ It sounded absurd (…). The words began reverberating, like a strident playground chant in his head. Me Her Me Her Mehermehermeher…” (n.pag.). Drawing the members of his family as birds leads Frankie to express his similarities with his mother, as if she were his own reflection in a mirror. On the reverse, Sydney’s alterity allows him to face his dissemblance from his double, as if this passage re-enacted Jacques Lacan’s theory of the mirror phase. Yet, the visual play on personal pronouns, written in bold and italics, to then merge together in one nonsensical word sounding like a mumble, highlights Frankie’s dependence on his mother. Their relationship exists outside the syntax of the English language, in what Julia Kristeva describes as a pre-linguistic space, a matriarchal spacetime, experienced as reassuring yet stifling (20), that is why I posit that Francie transmitted her girlhood trauma to her son in this pre-linguistic space.

By participating in the creation of a graphic novel, entitled The Valiant Ranger, Frankie finds empowerment in drawing Sydney’s narrative. He designs an imaginary bird,
called ‘the aral bird’. Here is a description of the boy in the process of revisiting and altering reality through his art: “Frankie imagined the arals so vividly when he was drawing that occasionally he forgot the species was an invention, a perfect composite of all his favourite bird bits” (ch. 7, n.pag.). Applying the technique of the collage to create something new with recycled parts, Frankie actually enacts a method of resilience in his art. If we consider the aral bird as a self-portrait, the collaborative construction of the graphic novel can be interpreted as empowering for the boy. Similarly, Frankie’s dialogic ‘10 p.m. questions’ to his mother are transcribed in italics at the end of each chapter – except for the last two ones where they do not occur. Their narration is at odds with the rest of the text, as if readers were invited to attend the mother and son’s dialogue from a closer position. This feeling of intimacy is rendered by the use of the stream of consciousness which plunges us right into Frankie’s direct thoughts. The boy builds himself up brick by brick during these one-to-one conversations following an anxiety crisis. Jeremy Holmes notes that:

[a]utobiographical competence – the ability to describe one’s past, however painful, clearly and coherently without denial or being overwhelmed – is a manifestation of secure attachment and reflexive function. Freud thought that putting trauma into words was curative, but it is more likely that secure attachment and concomitant reflexive function underlie both resilience and narrative competence. (105)

I have the impression that ‘The 10 p.m. Question’ passages are reconstitutions, as if I were reading a Künstlerroman within a YA novel. Indeed, there, Frankie is suddenly free from syntactical breaches and he does not resort to other languages to express himself. His mother plays the perfect trauma-reader, listening to him and soothing his anxiety. As their attachment bond is presented as secure, the boy can overcome his PTSD symptoms by authoring the story of his life. The typography, the orderly syntax, and the change of narrative perspective all hint at a change of author. I postulate that, in a metaliterary way, ‘The 10 p.m. Question’ passages are extracted from a novel written by Frankie within the novel – even if no indication of his authorship is outlined. In this sense, Frankie performs a technique developed by Epston and White, that of “the externalisation of the problem” (4). By narrating the story of his intergenerational trauma in seven episodes, the boy detaches himself from his mother’s girlhood trauma, framing his past anxiety crises into a coherent discourse. Writing his own life puts a distance between himself and his problems triggered by an attachment disorder. As Frankie’s autofiction is split into seven fragments – creating suspense for readers – De Goldi invites young readers to mimic the technique of the collage Frankie used to create his bird and his life writing text. In a pedagogical way, she creates an analogy between the hero’s
intradiegetic apprenticeship into resilience performed through art, and young adult readers’ extradiegetic reading process in and out of girlhood intergenerational trauma.

Conclusion

Contrary to the idyllic multicultural experience illustrated in the 2017 award-winning picture book, That’s Not a Hippopotamus! by Juliette MacIver and Sarah Davis, the Young Adult stories and novels studied in this chapter reflect negative perspectives of growing up in Aotearoa New Zealand due to subjugating factors like gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and social class. My analysis of YA literature and girlhood trauma encompasses eleven texts written between the 1980s and the 2020s by nine women writers, each belonging to one or more of the four main ethnic groups in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite having various formats such as sequels, graphic narratives, short stories, and novels, these texts are all addressed to a teenage readership – and occasionally adults too, in the case of crossover fiction. Contrary to the other literary genres included in this research, YA fiction seems to distinguish itself in its representations of girlhood trauma by its ending on a positive note. Most YA texts are indeed characterised by ‘happy endings’ as they emphasise the resilience of teenagers when facing and struggling with trauma. This structural singularity suggests that YA writers develop a pedagogical approach to childhood trauma as they aim at giving hope and agency to their young and impressionable readers.

Comparing texts across four decades has allowed me to trace an evolution in the publishing market of YA fiction in Aotearoa New Zealand. While texts from the 1980s like Macdonald’s The Lake at the End of the World are representative of segregationist practices in children’s literature, stories published since the 2010s tend to better reflect the multicultural society of contemporary Aotearoa. Non-Pākehā authors like Whiti Hereaka, Steph Matuku, and Jem Yoshioka, but also Selina Tusitala Marsh with her graphic memoir Mophead, have been awarded national prizes for children’s and young adult literature. The characters who inhabit their literary worlds diversify New Zealand literature by giving voice to Māori, Pasifika, and Asian heroines, expressing their concerns about racism and epistemic violence. Hence, they empower young readers from minorities, allowing them to validate their own cultural experiences within the control of wider New Zealand society. Young readers from
other ethnic groups also learn empathy and tolerance when reading YA texts featuring ethnic minorities and written by authors from underrepresented minorities. Even if male Pākehā authors remain the norm, an increasing visibility of minorities is becoming evident in the publishing landscape of YA fiction in Aotearoa.

Gender representativity remains an important factor to consider in YA literature around the world, and Aotearoa YA literature still contains a bias towards male experience. Boys are more often given the lead and girl characters often remain in the background. As the stories selected for this research mostly focus on (anti-)heroines, it is worth noting that boy characters are also affected by girlhood trauma, like Frankie who is haunted in an intergenerational way by his mother’s childhood trauma in De Goldi’s The 10 p.m. Question; Sorensen who is a male witch in Mahy’s The Changeover; and Kyle Mewburn who grew up in a boy’s body, when they identified themselves as a girl in “Break Up Day”. Gender roles and gender expectations are therefore sources of trauma for children and teenagers who grow up in a patriarchal society. Sexual orientation and sexual abuse also affect girls in their development. Homophobia, rape, and incest, though sensitive topics, are tackled by YA women writers who do not hesitate to question the social norms and the judicial systems in which their girl characters evolve.

Finally, Aotearoa New Zealand YA fiction also reflects environmental concerns linked to the current climate crisis. As early as the 1980s already, authors like Macdonald and Mahy located their teenage heroines within a rapidly changing New Zealand landscape, affected by several (destructive) waves of colonisation, and futuristic nuclear and pesticide disasters. Contemporary Māori YA fiction such as that written by Steph Matuku experiments with sci fi elements and Māori lore to explore teenage survival in the bush. New technologies are obsolete in this story as earthquakes, floods, and supernatural radiation keep the survivors isolated from ‘civilisation’. Plant Studies proves useful when analysing the trauma girls experience in the context of climate change. Plants endemic to Aotearoa become useful tools for heroines to adapt to natural catastrophes as well as objects of study for young adult readers who realise that they can find local resources to help them overcome uncertain climate conditions. YA climate fiction can thus offer young readers an optimistic perspective on contemporary discourses about climate change, and empower them with skills and agency, which can be useful in a time of climate crisis.
CHAPTER 7.

“Conclusion: Reading, Witnessing, and Translating Girlhood Trauma Written by Aotearoa New Zealand Women Authors”
**PART 1: Summary of the Objectives of the Research**

This research on the representations of girlhood trauma in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature written by women is unique in so far as it observes the impact literary genres have in shaping trauma-telling in a settler colony which is not widely studied, unlike the United States, Australia, and Canada (Craps et al., “Decolonizing”). The feminist and decolonial approach that I apply in Trauma Studies further excavates the specificities of Aotearoa New Zealand as a society composed of tangata whenua (people of the land, aka: the Māori) and tangata tiriti (people allowed to stay in Aotearoa following the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi on 6 February 1840). This historical distinction between the Indigenous people of Aotearoa and settlers – whether Pākehā descendants of British colonists, economic migrants, or political refugees, from the West, the Pacific, Asia, or Africa – respects the terms agreed on in the Treaty of Waitangi; gives Māori their rangatiratanga (sovereignty) back; and transforms the neoliberal bicultural policies opposing Pākehā and Māori, into a multicultural scope, as both communities are perceived in their diversity. Indeed, tangata whenua are, like tangata tiriti, ethnically diverse due to their whakapapa (family history), waves of migration, and a century and a half of colonisation. Since 1986, New Zealanders can claim their multiple ancestries in the national census, which allows them to recognise and honour their multiethnicity and their multiculturalism (Didham and Rocha 590). Iwi (tribes) and hapū (subtribes) – Indigenous societal structures which have survived British colonisation – are also bonds which are taken into account in the composition of people’s identities. Applying a kaupapa Māori (Māori methodology) frame of thought asserts the importance, agency, and creativity of the Indigenous people of Aotearoa in the politics of their country. When it comes to girlhood trauma, this set of methodologies is useful as it refuses to victimise survivors, preferring to give them tools to combat the various processes of traumatisation, voice their stories in a dedicated and respectful spacetime, and live on.

Culturally sensitive forms of trauma therapy, adapted to the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, are the foundations of this study. I owe a lot of my trauma-reading and interpretations to Sir Mason Durie, the founder of te whare tapa whā theory (i.e. the conception of health as a four-walled house in Māori culture); David Epston and Michael White, the founders of Narrative Therapy; Kiwi Tamasese and Charles Waldegrave, the founders of Just Therapy; and Linda and Mark Kopua, the founders of Mahi a atua, a form of
Narrative Therapy adapted to Māori storytelling practices. Western research on trauma – especially developed from the 1990s at Yale University, and continuing the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud – has also been essential in my apprenticeship into trauma-reading as it remains pertinent to understand the context in which these theories were formulated (the Victorian era, the First World War, the Shoah, the Vietnam War, 9/11), and how these historical events and eras affected the way trauma was perceived. Traumas which occur during a girl’s childhood must similarly be recontextualised, and the way trauma and gender are intertwined must be acknowledged. Indeed, studies show that girls are more prone to develop interpersonal forms of trauma at an early age, contrary to boys, which conditions their receptivity to future traumatic experiences. Having had their attachment and trust towards a caring figure severed in their formative years deeply damages their sense of self, or what Paul Ricoeur calls “ipséité”: “l’identité au sens d’ipse n’implique aucune assertion concernant un prétendu noyau non changeant de la personnalité” (Soi-même 13), that is to say: “the identity in the sense of ipse does not imply any assertion regarding a supposedly unchanging kernel in one’s personality” (my own translation). Indeed, “ipséité” cannot be construed without alterity (Soi-même 16): it is therefore a conception of identity which evolves over time and which can be altered, modified, damaged, and repaired. Patriarchal structures also damage girls, as they construct girls as the Other. Girls from ethnic minorities can therefore feel that they are at the intersection of several discriminating and othering factors, increasing their unease and the risk for them to be traumatised on several levels, in interpersonal, intergenerational, transgenerational, and/or vicarious ways.

In this last chapter, I would like to come back to some founding texts and ideas of Trauma Studies to create a dialogue between them and the forms girlhood trauma can take in Aotearoa – at least as I could observe them in this thesis. To do so, I will apply Mark Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory to overcome a ‘competitive’ approach to the memory of the Holocaust and that of the cultural traumas which are specific to Aotearoa. Rothberg argues that “far from blocking other historical memories from view in a competitive struggle for recognition, the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other histories” (Multidirectional Memory 6). In 2007, the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand was opened in Wellington. It now includes the 2018 Children’s Holocaust Memorial made of 1.5 million buttons to commemorate the 1.5 million Jewish children who were killed during the Shoah. It also remembers the Deckston Orphanage which was established during the Second World War in Wellington to look after
twenty Jewish children who had escaped from Europe (Holocaust Centre of New Zealand/Te Pūtai Urupatu o Aotearoa). In Canada, the construction of a memory site to the victims of the Holocaust triggers tensions with Indigenous people as no such memorial is planned in Ottawa to honour the victims of residential schools (Dolgoj and Elżanowski), although the 2015 Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission recognised that the residential school system (1880-1996) had been a “cultural genocide” perpetrated against the Indigenous peoples of Canada (Dawn Smith and Thorson 346). New Zealand’s recent interest in the Shoah can similarly look odd in a country which – though it took part in combat in Europe, North Africa, and the Pacific during the Second World War – did not experience any bombings nor any skirmishes on its own soil, and officially discriminated against Jewish refugees, rejecting their applications to settle in New Zealand during and after the Second World War (Holocaust Centre of New Zealand/Te Pūtai Urupatu o Aotearoa). Moreover, although the Jewish population of New Zealand is composed of about seven thousand members (Levine; NZ Census 2013), the cultural traumas experienced by the three main minorities of Aotearoa have not been fully acknowledged nor redressed. For instance, while the Asian Australian community’s contribution to the construction of Australia is recalled in museums like the Museum of Chinese Australian History in Melbourne (1985), the Golden Dragon Museum in Bendigo (1991), and the Northern Territory Chinese Museum (1992) (Couchmann and Bagnall 334), Asian New Zealanders still await their own museum. By applying a multidirectional approach to the memory of traumas provoked by genocides, the techniques deployed by specialists of Holocaust Trauma can be used to illuminate the specificities of the cultural traumas experienced by the Māori, but also by migrant populations like Asian New Zealanders, Pacific Islanders, and, more specifically, by any non-British, non-Protestant, non-white person having to accommodate into the mainstream Pākehā social code, inflected by colonialism, racism, and sexism. As Nuu-chah-nulth Dawn Smith and Helga Thorson note, “[a]n attempt to decolonize Holocaust and Genocide Studies does not diminish the horrors of the Holocaust. Each and every genocide and human rights atrocity is unique in its time and place, its scope, and the way it occurred” (345-346). Trauma Studies applied to the memory of the Shoah can therefore be employed as “a platform” (Rothberg) to give a voice and visibility to the trauma of colonisation that is unique to Aotearoa New Zealand. In such an approach, after summarising the objectives of this research, I would like to come back to the silencing powers of trauma on survivors and witnesses, before analysing literary genres
as modus operandi in trauma-telling. Finally, I will conclude with the roles of trauma-readers as witnesses and translators.

**PART 2: The Silencing Powers of Trauma: Silencing Survivors**

Trauma, by its very nature, is a belated experience which has aporia at its core as no words can contain it. Survivors can find it difficult to find a way to express what traumatised them, and be heard. Witnesses can be silenced too, when identifying with the victim, when feeling complicit with the perpetrator, or when seeing and listening and reading can be damaging for them too.

Signing the Treaty of Waitangi propelled Māori people into a “post-Native Apocalypse World”, as Grace Dillon would phrase it (*Walking the Clouds* 10, qtd. in Higgins 53). Grace Dillon (of Anishinaabe descent) coined this term to situate Indigenous peoples’ land dispossession and acculturation in settler colonies within the context of science fiction and speculative fiction methodologies. For her, colonisation is experienced as a destructive process through which Western technologies have been employed to eradicate Indigenous knowledge. Yet, she also notes, like Gerald Vizenor (of Ojibwa descent) before her, the power of ‘survivance’ (Vizenor) and of ‘biskaabiiyang’ (Dillon, “Introduction”) Indigenous communities have developed to resist against assimilation. Vizenor defines the concept of ‘survivance’ as “an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimization” (15). Beyond survival, this term encompasses ideas of resistance and resilience which debunk a certain reading of history which denigrates Indigenous peoples as passive and defeated victims. Despite the genocide they have endured in settler colonies (Wolfe), Indigenous peoples around the world continue to create art and literature, abide by their own societal and familial structures, and respect the land which saw them and their ancestors thrive. ‘*Biskaabiiyang*’, in Ojibwe, refers to a return to Indigenous epistemologies, which is a vital movement to combat internal colonialism such as the system imposed in settler colonies like Aotearoa New Zealand, where Western ideologies pervade and insidiously dominate the political, judicial, and public sphere.

I have argued in Chapter 1 that, following Dominick LaCapra’s arguments, the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi can be regarded as Aotearoa New Zealand’s foundational trauma. For Māori, this historical event plunged them into a traumatic world as they were excluded
from their ancestors’ land, marginalised from the political sphere, and systematically discriminated against by Western policies that continue to transform their way of life. LaCapra notes that:

Indigenous societies, where religion is not centered on a belief in God or some transcendant, ‘totally other’ being, tend to see the sacred and its spirits in relation to the land or the earth. This is one factor that makes land-based sovereignty so important and renders extremely disorienting, even traumatic, the forced displacement of groups onto typically inhospitable reservations, along with the extraction of minerals, often in exploitative ways by extratribal agents and at times involving the desecration or even looting of sacred places. (93)

In this quotation, LaCapra bases his argument on the cultural trauma experienced by Native Americans in the United States. Not officially named a ‘genocide’ (Dawn Smith and Thorson 345-346), Native American treatment at the hand of American colonists has been traumatising on several levels and the forceful loss of ancestral lands contributed to intergenerational traumatisation. Though not relegated to reservations, Māori lost a significant amount of land over the past 182 years, owning the full territory of both islands in 1840 but, “[b]y 1939 only about 3.5 million acres (1.4 million hectares) of land remained in Māori title” (McAlloon, n.pag.). Settler colonialism as experienced in Aotearoa has been compared to the Holocaust by Tāriana Tūria at the New Zealand Psychological Society Annual Conference in 2000. This comparison is also “referenced by the Waitangi Tribunal to describe the forcible confiscation of lands in the Taranaki during the Land Wars” (Meek 32). Indeed, the word ‘holocaust’ etymologically means ‘a burnt sacrifice’, and the violence suffered by Māori since 1840 can be read in terms of a genocide, as explicitly phrased by the 1948 Geneva Convention (Article II b + Article II e). As settlers never left (Tuhiwai-Smith, Decolonizing 65), Aotearoa cannot be considered as a postcolonial nation and Māori cannot escape from the trauma nourished by settler colonialism. Applying kaupapa Māori which gives centre stage to storytelling (Tuhiwai-Smith, Decolonizing 51) can voice the cultural and historical intergenerational trauma experienced by this community. Storytelling can counterweight the silencing power trauma has on survivors. Mahi a atua, a Māori culturally sensitive form of Narrative Therapy, entices survivors and their whānau (extended families) to engage with ancestors’ stories to analyse the pain they experience in the present time (Kopua 2020). Coming back to the Creation Stories inherited from Papatūānuku (the earth mother) and Ranginui (the sky father) from whom all living beings and non-beings were born, therapists – imagined as change agents – listen to their patients’ stories and help them uncover intergenerational patterns which shed light on their current behaviours, thinking, and approach to given situations.
Survivors of trauma are often trapped between a need to tell their stories and a need to remain silent, depending on the context of enunciation they happen to be in. This necessity to be a witness to the event or series of events which shook the foundations of their lives and identities can be contravened by the blank space left by trauma in their memory, a space which can remain wordless, inaccessible to verbal language. The ‘Yale School of Trauma Studies’ divined that the silencing powers of trauma generate a paradoxical game of interdependency between binary opposites. Shoshana Felman, for example, while analysing Walter Benjamin’s text “The Storyteller” written in 1936, argues that “[s]ilence, Benjamin knows well, is the essence of oppression and traumatization, but it is also something that escapes (resists) the master” (22). Silence is both a tool of repression and of resistance. It is the material of censorship and that of resilience. It is both an absence of text and its palimpsestic rewritings, hence the reversibility and complementarity of these binary opposites. For Dori Laub, trauma-telling is indeed a source of survival for Holocaust survivors and their descendants: “[t]he survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive” (“Event” 78).

Trauma-telling becomes a vital activity and yet it is constantly hindered by its silencing: either that of words which can’t be found, or that of listeners who can’t hear them. In Baby No-Eyes (1998), Patricia Grace expresses the lethal component of trauma-telling when Gran Kura, the grandmother, exclaims: “[o]ur stories could kill you” (26); and they did, as her grandson and stillborn great-grandchild die in a car accident after listening to the whānau’s stories of colonial traumatisation. They were not mentally prepared to hear these stories. Trauma-telling can be traumatising for its audience when the latter are not apprenticed into trauma-reading. Trauma-telling can also be traumatising for the survivor when her/his/their words come back at her/him/them like an echo. Laub continues: “if one talks about the trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to, the telling might itself be lived as a return of the trauma – a re-experiencing of the event itself” (“Bearing Witness” 67, italics in the original).

When the dialogic aspect of trauma-telling is denied, survivors can be turned into subalterns as their voices are not heard due to a power imbalance between speaker and listener (Spivak 292). This power imbalance stems from a certain disbelief on the part of the listener who can regard the traumatised as delusional.

When girl survivors of sexual abuse formulate what was done to them, their testimonies are often doubted, especially when they are at the intersection of several subjugating factors such as sexual orientation, gender, social class, ethnicity, and disability
(Gilmore and Marshall). They also disbelieve their own words as the patriarchal system(s) in which they evolve put pressure on them as being somehow responsible for the abuse they endured (Brison). In *Rain*, Kirsty Gunn sets a (grown) girl diarist as an intradiegetic writer who composes a grief diary to let go of the pain she has felt since her younger brother drowned. In this intimate space, filled with her own words addressed to herself, Jane Phelon voices her guilt at having been raped while her brother was left unattended by the lake. The shame which invades her at having kept a paedophilic relationship silent makes her minimise and marginalise the sexual abuse she suffered. The intradiegetic adult writer is unable to witness the trauma she endured as a tween as if she could not retrieve her past ‘you’, silenced as it is by the (white Western) Male Gaze. Following and adapting the work of Laura Mulvey on the Male Gaze in Hollywood movies, which Elizabeth Ann Kaplan defines as a “dominance-submission pattern” (“Gaze” 27), I have drawn this diagram:

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1. My Own Representation of the (white Western) Male Gaze.**

The (white Western) Male Gaze, as I have represented it in the triangular figure above, is a complex process which alienates girls and dispossesses them of their voice, their thoughts, their agency, and their body. In Jane’s case, her abuser’s (Pākehā) Male Gaze sexualised her at age twelve, raped her, manipulated her into thinking herself responsible for the violence she was experiencing, censored her, and made her feel guilty for her brother’s death. The gender power imbalance which founds patriarchal societies traumatises girls on several levels and in several stages. Even when girls testify to the trauma they experienced, they can be retraumatised by the (white Western) Male Gaze which constantly shames their bodies,
censors their voices, and refuses to hear their versions of events. A feminist approach to girlhood trauma is therefore needed to hear girl survivors’ stories.

PART 3: The Silencing Powers of Trauma: Silencing Witnesses

The term ‘witness’ needs to be specified as several significations can be attached to it. In his research on the Holocaust, Dori Laub excavates three levels of witnessing: “the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (“Event” 75). The first level has been evoked in the previous subsection and refers to the fact that trauma dispossesses survivors of a part of themselves, of who they were prior to the traumatic event, and leaves them without the memory of this event, as if unable to testify to what happened to themselves. The second level concerns the listener; and the third level: trials. In the second level which concerns us here, the listener can be a caring friend/relative, a therapist (as in Laub’s case), an interviewer/a researcher/a journalist, and/or a reader. As such, Laub compares this role to “that of a companion” (“Event” 76), “someone who actually participates in the reliving and reexperiencing of the event” (“Event” 76). Accompanying the survivor in her/his/their journey into trauma-telling, this external witness offers an ear, understanding, care, and a reading out of trauma, to avoid a form of re-traumaisation both for the survivor and for her/him/themselves. As trauma-telling is intertwined with silence and as it is also dependent on silence, Laub emphasises the fact that:

> [h]e or she must listen to and hear the silence, speaking mutely both in silence and in speech, both from behind and from within the speech. He or she must recognize, acknowledge and address that silence, even if this simply means respect – and knowing how to wait. The listener to trauma needs to know all this, so as to be a guide and an explorer, a companion in a journey onto an uncharted land, a journey the survivor cannot traverse or return from alone. (“Bearing Witness” 58-59)

Silence is part of the survivor’s text and needs to be apprehended as such. The listener to silence is like a geographer/cartographer there to help map the damage perpetrated by trauma within an individual and/or a community. Patience and observation are tools to employ in testimonial circumstances. In “The Metaphysics of Youth”, Benjamin wrote: “[c]onversation strives toward silence, and the listener is really the silent partner. The speaker receives meaning from him; the silent one is the unappropriated source of meaning” (6, qtd. in Felman 53). Trauma-telling is therefore conceived as a dialogue between words and their silence; between a trauma-teller and a trauma-reader. Both participants are decoding the traumatic
experience together, with shared knowledge. Indeed, a listener who is unaware of the cultural, historical, and linguistic context in which the traumatisation occurred would be an inefficient reader who would misread the traumatic tale with potentially disastrous consequences for the survivor. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the Kiwi Asian community has experienced a history of racism, social marginalisation, and cultural othering. The testimonies offered by women poets from this vast community cannot be read outside of this context. When Lily Ng honours her grandmother for finding the strength to swim from mainland China to Hong Kong and then settle in New Zealand, she contests the xenophobic discourse her people encounter in the New Zealand press, rejecting them as economic migrants, job and property thieves, to instead highlight the political component of their journey through the Pacific as (unofficial) asylum seekers.

Trauma-reading can be a source of pain and provoke a vicarious form of traumatisation. Compassion fatigue is a risk trauma-readers face when they are listening to trauma-telling. Trauma-reading is indeed not a simple passive activity as trauma-readers interpret the trauma narrative alongside the survivor. Laub explains that: “the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself” (“Bearing Witness” 57). Bearing witness to trauma-telling can lead to an identification with the survivor whom the listener helps share her/his/their tale. The listener’s personal involvement in trauma-telling and its silencing is also described by Charles Waldegrave and Kiwi Tamasese when explaining the basics of Just Therapy. For them,

[w]hen describing therapy, we often use the analogy of weaving. Although the symbolism of weaving is international, it is particularly appropriate in this context because it evokes the activity of many women in the South Pacific Ocean. People come with problem-centered patterns, and the therapist’s task is to weave new threads of meaning and possibility that give new color and new textures. The task of the therapist is to loosen the tight and rigid problem-centered pattern, enabling new and liberating weavings of resolution and hope. (“Central Ideas” 99)

The interdependency between trauma-teller and trauma-reader is made explicit in this analysis as therapists are portrayed as companions and interpreters of the narrative which is unfolded during one or several sessions of therapy. Without trauma-readers’ input, trauma-tellers would not gain cognisance of their traumatic experience. However, neither Waldegrave nor Tamasese mention vicarious traumatisation in the process of Just Therapy. To avoid being affected by their patients’ tales of trauma, Just Therapists at the Family Centre in Lower Hutt organise team work to analyse their own practices and help each other with patients’ cases.
This professional self-analysis performed with the support of other listeners allows trauma-readers to externalise their own reading methodologies and take some distance from the tales they hear and interpret. This communal reading counteracts the silencing powers of trauma which can impact witnesses/therapists. Dori Laub indeed emphasises the dangers faced by trauma-readers: “[t]here are hazards to the listening to trauma. Trauma – and its impact on the hearer – leaves, indeed, no hiding place intact” (“Bearing Witness” 72). Trauma-readers need to be trained in trauma-reading methodologies to avoid being annihilated by the silencing powers of trauma. When I read Selina Tusitala Marsh’s graphic memoir, *Mophead*, to my then four-year-old French and Kiwi Asian daughter, she felt uncomfortable at the end and asked to be told another story: *The Huge Bag of Worries* by Virginia Ironside. I wondered why she had reacted that way and reread *Mophead* after she had gone to sleep. I then realised that Marsh’s graphic memoir is quite accusing and my daughter probably identified with young Selina when the latter was mocked and verbally abused. Indeed, in one panel, trauma-readers are invited to be in young Selina’s shoes as a crowd of children are shown pointing at her/us while chanting swearwords. My daughter had been called ‘mophead’ at kindergarten and this passage probably revived her pain at being targeted and racialised for her Asian features amidst her white French peers. At age four, she was not armed to read Marsh’s trauma narrative without identifying with the heroine’s pain. The other children’s book came to counterbalance the effects of Marsh’s story of childhood abuse, as it shows children how to deal with one’s relatives’ worries. This self-care story relieved my daughter of the violence she had witnessed while reading young Selina’s trauma narrative. Trauma-reading thus requires an apprenticeship.

Testimonies can fail when readers contest the validity of trauma-telling. Children’s testimonies need to be considered cautiously as children can be manipulated by adults into seeing events through their distorted eyes. Moreover, children do not always perceive the frontier between fiction and reality, nor the consequences of their actions. Freud himself ended up systematically disqualifying girls’ (and women’s) accounts of childhood sexual abuse as fantasy. Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marhall argue that testimonies, when formulated by white girls, tend to be believed as white girls are commonly constructed as victims in the Western psyche. Yet, when girls are non-whites, disabled, not cisgendered, and from a lower social class, their voices are often doubted, hushed, and rejected as irrelevant. Some girls’ testimonies can therefore be challenged by silencing witnesses (Gilmore, “Introduction: Tainted Witness” 9). Leonie Pihama notes that Māori women’s opinions have
been marginalised since British colonisation, as a double patriarchal system was applied to them, weakening their roles within iwi, hapū, and whānau. The Waitangi Tribunal restores the mana of Māori women as it recognises their importance in whakapapa (genealogy), the way Christian missionaries debased them, and the validity of their experiences. The Waitangi Tribunal provides a spacetime in which Māori girls and women can testify to their traumas, and be heard. Laub’s theory of “the collapse of witnessing” (“Event” 80) during the Holocaust cannot be applied to Aotearoa New Zealand as a result. Laub explains that:

what precisely made a Holocaust out of the event is the unique way in which, during its historical occurrence, the event produced no witnesses. Not only, in effect, did the Nazis try to exterminate the physical witnesses of their crime; but the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims. (“Event” 80, italics in the original)

Laub’s interpretation of Holocaust-telling reveals that the silencing powers of trauma-reading are as destructive as the genocide of the Jews during the Shoah. However, in Aotearoa, trauma-reading is not endangered by a collapse of witnessing: Māori cultural trauma-telling is complicated by a series of distorted representations purported by colonists and influenced by Social Darwinist theories. When Māori women authors portray Māori girls’ trauma, they need to circumvent racist stereotypes which have for a long time prevented Māori readers from seeing themselves in Pākehā New Zealand literature (Grace; Tuhiwai-Smith).

PART 4: Literary Genres as Modus Operandi in Trauma-Telling

I have studied five literary genres in this thesis: life writing (ch. 2), poetry (ch. 3), fictional diaries and the epistolary mode (ch. 4), the female Bildungsroman (ch. 5), and young adult fiction (ch. 6). To these genres could have been added a study of historical novels and of short stories, due to the profusion of texts written by women and dealing with girlhood trauma in these two formats. Plays as well could have been analysed but, due to the Covid-19 pandemic during which this thesis was written, theatres were closed. I chose to observe the connections between the five genres mentioned above and girlhood trauma-telling because these genres construct an active readership and depend on a committed trauma-reader to exist. The texts which illustrate these genres have been selected to reflect the multicultural and multilingual texture of contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand Literature. In 2017, Tina Makereti (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Ati Awa, Ngāti Rangatahi, Pākehā, and Moriori) imagined
what the wharenui (communal house) of Aotearoa New Zealand Literature could look like. She deplored the overwhelming presence of Pākehā authors, at the expense of other communities’ writers. She therefore invited writers from ethnic minorities to write their visions and experiences of New Zealand. Michalia Arathimos (Greek New Zealander) answered her call some months later on e-tangata, arguing that, to be the reflection of contemporary Aotearoa, publishers would have to diversify the authors they back up and stop homogenising Pākehāness. For her, British writers are accepted into the club of Pākehā New Zealand authors while non-British Pākehā writers struggle to be published and be read as their cultural and linguistic experiences do not correspond to the white British Protestant tradition imposed and expected by settler colonialism.

Following this call for a more nuanced approach to the four main ethnic literary communities of Aotearoa (Pākehā, Māori, Asian, and Pasifika), I selected trauma-tellers from diverse ancestries. In Chapter 2 on life writing, I compared To the Is-land (1982) by Janet Koea (Irish Pākehā); The Kindness of Strangers: Kitchen Memoirs (2007) by Shonagh Kean (Scottish Pākehā); My Katherine Mansfield’s Project (2015), a notebook written by Kirsty Gunn (Scottish Pākehā); These Two Hands: A Memoir (2017) by Renée (Ngāti Kahungunu, Cape de Verdan, Irish, and Australian Pākehā); and Mophead (2019), a graphic memoir by Selina Tusitala Marsh (Samoan, Tuvaluan, English, Scottish, and French Pākehā). In Chapter 3 on poetry, I analysed poems by five Kiwi Asian women poets of Chinese descent: Renee Liang, Nina Mingya Powles, Lily Ng, Vanessa Mei Crofskey, and Wen-Juenn Lee. The family histories of these five poets reflect the diverse migration routes which have made up the heterogeneous Chinese New Zealand diaspora. Renee Liang’s family originates from Hong Kong. Lily Ng’s grandparents escaped from Communist China via Hong Kong. The families of Nina Mingya Powles, Vanessa Mei Crofskey, and Wen-Juenn Lee belong to the Chinese diaspora of Malaysia. Chapter 4 on fictional diaries and the epistolary mode focuses on The Book of Secrets (1987) by Fiona Kidman (English Pākehā); Rain (1994) by Kirsty Gunn (Scottish Pākehā); and Rich Man Road (2015) by Ann Glamuzina (Croatian Pākehā). Chapter 5 on the female Bildungsroman focuses on Cousins (1992) by Patricia Grace (Ngāti Toa, Ngāti Raukawa, and Te Āti Awa iwi); Does This Make Sense To You? (1995) by Renée (Ngāti Kahungunu, Cape de Verdan, Irish, and Australian Pākehā); and Reconnaissance (1999) by Kapka Kassabova (Bulgarian New Zealander then Scot). In Chapter 6, dedicated to young adult fiction, I compare the following texts: The Changeover: A Supernatural Romance (1984) by Margaret Mahy (English Pākehā); In Lane Three, Alex Archer (1987) by Tess
Duder (Pākehā); The Lake at the End of the World (1988) by Caroline Macdonald (Pākehā); the trilogy: I am Not Esther (1998), I Am Rebecca (2014), and Being Magdalene (2015) by Fleur Beale (Pākehā); The 10 p.m. Question (2008) by Kate De Goldi (Pākehā); Bugs (2013) by Whiti Hereaka (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Te Arawa, and Pākehā); “Break Up Day” (2015) by Kyle Mewburn (Australian Pākehā); Flight of the Fantail (2018) by Steph Matuku (Ngāti Mutunga, Ngāi Tama, and Te Atiawa); and Something Alive (2018) by Jem Yoshioka (Japanese New Zealander). This corpus is not exhaustive as other texts could have been analysed, which leaves this research open to further discussion.

Life writing, ideally based on an ethics of truth-telling and the confessional mode, requires a trauma-reader who is empathetic to the trauma narrative which unfolds under her/his/their eyes. Otherwise, the trauma-teller’s version of events runs the risk of being criticised and challenged, which can retraumatising the survivor. The closeness created by trauma-tellers when writing the narrative of their lives can engender a confusion of roles for trauma-readers who can think themselves allowed to analyse the trauma narrative they are discovering in a pathologising way. Laura Marcus warns against the psychoanalytic and psychological pitfalls of trauma-reading which confine trauma-tellers into one medicalised reading only, imprisoning survivors into one version of their trauma (262-263). Yet, as Benjamin explains, storytelling is based on the art of repetition (Felman 52). By analogy, trauma-telling keeps repeating itself, which demystifies the appearance of closure affirmed by the book version of trauma-writing. The multiplicity of life writing forms shows that trauma-tellers have the option to adapt this genre to the content of their traumatic tales. Some forms pretend to be shapeless, like notebooks, an aesthetic choice taken by Kirsty Gunn in My Katherine Mansfield Project. Others pay a limited attention to childhood, like memoirs – a literary device which happens to be useful when trauma-tellers’ memories have been damaged by childhood abuse, as, I argue, are the cases of Shonagh Koea and Renée. Fragmentation and anachrony seem to be common to all five women trauma-tellers of this chapter though, which are, for Roger Luckhurst, the very marks of trauma-telling. I have shown that humour, an unexpected device to express a traumatic experience, could yet be found in Renée’s texts to convey the cultural trauma endured by Māori girls and women, and in Marsh’s graphic memoir to adapt her trauma-telling style to her childhood audience so that they would not – or be less – traumatised by her own story.

Poetry, whether it is lyric or not, demands an attentive trauma-teller who is able to complete the (often) brief texts with her/his/their interpretations. To avoid such interpretations
becoming misleading or misrepresentative, trauma-readers need to respect the cultural, linguistic, and historical aporia contained in the texts they read. The preface to the first Kiwi Asian poetry collection, *Clear Dawn* (2021), written by Alison Wong and Paula Morris, invites trauma-readers to think beyond the Pākehā/Māori dichotomy introduced by neoliberal governments in the 1980s to promote New Zealand’s biculturalism. Indeed, this binary frame of reference excludes Asian New Zealanders and Pasifika from Aotearoa’s public and literary sphere. Wong and Morris instead invite us to read the poems written by New Asians (New Zealanders who migrated from Asia from the 1980s onwards) as anchored in another epistemology: kaupapa Māori. Indeed, when read as poems from tangata tiriti, and not from a marginalised community, Kiwi Asian poetry is read through the lens of the Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi, as inscribed in a social contract which allows settlers to dwell within Aotearoa if respecting Māori customs. The cultural and historical trauma experienced by Asian New Zealanders is conveyed by women poets discussed in this thesis as a form of girlhood intergenerational trauma, giving voice to their female ancestors who resisted against authoritarianism, the Male Gaze, and xenophobia. Kiwi Asian women poets draw their own migration maps, crossed by their female ancestors, in which the Pacific Ocean is like a lake, and their community belongs to a wider people encompassing Pacific Islanders and Māori. They therefore create a dialogue with Indigenous poets from the Pacific and from Aotearoa, such as Albert Wendt in “Towards a New Oceania” (1976) and Epeli Hau'ofa in “Our Sea of Islands” (1994) who imagined the water of the Pacific Ocean as the one bonding cultural element which connects diverse communities spread from Hawai’i to Easter Island to Taipei and to Samoa. Kiwi Asian women poets thus claim their share in a common cultural heritage inherited from the history of the Pacific Ocean and inscribe their trauma-telling in a culturally sensitive reading of Māori cultural trauma.

The topic of the fourth chapter on fictional diaries and the epistolary mode reveals the fluidity at the heart of genre analysis. These two fictional modes, mimicking life writing techniques, have experienced a renaissance in the twenty-first century due to the development of new technologies. Their eighteenth-century popularity in Western literature was followed by a certain disinterest for two centuries. My decision to work on both forms together is nourished by the work of Françoise Simonet-Tenant on literatures of privacy. Simonet-Tenant argues that letter and diary writing were developed during the Enlightenment when privacy was imagined in the West as a third space, between the public and private spheres. For her, these genres are one and the same because when a diarist composes her/his/their text they
address it to her/him/themselves as if to another person, as in letter writing. Moreover, letter and diary writing are often associated with the female sex, which can lead to pejorative interpretations of these genres as marginal and unliterary. Fiona Kidman inserts letters and diary entries into her historical novel, *The Book of Secrets*, to give authenticity to the women writers’ testimonies against patriarchal oppression during the nineteenth-century Normanist odyssey from Scotland to Canada, to Australia, and to New Zealand. In a similar way, Ann Glamuzina constructs her Magdalene story over three generations of Croatian and Samoan New Zealanders who excavate their girlhood intergenerational trauma through diary writing and reading. As for Kirsty Gunn, she composes a grief diary which reveals the inconsolable pain of the woman diarist who lost her younger brother when she was twelve, and the sexual abuse a friend of her parents made her suffer. Letter and diary writing allows girl survivors to find a space to testify to their past trauma, finding in their adult selves a companion to their teenage misfortunes. Trauma-writing in these genres is not cathartic as might be expected. Yet, trauma-reading offers understanding and closure to the survivors’ girl descendants.

The female Bildungsroman is the topic of Chapter 5. The Bildungsroman is a mythical genre commonly associated with whiteness, maleness, the bourgeoisie, and the nineteenth century, hence its deep connection with European imperialism. For Māori women writers like Patricia Grace and Renée to adapt this genre to express girlhood intergenerational trauma, they accomplish a political act which feminises and decolonises the traumatic narrative of their Indigenous (anti-) heroines. As a Bildungsroman intervenes on three levels (the hero(ine)’s apprenticeship, her/his/their nation’s history, and the reader’s personal development), the narration of Aotearoa New Zealand as a nation is tackled alongside the traumatic journeys of Māori and non-Māori girls-then-women. Contesting a unifying, Anglified, and Christian reading of New Zealand history, Grace and Renée each choose to amplify values like sisterhood and solidarity (between female relatives whose fates are intertwined in *Cousins*; between Magdalene ‘penitents’ who support each other over the years to overcome personal tragedies in *Does This Make Sense To You?*). Non-Māori trauma-readers are thus invited to question Pākehā-inflected nationalistic myths to nuance their approach to mana wahine (Māori women’s power and charisma), and acknowledge Māori women’s active roles in the well-being and development of their whakapapa (family history). As for *Reconnaissance* by Kapka Kassabova, its labelling as ‘migrant literature’ undermines its disillusioned portrait of Pākehā consumer society. The heroine, a Bulgarian refugee during the fall of the Soviet regime, experiences nostalgia for her motherland while touring her host
country until she meets her biological father (and political traitor) in Nelson. Readers uncover the traumatic history of Bulgaria while re-discovering Pākehā New Zealand, depicted as a hollow and soulless touristic site. As a white European, the heroine debunks the homogenising of the Pākehā community by highlighting her own ancestral religious and ethnic connections. Apprenticed heroines’ traumatic narratives can educate readers into listening through the interstices of cultural discourses and rehabilitate the voices of marginalised communities.

Young adult fiction, the topic of Chapter 6, is the literary genre where trauma-tellers need to be the most cautious, caring, and careful in the way they formulate their traumatic narratives as their audience/trauma-readers are not necessarily trained to interpret such experiences within the context of trauma theory and can be vicariously traumatised by the content of these stories. I explore a dozen texts which belong to various subgenres like the female Bildungsroman, the graphic memoir, Indigenous Futurism, fantasy, life writing, climate fiction, and dystopia. Their two commonalities, beyond the topic of girlhood trauma, are their readership who is underage, and their happy endings (which can be analysed as a way not to traumatise their young readers). And yet, the content of these texts is deemed ‘adult’ (Falconer 564) because they evoke personal and social taboos such as suicide, grief, drugs, childhood abuse, rape, racism, transphobia, sexism, and environmental catastrophes. The use of the stream of consciousness as in Bugs by Whiti Hereaka allows teenage-readers an intimate access into the meandering thoughts of a girl survivor, and this intrusion into the very fabric of trauma-telling can make them experience a way out of trauma as the trauma-teller is resilient and manages to relegate her traumatic narrative to the past. Cli fi and sci fi elements present in The Lake at the End of the World by Caroline Macdonald and The Flight of the Fantail by Steph Matuku invite the youth to face their own fears regarding climate change which directly affects them in their everyday life, as well as its apocalyptic discourse which invades the press and social media. In these scenarios, readers are both witnesses and survivors themselves as they could potentially experience such natural cataclysms just like their fictional avatars. Racism, however, pervades these young adult stories, either addressing its deleterious impact on a child’s self-development, and sometimes – quite shockingly – implementing it as the norm as in Macdonald’s New Zealand of the future which is – as I revealed while applying Plant Studies – imagined as an all-white British colony. More recent YA texts though denounce racism, giving readers an insight into what it means to be racialised and discriminated against for being perceived as differing from the colonially-
inherited Pākehā racial ideal. Steph Matuku and Whiti Hereaka give voice to socially marginalised teens who are at the intersection of several excluding factors such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and social class. Transforming these social pariahs into heroes challenges the success stories propagated by neoliberal Pākehā and patriarchal governments. In her graphic narrative *Something Alive*, Jem Yoshioka gives visibility to the anti-Asian sentiment and to racial and sexist prejudices she endured while growing up as a Japanese New Zealander. To do so, she employs silence and spatial separations to materialise the uneasiness she feels when confronted with cultural gaps, racism, and sexism. YA novels therefore deploy a lot of devices borrowed from other genres to train teenagers into reading a variety of traumas without traumatising them in return.

**PART 5: When Witnesses are Survivors are Readers are Listeners are Translators**

Trauma-readers are witnesses, listeners, and translators. The act of translation entails a movement from a language A regarded as a point of departure and a source of meaning, to a language B which is seen as a targeted mode of communication. In this passage from Language A to Language B, meaning can be added, distorted, mistranslated, adapted, and lose its authenticity. Meena Alexander, an Asian American poet, explains that “‘translate’ in the early sense of the word, mean[s] to transport across a border” (88). In this definition, languages are thus imagined as countries surrounded by clear-cut frontiers, which is utopian as interlinguistic reading (or ‘interlinguality’) highlights the common roots between words from different languages belonging to the same linguistic family. Reading through the seemingly foreign aspect of languages uncovers connections between words from different origins and excavates meaning where at first there was none for the language student. By analogy, trauma-readers translate the text of trauma, composed of silence and words, as if it were a foreign language. Indeed, trauma scars languages so deeply that it affects the syntactical order, deforming, modifying, transforming, and hiding the meaning of the experience words are supposed to convey/translate.

In this research, readers have witnessed my reading of the traumatic narratives written by women trauma-writers from Aotearoa New Zealand. I am a trauma-reader who happens to be in constant translation from English to French and back to English; from te reo Māori to English to French to English and back to te reo; from Samoan/Bulgarian/Croatian/… to
English to French to English and back to Samoan/Bulgarian/Croatian… I am constantly travelling between languages to read through Aotearoa New Zealand traumatic narratives. Kapka Kassabova describes the altering and sometimes alienating power of translation in *Reconnaissance* when she describes the physical metamorphosis of her main female character: a child speaking Bulgarian when she lived in her motherland; a menstruating woman forced to communicate in English in New Zealand, the country which offered a shelter to her biological father who proves to be a torturer for the Soviet regime. As this example shows, translating can sometimes be an alienating process for the trauma-reader.

Trauma is a linguistic experience which can be complexified when trauma-tellers are multilingual. As more than 160 languages are spoken in Aotearoa every day (The Royal Society of New Zealand/Te Apārangi), trauma therapists need to take the multilingual component of their patients’ traumatic tales into account. Narrative Therapy Centres hire Māori healers to address the health issues of Māori patients and their whānau. In Just Therapy, patients are seen by therapists who are aware of their cultural and linguistic requirements and expectations. Kiwi Tamasese, for example, applies Samoan values of care when addressing Samoan New Zealander patients and their family. Mahi a atua is specifically designed to meet Māori patients and their whānau’s needs in terms of mental health approach. Pākehā girls and women are also at risk of misdiagnosis when treated within the Western psychological tradition. Janet Frame’s alienating and destructive experience of psychoanalysis and psychiatry is revelatory of the limitations of Western patriarchal mental health treatments when applied to women and girls. The physical, verbal, and emotional violence she endured while being confined in mental health institutions participate in the process of institutional silencing. Her testimony aims at undermining the official medical discourse which had confined her within the diagnosis of schizophrenia. As a woman, her words and ideas did not fit the male discourse of psychology, as if trauma-telling was a gendered act. As psychology and psychoanalysis have a history of misogyny and have situated boys’ and men’s behaviours as the ‘norm’, women’ and girls’ trauma-telling differs from what male therapists can expect, as if female trauma-telling was another language altogether for some male therapists. Olga’s trauma-telling in *Rich Man Road* by Ann Glamuzina is deeply anchored in Croatian, in her syntactical use of the English language, and her insertion of Croatian words throughout her diary. She constantly feels the need to translate her traumatic personal journey from Croatian to English to be read by her granddaughter, Pualele, who is herself translating what she reads.
from English to Samoan as Samoan is her mother tongue. Trauma-reading can be a multilingual act of translation.

Walter Benjamin conceptualised the act of translation in these terms:

[i]n all language and linguistic creations, (...) there remains in addition to what can be conveyed something that cannot be communicated... It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work. (qtd. in Felman 23)

Language is all the more inefficient when used to express trauma, which further connects trauma-reading with translating in Benjamin’s terminology. The addition of meaning contained in the silence of a testimony can be translated by a trauma-reader who is trained in deciphering the cultural and linguistic differences at the heart of trauma-telling. The colonial suppression of te reo Māori contributed to the cultural trauma of the Māori community (McLellan et al. 461). Te reo speakers have access to te ao Māori (the Māori world), with its epistemology, cosmology, whakapapa, arts, and literature. The loss of te reo is regarded as traumatic for many Māori. Whakamā (shame, embarrassment) is the name Māori give to their relationship with this form of acculturation (Hurihanganui). The revival of te reo since the 1970s, shown in the increasing number of te reo-speakers amongst the younger generation, retrieves mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), which Hirini Moko Mead symbiotically connects with te reo: “[l]anguage was the vehicle and the tool that people employed to access, contribute to, or think about, knowledge in general” (n.pag.). Indeed, he explains that:

[s]ome of this accumulated knowledge is remembered in proverbs. Some of this knowledge is found in stories (...). Some of this knowledge is incorporated into traditional songs, into place names, into the names given to people, in the names given to various wind directions, and so on. (n.pag.)

Mātauranga Māori includes pre-colonial knowledge and knowledge adapted to today’s world. Its interdependency with te reo emphasises the need for Māori, and New Zealanders from other communities, to be linguistically and culturally trained in te ao Māori so as to read the intergenerational, transgenerational, and interpersonal forms of trauma Māori have encountered over more than a century and a half of occupation. The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, established in 2018 and abiding by the terms of the Treaty of Waitangi, bears witness to the trauma-telling of child abuse survivors. The findings of this trial show that Māori children have been systematically and discriminatively abused while in care. Their stolen childhood has had repercussions on their health, their employment history, their sociability, and their interactions with their loved ones over several generations. Testimonies of former Magdalene girls have also been heard at the hearings and published in
the press, corroborating Renée’s fictional reading of these teenage mothers’ interrupted lives. However, the Commission is calling for more survivors to testify as more than 260,000 children are believed to have suffered abuse while in care between 1950 and 1999. Only a few thousands of them have taken part in the trauma-telling stage set up by the State to acknowledge the damage done by institutional silence. In such a context, I feel legitimised in reading survivors’ and witnesses’ silence in the face of massive child abuse orchestrated by religious, governmental, and charitable institutions, as a form of trauma-telling.

“**My Ukrainian Friend**”

She turned her head
crowned with brazen plaits
to tell me a joke in chemistry class
What’s the difference between a pot of yoghurt and a New Zealander?
The yoghurt has more culture.

But we did not spring fully-grown
from the loins of the Motherland!
We slept in Papatūānuku’s womb,
woke in darkness.
We tore the only world we knew in two,
made a prisoner of the sun and called it Day.
We slung hooks into the ocean and called it Land.

We cried over smallpox scars,
picked musket balls from our bones
and when they split the atom
felt skeletons stir.
We were nailed to the cross, and on the third day rose again
to wait in the check-out line at New World.

On Saturdays we eat panekeke
out of Chinese take-out boxes.
I hand a red cheongsam to dry
in icy Wellington wind.

“Origin Myths”

*While watching Lisa Reihana’s video installation Transit of Venus [Infected] at the Royal Academy of Art, London.*

Where are you from? (In the background a woman’s voice is the wind)
What is your ethnicity? (Blue-green leaves shake while waves pour at my feet)
On your mother’s or father’s side? (I have never seen trees like these growing so near the sea)
How long have you been here? (The trees and mountains are listening to the wind)
How long has your family been here? (The imaginary trees cry out)
Where were you born? (Singing, dancing, an endless loop of sea and endless loop of sea of sea)
Where was your mother born? (They say the sun never sets on the British Empire)
Where was your passport issued? (A ship with white sails slips into the Sounds)
What is your permanent address? (A woman with feathers in her hair stands on the shore)
What is your mother tongue? (Watching small volcanoes erupt slowly in the distance)
Is your hair colour natural? (To complete the scene I sew my own star map in red thread)
What does this country mean to you? (I embroider volcanoes onto horizons)
Is this your home? (I stitch my name into the sea)
What is the purpose of your visit today? (I measure the distance)
[In this transcription, the signs * refer to Chinese logograms]

“Alternate words for mixed-race”
After Danez Smith

Mudblood¹.
Hapa².
“Nǐ shibushì hùnxuè?”³
A string of plastic chrysanthemums⁴.
My body’s made of crushed little stars⁵.
A bowl of tangerines left on the blue grave at dusk⁶.
“Can I guess your ethnicity?”⁷
An apparition; a faint trace of something; a faint secondary image produced by a fault in an optical system⁸.
“A stroke is missing here. Can’t you write your own name?”⁹
When I think of that word [half-caste], I get an image in my head of being split and split again to the point where you just shimmer like glitter¹⁰.
** is not my middle name but my second first name. My name¹¹.
I try again but I am left holding a bird in one hand and a halved moon in the other¹².

¹ When you described yourself with this word one night over Hainan chicken rice in the fluorescent shopping mall, I started to laugh -
² Not included in the document “Terms Used to Describe People of ‘Mixed-Race’: Past and Present” compiled by the Multiple Heritage Project in 2009.
³ In a stationary shop down a hutong in Beijing, shaking snow out of my hair, the shop attendant approaches me with her fingers outstretched.
⁴ These mourning flowers are always either yellow or white.
⁵ Mitski Miyawaki, from her album Puberty 2.
⁶ We bought mini tangerines at the market and unpeeled and ate them two at a time.
⁷ Standing in the crowd in the rooftop bar, the stars are about to burst over my head.
⁸ I don’t believe in ghosts but I believe people who say they have seen them.
⁹ Please present a report on your exchange in Beijing with a title page and photographs attached.
¹¹ Bright / elegance. I split the pieces into smaller pieces: a sun next to a moon / a tooth next to a bird.
¹² A close variant of * is *, crow.
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