OF GRIOTTES & PANTOMIMES

DYASPORA LOVE, DREAMS, MEMORIES, AND REALITIES IN THE WORKS OF EDWIDGE DANTICAT AS THEY RELATE TO BLACK FEMINISMS

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DEDICATED TO THE SISTER-WOMEN-WARRIORS AND BROTHER-REBELS

WHO KEEP ME GROUNDED IN REVOLUTION AND LOVE.

AS I TOO BELIEVE, TRUE REVOLUTIONARIES ARE GUIDED BY PROFOUND FEELINGS OF LOVE,

MY OWN (INNER)REVOLUTION IS GROUNDED IN MY LOVE FOR YOU.

THIS THESIS IS MY HEART SPEAKING.

I HOPE THAT BOTH MY ACTIONS AND MESSAGE SPEAK TO YOU HEARTS AS WELL.

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PREFACE

What initially piqued my interest in Edwidge Danticat's work is the manner in which her narratives bring to life dually—and often ternary—oppressed Haitian women. Beneath this interest lies my fascination with the way she deals with and writes of aspects within my own reality that remain perplexing to me. As a Haitian-American, Black[1] woman, I live at the crossroads of identities and often I can be found at my wits' end when attempting to explain Haitian epistemology and way of life within a western context. Edwidge Danticat's evocations of the permeability of trauma, the physical pain of absence, the tangibility of the dream and spiritual world, the corporeality of memory, and the evanescent yet empowering quality of love give voice to my realities in ways I have never before been able to explain. It is in understanding this—in addition to how this relates to the experience of life in a Black, low-income, female body—that I have found her literature revolutionary to my understanding of self.[2] It is at the nexus of Black, Caribbean, and Haitian feminism that I have found the tools to dissect how it is that her literature does this for me. Thus my thesis itself lives at the intersections of literary analysis, imagination, politics and theory; it involves interdisciplinarity at its best and epitomizes my own mode of

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[1] Throughout my thesis I will be using Black with a capital "b" because it is a political and social identity rather than just a phenotypically different sub-genus of the human race.

[2] Barbara Christian writes that, "Among the folk who speak in muted tones are people of color, feminists, radical critics, creative writers, who have struggled for much longer than a decade to make their voices, their various voices, heard, and for whom literature is…necessary nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better" (Christian 1988, 69).

existence. It is on this journey to understanding this intersectionality that I wish to take you.

My thesis is my interpretation of the interplay between Black and Haitian feminism and Danticat's revisionist historical[3] fiction. As this process has also enabled me to better understand women's role in Haiti's history, I am becoming better equipped to understand the voices of my own foremothers[4]. As Danticat's work is contemporary, relatively widely taught—in comparison to other Haitian women writers' works, and more popular among younger Haitian women in my age group, many of us have sought to comprehend not only Haitian womanhood, but also Haitian identity and Haiti as a nation by way of her novels. In the following pages, I am attempting to cognize how Danticat writes about Haitian women and their roles in Haitian politics in order to illuminate the paths along which identity is formed as well as understood, and also the process by which the politics of identity are shaped. It is my belief that Edwidge Danticat writes about Haiti through the eyes of her women. In so doing, she plays griotte, and pantomimes the silent struggles of Haitian women, making them audible and visible so that they may speak, and the world change.

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[3] Throughout my thesis I use "revisionist history" to denote the act of revising historical narratives whose authors chose to eliminate voices of those usually silent. I acknowledge that this term also has negative connotations, but I am simply referring to the act of revising history to make it more inclusive of fuller narratives and truths, specifically those of the women.

[4] Myriam Chancy writes that "women whose cultural identities have been plundered by imperialism and colonialism may reclaim the past by connecting themselves to a communal consciousness, the origin of which is the voice of their foremothers" (Chancy, 1997, 10). I hope to show that the way that Edwidge Danticat incorporates this reclamation of Haitian women's history in her writing is very important to the continued legacy of Haitian women who have striven alongside men to create this nation.

i.

ON THE POLITICS OF SPEAKING, WRITING AND SURVIVING SILENCE: REBEL LITERATURE AND EDWIDGE DANTICAT

It is my belief that "much of Haitian women's literature should be read as a literature of revolution"(Chancy 1997, 6). In this thesis, I explore Edwidge Danticat's portrayal of the ways Haitian women can be read as an example of writing rebel literature. Rebel literature is writing that expresses the plight and oppression of marginalized people in a way that problematizes normalized epistemics and hegemony. This literature helps to relocate the blame for society's ills in the actions and modes of existence of the powerful. The main characteristics of this genre of literature include: the employment of speech, the novel and memory as a revolutionary tool; the allocation of power to self-define and reform identity in the hands of Black women; and, lastly, the promotion of revisionist histories that give voice to the lives and stories of Black women who are otherwise speechless. It is my belief that Danticat's works do this.

Much has been written about Danticat concerning the ways her works' literary form allows for clear understanding. Much has also been written about her aesthetic and the ways it engages the senses, emotions, and more. In contrast, few literary critics have engaged with the ways these authorial choices she makes are related to Black and Caribbean feminism and both Black and Caribbean literary traditions. I argue that this literature and the techniques used in creating it may be read as such that subcribes to a Black and Haitian feminist ideology. I believe her works are part of a greater feminist project that posits Black women as agents of knowledge and places value on our worldview and modes of survival. Relying on the Afrocentric model developed by Patricia Hill Collins, I will show how three of Danticat's works contain literary components that allow for a Black feminist reading.

The basic tenet of Black Feminism is that at the intersection of race, gender, and class oppression exists a multi-layered subjugation under which Black women are forced to live. In her essay titled "Defining Black Feminist Thought," Collins articulates what is referred to as standpoint epistemology. She writes that Black feminist thought "involves facing this complex nexus of relationships among biological classification, the social construction of race and gender as categories of analysis, the material conditions accompanying these changing social constructions, and Black women's consciousness about these themes"(Collins 1990, 3). She insists on a specific relationship "between a Black women's standpoint—those experiences and ideas shared by African-American women that provide a unique angle of vision on self, community, and society—and theories that interpret these experiences"(ibid). Furthermore, she argues "Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women…[and thus] encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it"(ibid). Black feminist Carole Boyce Davies contends that "Black feminist criticism began as a subversion and counter-articulation to the terms of both Black and feminist criticism" (1994, 31). Within this vacuum of applicable critique about the world in relation to a multiplicity of oppressions arose Black Feminism decades before. Both Collins' and Davies' works, therefore, are built on years of literary criticisms and theoretical articulations commencing with those of the Combahee River Collective.

For Collins, with this view, Black feminists aim "to develop a theory that is emancipatory and reflective and which can aid African-American women's struggles

against oppression"(1990, 10). In that sense, they also hold a community-oriented vision constructed to combat the multiple forms of oppression Black women confront. In her essay "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory," Black feminist bell hooks concurs. She states, "[a]s a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other group"(2001, 144). A number of years prior to both Collins and hooks, the Combahee River Collective was in accordance with this logic. In their seminal statement, the Combahee River Collective asserted that any effort to eliminate Black women's social injustice will, in effect, eliminate that of all other people (Collective 1978). As Hazel Carby puts it, "[w]e [Black women] can point to no single source of our oppression"(2000). Indeed, we have a viewpoint that enables us to see how different aspects of oppression interact to subjugate us.

While Collin's work is focused on Black women's experiences in the United States, I find validity in her crystallization of a methodology that can be used to understand the way that Black women as authors use standpoint epistemology to write literature of revolt. According to Collins, there are three components used in articulating Black women's subjugation; these characteristics are: the use of Black women's experiences as the criterion of meaning, the inclusion of the ethic of caring, and the presence of the ethic of personal accountability (Collins 1990).

To understand these connections, I will consider the relationship between Black (American) feminism, Caribbean feminism and Haitian feminism. It is my

belief that at the nexus of these feminist ideologies exists the essence of a mode of belief supported in rebel literature. Furthermore, I find this essence made visible in my reading of Danticat's literature. In this thesis, I use the works of Black feminists—both Haitian and American—in addition to the ones mentioned previously to promote an understanding of Black Feminist theories. I then use literary analysis to articulate the ways Danticat's work can be read as supportive of said theories.

In her works that I discuss, I propose that Danticat combines the characteristic traits of Black feminist standpoint epistemology—namely the use of Black women's experiences as the criterion of meaning, the ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability—with aspects of Third World feminist theory and translates both theories through her characters. I argue that as Danticat uses the concrete experience of Haitian women as a criterion of meaning, she writes of women's stories of survival as truth—as opposed to fiction—and shows the need to include these stories in historical narratives. Danticat's works relate to Third World feminism[5] because in

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[5] A term that, though contested for its conveyance of people of the global south as monolithic and inferior to people in the "Western" world, is used as an umbrella classification for feminist theories constructed by women from the global south and Asia proper. I use it here not to connote inferiority but simply because that is the term I found most commonly used to refer to all the feminisms constructed by women of color. Chandra Tapalde Mohanty, in her essay titled "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," writes in disagreement with the portrayal of a monolithic third world women population as it renders western women superior. Western feminists, she believes, universalize the oppressions of third world women. They conceive of them as being universal dependents, victims of male violence, the colonial process of changing their societies, familial systems, religion, and the development process and contrarily portray the experience of the western woman secular, liberated and self-determined (1991, 353). Western feminists, she continues, "become the true 'subject' of this counter-history. Third world women, on the other hand, never rise above their generality and their 'object' status" (1991, 351). Mohanty

them women's memory is significant in the creation of oppositional agency and the political is made personal. Moreover, her work highlights an ethic of caring as it relates to the emotional nature of these stories and the ways emotion makes said stories more real. Her work not only exposes some of the difficult aspects of Haitian socio-political history but, with regard to a feminist project, it also portrays the simultaneity of oppression as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality. Danticat shows that Haitian women's oppression is based in their being Black, female, and often poor. In this way, her literature grounds feminist politics within Haiti's histories of racism, sexism, and imperialism. Lastly, with her emphasis on social justice and her historical revisionism she conveys the ethic of personal accountability that necessitates reading her work as resistance literature.

With the title Griottes[6] & Pantomimes[7]: *Dyaspora*[8] Love, Dreams, Memories, and Realities in the Works of Edwidge Danticat as they relate to Black Feminisms, this

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declares that western feminist do this because they are invested in the hegemonic systems of the West. The image of the monolithic third world woman exists, she writes, because "only in so far as 'Woman/Women' and 'the East' are defined as Others, or as *peripheral*, (Western) Man/Humanism can represent him/itself as the center" (Mohanty 1991, 353). Conclusively, then, in the end this view "might well tie into the larger economic and ideological praxis of 'disinterested' scientific inquiry and pluralism which are the surface manifestations of a latent economic and cultural colonization of the 'non-Western' world"(ibid). This, however, is an issue for another thesis.

[6] Griotte is the feminine noun form of "a member of a caste responsible for maintaining an oral record of tribal history in the form of music, poetry, and storytelling" in Western Africa (Collins 2009).
[7] Pantomime is defined as "the art or technique of conveying emotions, actions, feelings, etc., by gestures without speech"(Pantomime n.d.).
[8] I understand that there are many differing definitions for this word, however in the context of my thesis, I use the word as Danticat uses it. For Danticat, *Dyaspora* "are

thesis explores the different ways Danticat's characters confront race, class, gender, sexuality and religiosity. It is my belief that Danticat uses literature and fiction technique to translate Black and Third World feminist theory into fictive practice. In my reading of Danticat's work, she uses Collins' Black Feminist theoretical aspects to induce her fictive characters with a standpoint epistemology that allows them to both express and resist their oppression. I use three of Danticat's books—*Breath, Eyes, Memory, Krik? Krak!,* and *The Farming of Bones*—to both piece together her views on Haiti as a country with a distinct political history, as well as to interrogate the manner in which she uses literature to dissect and re-construct Haitian female identity. I aim to discuss how this identity definition is problematized and enhanced through her depictions of characters within the Haitian Diaspora surviving in the United States. Lastly, I work to understand how Danticat's work fits into the discourses of Black, Caribbean and Haitian womanhood and feminisms.

In the first chapter titled "The Tools of Our Sight: Black and Third World Feminism as They Relate to Danticat's Works," I lay out the foundation upon which Collins' work and Black Feminism is based. I include works of Collins, Davies, Carby and Mae Gwendolyn Henderson to show the trajectory of this mode of feminism. In this chapter, I also use Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen, Violet Eudine Barriteau to show the similarities between Black Feminism and Caribbean Feminism.

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[Haitian] people with their feet planted in both worlds" (Danticat, Introduction, xv). The word itself is both a insensitive classification of Haitians who have left Haiti and still attempt to have a role in the country and a factual terminology desribing the dual citizenship, of sorts, many Haitians in the tenth department—a term Jean-Bertrand Aristide coined to name the last department of Haiti as it relates to those diaporic Haitians who live abroad—where many Haitians live.

Myriam Chancy and Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo's work is that which I use to dialogue about Haitian Feminism. I close with how these ideologies all relate to and appear in Danticat's work.

In my second chapter titled "Revisionist Sexual Histories of *Dyaspora* in *Breathe, Eyes, Memory*," I demonstrate that Danticat uses the main character, Sophie Caco, to show militaristic sexual violence and how it may be overcome. Sophie defines and values herself based on her Haitian (read: Black) female identity and in relation to her relationships with her friends, family, nations and ancestors. She resists race, class, and gender oppression by reclaiming her matrilineal line, resisting patriarchal virginity tests and helping to halt the history of sexual oppression in Haiti. She also re-negotiates her understanding of family and motherhood in resisting her own oppression. Lastly, I explore the ways Sophie uses language and history to rewrite her and her family's narratives. In this chapter, I put the works of Violet Eudine Barriteau, Patricia Hill Collins, Carolle Charles, Régine Michelle Jean-Charles, Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo, and Barbara Ransby in conversation to show how the literary techniques Danticat uses can be read as supporting a Black and Haitian Feminist ideologies.

In the third chapter titled "A World in Our Image: The Roles of Griottes in *Krik? Krak!*," I consider the ways Danticat uses numerous characters—but namely the female lover to tell the story. The female lover defines and values herself based on her Haitian female identity, her love, her mother's strength and her father's courage. She resists her multiple oppressions by maintaining an oppositional stance to the

tonton macoutes[9] and their reign of terror. She negotiates and defines family by conversing with her ancestors and speaking with and through nature. She also re-negotiates the role and language of motherhood by learning her own matrilineal history. Finally, the female lover uses her journal writing and her love to resist political unrest and violence. I use the works of Patricia Hill Collins, Violet Eudine Barriteau, Beverly Bell, Jana Evans Braziel, Myriam Chancy, Elizabeth McAlister, Deborah McDowell, and Nick Nesbitt to convey the ways Danticat's work, with its use of Vodou religion, nature, and more work to support a Black Feminist standpoints.

In the fourth chapter titled "Black and Feminine Consciousness as Liberatory Invocation in *The Farming of Bone*s," I argue that Danticat uses Amabelle, the protagonist, to answer these questions. Amabelle defines and values herself based on her family's history, her love of her people and her resilience. She also understands herself to be a Black Haitian woman. Her resistance is evident in her way of surviving, (re)telling her and her ancestors' stories and finding strength in living on the borderlands. Amabelle negotiates and defines family and motherhood by reclaiming her motherland, her *pays natal*, and seeking to rebuild her family, after *el corte*, by creating new bonds with the women of Sebastien's mother's neighborhood. Lastly, Amabelle uses storytelling, dreaming and re-telling of history to resist the erasure of Haitian identity. I incorporate the works of Steve Biko, Jana Evans Braziel,

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[9] *tonton macoutes* were a Haitian paramilitary force created in 1959 by President François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier. They were named after a creature from Haitian children's stories that beats, punishes, and eats children who misbehave.

Myriam Chancy, Patricia Hill Collins, Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo, and Valerie Smith to show the ways Danticat's work can be viewed as valuing Black womanhood in a way that supports Black Feminist ideologies.

In the conclusion titled "On the Purposes of Liberation in Literature," I begin with my personal connection to fiction as a genre and I argue that Danticat uses all of these characters to articulate, narrate, and portray liberatory literature. Black women, in her books, can be read to symbolize and embody counter-hegemonic epistemologies. As such, her writing allows for the non-compliant woman of agency to create her own reality and gives voice to her oppression. In her works she uses names, first person narration, folklore and Vodou religion, color, nature and imagery, silence, syntax and intonation, mother-daughter relationships, *marassas* and borders. These help her to form an identity for her characters and more that Carine Mardorossian defines as a "relational identity that accounts for the contingent workings of difference *across* gender, race, class and national boundaries"(2010, 40). I argue that Danticat's literature works to "reclaim the matrilineage that has been occluded due to women's exclusion from the historical record"(ibid). This is all apparent in the way she treats topics such as love, trauma, absence, the dream and spiritual world and memory as it is in her portrayal of the character's understanding of these terms that one may see the counter-hegemony. In her novels, love is an empowering—and not weak—emotion, trauma is lived and passed on—and as such needs to be addressed, absence is ever-present in the dream and spiritual world—a world which is just as real and tangible as is reality, and memory is a tool with which to counter-act history's erasure of Black women's narratives. In so doing, I believe

Danticat creates, as the literary critic Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo has written, "a protected space from which will emerge new prospects for [Haiti]"(1998, 138).

To go back to my initial assertion, Danticat's literature, in the same tradition as other Haitian literary works, may be read as rebel literature or liberatory literature. A reading of this nature allows for both the beauty and lyricism of her writing style to become more visible and for said writing style to work for the purpose of promoting counter hegemonic ways of thinking and living. I intend to prove this further in the following pages.

ii.

THE TOOLS OF OUR SIGHT: BLACK AND THIRD WORLD FEMINISMS AS THEY RELATE TO DANTICAT'S WORKS

There is power in speaking, writing and remembering in order to combat the systematic silencing of marginalized people and their contributions to the world. Throughout history, oppressed peoples have asserted themselves, their power, and their humanity by way of expelling silence and seeking, in doing this, to name their oppression. Since their arrival in this hemisphere, Black women have been at the forefront of this effort to break their silence. This practice is at the foundation of Black feminism as Black women have written about the interplay of their experiences of race, class and gender. Caribbean feminism and Haitian feminism, in particular, focus more on the interplay of oppression at the intersections of gender, ethnicity and class as they relate to representation and not necessarily institutional power or with the aim of creating counter-hegemonic change. This is because their context is different; their realities less directly involve white people—though they are equally in tune with white supremacist ideology—, their socio-political histories are different and the systems of power they should aim to challenge are part of larger system of European colonization and US imperialism.

This chapter is about the trajectory of Black feminism and principles of Caribbean and Haitian feminism. In it, I give preliminary information about the different perspectives on Black feminism and summarize the goals of Caribbean feminism, and speak to how Haitian feminist aims may be read in Haitian literature. I speak to how speech, novels and memory can be revolutionary tools and how important the reclamation of the ability to self-define and reform one's identity is. I also touch on the purpose of literature of revolution in a manner that is more in-depth than in the previous chapter. I close the chapter by commenting on the strengths and

purpose of feminized positive historical revisionism.[10]

The Tools of Our Sight: Vision and Black Feminism

> Black feminism [is] a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community (Collins 1990, 15).

In an essay written in 1989, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins extrapolates the epistemic and cultural practices of peoples of the African Diaspora and how this pertains to their worldview and perceptions. She argues that from a shared history of oppression—whatever form it took in any given context—Black peoples have this "Afrocentric consciousness [that] permeates the shared history of people of African descent through the framework of a distinctive Afrocentric epistemology"(Collins 1989, 755). This shared subjugation, she stresses, lends itself to a shared way of viewing the world. [11] Moreover, Collins argues, "women share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent. This commonality of experience suggests that certain characteristic themes will be prominent in a Black woman's standpoint"(Collins 1990, 3). This experience,

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[10] Here I use the phrase positive historical revisionism as that which is the opposite of "a revision to history in the effort to serve its own goals rather than the effort to simply broaden the base of human historical knowledge (Lee and Rozman, 2006). Doing this, especially (although not necessarily) in a systematic fashion, would be termed *historical revisionism* in the negative sense (Lupo 2010)."

[11] To be clear, it is not that all Black people view the world in this way; it is more so that a shared history of oppression and a similar African lineage allows for similar components of viewing the world (i.e. viewing one's oppression as race-based, or coming from community and family structures that are reminiscent of West African traditions).

I contend, functions as a system of sight that has three components. For Collins, these include what she calls:

1. The use of concrete experience as a criterion of meaning,
2. an ethic of caring, and
3. an ethic of personal accountability (Collins 1989).

These three components, according to Collins, work to differentiate the ways Blacks understand knowledge from a Eurocentic way of thinking.

The change in the criterion of meaning drastically changes the location within which truth is founded. Collins dictates that as knowledge and wisdom do not go hand in hand in Black communities, the site of wisdom exists outside of academia. She believes that "[l]iving life as a Black woman requires wisdom" (1989, 758). She also contends that "knowledge about the dynamics of race, gender, and class subordination has been essential to Black women's survival" (ibid). As such, this wisdom, which is gained from experiencing these dynamics, must be passed down among Black women for their continued survival. As neither this mode of knowledge production and replication, nor the site within which this knowledge is founded are deemed legitimate in the world of academia, Black women are not seen as having concrete and substantiated knowledge (Collins 1989).[12] In Black communities,

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[12] The point here is that knowledge that is founded in systems outside of academia—ways of knowing based in emotive understanding of the world, or in oral traditions constructed by those not educated in formal school systems—is not valued as highly in academia as is textually grounded, "scientifically-proven", and tangible knowledge. It is not that *all* Black women are not valued in academia. In my opinion, the situation of Black women, and women of color in general, is not at all equal to that of their white male counterparts but nonetheless this statement is about social capital and different "non-academic" ways of knowing.

however, “African American women give such wisdom [the wisdom gained from experience] high credence in assessing knowledge”(ibid). The information gained from living and praxis is more valuable, as it enables survival. As such is the case, “concrete experience as a criterion for credibility is invoked by Black women when making knowledge claims”(ibid). In the Black community, then, living is a form of knowing. The next tool, the ethic of caring involves the emotive aspect of one’s expression.

The ethic of caring has three components, all of which work to ground the Afrocentric epistemology in a culture where emotion and validity are tied. The first principle of this ethic is that it is “rooted in a tradition of African humanism each individual is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy expressed by all life”(Collins 1989, 766). This means that a person’s individuality and personal expression is precious. The second principle is that “[e]motion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument”(ibid). The emotive expression of thought, facts, and ideas indicates that that which is being expressed is worthy of belief. In this mode of thought, emotion is not a problematic aspect to bring into discussions and intellectual discourse. The last principle dictates the need to develop “a capacity for empathy” (ibid). A person cannot exist without intellectually identifying with or experiencing the feelings of another. According to this component, there is an ethic to caring, truly caring about people and their emotions, that informs this epistemology. The next tool, the ethic of personal accountability, involves one’s character and individuality.

The ethic of personal accountability not only allows for personality and identity to enter one's intellectual work; it also mandates that nothing be deemed neutral. Without the guise of neutrality and through understanding the character of the writer, one can enhance how one assesses one's work. In this Afrocentric mode of thought exists the "notion that every idea has an owner and that owner's identity matters" (Collins 1989, 768). Black people, then, according to Collins, believe that the "[a]ssessment of an individual's knowledge claims simultaneously evaluate an individual's character, values, and ethics" (ibid). Knowledge, then, cannot be objective and is rather always subjective. Furthermore, "emotion, ethics, and reason are used as interconnected, essential components in assessing knowledge claims" (ibid). Not only is the emotional professing of information justified but it, as well as one's ethics and purpose, are essential for understanding the work one has created. Collins goes further and states that in "an Afrocentric feminist epistemology, values lie at the heart of the knowledge-validation process such that inquiry always has an ethical aim" (770). When Afrocentricity merges with feminism the way of understanding the world is further specialized.

These are all the processes Black women go through so as to be able to name their oppression. In naming something or someone, the "namer"—the person who gives the name—asserts power over that which is named. In naming their oppression, Black women provide the parameters over which they will not let the "namer" succeed in laying claim to them. Vocalizing the name of one's oppressor and identifying the roots of one's oppression will lead to a greater understanding of the self and the world one inhabits. Voice, therefore, becomes an important tool through

which one may liberate oneself. As I will show later, this act of naming is consistently evident in Danticat's works.

Black and Caribbean Feminisms

Outside of the United States context, Black feminist standpoint theory reverberates in the global south—though here it also takes different forms. Although Caribbean feminists tend to point out the differences between their experiences and those of their sisters in the north, there exist commonalities in their modes of feminisms. Caribbean feminist Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen finds the four main commonalities in Third World feminism—one inclusive of populations of Third World peoples in western metropoli—to be:

> 1. The idea of the simultaneity of oppression as fundamental to the experience of social and political marginality and the grounding of feminist politics in the histories of racism and imperialism;
> 2. The crucial role of a hegemonic state in circumscribing Third World women's daily lives and struggle;
> 3. The significance of memory and writing in the creation of oppositional agency; and,
> 4. The differences, conflicts, and contradictions internal to the Third World women's organizations and communities (Baksh-Soodeen 1998).

Political scientist Violet Eudine Barriteau writes that in the Caribbean in particular, feminists are more concerned than their Black American counterparts with "the state and women, identity politics, fractures and fissures within the women's movement (including exclusionary practices), the development of feminist consciousness, dialogues with masculinities"(2006, 24). In reality, all of these resonate with the basic tenets of Black feminism. She writes that, despite the fact that

for her, as "a black Caribbean woman and feminist" (Barriteau 2006, 10), "race and racism do not enter my life and the lives of most Caribbean women in the identical trajectories [as] they do for minority women in racist societies—[which are] the geographic and political locations for much of [Black feminist] theorizing" (ibid). This is in no way "to suggest that racism and racist practices are not threaded through the social fabric of the Caribbean life. They are, but they are experienced differently"(ibid). Because of this resonance in themes and different experiences of Blackness—but similar experience of overall oppression—Barriteau believes that Black feminist theory "provides many important conceptual tools for rethinking our understanding of social institutions, especially if we wish to reveal and erase relations of dominations in everyday life" (Barriteau 2006, 26).

Barriteau also concludes that there are twelve challenges to be made of Caribbean feminism. These include the need to:

> 1. unravel the knot that surrounds power, and to investigate how our difficulty with power influences what issues receive our attention. This is tied to grappling with feminists' ambivalence over power, how we come to power, claim it, respect it, and use it.
> 2. begin to rethink the processes we can develop and use to ensure that democratic practices define how we create knowledge, and how we expose and avoid replicating the hierarchies of power in the social relations we seek to disrupt.
> 3. establish genealogical authority and continuity between feminist thought and gender studies…[as] it is about identifying conceptual frameworks that recognize and explore those relations of power that shape how women and men experience the same social and economic phenomena in fundamentally dissimilar and unequal ways. This,

Barriteau hopes will help lessen the weaknesses in both scholarship and activism in linking the adversities in women's lives to larger structures of oppression and exploitation as well as the gentrification and abuse of power by the leadership in both the academy and the political movement.

4. tackle the knot of race/ethnicity/class, and deconstruct an us/them frame of analysis, which must transcend its origins in a post-colonial, nationalist treatise and engage with the challenge of class, another social relation of power and privilege that has not yet been satisfactorily interrogated in our work.
5. address the fragility and vulnerability of the women's movement in the face of a frontal assault on Caribbean women that goes beyond a backlash. Additionally the withdrawal of state attention from women and women's issues in a majority of Caribbean countries and the similar retreat from a focus on women by international development institutions also needs to be addressed (Barriteau 2006, 13-14).

Barriteau offers nine contributions Black feminism can make to Caribbean feminists. These are: a rejection of an undifferentiated notion of sisterhood; a prioritizing and problematizing of race as a social relation complicated by other social relations; a change to feminist methodologies that requires new methodological approaches; a theoretical foundation shaped by women's lived experiences and subjectivity; an introduction to the concept of multiple jeopardies/multiple consciousness/ multiple identities; a simultaneous problematizing of public and private spheres; an analysis that is located in political economy; a deconstruction of patriarchal relations; and, a placement of race at the center, that in doing so, alters basic concepts (Barriteau 2006).

Barriteau declares that Black feminist theory offers a rejection of an

undifferentiated notion of sisterhood. She argues that "Black feminist theory comprises a body of work by black feminist intellectuals reacting to the failure of existing feminist explanatory frameworks to adequately comprehend the realities of black women" (Barriteau 2006, 14). This newer comprehension of Black women's realities can offer a useful way of viewing the similar problems in the Caribbean. Barriteau offers that as Black feminist theory prioritizes and problematizes race as a social relation complicated by other social relations,

> A foundational contribution of black feminist scholarship is its exposure and problematising of race/racism as a social relation, which simultaneously complicates and is complicated by other social relations of domination. The intellectual and activist work of black feminists reveals hierarchies of power within categories of race, class, gender, patriarchal relations, sexuality and sexual orientation. Black feminism demonstrates that white or other feminist theorising that refuses or fails to recognise race as a relation of domination within feminism and society, facilitates the continued oppression of black women within the feminist movement and within society. This is a very powerful argument (Barriteau 2006, 15).

This view of the matrix of domination—a term Patricia Hill Collins coined to refer to the intersecting nature of oppression based on race, gender, class, and sexuality—allows for a more holistic view of the problems women of color face, as it also "exposes racism and the politics of exclusion and denial embedded in feminist knowledge production in the same way that black feminist activism confronts racism in everyday life" (Barriteau 2006, 16). In that sense, Black feminist theory offers to the Caribbean a more holistic view of and methodology to articulate the oppression her women face.

Caribbean feminism does involve a more embracing politic of identity that

Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen believes is allowed for by Black feminism. I do not agree entirely with that assertion as Black feminist ideology does not equate Black supremacist feminism, and such an assertion does not allow the entirety of the global feminism Black feminism promotes to be seen.

Black and Haitian Feminism

Sociologist Deborah K. King, believes, "Black feminism asserts self-determination as essential" (King is quoted in Collins 1990, 11). Ideology simply existing as thought and not put into praxis does not suffice. It is both the ability to name your oppression and to find counter-hegemonic ways of living and thinking that make Black feminist praxis a radical epistemology. Patricia Hill Collins believes that "[p]eople experience and resist oppression on three levels: the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions" (Collins 1990, 223). There needs to, then, be a strategy for attacking all three sites so that all aspects of and places of oppression may be accounted for and addressed. Collins believes since "Black feminist thought emphasizes all three levels as sites of domination," it also serves as a theory with which to use these three sites of oppression "as potential sites of resistance"(ibid). As I have previously stated, these three sites of resistance have been articulated in Danticat's works.

Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, a Black English professor with expertise in African American and feminist criticism, theory, and pedagogy, declares that Black

women writers "speak in tongues" (2000).[13] She states that Black women's "complex social, historical, and cultural positionality…in effect, constitutes black female subjectivity" (2000, 350). The Black woman "writer not only speaks familiarly in the discourse of the other(s), but as Other she is in contestorial dialogue with the hegemonic dominant and subdoninant or 'ambiguously (non)hegemonic' discourses" (Henderson 2000, 351). In other words, by virtue of the extremely marginal position of Black women, they contest hegemonic notions and intervene in hegemonic dialogues.

Henderson also posits that because Black women speak in tongues, "it is black women writers who are the modern day apostles, empowered by experience to speak as poets and prophets in many tongues" (Henderson 2000, 354). In an effort to self-inscribe, said writers use disruption and revision to tell their stories. Disruption being "the initial response to hegemonic and ambiguosly (non)hegemonic discourse" (Henderson 2000, 358), and revision being "rewriting or rereading" (ibid). Together, these tactics "suggest a model for reading black and female literary expression" (ibid). They demarcate the interplay of Collin's criterion of meaning, ethic of caring and ethic of personal accountability. In speaking in tongues, Black women use their own experience, and that of their communities, as their pool from which to gain and with which to assert their knowledge. Using their experience, they speaking as

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[13] Carole Boyce Davies argues similarly. She writes, "Black women writers are engaged in all kinds of processes of re-acquisition of the 'tongue'" (1994, 23). These processes, she continues, involve "movements of re-connection and, at times, of re-evaluation"(ibid).

griottes and embody the stories as pantomimes so as to understand the purpose in using emotion and their individuality and morality to articulate their stories.

Haitian feminist Myriam Chancy writes that "[a] witness to her own oppression, she [the Haitian woman writer] boldly affirms her humanity by *embodying the power of speech*" (Chancy 1997, 37). Affirming humanity and identity formation are tools with which to build a community. In furthering Chancy's idea, I believe that, the Haitian woman writer creates a framework for revolt in creating new ways of defining oneself. Chancy also argues that, "because of the ability to communicate (and let me here underscore that communication need not be limited to the act of speaking, of making 'sound'), very few human beings are completely powerless" (ibid). Language, according to Chancy, "is the vehicle through which power is enunciated as transformative or as destructive. It can be used to forge alliances or prevent them; it can be used to enlighten or to blind" (ibid). Haitian women "who are themselves oppressed…are never as disempowered as their oppressors would have them believe. The oppressed can use tools of communication to transform their own perceptions of self as well as those of their captors"(ibid). This transformation allows for "the habitual process of self-definition that occurs at the onset of revolutionary action" (Chancy 1997, 36). Communication and language, then, is key to self-definition, to identity formation and to revolutionizing how one structures and thinks about society. These are all characteristics of literature of revolution.

As the name indicates, literature of revolution critiques cultural norms that are oppressive and creates a counter-hegemonic discourse. In writing such literature, women work to articulate their oppression and communicate alternative ways of living. In this process of telling and speaking of one's struggle they "[engage] in a process of learning to un-learn marginalization, racism, prejudice, elitism, [and] silence"(ibid). It is my belief that, from their oppressed position, the writers of literature of revolution write to help people think critically about systems of power and to inspire change. This change begins with the inclusion of women's narratives in historical accounts.

Black feminist thought aims to spark change and inculcate new ways of viewing one's experiences. It "encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it" (Collins 1990, 3). This mode of thought "should aim to infuse Black women's experiences and everyday thought…and encompasses theoretical interpretations new meaning by rearticulating the interdependence of Black women's experience and consciousness"(ibid). This interconnectedness is also similar in Haitian women's efforts to create a revisionist history.

Haitian Women's Resistance, Feminism, and Writing

Haitian women have been at the forefront of revolutionary action since Haiti's Revolution. In Haiti, colonialism in its known form ended in 1804 with the Haitian Revolution. Women "were involved in revolutionary acts" but "they were remembered not as having taken part in them as women but as members of the

faceless many"(Chancy 1997, 39). Their roles were forgotten amidst the acclaimed participation of our nation's forefathers. In Haiti, as is the reality in numerous other countries, "the battles between sexes, races, and classes intertwine…[and] it is the hierarchical nature of the social order' that generates sexual roles as well as gender roles and relations"(Trouillot 1992, 27). Long ago, colonizers stratified in the social order that left an indelible mark on the formation of a new Haitian society.

In order to silence Haitian women in 1794, Etienne Polverel appealed to men and started the country down the path toward the "masculinization" of citizenship. In a declaration, he stated, "[i]t is not against the owner; it is against yourselves, against their men, that the women formulate these exaggerated pretensions"(Charles 1995) or more correctly their rightful attempts at achieving equal pay for equal work. He continues, "Africans [in this case meaning only men], if you want to make your women listen to reason, listen to reason yourselves"(ibid). Carolle Charles concludes from this event and those that followed that the "central role of gender in the formation of the state became crystallized in the many constitutions promulgated in Haiti between 1801 and 1950. [During this time a] systematic politics of exclusion became the hallmark of the charters of Haitian society"(ibid). Only after 1950 did Haitian women's reality, in regards to political life, begin to change.

Before the 1950s however, Haitian women "had also been instrumental in [nationalistic] organizing against the U.S. Occupation, using their mobility as market women to [smuggle] ammunition and intelligence on U.S. troop movement to insurgents throughout the countryside"(Chancy 1997, 39-40). The U.S. troops'

indiscriminate use of violence "made it impossible for women not to take an active part in the country's affairs"(ibid). After this occupation and using similar means of organizing a constituency, "an active women's movement arose at the end of the Occupation"(ibid) as only then could they move from nationalistic focus to a more women-centered one.

The *Ligue Feminine d'Action Social* was one such organization that arose. Formed the year U.S. occupation of Haiti ended, in 1934, this league of women always fought for the advancement of Haitian women and thus, inadvertently, for the dismemberment of not only imperialism but also patriarchy and misogyny. Their efforts commenced with little to do with opposing the male-centered system of power but led to more drastic movement towards women's social liberation. In 1934, the *Ligue* participated in "lobbying for legislation to provide an equal minimum wage for men and women and three week maternity leave for women"(Chancy 1997, 41). In 1943, "their efforts resulted in the opening of a high school for young women in Port-au-Prince; by 1944, girls were admitted to traditionally male high schools in the capital. Women's access to education was [also] pursued in the countryside…[and] it appears that the *Ligue*'s efforts contributed to the growth in functional literacy among the general Haitian populace"(ibid). Also by 1944, "the *Ligue*'s efforts to have women's political rights recognized in the Constitution had resulted in women being granted the right to be elected to political office…and [after much protest and petition signing] in 1950, article nine of the Haitian Constitution recognized women as fully emancipated human beings with equal rights"(ibid). This was a drastic move away from the French inspired notion of *femme couverte*, which asserted that women had

legal protection only under their husbands and fathers. In 1957, with the election of self-proposed patriarchal figure President François Duvalier, the Haitian women's movement ended.

Haitian women's resistance to patriarchy was predicated on their self-definitions, their success in former struggles, and their own need for survival. Their anti-patriarchal stance "is best understood as symptomatic [but not only as a result] of U.S. racist attitudes instituted during the Occupation and sustained by the misogynist practices of the Duvalier government"(Chancy 1997, 43). This mode of thought and resistance, with varying degrees of both support and success "presents itself as a defiant strain of Third World feminism in the West, hinging on socialist reform, a belief in the universalization of human rights and a steadfast dedication to the uplift of woman in nationalist and global agenda"(Chancy 1997, 45). Whatever the terminology used to define it, a society that had invested all power in its males was that which they opposed. In fighting for "solutions to poverty, illiteracy, limited education, inaccessible careers, voting rights and protection under the law"(Chancy 1997, 44), the common opponent was the system of male dominated governance. Inherently, then, the terminology used to define their feminism, their political activities, and their consciousness raising efforts make Haitian feminism resistant to all forms of patriarchy.

Haitian feminism, then, stems from feminist ideologies of the global south and as such aims to achieve large-scale social advancement. Haitian feminists "attempt to disrupt patterns of hegemony that bind whole groups of people [and not simply

themselves] to poverty, illiteracy, and lives filled with violence"(Chancy 1997, 35). In solving these issues and achieving equality between men and women, Haitian feminists believe that they will achieve said equality for all along gender lines.[14] In this disruption of hegemonic patterns—as they relate to gender norms—Myriam Chancy believes that Haitian feminists have a "tacit understanding that the liberation of women on multiple fronts will result in the emancipation of all"(ibid). While they themselves may not have fought for equality on all levels, their understanding of a multi-layered equality is crucial and such an understanding deserves to be nascent to all revolutionary ideology.

It is important to note that most Haitian feminists were and are also authors. Haitian women writers, like Edwidge Danticat—who is one of the few Haitian women writers who was not born of (relative) wealth—, use speaking and writing to redefine Haitian womanhood and Haitian women's identities. They utilize novels to re-imagine a history that is inclusive of the stories of Haitian women. They create a canon of liberatory literature and retell history in order to move toward and/or enunciate a distinct kind of feminism. There is a pattern in Haitian feminism, "which progresses from *speech activation* to *dialogue integration*, to the paradoxical *creation of an imperceptible woman's space*, to the *enforced implementation of women's rights* beyond a closed sphere of women's interactions as revolutionary consciousness is developed and honed" (Chancy 1997, 27). If this is true, then as soon as there was

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[14] I use "gender lines" specifically because historically Haitian feminists in general were of the upper-income bracket and as such did not attempt to challenge class hierarchy.

literature and the re-appropriation of speech and speaking, the politicization and the raising of consciousness soon followed. This was and is the purpose of Haitian women's literature and Haitian feminism. Haitian feminism, then, "stands as a model of Third World feminist politics in that it is articulated through critical praxis" (Chancy 1997, 28) as it is clearly not only theory. Daily are the acts of resistance that stem from and/or are inspired by decades of fighting colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy.

Haitian feminism negates notions of the inability of the oppressed to speak for herself. This is, seemingly, a common notion in both Western and white feminist ideology. Haitian feminism distinguishes itself from mainstream Western feminism "in its refusal to acknowledge *lack of consciousness*" (Chancy 1997, 38). Instead, the Haitian women advocate for another approach, one that "*presupposes* that the consciousness of the oppressed is a given and that considers the paramount issue to be the *communication* of that consciousness"(ibid). In an effort to do this, Haitian feminists "speak on behalf of themselves individualistically in order to take part in the *dialogic expression* of a feminist agenda articulated by Haitian women as a socio-political group"(ibid). In expressing her own individual reality or the individual reality of the characters in her novel, the Haitian woman feminist writer articulates the reality of Haitian women. As a socio-cultural and a political group—as the intent of the discourse in the literature is indeed political—the Haitian feminist re-claims her ability to qualify her struggle, speak out against it and in—speaking truth to power—asserts a means by which to change her reality. This dialogic expression of their oppression is, indeed, related to Collin's understanding of the criterion of meaning.

Haitian women writers and artistic producers find power in including the woman into a balanced reading of history. Haitian women live on the parameter of Haitian society and citizenship, *and* the history produced to institutionalize knowledge of the two. In regards to this "history", she is ignored, her role diminished and her power in the shaping of it made invisible. The experience of the "Haitian woman is defined by exile within her own country, for she is alienated from the means to assert at once feminine and feminist identities at the same time that she undergoes the same colonial experiences of her male counterparts" (Chancy 1997, 13). She is made to appear less Haitian and less deserving of the equal rights that her male counterparts are gifted at birth. In an effort to counteract this, "Haitian women writers demonstrate…that the project of recovering Haitian women's lives must begin with the re-composition of history and nationality" (ibid).

Regarding the memory as a revolutionary tool, it must be made clear that it is equally important, if not more important, to elucidate on the stories that hegemonic accounts of history leave out. In the case of Haiti, as in many other nations, these untold stories are those of the women. In an effort to combat this, Haitian women writers re-assert their claim to language and knowledge and inculcate a new reading of history. This reading of history is a re-telling of events that were not only excluded prior to their re-telling it, but that were told in a way to "masculinize" a people and a revolution. They, in turn, infuse this history-telling with a feminized reality. This reality works to both create a more balanced account of Haitian history *and* to give Haitian women a fuller identity as they have had a role in the creation of their world. It is in this conversation that I comprehend Danticat's works.

Using Black feminism, I have come to realize the ways the Black women subjects in Danticat's works speak to me. Firstly, their stories work to support a larger narrative of understanding and positing the Black woman as an agent of knowledge and her experiences as the criterion of meaning. This meaning refers to the seed from which her views of the world grow. In researching these concepts, I became better equipped with the tools to articulate why giving Haitian women's existence a voice is powerful. Secondly, in comprehending Black feminism I also know the value of discussing love, trauma, and absence as these themes relate to the ethic of caring. As Collins explains it, in Black feminism emotion, ethics, and reason are essential in evaluating knowledge claims (Collins 1989, 770). Understanding Black feminism helped me understand the impact of Danticat's work.

Using Caribbean and Haitian feminisms, I came to realize the importance of literature of revolt or liberatory literature. As many Haitian feminists were and are also authors, I was able to navigate the relationship politics has had with literature. More specifically, in light of the erasure of women's narratives from History, I became aware that the Danticat's effort to write historical revisionist fiction was, in essence, an attempt at counteracting the erasure of Haitian women. Imbibed with a cultural religiosity[15] and understanding of the world that counteracts the dichotomizing way that the Western world views the mind and body, rationality and irrationality, life and death, real and unreal and much more, this literature is political on multiple levels. In understanding Caribbean and Haitian historical context and

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[15] Religiosity meaning affected devotedness to religion

feminisms, I better comprehended the reasons why Danticat's aesthetic, and writing style so revolutionary.

Now I will show this understanding using literary analysis of the three novels in a more detailed manner.

iii.

REVISIONIST SEXUAL HISTORIES OF *DYASPORA* IN *BREATHE, EYES, MEMORY*

Breath, *Eyes*, *Memory* is a novel about corporeal memory, permeable trauma and empowering love. In this work ancestral figures speak through their progeny, psychosexual trauma experienced through sexual violence can be passed down, and love can help heal—formerly long-lasting—wounds. As a novel about memory, love and the world of ancestors, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* works to show how these are embodied in the life of Black and Haitian women. In this novel, the named oppressions and first-person narration relate to the concept of memory and the folklore helps resist oppression and relates to the world of interconnected reality and dreams. Also in this novel, colors are used to articulate characters' personal and emotional evolutions; this relates to the concept of love. Edwidge Danticat writes this novel in an effort to combat an incomplete telling of the history of sexual violence in Haiti as a tool of political repression. In writing novels for this purpose, Danticat stands on the shoulders of Haitian women authors like Marie Chauvet, Paulette Poujol-Oriol and more. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, then, is a "fictional counter-narrative that chronicles how empires, the postcolonial state, and the patriarchal family have abused, exposed, and compromised the sexed bodies of Caribbean women and girls" (Francis 2004, 75).

In this novel, Sophie Caco, the protagonist, has a story that is similar to that of many transnational peoples, only her complex relation to nationhood, identity and power is bordered by sexual violence. This complexity arises out of the fact that she and her mother are sexually violated: Martine, her mother, by a paramilitary official and Sophie by her mother and her tests to verify Sophie's virginity. After Sophie's birth, her mother leaves her in the hands of her Tante Atie and grandmother and

attempts to flee the rape and start anew in Brooklyn, New York. Later Martine sends for her child and is faced with the ever-present past she left behind and the frightening present of raising a child in a dangerously different society. Throughout the novel Sophie tries to understand her place in the world and help her many mothers—Martine, Tante Atie and her grandmother. When she falls in love and is consequently forced to go through her final virginity test, Sophie refuses to participate in the humiliating tradition. She then forces a pestle to rip her hymen and elopes with her lover. Later when she is married and gives birth to her daughter, Sophie goes home to Haiti to reconcile her life choices with her matriarchic family *and* to try to understand them and her role as both a mother and wife better. She evolves and reunites with her mother only in time to realize that her mother Martine's pain and past is still present and leads to Martine killing herself.

In writing this fictional novel, Danticat gives voice to the stories of numerous women who were victimized by the military and paramilitary structures of both the United States of America and Haiti. In this chapter I will write about the ways Danticat employs four literary devices to do just this. In the section titled *Naming Oppression*, I will discuss how the Caco family name is important in understanding the Caco family history. In the section titled *First Person Narration*, I will portray the importance of Danticat's use of the first person to articulate the pained narrative of sexual trauma. In the section titled *Folklore and the Resistance It Allows for*, I will discuss how it is through the use of folklore that Danticat centers Vodou culture and women's experience. In the section titled *Color Significations*, I convey the importance of color in the novel and how the colors help show the mother's mental

transformation and source of spiritual guidance. Through naming the characters a surname of historical importance, narrating in the first person, weaving in folktales that offer insight into the protagonist's state of mind, and using colors as symbols, Danticat narrates different stories. I argue these stories are of "silences too horrific to disturb" (Francis 2004), silences Danticat disrupts in her writing of them. In Danticat's essay titled "We are Ugly but We are Here", she writes that when "watching the news reports, it is often hard to tell whether there are real living and breathing women in conflict-stricken places like Haiti. [This is because the] evening news broadcasts only allow us a brief glimpse of presidential coups, rejected boat people, and subjugated elections. [As a result, the] women's stories never manage to make the front page. However, they do exist" (Danticat quoted in Francis 2004). Danticat's works deem said stories worthy of the delegation "top story" news (Francis 2004, 75). In closing, I will show how these devices play into Black and Third World Feminist theories in that they centralize the story of the Caco women, support a reclamation of the matrilineal line as well as the power it contains, and show the power of women to build their own identities in spite of their oppression.

Naming Oppression

In giving Sophie's family the surname Caco, Danticat calls forth not only the many meanings and interpretations of the word, but also its histories. At the moment the mind utters the word, its most common association is with the cacao plant from which chocolate—a food important to the Haitian economy—is birthed. While, this is probably intentional, it is also purposeful that this word is also implicated in the

political history of Haiti. The word "Caco" has anti-imperialist connotations and also plays a role in the recovery of the history of sexual violence in Haiti.

The Cacos were a guerilla group of peasant men who opposed the American occupation from 1915 to 1935. Their name also is inspired by the name Dominicans gave to northern Dominican rebel peasants (Kaussen 2008, xii). According to Donnette Francis, this name "symbolically links these women to the Cacos…[who] maintained armed resistance against the US Marines" (Francis 2004, 77). "Caco" binds Sophie and her family to a powerful history of resistance. It also, however, ties them to the struggle of many Haitian women and girls fighting against a history of "sexual violations by state, empire or even of daughters by mothers in the socialization process" (Francis 2004, 78). The latter form occurred with the temporally pervasive nature of the virginity tests. The other sexual violations occurred at the hands of the US military and Haitian paramilitary. The Cacos who guarded the nation against American imperialist aims, "raped women of the very nation they were assembled to protect" (Francis 2004, 77). The lineage this name has to a history of violent sexual crime is also evinced in relation to the United States Marines and the Duvalier regime.

In using the word "Caco", Danticat reveals the history of American sexual exploitation of Haitian women. During the military occupation, the US Marines dismantled the Haitian army and remade it in their own image. This military force also replaced the Haitian legislature with a puppet Council of State after previously dismantling that legislative body. The Council of State now had the power to override

local civil courts (Francis 2004, 78). In doing all of this, the United States "ushered in a significant shift in Haitian political culture by installing a military state that ruled against the nation as the state now followed the dictates of the US government rather than Haitian citizens" (ibid). Under this symbiotic governmental leadership, Haitian women were systematically raped and sexually violated by American servicemen and officers. These acts of violence went unrecognized, undisclosed, and unpunished by the US government. When state officials *did* comment on this behavior, they simply "justified [it] by designating these servicemen as drunk or mentally unbalanced as a result of their tenure in the tropics" (ibid) thus deflecting numerous instances of rape and deeming it utterly customary behavior in the degenerative nature of metropolitan subjects in the tropical Caribbean. This history of sexual violation at the hands of the armed forces is replicated and reformed in the Duvalier regime.

The violent period in which rape was used as a tool of political repression under the Duvalier regime is exposed through the use of the word Caco as the use of it illuminates the legacy of sexual violence that his paramilitary troops followed once he was in power. With a nullification of who was defined as politically innocent, and thus unable to be deemed terrorists or politically oppositional, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier set the stage for politically justifiable rape (Charles 1995). Before the initiation of the Duvalier regime, in 1957, the government saw "women, children, and old people…as political innocents. Because women, in particular, were viewed by the state as being dependents, they had the 'privilege' of not being subjected to state violence" (Charles 1995, 139). After Papa Doc came to power, the minute women voiced their political opinions or were aligned—as blood relative or as partners—to

people deemed politically oppositional they were seen as "subversive, unpatriotic and unnatural" (Charles 1995, 140). In being so they were "deserving" of punishment, the primary source of which was sexual torture. After the 1959 creation of the militia group the *tonton macoutes*, Duvalier took control of Haiti. In the span of two years "Duvalier's rural militia wielded more power than the Haitian Army and their own brand of *politically motivated rape* was a notorious method of maintaining their power" (Francis 2004, 178). This arm of the regime—trained by the US-sponsored National Guard—created a "hyper-machismo, [and] enacted [it] upon women's bodies" (ibid).

Breath, Eyes, Memory is set years after the US invasion. In 1994, after an embargo against the Haitian *de facto* government, Human Rights Watch and National Coalition for Haitian Refugees, both with headquarters in the United States, "found" that the paramilitary that replaced the *tonton macoutes* used rape and sexual assault to punish and intimidate women. This reprimanding was "for their actual and imputed political beliefs, or to terrorize them" during sweeps of oppositional neighborhoods (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998, 128-129). Other articles in US media reported similar stories; one even going so far as to cite that political rape was "a new phenomenon in the history of repression in Haiti" (Francis 2004, 79). This large-scale lack of acknowledgement of the history of this mode of sexual violence, in relation to the normalized historical narrative of Haiti, shows that many, if not all, of these narratives were rendered silent. This silence occurred in response to both an imbalance of power and a refusal of historians and the state to acknowledge their

validity. Coincidentally, *Breath*, *Eyes*, *Memory*'s publication came in a timely manner as it was published the same year as this report.

As "sexual violence against women in Haiti operates through the politics of invisibility" and "sexual violations against women get subsumed under a general discourse about violence" (Francis 2004, 78)—a violence deemed universal or attributable to class. Women, therefore, have to narrate their own stories of sexual violation in order to reclaim said stories of rape and sexual abuse from the world of silence. Literary scholar Donette Francis stresses that the "obfuscation of the specificity of women's violations belittles the political nature of these crimes while also suggestion that these sexual violations are not deserving of the state's immediate attention and reprisal"(ibid). As knowledge of the matrix of domination is needed to overcome oppression, the survival of Haitian women in this context relies on the reclamation of this story, and the telling of it. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, incorporates the Black Feminist technique of using the female experience as the foundation from which the criterion of meaning is determined. In the use of the word Caco, Danticat also uses the technique of Haitian women writers, the "double discourse [or rather quadruple discourse in this context], *double entendre*" (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998, 138). The four meanings that the word "Caco" encompasses work to subvert the dominant male discourse that sought to silence victims of sexual violence and in so doing, gives them voice.

Naming Sophie's oppression reinforces Collin's use of experience as the criterion of meaning because as her last name holds the story of her and her family's

oppression. In this novel, Danticat employs both speech and memory as a revolutionary tool. Myriam Chancy writes that "[a]fter asserting and mastering this tool [of writing], Haitian women use it to write about their oppression" (Chancy 1997, 13). In Sophie Caco's instance, Danticat uses the histories and stories of sexual violence under military control that many Haitian women have and authors a fictive amalgamated replica. Quoting Maryse Condé, Chancy continues and says that, "through literature, it is possible to capture the image of a community…The novel, if it represents the intimate world to which an author gives us access, is also a witness of society"(ibid). Danticat's work gives voice to and speaks both with and through the voice of Sophie Caco. In doing this it vocalizes a story of oppressed Haitian women in order to show the atrocities that go unspoken.[16]

First Person Narration

Narrated in the voice of Sophie Caco, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, allows the reader to enter the head of a young women who attempts to reclaim her sexually violated history, body, and future. The story is principally "narrated from Sophie's point of view, yet…the novel provides moments of counterpoint by incorporating the multiple voices of Martine, Atie, the grandmother, the Haitian community of women, Sophie's [Black woman] therapist, and her sex therapy group" (Francis 2004, 76). This

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[16] In her letter to Sophie Caco at the end of this novel, Edwidge Danticat is very adamant about the fact that neither she nor the character of Sophie is representative of all Haitian women. The voice she give to the experiences of the Haitian women who inspired Sophie's story, in my opinion, does not enforce a monolithic view of Haitian women but simply illuminates the situations of *some* of the women who are subjugated because of their skin color, gender, political views and more. I hold this belief throughout my reading of all three of these novels.

multiplicity of views and voices, works to show the full story. The crime of sexual violence, then, is that which a community of women need to address as they are all victims either directly—as is the case with Martine, indirectly—as is the case with Rena, the therapist, or inadvertently—as is the case with Brigitte, Sophie's daughter.

The role of those directly involved is to reclaim their bodies by way of coming to terms with what happened and by naming their oppressor. In many ways all of the Haitian women are directly involved in the narrative of sexual violence. Some were raped, others were forced to endure virginity tests, and others performed the virginity tests. *All* have to deal with the repercussions of this. Martine's death proves this much. Martine dies because she is unable to continue her life after the rape. She choses not to remarry, avoids talking about the incident in the cane-fields and continues to live in fear even after relocating to the United States. After she unintentionally becomes pregnant by her lover of ten years, Marc Chevalier—a man whose last name means chivalrous and of low-ranked nobility—she experiences a psychotic break and kills herself. During her psychotic break she hears her unborn fetus talking and "it has a man's voice" (Danticat 1994, 217). As this signifies that he will be male and, in Martine's mind, a reproduction of "a violent misogynistic patriarchy that sits in judgment of her and finds her lacking" (Francis 2004, 86), Martine decides that it is of the utmost importance that she gets the fetus out of her. Accordingly, in her mind, she stabs herself in the stomach.

Sophie's abuse lies in her being forced to take the virginity tests and the self-inflicted pain she endures because of it. It also lies in her being her mother's

marassa[17]. Sophie evinces three forms of sexual trauma: two are physical and one is mental. The physical ones, I will show, are a result of internalized racism and religiosity that encourages Haitian women to value a woman based on her purity or virginity. Women in Haiti are taught that each finger has a purpose. This is "the way [they] had been taught to prepare [themselves] to become [women]" (Danticat 1994, 151). The fingers stand for "Mothering. Boiling. Loving. Baking. Nursing. Frying. Healing. Washing. Ironing. Scrubbing"(ibid). In accordance with this, it is also said that "[t]he men in this area, they insist that their women are virgins and have ten fingers"(ibid). Virginity and ability to take care of the home are the main ways to womanhood in this mode of thought. When Sophie decides to break her hymen with her mother's pestle, she ends her virginity tests but inflicts a second type of sexual trauma on herself. The two in conjunction—the sanctified way of viewing sex and the sexual violation with the pestle—work to make sex painful. Her mental sexual trauma is, again, because she is her mother's *marassa*. In short, a *marassa* is a twin. As Danticat writes, "[d]reams move the wind" (1994, 230), and thus they spread stories, be they of trauma or pleasure. Sophie breathes in her mother's trauma. In the course of living with Martine, Sophie realizes that her mother's "nightmares had somehow become [her] own, so much so that [she] would wake up some mornings wondering if [they] hadn't spent the night dreaming about the same thing: a man with no face, pounding a life into a helpless young girl" (Danticat 1994, 230). In order to be recover from her mother's trauma and the trauma induced by her mother—and

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[17] I will delve into this folkloric tale in a latter section

foremothers—Sophie must come to terms with all her instances of sexual violence and name her oppressor in order to heal. Rena and Brigitte help her to do so.

The role of those indirectly involved is to help in the healing process and to continue the story never allowing for its erasure. This is the role that the sex therapist named Rena. Rena is described as "a gorgeous black woman who was an "initiated Santeria priestess…[who] had done two years in the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic" (Danticat 1994, 206). She is very Afrocentric—with a Diasporic and Pan-African afrocentricity. Rena introduces Sophie to a sex therapy support group that consists of "Buki, an Ethiopian student who had her clitoris cut and her labia sewn up when she was a girl" (Danticat 1994, 201) and Davina, "a middle-aged Chicana, [who] had been raped by her grandfather for ten years" (ibid). In including these characters in the narrative, it becomes clear that this story has its focus in not only the Haitian community of female-bodied women, but in many communities of the Black diaspora and the world of women of the global south. Danticat does this in an effort to make "evident that sexual traumas are a collective plight shared by postcolonial women" (Francis 2004, 85)—maybe even because of the nature of colonial relationships. She also to show that a therapy containing Indigenous spirituality, love, talking about sexual-violence, reclaiming one's true history and facing one's oppressor may be the only way to get past such trauma.

The role of those inadvertently involved is to end the cycle and start anew and liberated. This is the role of Brigitte. As Sophie's daughter, her birth inspires Sophie to seek closure for all of her experiences of sexual violence. The last of which is

forgiving her mother and facing her mother's rapist who is also her father. Sophie decides to do this because of therapy, where she is inspired to go back to Haiti and give her mother's rapist a face in order to "name" him. Sophie also goes to the site to see that she is "able to walk away from it" (Danticat 1994, 211), it being both the spot where it happened and the ghosts it inspired. This is also important because, according to Rena, Sophie must "reclaim [her] mother line" (Danticat 1994, 207). In light of all this, Sophie symbolically burns her mother's name in a ceremony with her sex therapy group in order to begin the process of forgiving her. She also goes back to Haiti to bury her mother and once done becomes more fully liberated. According to Sophie "[i]t was up to me to avoid my turn in the fire. It was up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares, and never had *her* name burnt in the flames" (Danticat 1994, 203). In accordance with the terms of dealing with trauma, Sophie survives hers and lives to change the cyclical nature of internalized sexist sexual trauma, the virginity tests. [18]

First person Narration serves as an example of Collin's understanding of the purpose of using Black women's experience as a criterion of meaning because Sophie's experience is told in her own voice allowing her to speak of her own

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[18] In much of Edwidge Danticat's literature there is a strong tie between beauty, love and strength. In the scene of the burning ceremony, Buki, Sophie and Davina chant the affirmation: "We are beautiful women with strong bodies" (Danticat 1994, 202). Buki and Sophie forgive their women oppressors in the name of a their similar identity, understanding, oppression and love. Buki writes in a letter "It would be easy to hate you, but I can't because you are part of me. You are me"(ibid), and Sophie thinks "I knew my hurt and hers were links in a long chain and if she hurt me, it was because she was hurt, too" (Danticat 1994, 203). Also, Rena is spiritually powerful, a priestess but also described as gorgeous. This will become more apparent in Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*

oppression and define herself for herself. First person narration and what her story inspires in her also helps her reform her story and her past turmoil. Patricia Hill Collins argues that methods of survival are gained through sharing knowledge about the multiplicity of oppression. The wisdom that is gained from experiencing these dynamics must be passed down in order to continue to survive (Collins 1989, 758). In writing of the experience of Sophie Caco and her female relatives in the first-person, Sophie, a Black Haitian woman, becomes the agent of knowledge. Danticat, in doing this, also makes Sophie an agent of change, as it is Sophie who uses this knowledge about the dynamics of her experience to begin to change the experience of sexual violence of other young Haitian women through her interactions with her daughter.

Folklore and the Resistance it Allow for

Danticat intertwines folklore and song in the last chapter to show the resilience of cultural practices as a resilience of Haitian women. In Haiti, there is a proverb that says "[o]nly a mountain can crush a Haitian woman" (Danticat 1994, 198), Danticat's work in this novel shows this to be true. She does this through use of the mountain—and the mountanous task of healing from sexual violence—in conjuction with folklore that focuses on the stories of women. These stories are then appropriated into a novel that attempts to not only enunciate and elaborate on the stories of sexual violence of women on the island, but to also dictate the ways to solve this issue. As Francis notes, Danticat "includes folklore and storytelling, even while she critiques their role in undergirding misogynistic cultural practice" (2004, 77). In doing this, she works the folklore so that it may also transform in the telling of the stories. Many of

the stories the reader experiences surround the happenings around Sophie. This is purposely done so as to have a nuanced reading of the story—and its lesson—in relation to that moment in Sophie's life. There are eleven such tales—ten that I will discuss, the last of which I will touch in the section describing the significance of color in the novel.

The first tale we encounter is told as a means of foreshadowing Sophie's circumstance and also showing Sophie's strength. The story is of a people in Guinea—the heavens in Vodou—who "carry the sky on their heads" (Danticat 1994, 25) as they are the "people of Creation" (ibid), and therefore are also strong enough to carry part of the sky. Tante Atie tells a young Sophie this story to help her understand that she will need to find strength to deal with whatever she may face because their maker has deemed her capable. This lesson helps to encourage Sophie to solve the issues she encounters in life.

The second tale we encounter aids the reader in developing an understanding that Sophie's conception story and family structure is complex and dynamic. One day Sophie asks Tante Atie how it was that she was born "with a mother and no father" (Danticat 1994, 47). Tante Atie, tells Sophie the story of a girl "who was born out of the petals of roses, water from the stream and a chunk of the sky"(ibid). Using this story, the reader can infer that Sophie's conception involved pain and hard work—the sky people, as well as the love of her mother—and not her father. The truth is that a *tonton macoute* raped Martine. The rose imagery is often a symbol for virginity and this is the topic of later tales.

The third tale is the tale of the *Marassas* that is used to show the legacy of sexual violence and the unity of Sophie and Martine. In performing the virginity test, Martine knows that she is inflicting pain on Sophie and so she chooses to help her mind escape into a story. The story is of "two inseparable lovers…[who] were the same person duplicated in two" (Danticat 1994, 85). The message in this story marks another example of lessons in sexual purity. Martine states, "[w]hen you love someone, you want him to be closer to you than your *Marassa*. Closer than your shadow. You want him to be your soul" (ibid). Even still, the lesson continues, you should fear him and that kind of closeness because "[w]hen you look in a stream, if you [see] that man's face, wouldn't you think it was a water spirit? Wouldn't you scream? Wouldn't you think he was hiding under a sheet of water or behind a pane of glass to kill you" (ibid). Martine implores Sophie to be her *marassa* and in doing so offers a non-misogynistic reading, one in which all Sophie will need is matriarchal love. It is an evocation of mother-daughter love. This story also may be interpreted as an expression of fear and anxiety around separation and around rape. Martine's assertion that the man could be hiding waiting to kill Sophie, shows, in some way, that Martine has not quite gotten past her own rape in which the scenario played out similarly. In using this story, Danticat shows the possibility of a dual reading of the same story; History, then, can be fallible and one-sided.

The fourth tale comes only a couple pages later and is that which Sophie invokes when she is inflicting bodily harm on herself to protest the virginity tests. The story is of a woman who bleeds from unbroken skin. After a consultation with Erzulie "it became apparent to the bleeding woman what she would have to do"

(Danticat 1994, 87). The reality for this woman is that "if she wanted to stop bleeding, she would have to give up her right to be a human being. She could choose to what to be, a plant or an animal, but she could no longer be a woman" (ibid). The woman decides to go through with the transformation and asks Erzulie to make her an animal that was free and small. She is given her wish and becomes a butterfly. This story can be seen as a misogynistic way of telling women to be fragile and like butterflies. It can also be read as a tale that foreshadows what happens to Martine. In order to heal from the mental trauma of her rape she will need to go through a transformation and become free. Sophie will need to do the same. One way to this "freedom" can be seen as death; this reading births another reading of Martine as weak and incapable of overcoming her patriarchal and political form of torture. It can also, however, be said that, in the end, Martine does find freedom and its new form allows her to free Sophie. I believe that in writing this, Danticat writes of patriarchal oppression. In this story, interestingly enough, the oppressor does not win.

The fifth tale is told to Sophie at her grandmother's feet when she returns home in search of answers. The story is of a conniving lark that attempts to lure a young girl away from home and to the King who eats girls' hearts. The lark uses a delicious pomegranate. The girl falls for the pomegranate but then tricks the bird into letting her go home. When told of the King's intentions after her arrival at the scene, the girl says 'I didn't tell you this because it was a small thing, but little girls, they leave their hearts at home when they walk outside. Hearts are so precious. They don't want to lose them" (Danticat 1994, 125). The lark thinking he can simply trick her into going home to get her heart ends up, mistakenly, letting her go. The moral of the

story, as told by Grandmè Ifé is "[i]f you see a handsome lark in a tree, you had better know that he is waiting for a very very pretty little girl who will never come back to him" (ibid). At first glance, this story appears to imply that young women should heed the warnings of their paternalistic parents and guard their hearts against strange men—like Joseph, Sophie's husband. However, taken in addition to the reality that Joseph actually treats Sophie well and that the little pretty girl gets away because of her own intelligence, this story may also be understood to dictate that education and true love—as that is what Sophie has—will guide you away from the King's workers whose only aim is to use one for one's heart and body.

The sixth story is that of the *tonton macoutes*. It is this story that Danticat uses to name Martine's oppressor and in doing so allow Sophie to heal from her mother's wounds. She writes that "[i]n the fairy tales, the *Tonton Macoute* was a bogeyman, a scarecrow with human flesh" (Danticat 1994, 138). *Tonton Macoute* was named after a fictional creature and the tactic of naming the paramilitary this was, according to Francis, done with the purpose of creating a "cultural linguistic block that already discredits the reality of women's stories of sexual abuse by relegating abuse to the realm of the unreal" (Francis 2004). In writing that he also wore "denim overalls and a carried a cutlass and a knapsack made of straw", Danticat pulls the *macoutes* back into the realm of the real as this is how they were perpetually identified, in conjunction with their dark-lensed sunglasses. She continues the child's tale effect in writing that "[i]n his knapsack, he always had scraps of naughty children, whom he dismembered to eat as snacks" and that the lesson was that "[*i]f you don't respect your elders then the Tonton Macoute will take you away*" (Danticat 1994, 138). In

doing this, Danticat harkens on the typical understanding of *macoutes* that believes the telling of this story condones "abuse as appropriate punishment for a subordinate who has misbehaved" (Francis 2004). The latter part of this quote however, allows for a different reading. It is easy to say that if Sophie truly respects her elders, she will want to do as her therapist Rena dictates and reclaim her bloodline; as a respect of matrilineal relations would require such. In honor of this, then, the *tonton macoute* in mythical or real form is with whom she must inflict her wrath at being subjugated. This way of reading the story is evinced in how Danticat writes the end scene in which Sophie is battling the cane stalks at the site of her mother's rape and her grandfather's demise that led to her family's further impoverishment. In this scene Sophie wins.

The seventh tale is told in relation to the virginity cult and shows the dangerous nature of the cult habits. The story is that "an extremely rich man…married a poor girl" (Danticat 1994, 154)[19] and on their wedding night, he finds out that the girl does not bleed and deems her un-pure. In an effort to reclaim his manhood—one defined outside of himself and within his material possessions—he cuts her hymen with a knife to show her hymen blood on the fresh white sheets and get enough to drink in his goat milk (of masculinity). From the wound inflicted by the knife, the young woman bleeds profusely and dies. Overly concerned with the fact that he "did not have a blood-spotted sheet to hang in his courtyard [for] the next

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[19] In Haiti, as it is in many countries, marriage is often a precursor for land acquisition. In this story the daughter's mother agrees to the marriage because her daughter will gain access to all that wealth makes accessible.

morning" (Danticat 1994, 155) this rich man kills the poor (read: Black) girl. While this story is told to promote virginity, Danticat uses it to show the man's absurdity and barbarism and the ensuing absurdity of those who think like him. She does this by contrasting this with Sophie's thinking of the instance that drove her to violate her own hymen. In doing this, Danticat questions the purpose of both the virginity cult and the virginity tests its members force women to endure. Given that Joseph, one of the few good men in the novel, falls in love with and marries Sophie without caring whether or not she is a virgin, Danticat shows that the brute force and pomp of the rich man is superfluous and indicative of the oppression he has no issue causing.

The eighth tale, is actually a song Martine sings at dinner and is used to portray just how alienating her rape and consequently her departure has made Martine. When Martine invites Sophie and Joseph to dinner, she is attempting to make amends and include them in her life with Marc. When she finds that Joseph is a musician, she proclaims that her favorite Negro spiritual is one in which the lyrics proclaim "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child./ Sometimes I feel like a motherless child./ Sometimes I feel like a mother less child./ A long ways from home"(Danticat 1994, 215). Unable to deal with her trauma Martine loses her connection to her motherland, her mother, and her lineage, who and which were all also incapable of protecting her from a system that inflicts misogynistic political violence. In her death, Sophie, must reclaim the Caco women's story and in doing so reclaim her mother and her ability to mother.

The ninth tale positions Sophie in the lineage of female storytellers. At her mother's funeral she begins to sing a play song. It goes "*[r]ing sways to Mother. Ring stays with Mother. Pass it. Pass it along. Pass me. Pass me along*" this becomes, to both Sophie and the reader, an emblem of the role of women as culture keepers. Sophie thinks to herself

> Listening to the song, I realized that it was neither my mother nor my Tante Atie who had given all the mother-and-daughter motifs to all the stories they told and all the songs they sang. It was something that was essentially Haitian. Somehow, early on, our song makers and tale weavers had decided that we were all daughters of this land (Danticat 1994, 230).

The song makers and tale weavers made all their songs and stories about daughters. This may very well be because they made these stories about themselves, or inclusive of characters that reminded them of themselves. In this logic the song makers and tale weavers would be women. As these productions are means through which culture is promoted and kept, the song makers and tale weavers are culture keepers. Women, again, are the culture keepers in this novel as well as in Haiti. The songs sung by the men in the sugar cane fields are about women. Sexually liberated, domestically abused for the sake of male pride—and in the name of love—, fantastical women. The stories meant to keep children safe are about little girls; witty, intelligent, beautiful and often maltreated little girls. These are the stories of the Caco women. These are the stories of Haiti.

In line with the proverb quoted at the beginning of this section, when Martine dies it is because of the fall of a mountain. The sheets that surround Martine in her

last hour are described as a "mountain of sheets on the floor" (Danticat 1994, 224). This is symbolic of the mountanous task of healing from sexual violence. Though the stories show Danticat's attempt at reclaiming women's roles in a misogynist culture and reasserting the value of women into the reading of the folkloric tales, Martine still does not survive in the form we know her to occupy throughout the novel. Martine and Sophie do, however heal in the end and the folktale that is told at that moment is color struck and liberating.

These folktales relate to the ethic of caring because they are full of emotion and speak of the pained struggle the women in the tales go through. Once retold and used as a means of education from which to learn new ways of living, these stories work to empower the listener. According to Patricia Hill Collins, "rooted in a tradition of African humanism, each individual is thought to be a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy expressed by all life" (Collins 1989, 766). The emotion shown in the folklore helps to exemplify the unique expression of a common power as it shows how women's roles in Haitian society can be used to subvert their oppression.

Furthermore, the folktales evoke tenets of Black feminism, as the stories revolve around the multiplicity of the oppression inherent in Haitian women's lives. The mysoginist practices that women endure involve ethnic, gender, and class biases—one of the sexual trauma is even done by Haitian women, to promote a middle class ideology of respectability. Barriteau posits that Black feminism introduces the concept of multiple jeopardies, multiple consciousnesses, and multiple

identities. She later quotes Barbara Ransby and declares that

> [b]ecause any political agenda that addresses the realities of most African-American women's lives must deal with the four major systems of oppression and exploitation – race, class, gender and sexuality – black feminist politics radically breaks down the notion of mutually exclusive, competing identities and interests and instead understands identities and political process as organic, fluid, interdependent, dynamic and historical (Barriteau 2006, 18).

I believe that this declaration applies to Danticat's work. Furthermore, as the folklore reveals the matrix of domination, it helps make the novel more political.

For Patricia Hill Collins, "[p]eople experience and resist oppression on three levels: the level of personal biography; the group or community level of the cultural context created by race, class, and gender; and the systemic level of social institutions" (Collins 1990, 223). According to this mode of thought, there needs to, then, be a strategy for attacking all three sites. Collins believes that because "Black feminist thought emphasizes all three levels as sites of domination," it also serves as a theory with which to comprehend these three sites of oppression "as potential sites of resistance"(ibid). Moreover, in realizing the multiplicity of one's oppression, one is better equipped to maneuver through life in an effort to counteract one's subjugation. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the folklore dialogues about the personal experiences of the young women within the stories. In so doing, it touches on the community moral code. It may also be used to argue against the system of patriarchy, and white and male supremacy under which these women live.

Color Significations

Danticat uses primary colors, namely yellow and red—although blue is used as well—, in *Breath*, *Eyes*, *Memory* to dictate the nature of the character's relationship to her mother and her mother's sanity. Coincidentally, the primary colors in varied name—red, gold, and navy blue as opposed to red, yellow and blue—with the addition of the color green are also associated with the deity Erzulie (Filan 2006) whom Sophie calls upon—in her different forms—in numerous instances. For this section, however, I will focus on the uses of yellow and red, as they are those most used in the novel. Colors, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, have a synesthetic quality.

Yellow, in *Breath*, *Eyes*, *Memory*, is innocent, lemon-scented, warm, and loving at once. Most, if not all, of the yellow comes in the beginning of Sophie's story. The novel opens with the image of a "flattened and drying daffodil" (Danticat 1994, 3), and the image of children happily "crushing dried yellow leaves into the ground…leaves [that] had been left in the sun to dry" (ibid). Also in the opening pages is the mention of her Tante Atie's lemon-scented perfume that Martine sends her sister from New York, the image of her mother chasing her in a field of daffodils, and the poem Sophie writes of her mother as a daffodil[20]. Sophie also envisions her mother as the virgin Erzulie. This is the Erzulie Freda Dahomey in the Rada tradition of Vodou (Guiley 1989). Sophie envisions her to be the "lavish Virgin Mother. She [who] was the healer of all women and the desire of all men. She [who] had gorgeous dresses in satin, silk, and lace, necklaces, pendants, earrings, bracelets, anklets, and lots and lots of French perfume" (Danticat 1994, 59). All of this is reminiscent of, as

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[20] Sophies poems states "My mother is a daffodil,/ limber and strong as one./ My mother is a daffodil, but in th wind, iron strog" (Danticat 1994, 29)

seen in the jewelry, gold or yellow but also of wealth. The mother, Sophie imagines, "never had to work for anything because the rainbow and the stars did her work for her" (ibid). This mother, "[e]ven though she was far away, she was always with [her]. [She] could always count on her, like one counts on the sun coming out at dawn" (ibid). This is much of the color used to describe Sophie's experience as a young girl in Haiti.

Once little Sophie Caco is informed that she will be moving to the United States to live with her mother, new yellow images come about. She writes that her and her Tante Atie were "[s]unflowers, staring directly at the sun" (Danticat 1994, 30). Later Sophie speaks of the yellow taxi-cars, yellow dresses on her mother's doll, and the sun in her curtains of her new apartment. After Sophie and her mom move into a house, with the help of Marc Chevalier, one of the last yellow images is of her in a "tight-fitting yellow dress" (Danticat 1994, 82) which Sophie wears when she goes on an innocent—though hidden—date with Joseph her neighbor and future husband[21]. All of this yellow—or gold—is, then, meant to remind us of warmth cheeriness, joy, action, optimism, happiness, idealism, summer, hope, imagination,

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[21] Interestingly enough, much of the imagery Sophie uses to represent her love for Joseph is water imagery; taking from her Tante Atie's opinion that "love is like rain" (Danticat 1994, 67). Love "comes in a drizzle sometimes," Tante Atie believes, "[t]hen it starts pouring and if you're not careful it will drown you"(ibid). At age eighteen she falls in love with Joseph Wood and his music, which she can hear through the walls of their neighboring houses. Again, her love for him is refered to using water. She states, "[t]he notes and scales were like raindrops, teardrops, torrents. Then I relaxed, letting it go, feeling a rush that I knew I wasn't supposed to feel" (Danticat 1994, 76). Erzulie Freda Dahomey (the Virgin Mother) cries tears of longing and regret (Filan 2006). In line with the novel, then, Tante Atie's tears would be tears of regret at not having openly proclaimed her love and risked life with her lover, and Sophie's tears, would be tears of longing (for Joseph, for peace etc).

sunshine, philosophy, [and] youth (Gage 2000) (The Meaning of Color n.d.). After she is caught in a lie about a make-believe Haitian younger male lover, the first color that is used to describe her mother is red.

Red, in *Breath*, *Eyes*, *Memory*, is the color that represents pain, anger and death. There is a nuanced understanding of these because the negative understanding of pain and death, as represented by the color red, change to be more positive representation with the death of Sophie's mother. Martine and Sophie's move into their new house—the one next to Joseph's house—is marked with red and a change in her mother's color preference. In light of this, they "decorated [their] living room in red, everything from the carpet to the plastic roses in the coffee table" (Danticat 1994, 65). Her mother's new flower becomes the hibiscus as "[s]he had grown tired of daffodils" (ibid). I would add that Martine had also grown tired of yellow. Also red are the lifelines of her mother's palms as she taps it with the belt she is holding when Sophie comes home late from an unsanctioned date with Joseph (Danticat 1994, 84). Short to follow are the red images of the testing process that leads to self-inflicted sexual violation with the pestle. Red also consumes Sophie's Haiti as well.

On the island, formerly ignored red surfaces, become more visible as does the insanity of her mother. Her mother's insanity is represented with Erzulie. In Haiti, the only red that existed before the move to the house was the image of the eggplant hair of her mother's attacker. Even then, eggplant is more purple than red. After the move, images like the flamboyant tree outside of her family's house, the fire-red Caco bird at its death—the fifth and final example of the importance of their name—, and the

rusted knife Martine uses to stab herself seventeen times, are only a few of the red images included. This red, then, evinces notions of danger, aggression and power (Gage 2000) (The Meaning of Color n.d.). This red is also the color of Erzulie Danto, the scarred protector of women and children in the Petro tradition of Vodou. Erzulie (Ezili) Danto's story is as follows:

> At a 1791 ceremony in Bwa Cayman, a Vodou priestess possessed by Ezili Danto slit a black pig's throat[22]. Those present drank its blood, and then swore that they would drive out the French slave masters or die trying. A week later, 1,000 settlers were dead, the rich plantations of Cape François were in smoldering ruins and the Haitian Revolution had begun. Some say slavers cut out the priestess's tongue as punishment for participating in the revolution, while still others claim Danto was made mute by the black guerrillas so that she could not betray them under torture if captured. All agree that thirteen years later the last French soldiers were gone, and the Free Black Republic of Haiti was born (Filan 2006).

There is more to her story but in this excerpt we see that Erzulie Danto helped birth the nation of Haiti and even still was scarred by different parties for her participation in the revolution. As the red becomes her mother's new color—a color that seems to envelop Sophie as well—Sophie's image of her mother also changes. Just as Erzulie Danto is a protector of children and women[23], Martine, in her death becomes Sophie and Brigitte's protector. Her mother's red preference is transferred into her mother's funeral outfit. Sophie dresses blue-faced and post-mortem Martine in "too loud a

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[22] Her grandmother's neighbor in Haiti perpetually offers Sophie a pig.
[23] Erzulie Danto is also thought to be the protector of lesbians and it is interesting to note that Sophie's grandmother, Grandmè Ifé, is unhappy about the nature of the relationship between Tante Atie and the young woman who insists on selling the Caco family her pig.

color for a burial" (Danticat 1994, 227). This new understanding of the color and her mother's role encourages Sophie to dress her dead mother's body so that Martine "would look like a Jezebel, hot-blooded Erzulie who feared no men, but rather made them her slaves, raped *them,* and killed *them*. She was the only woman with that power" (italics mine, ibid). At her mother's funeral in Haiti, Sophie goes into the cane fields, the site of her mother's rape, and reclaims her bloodline. This sanguine lineage and the reclamation of it, frees them all. At the site, Sophie breaks down and attacks the cane itself. After allowing her some respite, Granmè Ifé comes to Sophie and tells her the story in the wind. She states, "[l]isten. Listen before it passes. *Paròl gin pié zèl*. The words can give wings to your feet. There is so much to say, but time has failed you" (Danticat 1994, 234). The story that follows is reminiscent of her mother. It states

> There is a place where women are buried in clothes the color of flames, where we drop coffee on the ground for those who went ahead, where the daughter is never fully a woman until her mother has passed on before her. There is always a place where, if you listen closely in the night, you will hear a mother telling a story and at the end of the tale, she will ask you this question: '*Ou libéré*?' Are you free my daughter?'...Now…you will know how to answer (ibid).

This is a crucial point in the book. The point at which the women, by way of Martine's transformative death and Sophie's courageous reclamation of the bloodline, are liberated.

The color signification works to weave Vodou and different notions of femininity into the narrative of life under the Duvalier regime. As this is related to

positionality it is also related Collins' ethic of personal accountability. The color significations show a transformation in Martine's understanding of her femininity and this changed position alters her personal accountability. Collins believes that in calculating knowledge claims, comprehending the feelings, integrities, and motives of the author are necessary (Collins 1989, 770). Collins' understanding of personal accountability conveys the idea that people are not neutral in their understandings as all thoughts also involve one's experience. Martine is an example of this. In relation to her, the essential component with which she assesses her understanding changes with her transformation in allegiance to the different Erzulies. Her emotions, ethics, and ability to reason are clearly affiliated with the different Erzulies. The Erzulies are, in turn, associated with her worldview. This shift in emotion is, in part due to migration. Davies writes that, "the renegotiating of identities is as fundamental to migration as it is fundamental to Black women's writing in cross-cultural contexts. It is the conveyance of multiple places and cultures that renegotiates the terms of Black women's experience that in turn negotiates and re-negotiates their identities" (1994, 3). Martine's experiences a grand shift in emotions and perception as she travels back and forth between her *pays natal* and her country of refuge—which offers no refuge at all.

In Closing

Breath, Eyes, Memory reflects aspects of Black and Third World Feminist theory in that it centralizes the story of the Caco women, supports reclamation of the matrilineal line and the power it contains, and shows the power of women in building

their own identities in spite of their oppression. For the Caribbean-American woman writer, Davies argues, "cultural politics have to be worked out and articulated along with sexual politics"(1994, 115). For Caribbean women to fully "[confront] racial discrimination and foreign bias, Caribbean male phallicism and American imperialism," Davies continues, "the relationship to Caribbean identity has to be problematized" (ibid). Sophie's identity is problematized in her naming her oppression and remembering. The identification of one's oppression relates to using speech and memory as a revolutionary tool. The first person narration refers to both asserting power to self-define and reforming one's identity. In relation to Black Feminist theory the devices fall under the category of using women's experiences as the criterion of meaning. The folklore and resistance relates to utilizing literature of revolution as means towards self-empowerment and Collins' ethic of caring. The Color Signification and the story in its entirety relate to showing strength in a feminist reading of history as well as Collins' ethic of personal accountability.

The entirety of this work serves as a feminist reading of Haitian history. Danticat, and other Haitian women authors write revisionist historical narratives. Chancy decrees that when a population is "considered so insignificant that its existence goes undocumented, storytelling becomes, necessarily, a source of retrieval; a story must be imagined, a fiction created, that will stand the stress of devaluation" (1997, 15). This is the role the Haitian woman rebel literature writer undertakes. Said writers fill in the holes in historical narratives where women's stories were erased.

Furthermore Chancy argues that, the "gaps" these writers uncover "are specifically gendered and seen not merely as absences but as sites of affirmation. It is

through the consciousness of absence, then, that identity is recovered and preciously defended" (Chancy 1997, 16). Through authorship, the writers assert their identity and their power through their writing. Clearly, then, Haitian women write to articulate and proclaim the power they hold and their ability to survive. This proclamation makes this novel an example of liberatory literature.

In titling this novel *Breath*, *Eyes*, *Memory*, she mandates that the reader as well as the characters live, see, and remember the stories both within and without this novel. In dedicating this novel "to the brave women of Haiti,/ grandmothers, mothers, aunts,/ sisters, cousins, daughters, and friends,/ on this shore and other shores" and ending the dedication with "We have stumbled but we will not fall" (Danticat 1994) Danticat writes Haitian women into a narrative that "reclaim[s] the matrilineage that has been occluded due to women's exclusion from the historical record" (Mardorossian 2010, 40). In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Danticat's use of the theme of healing from sexual violence parallels the same theme's usage in other examples of Black feminist literature. Other similar themes in this novel and within the tradition of African American feminist literary techniques include "close-knit female relationships, silence and voice, the transformative power of reading and writing, the legacy of traumatic[24] memory, preoccupations with the female body, mothering, sexuality, spirituality, vernacular, the constitution of the self and the use of storytelling and folklore" (R. M. Jean-Charles 2010, 59). As the themes are evidently

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[24] Trauma and trauma theory has a relationship to Caribbean post-colonial theory and Black feminism as they too emphasize memory and values "histories" over hegemonic History and historical production (Kaussen 2008, 191).

similar, this work also reveals a thematic relationship to the Black feminist literature. Danticat, in writing this novel, propels Haitian women and other Black women to render their experiences equally important to those formerly recorded and their knowledge and wisdoms as that with which to retell history.

iv.

A World in Our Image: The Roles of Griottes in *Krik? Krak!*

Krik! Krak? is a novel about the tangibility of the spiritual and ancestral world and the strengthening power of love. As a novel about love, memory and the spirit world it articulates the beauty of these concepts as they relate to a Black Haitian female protagonist. The section titled *Of Love and Sea Children* shows the ways the young woman deals with love's multiple incantation and the section *Of Heavenly Nature and Ancestral Speaking* conveys the way the female lover inhabits two worlds, the spiritual one and the one of a very present politically tumultuous reality.

In a conversation with Gloria Naylor, Toni Morrison states that she got the inspiration for her novel *Jazz* from the story of a murdered "woman [who] loved something other than herself so much. She had placed all of the value of her life in something outside herself" (Taylor-Guthrie 1994, 207). This seems to be the archetypal woman/mother figure who loves deeply and sacrifices for her children and other loved ones. In Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* the women seem to also love deeply and sacrifice of themselves in honor of this love. They place their love in justice, tradition and their children. The short stories in *Krik? Krak!* represent Haiti as a land where women keep giving because men cannot give enough. *Krik? Krak!* is a story-cycle[25], a series of interconnected short stories, that captures the lives of numerous women who are involved in the politics of resistance because the system within which they live implicates them and violates their right to live. Even so, it is not a typical narrative of domestic abuses and wounded women. Instead, Danticat's

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[25] A story cycle, according to literary critic Nick Nesbitt, is a novel composed of short stories woven together and "strengthened by varying types of internal cohesion" (Nesbitt 2010, 75).

female characters push forward regardless of political unrest, poverty and other problems in the socio-political history of Haiti in order to ensure that their future and that of their children will be brighter. In this manner, *Krik? Krak!* transforms the typical narrative of domestic abuses and wounded women and goes from being a novel of sacrifice and sadness to a novel about women warriors with wings of flames soaring above despair. Danticat's portrayal of mothers and wives in *Krik? Krak!* concocts a notion of Haitian womanhood and love as being political. In authoring these women as people trapped within a system that has failed them, she shows that in their existence and daily activities they try to resist their oppression. Many of them resist simply by continuing to love the oppositional women others—namely the government—despise. In representing Haitian women as daughters and mothers—and placing the mothers' role in contrast to that of the fathers—Danticat reorders the power in family structures and renders them different from normalized Western notions of family and household; this notion being that the nuclear family is naturally headed by a male patriarch. In *Krik? Krak!* mothers are to be viewed as not only the judicious, sacrificial and spiritual leaders of their households but also the natural, majestic beings that remain wholly humane, despite their torrential surroundings. In the end, mothers remain dynamic, powerful and supreme.

Kirk? Krak! is a novel of short stories. In this text, Danticat follows the theme of love as a tool for survival—evinced in the importance of the bond between mother and daughter and others—to comment on the role Haitian women play in their family's continuous survival.

In the opening story, "Children of the Sea", Danticat lays the foundation for the other stories. She sets the political context as well as the socio-cultural context with this story. The story is set in 1991 after a United States supported coup d'état that ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. In its aftermath, the popularly elected president and his supporters—who appear to be the more youthful and progressive of the nation—are now in grave danger. They must flee Haiti or risk death. Terror has become part of their daily existence as has political sexual violence and military killing of the innocent in order to maintain a forced silence and perpetual state of fear within the Haitian borders. This circumscribed inability to speak out—without risking death or the violation of one's family members—forces many Haitians to leave their families, friends and lovers behind. The violent nature of their existence takes control of the communal and caring aspects of Haitian life and maintains a situation where the formerly empowered—the men—cannot keep their families as safe as they formerly could. Many leave on miserly boats, others die, and yet others remain silenced, all the while leaving the women to take on full household leadership. Throughout the novel, Danticat uses first person narration and, as stated before, shows love to be a tool for survival. She also personifies nature and shows its ability to articulate the will and messages of the heavens. In this story cycle, Danticat personalizes the political turmoil of Haiti and voices how it is experienced in the bodies of women. This is best evinced in "Children of the Sea", a story of young love.

In this chapter, I will show how Black and Third World Feminist theory are related to this short story. In the section titled *Of Love and Sea Children*, I portray how the composition, emotion, and structure of each lover's letters works to produce

a particular effect on the writer's story. In the section titled *Of Heavenly Nature and Ancestral Speaking*, I show how Danticat's personification of nature and portrayal of nature's importance in conveying the messages of the ancestors works to show a matrilineal lineage and a spiritual connection between the women in the novel. In the end, I will show how these devices and literary tools help to give Danticat's work a place in the Black and Third World feminist tradition in that it places the female lover's story in the center, implicates the state in the shaken identities of the lovers, and articulates a connection between nature, feminine ancestry and the heavens.

Of Love and Sea Children

Captured in the un-mailed letters that each unnamed lover writes to the other, the short story "Children of the Sea" portrays just how political unrest is life-changing. In this story of love letters love transforms and traverses and nature voices the will and messages of the heavens. Danticat, then, uses first person narration, the theme of love as a survival tool, and the personification of nature to personalize political turmoil. She does all this by voicing the realities of women during this coup d'état; inasmuch as she does this, she offers a revisionist history of Haiti by privileging women's narratives, an emotional recounting of said narratives; these all work to make *Krik? Krak!* a liberatory novel.

Each letter, written in the first person, attempts to dictate the circumstance of the writer and confess an undying love. They each write in hopes that they will capture each lonely moment, and never miss a beat once reunited. They never see each other again. The daughter is still on the island and her lover on a makeshift boat

aiming to escape political persecution for his oppositional statements made on the radio. While both lovers recount the events in their lives, the way they tell their stories works to different ends. They both work to promote a feeling of borderlessness as their love continues to exist beyond the boundaries of Haiti.

Male[26] Love Letters

The male lover's letters are well composed and written in normal sentence structures, show a clear connection to Haitian Vodou and folklore, show the tractable and fluid nature of identity and race, and vociferate about the power of love. His diction implies a thoughtful ease at writing. Given his existence on a rickety boat at sea, this style is in many ways an equivocation when it is thought of as regarding the precarious nature of his circumstance. In reference to his mental state, however, his diction makes sense; he is at sea after narrowly escaping death at the hands of the military. Near the beginning of his letters, after dreaming that the "winds come [out] of the sky and claim [him and the other people on the boat] for the sea" (Danticat 1996, 6) he proclaims that, "[he is] more comfortable now with the idea of dying" (ibid). This is not because he "has completely accepted it, but [because he] know[s] that it might happen" (ibid). The male lover is not a martyr for he knows that he is "no good to anybody dead, but if that is what's coming"(ibid), he also knows that he "cannot just scream at it and tell it to go away" (ibid). His well-structured sentence format, ease of narrative voice are indicative of his not being in immediate danger—

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[26] Very little information is given about his gender, however the little that is given renders the idea that he is male.

though it is in imminent danger. It also shows that he has a copious amount of time that he has to write virtually unbothered by others.

The waters he dreams of are inhabited by the children of the sea and Agwé and catholic mermaids singing in Latin. In these dreams, he remains voiceless and powerless. This shows his connection to the syncretic Haitian religion of vodou. Agwé or "'Admiral' Agwe, one of the primary Rada spirits, is captain and protector of ships on the sea" (Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou: Agwé n.d.). This dream is prophetic and in the end, the male lover dies.

The fluidity in identity is experienced in the male lover's interactions with the sun. The more he identifies as African, the more Vodou religiosity he reveals. This encapsulates Afrocentic epistemology because he learns to value his African descent. He begins hating "having the sun in [his] face all day long" (Danticat 1996, 4), and shows displeasure at his becoming so dark. He continues to show this discontentment with this color change and writes of the another person's unease because "[n]ow [they] will never be mistaken for Cubans" (Danticat 1996, 8).[27] Closer to the end of the story, he is, in fact, "African…even darker than [his lover's] father" (Danticat 1996, 11). In the same letter that he professes his Africanness, he dreams of Agwé and the mermaids. The more he interacts with the sun, and his own mortality, the more he looks for resolution in an Afrocentric religion. Here he finds many of the

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[27] This is also a reference to the different modes of incorporation that the US government fosters for Cubans and Haitians.

solutions to his problems in that he is able to come to terms with his new home at the bottom of the ocean. In this home, he will live eternally.

Before being forced to throw his journal overboard, he writes one last piece. In it he professes his endless and undying love. He also asserts "I go to them now as though it was always meant to be, as though the very day that my mother birthed me, she had chosen me to live life eternal, among the children of the deep blue sea, those who have escaped the chains of slavery to form a world beneath the heavens and the blood-drenched earth where you live" (Danticat 1996, 27). This is an important statement for three reasons: it shows that even in nearing death his love for her is still strong—and possibly curative in that it helps him continue to want to live; it depicts the dynamic power of mothers—and not fathers—to lovingly and selflessly choose and/or form the fate of their children; and in the fact that his letters do not survive physically and his female lover's letters do, it professes the importance of *her* history and *her* telling of their story. This all relates to Patricia Hill Collins' idea of using women's experience as the criterion of meaning and also to the purpose of speaking because one is not protected by one's silence[28].

Female Love Letters

The female lover's letters lack capitalization and are in bold print; they show the transformation of her family and growth into womanhood; they too vociferate about the power of love. Her diction shows urgency and is very emotional. Her urgency is understandable given the fact that she is living under a military dictatorship from 7878

[28] This is in reference to Audre Lorde's quote "[y]our silence will not protect you" (Lorde 1984, 2007, 41).

which her lover has fled. She and her family live in hiding for fear that the *tonton macoutes* will invade their house at any moment and rape and/or kill them. This, in fact, almost happened because the paramilitary wanted to identify her as an accomplice of her lover and the other five students who worked at the radio show. The bold print helps to dramatize her experiences.

The heightened emotional state of her letters replicate the quotidian violence she and her family endure. She loses her lover to his boat voyage and loses her own father to his anger before the book begins. Throughout the story the reader learns that around the same time that her lover left, the *macoutes* attempted to capture her in the name of betrayal of the government. The only thing that stops them is the bribe that comes from her father. The fact that he has to pay this bribe to save her life—and that he and his family were Aristide supporters—leads the father into a nervous breakdown. His anger against his powerlessness and at his own fear leads him to abuse his family. His version of survival is not that of his wife and daughter. They would rather help all the men and women within their community fight back against the military, while he would rather protect only himself and his family and leave the city for the suburbs. Coincidently, they are able to retain their composure and humanness throughout the story in ways that he cannot.

The daughter and her mother live with the same fears, but their womanhood and femininity allows them to continue to love; want to save lives, and remain hopeful. The daughter grows into womanhood as her lover continues to die. This womanhood is defined by her ability to maintain herself despite the crumbling

conditions of her country. While her lover's letters show despair and contain a story of a young woman, Célianne, who commits suicide after her stillborn child—conceived after she herself is gang raped—the daughter's letters contain a story of Madan Roger. Madan Roger's son is murdered because he is part of the radio six. Once she is able to claim his body, she finds that only his head was maintained after he was killed. She carries his head through all of Port-au-Prince showing the city what was done to her child. In further defiance of the status quo, Madan Roger talks back and curses the mothers of the soldiers who come to her house after her accusatory parade. She is killed but dies maintaining their fault; she goes down vocally fighting. The change in the narrative made by the female lover is that the violated woman is made powerful in her last scene. Célianne takes her life in order to not continue her existence in a state of subjugation and Madan Roger commits another kind of suicide—as she knew they would kill her for her oppositional stance—in her being subversive. As English professor Jana Evans Braziel suggests, Danticat uses heroic maternal figures to "underscore the necessity of thinking of *nanchon* and *dyaspora* as racialized, gendered, and sexualized terrains" (2004, 78). In this mode of thinking, love cannot be denied.

The female lover proclaims and cherishes her love for her lover, but also for her family, and her country. Her love for her boyfriend is as endless as the sea; so much so that she keeps her tapes of the radio show and her letters to him, despite the reality that if the *macoutes* find it she will be killed. Her love for her father is evinced in her having no words to thank him—after finding out he saved her life—and her requesting that her lover love him for it as well. Her love for her mother lies in the

female lover's love for her strength and courage and ability to replicate it. Her mother's strength is shown in wisdom, her wanting to help Madan Roger when she is being attacked and at the risk of her own life, and in her mother's understanding of love. Her mother states that "all anyone can hope for is just a tiny bit of love…like a drop in a cup if you can get it, or a waterfall, a flood, if you can get that too" (Danticat 1996, 13-14). The female lover agrees. Her love for her country is a bit subtle. She proclaims a disgust for the soldiers and/or the political unrest but she never professes a hatred of Haiti; what she would rather is never having any reason to want to, or actually, leave.

The composition, emotion, and structure of each lover's letters works in this section relate to Collins' criterion of meaning. This is because these literary tools convey a use of the female lovers experience to promote the use of speech and memory as a revolutionary tool. They also allot the female love a power with which to self-define and reform her identity. In writing about the criterion of meaning, Collins writes that for African American women, the wisdom gained from living attains high authority in assessing knowledge (Collins 1989, 758). This is also the case for Haitian women, and as is evinced in the story of the female lover, the wisdom gained from both her own experience and that of her mother allows her to deal with her situation and helps her avoid military violence.

Danticat's historic storytelling in *Krik? Krak!* "draws on a long *griot* tradition that people of African descent have used to give alternative accounts of the world" (Braziel 2004, 88). In writing "Children of the Sea", Danticat "reminds us that this

tradition belonged as much to the *griotte* (female) as to the *griot* (male)"(ibid). This tradition involves both sexes, their stories—in addition to those of peoples from varying sectors of society—and histories it births. It must, therefore, be used to recount the history of the nation.

Beverly Bell, in her introduction to a collection of Haitian women's resistance narratives writes that, "poor Haitian women 'are virtually absent as recorders of history and as actors in that history. The routine muffling of their voices has expunged the lives of millions of Haitian citizens. It has also crippled the breadth, depth, and accuracy of depictions of Haiti, its history, and its women. At best, women are portrayed peripherally, as helpless victims or exotic folklore" (Bell 2001, 2-3) (Braziel 2004). Danticat, in the company of and with the help of the other writers in that book, works to make sure women's narratives are in this history.

Danticat "not only envisions new configurations of *nanchon* and *diaspora* while imagining the places of Haiti's women within these national and diasporic formations but also suggests the historical role that gender has played in forming ideas about *nanchon* and *dyaspora*" (Braziel 2004, 88). In turbulent times when men are fighting for governmental power, many women still hold power in their families and in the way their humane notions of justice and love are maintained. This is not as easily shifted, as are regime allegiances. It is, however, just as political. These women's ideas about *nanchon* allow for a more humane and emotional interpretation that invokes a cherishing of life and people over money and power. Their understanding of *dyaspora* allows for an understanding of the limitless nature of their

lineage. Furthermore, for these women, whether their offspring live in Haiti, abroad in search of political or economic asylum, or in the sea, they will be Haitian and important to the narrative and history of the country.

Danticat's writing helps to show that political unrest "cuts across previous demarcations of both personal and political space and narrative genre (novel, short story, memoir, op-ed editorial) to chart the course of new modalities and conceptualizations of political activity" (Nesbitt 2010, 74). In essence, her writing "testifies anew that a gifted storyteller is not speaking in place of others, but voicing the intersubjective experience of a community of diverse, singular beings, testifying to the absence and voicelessness of those who have passed on, those who have been eliminated, those who have not yet found the means or courage to speak their singular experiences" (Nesbitt 2010, 74). Most importantly, it is, as Nesbitt agrees, for those 'people in the world whose names don't matter to anyone but themselves" (Danticat 1996, 3).

The namelessness of many of the stories characters gives a universal quality to the piece. They can literally be anyone during that time period. The lack of capitals in the female lover's story asserts the equality of all the characters in her narrative. The male lover, early in his journal, believes that if he "was a girl, maybe [he] would have been at home and not out politicking and getting [himself] into something like this" (Danticat 1996, 9). Little does he realize that the politicking is not just done on the radio and outwardly. His lover, his mother, and the other mothers of the novel are also politicking. They are not only showing how political poison-like violence

detrimentally affects the lives of women, but also the ways their stories are also speaking toward a revision of history.

Danticat uses them to revise "*Ayiti's* history, *nanchon*, and *dyaspora*, as connected through genealogical and ancestral lines (however history has sought to sever, forget, and erase those familial and feminine *lieux de mémoire*[29])" (Braziel 2004, 81). She uses their stories, and the other stories of women in the novel to pontificate on the importance of including women in the historical narrative of Haiti in order to make it truthful and whole. She does this because she includes the female lover's letters in addition to the male lover's and without which the full story could never be realized. In doing this, she symbolically shows the necessity of including all sides of a story—or history—present in order to full understand the narrative. This novel, then, "is not Haiti's maternal *histoire*; it is Haiti's *histoire* maternally written and read, remembers and embodied, rendered palpably and visibly present through her diasporic daughters" (Braziel 2004, 83). Furthermore, through diasporic distance and through the inclusion of the traumas of female embodiment in the Haitian narrative, Danticat uses fiction to rewrite Haiti's history and make it accessible to all who read English. In doing all of this, Danticat is "insisting that it is only by passing through Haiti's maternal bodies that the country will be reborn, that she will survive and necessarily confront the future" (ibid). This, Danticat maintains, is "Haiti's necessary birth and rebirth pains, her passage from a revolutionary past to future

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[29] *Lieux de mémoire* are the fragments of historical memory that remain within the Haitian repository of "folklore, legend, *chante* (songs), *pwovèb* (proverbs), and other oral histories of vodou" (Braziel 79).

possibilities of social egalitarianism for all Haiti's sons and daughters" (ibid). This imagery of rebirth is reminiscent of the way Danticat uses nature to show how the ancestral world is participating in this torrential political time.

Of Heavenly Nature and Ancestral Speaking

In *Krik? Krak!* Danticat personifies nature and shows its ability to articulate the will and messages of the heavens[30]. She does this by showing that the weather espouses the feelings of the heavens; portraying the interplay of death and butterflies; and using the banyan tree's cultural significance to help the female lover find solace, learn the important role ancestors play, and to speak to the gods.

Rain & Waterfalls

Danticat writes of the weather's ability to espouse the feelings of the heavens in order to show both the impact that this violence is having on nature as well as nature's response to this. She pays particular attention to water. As stated before, the mother

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[30] It may be said that she uses magical realism. Magical realism is a "literary mode rather than a distinguishable genre, [which] aims to seize the paradox of the union of opposites. For instance, it challenges polar opposites like life and death and the pre-colonial past versus the post-industrial present. Magical realism is characterized by two conflicting perspectives, one based on a rational view of reality and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as prosaic reality. Magical realism differs from pure fantasy primarily because it is set in a normal, modern world with authentic descriptions of humans and society" (Moore 1998).Accordin to this definition, I would disagree. Firstly, I disagree because I do not believe the world of the living to be more rational than the world of the dead, nor do I see it as more real. Inasmuch as the novel is concerned, I also believe the characters see the two worlds as being equally important and equally real. Secondly, I disagree because while the surreal aspect of nature, the carrying of messages, does lend itself to a magical realist reading, I do not see the aspects of nature as those that conflict with the characters' reality but more so, and simply, as the aspects that add another layer to it.

and daughter use waterfalls and floods to symbolize love, while the male lover uses storms are used to symbolize death. In his letter, the male lover writes, "[a]s you know, I am not very religious. Still I pray every night that we won't hit a storm" (Danticat 1996, 6). If a storm comes, he believes, they surely will not survive it. He continues, "[w]hen I do manage to sleep, I dream that we are caught in one hurricane after another. I dream that the winds come of the sky and claim us for the sea" (ibid). Danticat personifies the storm's wind. She, in authoring the male lover to believe this, also shows that the want of the storm is to maintain the population of sea children and Agwé's world. Throughout this story the water in the boat is also rising. This water also signifies the people on the boat's closeness to death. In somewhat striking contrast to the female lover's usage, this water in the boat shows that it is likely that the people on the boat will drown. How is it possible that the same source can have two different meanings?

To answer this, one must go back to Vodou. In Vodou, there are a number of aquatic spirits. The ones pertinent to understand this duality of water symbolism are Danbala and Ezili (Erzulie). Danbala is an ancient water deity associated with rain [sometimes storms], wisdom and fertility; Ezili is a water deity, of many personae, associated with *Sodo* or waterfalls, love, lust, sexuality, motherhood and all things feminine. (Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou: Danbala n.d.) (Tate 2006) (McAlister 2009). The male lover's reference point is both being at sea—and thus being at the hands of Agwé—but also fearing storms and rain, the elements that refer to Danbala. The female lover refers to this association with Danbala and rainstorms as well. She states, "there are only two rooms [in their new house in Ville Rose] and a tin roof that

makes music when it rains, especially when there is hail, which falls like angry tears from heaven" (Danticat 1996, 22). The angry sky tears support an image of Danbala's rain. Her biggest difference, though, is that she also has a huge association with Ezili—Ezili Freda Dahomey and Ezili Dantó—in that she is a woman who loves love, loves her mother and deeply appreciates and comprehends her mother's statement that "all anyone can hope for is just a tiny bit of love…like a drop in a cup if you can get it, or a waterfall, a flood, if you can get that too" (Danticat 1996, 13-14). This difference portrays the unique views and thoughts about rain versus thoughts about waterfalls and allows for the difference in ideas and beliefs about the natural element of water. With either view water, nature holds messages of the heavens as well as characteristics of the heavenly.

Butterfly Paperboys

Danticat, in "Children of the Sea", portrays the interplay of death and butterflies. Butterflies, according to Haitian belief, carry news. The female lover writes of this. She dictates, "manman says that butterflies can bring news. The bright ones bring happy news and the black ones warn us of death" (Danticat 1996, 5). As a result of this, she waits to hear both radio reports and butterfly stories to find out what has happened to her lover. Later, once she leaves Port-au-Prince, she hears word. In writing about her new home in Ville Rose, she states**,** "I am getting used to ville rose. There are butterflies here, tons of butterflies. So far none has landed on my hand which means they have no news for me" (Danticat 1996, 25-26). In her next entry, however, she receives word. After conversing with her father she is refreshed and able to continue moving on her path to womanhood. She composes "today I said

thank you. I said thank you, papa, because you saved my life. He groaned and just touched my shoulder, moving his hand quickly away like a butterfly" (Danticat 1996, 28). After this moment, the real news carrier arrives. She inscribes "[a]nd then, there it was, the black butterfly floating around us. I began to run and run so it wouldn't land on me, but it had already carried its news. I know what must have happened"(ibid). With the winged word of the butterfly she is able to deduce that her lover at sea has passed. Even later, she receives the news from the radio that a boat has sunk off the shores of the Bahamas.

Danticat uses the suggested cultural belief that butterflies carry messages to show that nature is more than just life's backdrop. The idea of borderlessness is also apparent here. Jana Evans Braziel writes that "With the critical and popular successes of Edwidge Danticat's literary texts, Haitian literatures in the United States have found a new Anglophone feminist voice that sings of memory and loss, motherland and migration, as well as liminal spaces between: the Atlantic Ocean for those crossing the sea by U.S. Coast Guards and detained there" (Braziel 2004, 77). It helps to lessen the "other America" feeling usually ascribed when writing about the Caribbean and Danticat uses feminist revisionist history to make universal the experience of Haitian women during political turmoil and exposed violence. Furthermore, Danticat, with the use of her literary texts, "rethink national boundaries, specifically Haiti's border of *nanchon* (nation) and *dyaspora* (diaspora), and her narratives suggest transnational flows across the Atlantic and the Caribbean in which Haiti's *dyaspora* informs its *nanchon*"(ibid). In "Children of the Sea", there is the ever-present notion of travel. Of transcending physical borders and maintaining love,

of searching for lands where one can be free from political persecution. In this short story there is also a beautiful account of the path between life and death. In this way, as is evinced with the role of the butterfly, nature can be viewed as a means of communication between the world of the living and the dead.

Tree Talkers and Ancestral Spirits

Danticat uses the cultural relevance of the banyan tree to help the female lover find solace, learn the important role ancestors play, and to speak to the gods. Once she moves to Ville Rose she finds the banyan tree and in furthering her relationship with her mother, she furthers her relationship with the tree. The symbolism is in the portrayal of the tree as a link to the ancestral world. In conversing with her mother, she learns of her history and that of her bloodline. Under this tree she learns about her parents' relationship, her father's life as a gardener[31], her mothers choice to marry for love. After these conversations and writing numerous letters under the shelter of the banyan, the female lover realizes that "the banyan tree now is [her] trusted friend" (Danticat 1996, 26). She continues, "[t]hey say banyans can last hundreds of years. Even the branches that lean down from them become like trees themselves. A banyan could become a forest, manman says, if it were given a chance"(ibid). The banyan's ability to both listen to her heart's wish and help in the process of storytelling allows

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[31] Her father's role, though he goes through a period of violence, is similar to the persona of the Vodou deity Azaka as he was once a peasant farmer. Azaka, "affectionately known as Zaka, is the patron of agriculture and a good-natured man of the mountains. He is considered family and addressed most often as 'Papa' or 'Cousin.' Zaka's garb is that of a peasant farmer" (Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou: Azaka).

for the "forest" to grow.[32] The forest is the representation of the family's and the nation's whole history. The statement that the branches become trees themselves supports the idea she too will grow and continue because it conveys she too will become as strong and as important a culture and story keeper as is the banyan, and her own mother, if she is given a chance.

Later in the story, after finding out that her lover has died, she seeks the banyan in order to find solace. She writes, "I don't know what's going to happen, but I cannot see staying here forever. I am writing to you from the bottom of the banyan tree" (Danticat 1996, 28). She is unsure of her future and her future path and seeks the tree and its link to the ancestral world. She also uses it as a link to the gods. She continues, "Manman says that banyan trees are holy and sometimes if we call the gods from beneath them, they will hear our voices clearer. Now there are butterflies all around me, black ones that I refuse to let find my hand. I throw big rocks at them, but they are too fast"(ibid).

Danticat obeys the Toni Morrison tradition of writing about painful situations without really offering much detail into the pain. Danticat inscribes a deliberate evanescence in the closing of the short story. Although it is clear that the female lover's stories remain, it is unclear if the female lover dies in the end. If the bottom of trees is where the spirits lie, if she is posited as sitting at the bottom of this tree, it becomes indiscernible if she is dead or alive. As she asks for death in the beginning

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[32] This is also a comment on deforestation and the ways it harms the natural balance of the relationship and interconnectivity of humans and nature.

of the novel and is now surrounded by butterflies, it can be asserted that her prayer for death has been answered and the butterflies are also speaking of her death; it may also be asserted that the gods answered her prayer for a life without turmoil, and instead the butterflies are warning her of the death of others, and quite possibly of the regime. While the form her solace takes is unclear, Danticat's use of nature to represent the will and messages of the heavens is well defined; She does this with the use of water, butterflies, banyan trees and Vodou.

This inclusion of the importance of nature involves feminism in a more subtle sense. Commonly referred to as Mother Nature, this delicate reference of earth as more than a backdrop perpetuates the idea of the important role of mothers. The natural resources she uses are also such that are usually referred to as feminine. Water, not only in recognition of Vodou deities, but also in reference to its life-giving, and life-supporting qualities is often thought of as feminine. Butterflies are gendered in most minds because of their aesthetic quality and garden habitats. Trees are reminiscent of birth and life and as such are also used as images for motherhood.

Also, much of early Haitian literature refers to Haiti, the island, as a woman. The depiction of nature and earth is both a synecdoche for Haiti, the land, and a metonymy for Haitian women (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998). The land is a synecdoche for the Haitian nation; nature, earth, and Haiti. It is also a metonym and metaphor for Haitian women. Haitian women, then, are a link between the ancestral world and the present because they are the culture keepers. As they are the keepers of *lieux de mémoire*, their histories should also be included in that of the nation.

In Closing

The devices and literary tools in *Krik? Krak!* help to give Danticat's work a place in the Black and Third World feminist literary tradition. This is because these traditions show love to be radical, power in a matrilineal lineage and a spiritual connection between the women in the novel. The composition, emotion, and structure of each lover's letters works in the section *Of Love and Sea Children* to using Speech/ Novel/ Memory as a Revolutionary Tool Power to self-define and reform identity. The personification of nature and portrayal of nature's importance in conveying the messages of the ancestors in the section titled *Of Heavenly Nature and Ancestral Speaking* does this as well. This corresponds to Collin's criterion of meaning.

Danticat's work in *Krik? Krak!* shows the importance of finding strength in a feminized reading of history and Collins' ethic of personal accountability because it is in hearing her mother's stories under the banyan tree that the female lover finds solace and inspiration. The story of her matrilineal lineage, then, revitalizes the female lover's own story. The lover never knew her parents' complete love story until her mother told it to her. In her mother's doing so, the female lover learns that her parents had a similar narrative to that of her own in relation to love and romantic relationships. Before she finds this out, she feels as though her father's distaste for her male lover is not well-founded and only used to persecute the two of them. After she hears it, she realizes that her mother's father treated her own father similarly because he never believed him to be good enough for her mother. The female lover, after this moment, notices that histories "are not, therefore, infallible, for all these 'facts' must

bear the weight of interpretation, that of one particular power which controls the coloring of the storytelling" (Chancy 1997, 15). Before the period of storytelling under the banyan tree she only heard the version of her parent's story that did not show much conflict. After the storytelling she comes to realize that that is what was told to her because they never felt the need to tell her otherwise. After this moment, it is clear, to her, that the imparting of history, then, becomes a process of storytelling—an honest recount of historical events. For her own purposes this honest storytelling must be one that relocates women at the equal level of men as key historical players in the formation of Haitian society. In honor of Collins' personal accountability, the female lover's story can be tied to both her escape from sexual violence and her reclamation of her mother's and ancestors' memories. Memory, then, can be a revolutionary tool as it "serves as the paradigm for survival transhistorically" (Chancy 1997, 11). Transhistorical survival is in no way done to "claim to an evasion of history but, rather, [to] challenge [one] to remember that cultures are shaped by what survives from one generation to the next"(ibid). As the letters of the female lover will survive, this may be seen as a representation that confirms that the stories of women, once written and/or re-told, will continue to survive if there is a conscious effort to remember. If recollected, then the roles of women in the history of Haiti will not be denied. Quoting Paulo Freire, Chancy writes "to speak a true word is to transform the world" (Chancy 1997, 32). A true word in this context is a true history. This inclusive historical narrative—one that includes the roles and participation of all and without which the revolution that Haiti is in need of, cannot happen—needs to be incorporated into the nation's memory. This short story in *Krik? Krak* may be

interpreted in this vain. Memory, then, becomes a necessary part in the advancement of the women in this story and can be seen as a crucial aide in the improvement of the lives of many, if not all, Haitian women.[33]

This chapter also works to show the importance of finding strength in a feminist reading of history and Collins' ethic of personal accountability because the female lover's story will not be erased by military violence. Her story is in letterform and kept in a hidden journal as it is biased against the military force and in favor of the "radio six". Her position is clear and her letters are tainted with it and her love for both her rebellious lover and a time when Haiti will be free from political subjugation. As the letters are inherently oppositional to the people in power, they must be hidden. The bias in her letters renders Collins' ethic of personal accountability true and applicable to this story. Black people, according to Collins, believe that in order to simultaneously evaluate an individual's character, values, and ethics, one must assess the individual's knowledge claims (Collins 1989, 769). The female lover's stories render a women-centered reading of history because her story is the only surviving story of their love and within her story she also reclaims her own ancestral lineage and professes hatred toward the blatant brutal forces in power within

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[33] This women-centered history is also seen in the use of nature as nature and the natural are thought of as existing in relation to Mother Earth—mother connoting the femininity of both the earth and the natural. In personifying nature, Danticat incorporates aspects of the surreal but blends it in with the characters' reality and uses it to promote a feminine telling of the history by way of the ancestors who have passed on previously.

Haiti. To re-compose history and nationalistic ideology one must remember the *real* history of a people.

This chapter relates to the use of literature of revolution as means towards self-empowerment and Collins' ethic of caring because it is in writing and telling their story emotively that the woman will live on and overcome the limitations of her injustices. Collins writes that emotion signifies that a speaker believes in the legitimacy of her/his argument (Collins 1989, 766). In this story of lovers, love is important, as are fear, pain, and grief. Without Danticat's holistic and appropriate portrayal of these feelings the narrative would not be believable. The ethic of caring, then, is important in this short story and in many Haitian novels. Chancy writes "the novel genre enables these visionary [Haitian] women … to elucidate the implicit power structure of a given historical conjuncture [as] the discourse of narrative is capable of exposing these structures" (Chancy1997, 10). According to Chancy, the novel is even qualified to eventually realign society's structures and redress the imbalance (ibid). Along these lines, then, "it becomes necessary to define the novelistic literary tradition of Haitian women as one that transgresses nationalistic ideologies and reformulates nation and identity through the lens of personal and communal exile"(ibid). In this story-cycle, nation and identity are envisioned through the eyes of the women. Their personal exile as women who are and/ or love political people—the people for whom the women are also persecuted—is the exemplified.

Toni Morrison once said that, "definers want the power to name" (Denard 2008, 101). Following this idea *Krik? Krak!* also help to create new definitions for

women's roles as mothers. According to Braziel, Danticat views, "*Ayiti* [as] an orphaned child whose historical and mythical mothers have to be reclaimed within the nation and the diaspora" (Braziel 2004, 80). In order for the process of reclamation to commence, the *griotte* needed to introduce the stories. In this vein, she asked "Krik?" and we readers responded "Krak!". The women-centered, historical revisionist stories manifest themselves from then on[34].

In her epilogue titled "Women Like Us" Danticat writes

> The women in your family have never lost touch with one another. Death is a path we take to meet on the other side. What goddesses have joined, let no one cast asunder. With every step you take, there is an army of women watching over you. We are never farther than the sweat on you browns or the dust on you toes. Though you walk through the valley of the shadows of death, fear no evil for we are always with you (Danticat 1996, 223).

Here she posits women ancestors on the rank of the gods and in said position they truly invoke all of the roles she ascribes to them in her short stories.

Danticat's work, according to Nick Nesbitt, "can be understood as a Haitian American example of the turn toward the genre of the testimonial, that is, the narration (whether fictional or not) by subaltern subjects of individual experiences of social" (Nesbitt 2010, 73). The subaltern in Danticat's novels is the Haitian woman. In writing about such women, she "suggests a transnational feminist politics to address the struggles of women in Haiti and in its *dyaspora.* [She also] chart[s] cross-

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[34] *Krik? Krak! Honor. Respét* was the general introduction to storytelling in Haiti. It is no longer prominently used. When asked *Krik?* Those wanting to hear the story answer exuberantly *Krak!* Honor and respect are retained in the process of sharing.

national alliances between them" (Braziel 2004, 77). In these alliances, a politic that benefits both parties is formed. As Black women are of the most subjugated population of people, their socially just politics should benefit all parties. Danticat's literary texts, Braziel believes, also "have significant parallels with theorizations by Carolle Charles and Myriam J.A. Chancy for a transnational Haitian feminist politics and poetics" (Braziel 2004, 77). Like Charles and Chancy, Danticat "intimates that citizenship needs to be thought of as diasporic and transnational rather than merely as a national category of identification"(ibid). As such, Haitian women and people at large are citizens of the world. They are, then, also responsible for the humane maintenance of this world. Furthering this idea of world citizenship, Myriam Chancy writes that Caribbean authors, Danticat included, "bring us closer to home, even when home is not a fixed or stable place. Through their eyes we can imagine the Caribbean without romanticism or objectification, not as *tourists* but as *citizens* of the world, with all the respect and responsibility this entails" (Chancy 2001, 341). The world, then, becomes our oyster with which to coax pearls of equality into existence.

To refer back to the nature imagery, if "[a]ll water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was" (Morrison 1998, 199), we women need continue being like water and not only remaining both our own and the world's life force but also remembering from whence we came. In doing this, and speaking of our banyan trees, our lineage and our roles in nation-building, we will further Danticat's efforts and mark ourselves in history books. In so doing, we will continue to be fearless warriors who devote ourselves to creating a world in our images.

v.

BLACK AND FEMININE CONSCIOUSNESS AS LIBERATORY INVOCATION IN *THE FARMING OF BONES*

The Farming of Bones is a novel about emboldening love, living dreams, and the pain of absence. It captures the life of Haitian migrant workers, or *viejos*[35], who fall victim to race-based genocide and poverty ills. Love, the guidance of the ancestors and spirits, and powerful understandings of self–grounded in a positive Haitian identity—help the protagonist survive despite countless attacks on her life. It is a novel about love, memory, and the spirit world at its core. It also expresses these themes in relation to the Black Haitian identity. The section titled *Haitians* speaks more directly to this effect.

Blackness, for many, is a qualifier for inferiority. This is not the case in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bone*s. Named after the Haitian phrase for sugarcane farming, this novel delves into the world of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic during the years of General Trujillo, before, during, and after the massacre of thousands of Haitians. This is a story of a young housemaid, Amabelle, who, after losing her parents at the river crossing, is taken into the home of a Spanish general and his daughter, both whom she imagines to be her new family. After years of growing up with them she not only becomes their beloved maid but she also falls in love. Her lover's name is Sebastien Onius; reminiscing about her love for him is how the story begins. What begins as small rumors about violence enacted on

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[35] Valerie Kaussen writes the "*viejos* [migrant sugarcane farmers] appears in Haitian literature in the mid-thirties on as working class cosmopolitans whose movements map a Caribbean/American space that is an alternative to the colonial designs of US imperialism" (Kaussen 2008, xi). Literature, she continues, "represents the *viejos* as worldly, culturally hybrid individuals whose identities signified the new pan-Caribbean contacts created out of US empire…Twentieth-century Haitian writers depict this cultural syncretism as inseparable from the *viejos*' political militancy" (ibid).

Haitians turns out to be true. Throughout the novel Trujillo supporters threaten Amabelle's life and the lives of numerous Haitians are taken. Thousands die. Amabelle goes from somewhat naively believing that her Dominican family's appreciation for her is founded in something more than love, only to find out that she can trust very few people who are not Haitian. This is because all allies—along with the Haitians—are also attacked. She loses her lover, and many of her Haitian friends, but does make it back to Haiti where she starts a new life for herself and begins learning what it actually means to be a survivor of trauma. In the end, Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* is a novel about the complexities of race and the underlying need for love and solidarity.

While the criteria most notably used to determine who is or is not Haitian was the pronunciation of the Spanish word *perejil*, Danticat asserts that there was also the presumption that all things Black be associated with Haitian-ness and thus Black[36] people with dark skin were also under attack. *The Farming of Bones*, then, is a novel about race. It is a novel about how internalized racism can be so prevalent that, when added to feelings of economic injustice and loss of control, a people can turn on one another and cause a fissure in both societies. Danticat writes the novel to show all of this through the eyes of Amabelle. Amabelle, then, represents a lot of good and innocence; she is still tortured and brutalized because of her Haitian-ness and her

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[36] In his seminal work on race politics in the Dominican Republic, Ernesto Sagas shows that in the Dominican Republic, Blackness is synonymous with Haitian (Sagas 2002). While this is the case, I use "Black" to connote being of African descent. As the Dominican Republic has had a longer history of slavery than has Haiti, and Valencia's daughter is brown-skinned, using Black seems suffice.

Black skin. Danticat, therefore, uses the interactions between Haitian and the Dominican characters in *The Farming of Bone*s to portray how a country with a similar history of slavery as the country it opposes can project and try to murder its own Blackness.

In the section titled *Dominicans*, I show how Danticat uses five Dominican characters to portray the Dominican conceptualization of Black and Haitian identity for both Dominicans who do not consider Haitians as people of value and those who do. In the section titled *Haitians*, I posit that Danticat uses two Haitian and Dominican characters who identify with Haitians—forcefully or willingly—to identify beauty in blackness, discusses motherlessness as a type of country-lessness, contrast *marassas* to show the benefits of unification, and imagine border-crossing as a means of revolutionizing the self. In closing this chapter, I will show how this novel can be read as one that supports Black and Third World feminisms. This is because it places Amabelle's experience as one central to the story, helps the reader to empathize with the experience of Haitians, and articulates how this massacre affected Haitian women, a part of the story few speak of.

Dominicans

Blackness, in *The Farming of Bones*, is not simply a matter of pigmentation. To the Dominicans in the novel, Blackness, darker-skinned, sun-kissed existence means Haitian and Haitian is everything that Dominican is superior to. This pigmentation is rendered not only as non-Dominican, but also of inferior blood and class. Valencia, Pico, and Papi all ascribe to this belief. This is evident when Señora

Valencia's daughter Rosalinda is born. Valencia is an economically privileged woman. She has servants, a beautiful house, an army man for a husband, and a former Spanish soldier for a father. Her way of life is understood to be that which is appropriate for her class as well as for people of her skin color. While Valencia's pigmentation is rarely discussed and her racial history not easily determinable. When she gives birth to a baby of "deep bronze" skin, her own biases and those of her husband and father become apparent.

Anti-Black Dominicans

Valencia's Denial

To Valencia, Blackness is equivalent to Haitian-ness. Valencia goes through a process when trying to understand her daughter's skin tendency. She moves from thinking of Haitian-ness (read: Blackness) as otherness to the more accepted—though false—idea of Dominican Indigenous-ness. When her daughter comes out brown-skinned, she believes that she has taken on Amabelle's dark skin. Valencia proclaims "[m]y daughter is a chameleon. She's taken your color from the mere sight of your face" (Danticat 1998, 11). To Valencia, her daughter cannot be Black or have Black ancestry; the privilege afforded to this child is too great for such a history. As opposed to being Black and human, she would rather think her child is reptilian but still white.

Valencia later professes her biggest fear for this ebony child. While talking to Amabelle, she states, "[m]y poor love, what is she's mistaken for one of your people" (Danticat 1998, 12). While it is unclear who, in fact, is her "poor love" in this

sentence—it could be Rosalinda or Amabelle—it is clear that to Valencia, the poverty of that person is aligned with their Haitian-ness. As their Haitian-ness synonymous with and thus thought to be seen in their Blackness, their poverty and painful existence is "due" to their Blackness. The only way Valencia may quell the reality that her child is indeed Black is by using clichéd terminology and conjuring up an Indigenous ancestry. Instead of being Black, her daughter may be Indian. She calls her daughter an Indian princess and states "[w]ouldn't you like to be a princess?...She will steal many hearts, my Rosalinda. Look at that profile. The profile of Anacoana, a true Indian queen" (Danticat 1998, 29). Valencia never knew that queens also reigned in Africa. In asking Rosalinda if she would like to be a princess, Valencia is also asking her if she would like to be Indian and not Black, as if this were truly possible. Being Black in the Dominican Republic will make Rosalinda not Dominican. She cannot steal hearts and rightfully reign with the power of her family's wealth if she is Black. Danticat writes that this child was born with a caul on her face and an umbilical cord around her neck, signifying a curse. The only cursed attribute Rosalinda is authored to have, according to Dominican society, is black skin. Perhaps then in their eyes, Rosalinda's Blackness is indeed her curse.

Pico's Revenge

To Señor Pico, Valencia's army officer husband, Blackness is non-Dominican and vile. After the death of his son—a son who symbolizes not only patriarchy but also white patriarchy, in that he is very fair-skinned—Pico cannot look at or be affectionate towards his bronze-skinned daughter Rosalinda. He avoids kissing her

and holding her at all costs. Pico "avoids the child" (Danticat 1998, 137) and Amabelle presumes that "the señor was tired of watching his daughter grow plumper and happier every day while he was thinking of the [white] male heir he had lost" (Danticat 1998, 135). If Pico so clearly dislikes his own offspring it is safe to assume that his dislike is stronger for the Blacks who are not of his lineage. This type of hatred is very evident in the novel in Pico's mistreatment and killing of Black Haitians. On the way to the birth of his children, Pico drives fast. On his way home he chases two men off the road and hits and kills the third forcing that man's body into the ravine. After this accident, Pico "did not want to search" (Danticat 1998, 44) for the body and in the end does not do so because that man's life was of no value to him.

This same sentiment is evident in his relationship with Amabelle. He secretly despises her. When training his wife on how to use a gun, he fires it in Amabelle's direction and barely misses her head. He does not allow her to sleep in the house with Valencia when he is home, preferring the Dominican servant Juana. He also refuses to allow Danticat to kiss Rosalinda. In a scene after her baptism, when Valencia in excitement holds Rosalinda up to be adorned by her servants, Pico "yanks his wife's arm away and pulled her away, almost making the señora drop the child" (Danticat 1998, 119). He wishes to end that scene of Haitian and Dominican exchange of (Black) love.

Pico also openly despises other Haitians. After his wife invites the father of the Haitian man he has killed to tea, Pico throws away the tea set. More injurious than this, Pico is one of the leading army officials who massacre thousands of Haitian

people. A former lover of Pico's, Beatriz, proclaims that "[t]here is a side to Pico that [she] never liked…He's always dreamt that one day he would be president of this country, and it seems to me he would move more than mountains to make it so" (Danticat 1998, 150). One mountain is comprised of Haitian immigrant workers in the houses and farmlands of elite the Dominican Republic; Pico would just as soon kill Haitians, as he would threaten Amabelle's life and love. He, in fact, does just this and does it simply because he wants to—and he is following Trujillo's order. To Pico, Black life has little value to him; he does not only kill thousands of Haitians because he is following the orders he was given, despite what his wife Valencia wants to believe.

Mastering Papi

To Papi, Valencia's father, Black is also inferior. This is evident in two ways: Amabelle calls him Papi and he gets angered when he is considered to have married a Black woman. He himself does not really value Black life. In calling him Papi, a term inherently patriarchal, Amabelle ascribes a familial term to a man who is her employer. Whether it be her own naiveté that allows her to do this, or due to a past mandate Papi has made mandating that she do it, it is still evidence of a presumed inferiority. While Amabelle is not a slave, her relationship to Papi's family is similar to that of a Black slave. She works for them, she was taken from her parents—although it was because she was also orphaned—and there is never any mention of payment garnered for her work in his household. Many slave-owners used familial names with their slaves so as to pretend familial relationships existed and therefore

force loyalty. She may have chosen to call him Papi all on her own, but as he is less her father than he is her employer, and her own survival is founded on working for them without payment, Papi is Amabelle's master. The fact that he is the "master" in this relationship requires that he have a subordinate.

Papi values Black life only when his own security is not in question. He is in the car with Pico when Pico kills a man and while Papi wants to help the fallen man "he did not force [Pico] to do it [because it] was already dark. [He] didn't make myself or Luis [his servant] go down into the ravine to look for the man, to see if [they] could save his life" (Danticat 1998, 44). To have gone into the ravine would have put his status into question—after all, the ravine is not a place for the elite, and helping Haitians is also not something people of his class do. Papi came to the Dominican Republic after fighting in Spanish wars "because [he] wanted to escape such dealings, escape from armies and officers" (Danticat 1998, 137). Such things put his security and beliefs into question. He may profess to want to leave war behind, yet he listens daily to radio broadcasts of the war in Spain. What he wishes to leave behind is the instability, the questioning of his status and racial make-up that happens when he wants to do the right thing and help Black people.

Later in the novel when Valencia's doctor, Doctor Javier, is examining Rosalinda, Papi's belief in Black inferiority is once again shown. When he is giving Rosalinda her first bath, he boldly says to Valencia that Rosalinda "has a little charcoal behind the ears" (Danticat 1998, 17), a statement alluding to her Black heritage. Papi later confronts him about the "insult". He proclaims

> My daughter [Valencia] was born in the capital of this country. Her mother was of pure Spanish blood. She can trace her family to the Conquistadores, the line of El Almirante, Cristobal Colón. And I, myself, was born near a seaport in Valencia, Spain (Danticat 1998, 18).

This statement is supposed to assert his whiteness, but in reality does just the opposite. His and his wife's lineage is not at all all-European and is, in fact, very ambiguous. His wife is clearly anything but European. The year this story takes place is 1937 and Cristobal Colón landed in 1492. In the all of the 445 years since he landed there were more Indigenous people and people of African ancestry on the island than there were Europeans. While she may be able to trace her family to the conquistadores, a very fortunate ability in a world of people who deny their Blackness, chances are that in it there was not only miscegenation but also generations of people who also deny their Blackness. Regarding his own racial make-up, his being born near a seaport in Valencia, Spain verifies only that he, in fact, was born there, *not* that he is Spanish. In addressing Doctor Javier declaration Papi goes further to state that Doctor Javier has made "a very impolite assertion…[and] we don't want to hear anything more of the kind"(ibid). He refuses to have his racial identity, and that of his wife, questioned. Questioning his own racial background would be questioning his whiteness and his class status. Interrogating his wife's racial history would be suggesting that he fell in love with a Black or at least multi-racial woman. Inquiring about his family's racial identity would be questioning his racial superiority.

In a country where the leadership has internalized racism and thus denies its Blackness, anything and any person Black is repudiated. This hatred is evident in the

actions and beliefs of Valencia, Pico, and Papi. It is also evident in the fact that many Dominicans were also attacked and/or harmed because they, like one of the men in the clinic with Amabelle, were "black like the nun who came to re-dress [their] wounds. [They had] been mistaken for one of us" (Danticat 1998, 217). Blackness, however, was not the only thing was massacred.

Black Dominicans

In South African activist Steve Biko claims in his book *I Write What I Like* that, "[b]eing black is not a matter of pigmentation—being black is a reflection of a mental attitude" (Biko 1979, 48). This understanding of Blackness is one that Dominicans who have positive associations and relationships with Haitians realized. This type of Black consciousness was also attacked in *el corte*. Of those attacked under this premise, some were phenotypically Black and others were ideologically so. Both peoples suffered. Danticat authors this side of the story through the use of the histories of two priests, Doctor Javier, and Sebastien.

Religious Freedom

The two priests, one Haitian and the other Dominican, exemplify a type of race consciousness and love of humanity that, though beautiful, ends up putting them in harms way. Father Romain and Father Vargas both work in Alegría, where Amabelle lives, and attempt to help both the Dominicans and the Haitians according to the Christian doctrine. They help orphaned children, celebrate Mass and, in the latter part or the novel, they attempt to help the endangered Haitians to escape. They, with the help of Doctor Javier, devise a plan to use the evening Mass for Santa Teresa as a

meeting ground for clandestine evacuation because "[o]n the Generalissimo [Trujillo's] order soldiers and civilians are killing Haitians" (Danticat, 1998, 140) and they want to help them escape. They are captured by Trujillo's troops and cry "like new widows" (Danticat 1998, 158) because they are to be tortured and the people they endeavored to help killed. This is the racial solidarity and consciousness that was attacked in this massacre. Father Romain and Father Vargas are living examples of how the island could live in unity. They are a Haitian and a Dominican working together for the common good. Danticat does not go into much detail about what happens to the two. She does, however, create Father Romain to go temporarily insane, only to be cured by a Haitian woman's love because "it took more than prayers to heal [him] after the slaughter" (Danticat 1998, 272). In the end, they alone cannot save each other and they are separated.

Doctors Without Borders

Doctor Javier's race consciousness is exemplified in his helping Haitians. Doctor Javier defies all social codes ascribed to his class status in helping Haitians. This help is in regard to his profession, the fact that he also speaks Kreyòl and his attempt at helping them escape the massacre. Doctor Javier runs a clinic in Haiti and helps Haitian people bring new life into this torn world. This is exactly the opposite of what Trujillo aims to do. The doctor is involved in Haitian cultural practices—he carries a talisman that is similar to Amabelle's parents—, he even professes to have a passion for "language and lineage" (Danticat 1998, 20) in addition to medicine. After he—along with Father Romain and Father Vargas—attempts to help the Haitians living in

Alegría escape, he disappears and is never found again. Presumably, he dies along with the Haitians he tries to save. The race consciousness that he embodies and his mental attitude gets him killed. It is as though his love of lineage allowed him to see the truth in the similarity in Dominican and Haitian ancestry. This truth, in turn, allowed him to want to help those he defined as distant siblings.

Haitians

Edwidge Danticat writes *The Farming of Bones* as a story of Trujillo's massacre of thousands of Haitians. In making the protagonist a Black woman, Danticat tells this tale through a racialized and gendered lens and, in doing so, makes race and gender central to the story of the massacre. Because Dominicans understood Black to be synonymous with Haitian, the story shows how internalized racism and ignorance caused the massacre of Haitians living on Dominican soil in 1937. In this novel, Danticat identifies Amabelle's beauty to be in her blackness; discusses the terms of motherlessness as a type of country-lessness; contrasts *marassas* to show the benefits of unification; and shows border-crossing to be a means of revolutionizing the self. She does all this to include women in the narrative of Haiti's history of trauma and to politicize memory, to portray an understanding of love as a form of strength, and to reformulate the notion of citizenship.

Black Beauty

Danticat uses the notion of Black beauty in *The Farming of Bones* to combat the understanding of love and to challenge conceptions of beauty. The novel opens with Amabelle thinking about Sebastien. Sebastien sees himself as a *vwayajé* Haitian, a

traveling Haitian, and as a Black person. He attempts to help Amabelle see that her allegiance is more appropriately placed with her Haitians people than with Papi and Valencia. His love for her helps her to get through the pain of losing her parents, which she endures nightly, and to see herself as beautiful. He says, "[l]ook at your perfect little face…your perfect little shape, your perfect little body, a woman child with deep black skin, all the shades of black in you, what we see and what we don't see, the good and the bad" (Danticat 1998, 3). In calling her perfect and acknowledging the wholeness, the completeness of her blackness, he is diminishing the "bad" that Blackness connotes and replacing it with good. He too is Black; his name is Sebastien Onius and he is a Black man. Steve Biko writes that "[m]erely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road toward emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being" (Biko 1979, 48). This understanding attempts to build an alliance between all people of African descent in opposition to the many ways white supremacy is realized. Sebastien endeavors to liberate Amabelle from her mental chains of feeling inferior because of her orphan-hood, her blackness, and her womanhood. He helps her learn to love her whole self by helping her to love her Blackness, her Haitian-ness. He also attempts to physically emancipate himself, Amabelle, and his sister Mimi from the massacre. He does not succeed. He dies in the church at the Mass that Doctor Javier, Father Romain, and Father Vargas have to help the Haitians escape. Sebastien—a Black person, with Black pride and consciousness—is the Dominican Republic's worst enemy.

Following the lead of her predecessors, in which "strength is equated to beauty in most fictions" (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998, 133), Danticat portrays Amabelle's beauty not only in her being Black, but also in her being courageous and resilient. This courage allows her to continue to survive despite numerous obstacles, threats to her life and losing loved ones. This ability to survive is used as an example of the strength of Haitian women.

The identification of beauty in blackness also refers to the power to self-define and reform identity and Collins' understanding of the criterion of meaning because it places value in Amabelle's ability to understand her own Blackness and define it as beautiful, with the help of others. In the Black community, then, living is a form of knowing (Collins 1989, 759). It is in experiencing her oppression and finding the terminology for it—in her dialogues with Sebastien and personal trials—that Amabelle begins to see the beauty in her own Blackness and Haitian-ness, despite the overwhelming hatred of the two within the Dominican Republic. Literary scholar Valerie Smith declares that writers who are "self-conscious and self-reflexive, [in their] examining [of the] ways in which literary study" help to portray the changes that occur once "questions of race, class, and gender become central to the process of literary analysis" (2000, 375). As such these writers—and their critics—are said to "challenge the conceptualization of literary study" (ibid). Writers in this vein "argue that the meaning of blackness in this county [America] shapes profoundly the experience of gender, just as the conditions of womanhood affect ineluctably the expression of race" (376). Haitian women writers and other women of color authors contend similarly. Danticat, for instance, articulates a similar message in relation to

Amabelle and Haiti. Amabelle is not allotted the same respect, protection, love etc, as is given to Valencia simply because she is a Black, Haitian, poor women. This prejudice, the reader can see, is one of the roots of the problems Amabelle faces.

From this standpoint one of two things are apparent: one, that this situation is unjust and that nothing can be done, and the second, that this injustice must be altered. In working to reform a nation and identity by way of writing about women, their oppression and their transformative ideologies on the formation of society, this literature inspires revolution. Be it personal or societal, the revolution begins with the fiction writing because fiction allows the reader to imagine an equal world we have yet to occupy.

Danticat also uses women to another effect.

Motherlessness

"Women= Haiti=Freedom"

(N'Zengou-Tayo 1998, 133).

In *The Farming of Bones*, Haiti is feminized in order to challenge the accepted understanding of citizenship. From its inception, "Haitian literature was politically motivated…and the literary representation of women immediately took in a symbolic value" (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998, 133). During the 1915 American Occupation, "Haitian women again became literary political symbols…and Haiti was once more feminized with an interesting paradigm of the black peasant woman as the symbol of the

country's exploitation and resilience" (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998, 134). Danticat uses the character Amabelle to the same effect.

Amabelle's being an orphan represents the state of the Haitian nation. Not a new image in Danticat's work, the imagery of the orphan girl—in this case Amabelle—shows a stunted personal development as well as a halted connection with her motherland. As she did not have the time to build a stronger connection to her parents, she did not have a chance to build a stronger sense of her Haitian self—before she met Sebastien. Braziel believes that the images of "stillbirths, and orphans are so pervasive in Danticat's texts that is difficult *not* to see these images as symbolic for the arrested state of development of the Haitian Republic itself" (2004, 82). After the massacre, Amabelle moves back to her mother's land and creates a life for herself by re-tracing her lineage and re-creating her family by way of connecting with Sebastien's mother. In this process, Amabelle also connects with the neighborhood Sebastien's mother inhabits and creates a new community.

In creating Amabelle, Danticat also posits citizenship in the hands of the women. Women are the culture and story keepers and as such are dealt the task of maintaining the history of the massacre and those lost in it. During the period of American occupation, novelists "systematically developed a paradigm of strength and resilience to represent…[and idealize] peasant and working class women" (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998, 134). This continued and is exemplified in *The Farming of Bones.* Danticat uses other aspects of Haitian culture to further implicate women in Haitian nation building efforts.

The discussion of motherlessness as a type of country-lessness relates to using memory as a revolutionary tool and supports Collins' understanding of the purpose in using Black women's experiences as the criterion of meaning. This is because *The Farming of Bones* is conveyed as a story of mothers and the ways life without them there can lead to having no national identity. The mother, then, becomes crucial to nation building. In the novel, Amabelle loses both parents to a swell in the river they are crossing in order to buy goods in the Dominican Republic. She remembers vividly the face of her mother as she drowns. After living as a servant in the Dominican Republic, Amabelle's reality is changed with Trujillo's regime and she is physically beaten time and time again in her efforts to return to her motherland. Amabelle's story and her survival are crucial to the development and understanding of novel. Collins writes, "Black feminist thought demonstrates Black women's emerging power as agents of knowledge. By portraying African-American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender and class oppressions, Afrocentric feminist thought speaks to the importance that knowledge plays in empowering oppressed people" (Collins 1990, 221). The same is at play for Haitian women writers. Through writing, Chancy argues that Haitian women writers "solidify the connections between these moments in history at the same time that they articulate women's absence at each of these junctures within the historical record" (1997, 16). Danticat does this in *The Farming of Bones* as she incorporates a fictive female's story of racial, class, and gendered subjugation into the factual historical moment of *el corte*. In doing this, Danticat helps give voice to the narratives of numerous women who were left out of the historical record of this moment. The writings of women of

color reveal, "that the creation of identity in the face of imperialist and colonial oppression begins with the transmutation of the personal into the creative, into modes of self empowerment that in and of themselves create a theory of self-definition" (Chancy 1997, 6). Danticat uses writing to this aim.

Marassas & Doubling to Unify

In *The Farming of Bones* Danticat uses the concept of *marassa* to show the benefits of Haitian and Dominican unification and to politicize memory. To do this, she incorporates twin characters and double meaning of words.

Twinning Twins

Danticat uses twin characters to politicize the history of the 1937 massacre of Haitians living on the border of the Dominican Republic. To do this, Danticat uses Valencia's twin babies and two Dominican twins. With Valencia's children she shows the similarities in the racial histories of the countries; they "become allegories of the historical linkage of two nations, two races, two cultures" (Kaussen 2008, 209). Danticat also portrays how this racial history is experienced and how Blackness can be denied. As Rosalinda is called *indio* and not Black it is clear that the upper-class family does not wish to claim African heritage. In the creation of the male child, Danticat narrates a story of white male oppression. Rafael, the white male baby, was presumed to attempt to strangle Rosalinda, his Black female sister, while they were both in Valencia's womb. Born with a "caul over her face and the umbilical cord…badly placed" (Danticat 1998, 19), Doctor Javier deduces that it is as if Rafael "tried to strangle her" (ibid). Ironically enough, it is Rafael who dies because he has

lost his breath. This accompanied with the family's treatment of Rosalinda and other darker skinned people convey the notion that they do not think to highly of those of African descent and/or Haitians.

Danticat contrasts this story of twins with the story of Dolores and Doloritas [whose names are feminine words for sorrows and little sorrows]. These pumpkin haired women are traveling through the Dominican border during the massacre in search of Ilestbien, Doloritas' lover. They are Dominican and Ilestbien is Haitian. The love that Doloritas has for him renders her incapable of living without knowing his fate and she sets out to find him in Dajabón. Her sister Dolores goes with her because she loves Doloritas and understands her love of Ilestbien. This story contrasts the story of Valencia's twins because these Dominicans love a Haitian and in many ways this shows their love of Haitians and their understanding that both peoples are similar. Even still, however, their overall understanding does not change the reality. Amabelle and the other Haitians soon part ways with them for the safety of both parties. If caught traveling together with these women the Haitians will die.

The interesting fact in both stories of twins is that the twins who have some undeniable affiliation with Haitians are the ones who live. Rosalinda, with her "honey-almond skin and charcoal eyes" (Danticat 1998, 35), survives her brother's supposed strangling while her brother suffocates all on his own. Doloritas and Dolores "would not have as many obstacles as [Amabelle and the others of the group] would in Dajabón" (Danticat 1998, 183). Danticat uses Doloritas' story in a way similar to the way that she used Amabelle and Sebastien's story. Doloritas' love for

Ilestbien not only revolutionizes her ideology about Haitians and the way she views herself, it also strengthens her in the face of this massacre and enables her and her sister to attempt to defy the odds. Their allegiance with Haitians is a large part of who these female characters are—though possibly unwillingly in Rosalinda's case—and their Dominican middle to upper-class identity helps them to survive. According to Chancy—and in the case of Raphael and Rosalinda, Danticat therefore "makes use of *marassas*, or twinnings, in the novel as a way to invert the usual paradigms associated with twins (ideas of oneness, for example) so that the twin characters…come to signify differing aspects of the relationship between Haitians and Dominicans" (2010, 136). She also does this same twinning with the massacre itself.

Bone Farming

Danticat uses the phrase after which the novel is titled to convey a unification of Haitian and Dominican identity. This "*travay tè pou zo*" (Danticat 1998, 55) links the Haitian and Dominican peoples. They are working together, sharing living spaces and borders as a result of US imperialist farming endeavors. The peoples of both countries of Hispaniola, namely the poorer ones, are implicated in the maintenance of sugar-cane fields to sustain the North American importation of sugar (Chancy 2010). The titling of this novel *The Farming of Bones* is in itself an example of *marassa* except in this instance it is a doubling of words, a word play. The massacre further aligns the two peoples and presents the second meaning of the phrase.

Danticat uses the 1937 massacre to portray the double meaning of "*travay tè pou zo*". In this novel, the massacre is used to link "the Haitian experience of the

Trujillo massacre to national identity by describing how Dominican land becomes a Haitian burial ground" (Chancy 2010, 135). Quoting Gabriel Garcia Marques in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Myriam Chancy writes "you don't really belong to a place until you're buried your dead there" (Chancy 2010, 141). As the Haitian peoples are being killed on the land and the Trujillo regime and Dominican peoples are participating in the mass burials of the dead Haitian bodies, this is the other farming of bones. This farming confirms the alignment of the peoples' history. It makes the Haitian people belong to both parts of the island. Furthermore, Chancy asserts that, "[t]he burying of the dead in a new landscape transforms the landscape into a home ground even as un-belonging persists" (ibid). Even as Haitian people are unwanted in the political ideology they are needed in the financial reality and undeniably linked to both the racial history and present. This is a fact in spite of many efforts to deny this. Danticat furthers this doubling and creates the Dominican Republic to be the *marassa* of Haiti.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic Doubles

Danticat writes *The Farming of Bones* and it conveys a political reading of history. This reading is informed by Black feminist theory in that it involves the re-incorporation of the histories of women, and the inclusion of a classed and racialized reading as well. Quoting James Ferguson, Myriam Chancy writes, a "myth of racial superiority has grown [and it] paints the Dominican Republic as European, modern, and democratic and Haiti as African, archaic, and dictatorial. The myth paradoxically fuels the inhumane treatment of the Haitians contemporaneously" (Chancy 2010,

142). This legend of an oppositional history, and thus reality, is what Danticat combats with this novel. *The Farming of Bones* "points to the idea that Haitians and Dominicans are one people, that Hispaniola is one land, even though history and border zones have obscured these truisms" (Chancy 2010, 136). Other writers from Hispaniola do this as well. With the inclusion of this revised history of the 1937 massacre, Danticat shows that there is a shared story between the nations. In writing about Black women's writing in relation to the Euro-American male, female canon or Black male canon, Davies argues it "should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing" (Davies 1994, 4). Furthermore, she argues that in articulating a "cross-cultural, transnational, translocal, diasporic perspectives", Black women's writing also "redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality" (ibid). Additionally, Black women's writing and existence, "marginalized in the terms of majority-minority discourses…redefines its identity as it re-connects and re-members [and] brings together black women dis-located by space and time"(ibid). Danticat uses the boundary-crossing theme to reconnect the women of Hispaniola. With this shared memory of *el corte*, Danticat further clarifies the shared lineage of the people on this island. Haiti and the Dominican Republic, then, are twins; the countries themselves are *marassas*.

The contrasting of *marassas* is in line with using rebel literature as means towards self-empowerment and Collins' ethic of caring because the stories that surround the *marassas* portray varying emotions and connections that strike the heart strings of the reader and without which the novel cannot be fully understood. As

hooks says "[o]ppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, [and] telling their story" (hooks quoted in Collins 1990, 11). But just as that is important, it cannot be forgotten that "Black feminist thought affirms and rearticulates a consciousness that already exists"(ibid) and it is "this rearticulated consciousness [that] empowers African-American women and stimulates resistance" (Collins 1990, 10). It is the interconnectedness of thought and action that maintains part of the revolutionary aspect of Black feminist theory. As King believes, "Black feminism asserts self-determination as essential" (Collins 1990, 12). It is both the ability to name your oppression and the ability to find counter-hegemonic ways of living and thinking that position Black feminism to be a radical epistemology. In *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle begins to be self-determined when all her ties to the Dominican Republic are severed and she must return to Haiti to rebuild new kinship networks. In this move to Haiti, her building with Sebastien around notions of Black beauty and Haiti as a homeland is influential. She turns these thoughts and dialogues into action in order to survive. In relation to Collins' ethic of caring, the capacity for empathy (Collins 1989) in this novel enables it to be better comprehended. A person cannot exist without intellectually identifying with or figuratively experiencing the feelings of another.

Revolutionary Border Crossing

In *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat reformulates the notion of citizenship and revises history by showing how the massacre impacted the lives of women. To this effect,

Danticat shows that the wants and needs of most women during this time were not considered when Trujillo made his decision to commence this genocide. She also conveys the ways the gender of Haitian women did not protect them in the way it did for Dominican women because Haitian-ness was believed to be synonymous with Blackness and that—despite all of this—women still had agency despite the tumultuous and bellicose nature of the times. Myriam Chancy writes that during this time, "[w]omen's bodies, in particular, associated with the market place and prostitution in exchanges of goods between the two countries, became abject entities" (Chancy 2010, 130). This objectification of women and misogynist ideologies allowed for Trujillo to not care to include them much in the decision-making processes. This same objectification and ignoring of women did, however, alter the ways women could operate around borders. These shifts "in perception of border trade, wherein goods sold by women and the prostitution of women operated with impunity, could not predict… the degree to which border zone women would reformulate the notion of the nation as a Europeanized male state" (ibid). Once this idea is in place the women could move in opposition to it, if they so chose to do so. In writing of a Saudi woman asked to dialogue about her oppression, Davies states, "in the midst of multiple struggles of imperialist and patriarchal domination, movement was located within the politics of desire" (1994, 3). If citizenship and representation can be seen as desirable, then this sentiment is clearly similar in Danticat's works.

In participating in the crossing of borderlands women, Amabelle included, inherently participated in a dialogue about citizenship and statehood. Danticat "associates this hybrid subculture with women, who inhabit a world of fluidity that

subverts the boundaries that separate classes and racial groups, masters and servants, whites and blacks" (Kaussen 2008, 210). The fluidity with which these border women operated before the massacre was predicated on their being poor. Whether it was because of their social class or because they were Haitian or dark-skinned crossing into Haiti was not hard, and crossing for work in the Dominican Republic was normalized. All they needed, before the massacre was for the river to be, and remain, low. Amabelle is evidence of this as she is a *fille de la frontiére* who represents changing identities on the island of *Hispanola* (Kaussen 2008, 211). During and after the massacre, identity lines became less fluid and Dominican was everything that Haitian was not. The Dominican Republic began to foster this myth of European descent more strongly and the transnational nature of border women—whether Haitian or Dominican—was changed. Given that Trujillo and the military ruled and only allowed men to join, the patriarchal reign of white males was furthered.

Danticat, in this novel, gives agency and voice to border crossers by way of Amabelle. In focusing in large part on the exchange between Haitian and Dominican women in her novel, "Danticat gives voice to the impact of these shifts upon 'real' women while at the same time attempting to lift the veil of amnesia that obscures the painful period in both Haitian and Dominican history" (Chancy 2010, 130-131). She humanizes, racializes, classes and genders this historical event. Danticat "brings a face to the slain masses, gendering the experiences of the *braceros* and ultimately reconfiguring the possibility of reconciliation between the Haitians and Dominicans in the border crossings of her female protagonist, Amabelle" (Chancy 2010, 136). Amabelle's ability to move in both worlds is remarkable. Her being a Haitian raised

in the Dominican Republic helps her learn Spanish and be accustomed to Dominican culture. Her being a woman helps her assimilate into the social structure of Papi's house and also of the sugar cane farming community, as she is Sebastien's love. Her being Black, though it restrains her movement some, does allow her to move within both worlds, one with more limitations than the other. Amabelle is the symbol of reconciliation between the two countries and this ability to reconcile lies in her being a border-crosser. Amabelle also crosses the border between history and the ancestors and the present and living reality.

Amabelle and Shadows

Danticat writes Amabelle as a spiritual border-crosser in addition to her being a physical and phenotypic one. She relives her parents' death amidst living her life in love. She relives her experiences of love and living with Sebastien while fighting to survive the massacre. The shadows of history remain within her and help her to navigate her life. Amabelle "learns from [Father Romain] the importance of holding on to the past through language and custom rather than [only] through blood or material possession; in part, he teaches her the value of her soul's belonging wherever her body might travel" (Chancy 2010, 137). In keeping history with her she "gains strength from the 'other' she meets in the shadow contained within herself" (Chancy 2010, 139).

For Amabelle, "[t]he bones of the slain, commemorated and buried, travel with the living to their new destination: no one is forgotten nor truly left behind" (Chancy 2010, 141). In doing this, Danticat positions her criterion of meaning to be in

the experience of this Black woman. She also gives Amabelle the ability to move within these different borders and the agency to carve out her existence in the tree of life. Amabelle, then, has many twinnings, as she is so apt at living anywhere and at surviving despite oppression. She is also highly capable of even using her history of struggle to further her future of freedom. This ability to live on borderlands connotes Amabelle's ability to resist and survive. Myriam Chancy writes that, "[t]he twinnings associated with women suggest not only the transcendence of earthly pain but also reconciliation through the transmutation of the border zones that they inhabit into a zone that will lead to freedom" (Chancy 2010, 136). Amabelle is a perfect example of this. Her telling of this story, her finding strength in her love of herself, her family, of Sebastien and the people she encounters who care about her, and her understanding of belonging to both parts of the island help to further Danticat's aim of narrating the Haitian massacre of 1937.

The imagining of border crossing as a means of revolutionizing the self follows the purpose of, as do the other aspects of this novel, finding strength in a feminized reading of history and Collins' ethic of personal accountability. This is because women are the principle border-crossers and thus Amabelle's story is a re-telling of the history of *el corte* through their eyes. In the Afrocentric mode of thought exists the "notion that every idea has an owner and that owner's identity matters" (Collins 1989, 768). For the women through whom the story is told crossing borders is part of their identity and so an ideology supporting fluidity and cultural understanding may be used to re-tell their narrative. As they are women, their narration rearticulates their stories into the narrative of Haiti and Dominican nation

building histories. Myriam Chancy writes that, "social and literary 'History' are both revealed as 'man'-made artifacts in Haitian women's literature" (Chancy 1997, 15). They are assumed to be man-made in Danticat's novels, because it is in spite of this that the women characters tell their stories. In an effort to perpetuate this process of remembering Haitian women writers, Danticat specifically, have "created a vision of Haitian women in fictional form that corresponds to a feminized reading of the history of our country" (Chancy 1997, 6). Danticat attracts a readership, through the use of the genre of fiction and the form of novels. In her works she creates a foundation and a system of remunerable, self-sustained knowledge that may be passed on popularly—even if ignored by (socio-historical) educational institutions.

In Closing

Finding beauty in Blackness, womanhood in citizenship and love in war are all possible through the character of Amabelle in *The Farming of Bones*. In fact, many of the techniques Danticat employs, relate to Black and Third World feminist theories. This is because they place Amabelle's experience as one central to the story, help the reader to empathize with the experience of Haitians, and articulate the ways this massacre affected Haitian women—a crucial part of the story few speak of. In the section titled Dominicans, Danticat uses five Dominican characters to portray the Dominican conceptualization of Black and Haitian identity for Dominicans who do not consider Haitians as people of value as well as for those who do. In the section titled Haitians Danticat more clearly articulates an understanding of Hispanola racial history and all of its complexities. This aspect of the novel serves to show the society

from which Amabelle must break in order to form and maintain a positive identity. Danticat uses her Haitian characters and a few Dominican characters who identify with Haitians—forcefully or willingly—to identify beauty in Blackness, to discuss motherlessness as a type of country-lessness, to contrast *marassas* and show the benefits of unification, and to imagine border-crossing as a means of revolutionizing the self. The identification of beauty in Blackness refers to the power to self-define and reform identity. The discussion of motherlessness as a type of country-lessness relates to using memory as a revolutionary tool. Both of these follow Collins' understanding of the purpose in using Black women's experiences as the criterion of meaning. The contrasting of *marassas* is in line with using literature of revolution as a means towards self-empowerment and Collins' ethic of caring. Lastly the imagining of border-crossing as a means of revolutionizing the self are in line with the politics of—as are other aspects of this novel—finding strength in a feminist reading of history and Collins' ethic of personal accountability.

Violet Eudine Barriteau believes that Black feminist theory offers an analysis that is located in political economy. She states that:

> Like socialist feminist theorising, black feminist theory deliberately adopts a framework of analysis that is situated in the political economy of state systems. Material relations and class relations are intrinsic to this analysis, which identifies how working-class black women experience antagonistic capitalist relations more intensely, as a result of the ideological relations arising from race acting upon the oppressive relations arising from gender. Once more, a very different and far more nuanced rendering emerges when the political economy of a society is examined from a black feminist theoretical perspective (Barriteau 2006, 20).

This is evident in *The Farming of Bones* as it narrates Haitian and Dominican relations during the Trujillo era. The political economy of the Dominican Republic and Haiti allowed many Haitians who were seeking employment to live in poverty—a poverty that many believed was better than that in Haiti. This impoverished situation helped to make financially poor, Black, and Haitian synonymous in the Dominican Republic. Women who were not able to do much manual labor, the women Amabelle represents, were more at the whims of their Dominican employers as they did not have many employment options. It is in this multiplicity of oppressions that the turmoil Amabelle experiences manifests itself.

This novel enraptures a story about memory, loss and the spirit world. It is at the interplay between these that the novel exists. It is the absence of Sebastien, Kaussen believes, that "organizes the novel even before Danticat recounts the death[s], as the narrative of *The Farming of Bones* is punctuated with scenes from Amabelle's dream-life, the space in which the dead and living intermingle" (Kaussen 2008, 193). I would add that the novel is also organized around the dreams Amabelle has about her parents as these offer other examples of the intermingling of life and death. Shreerekha Subramanian, in her essay "Blood, Memory, and Nation: Massacre and Mourning in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*," argues that the unified community of the living and dead is evinced in Amabelle's dream states (2005). Subramanian also argues, according to Kaussen, "that in this novel the other world of death, ghosts, and shadows symbolizes the effacement and erasure of black lives from the global community of citizenship" (Kaussen 2008, 195). This erasure did happen during the massacre but was incomplete because the memory of these people lives on.

Amabelle's dreams often bring her back to the Massacre River that has taken the lives of her parents and separates her from the land where her lover resides.

At its core, this novel is also a love story. Through the gore, horror, and murder of this historical moment, Danticat still writes about love: Black love, Haitian love, Dominican-Haitian love and more. Amabelle's name can even be read as a type of love—*ama* being Spanish for she/he/it loves and *belle* being French for beauty. Amabelle, then, is she who loves beauty and her name a spell of Hispaniola unification. As she loves a Black man and grows to love herself, her people and her history, Amabelle, then, is she who loves Black and Haitian women, men, lineage, and beauty. If only she could teach this to the world.

vi.

ON THE PURPOSES OF LIBERATION IN LITERATURE

As a Black woman activist I am amazed by the ways oppressed people—and more specifically, marginalized women—work successfully to combat supremacy in all of its forms. I have first-hand experience doing this at the grassroots level. I have organized press conferences, protests, rallies and even conferences on different social justice issues. There are times when I try to think back to my own path and how I have arrived at my current state of political consciousness that is of course ever evolving. After relentless self-analysis and reflection, I realize that I have learned a lot of my politics through literature and by working with my various mentors.

In the summer of 2004, I began organizing. After his workshop titled "Lions and Historians"—a session on the history of slavery in the Americas—a mentor of mine, Khary Lazarre-White, suggested that I read C.L.R. James' *Black Jacobins* in order to further understand the Haitian Revolution. The title of his workshop was inspired by a West African proverb: "only when lions have their own historians will hunters cease being heroes". I only understood how accurate this proverb was after reading this book. James' text ignited the spark of my political consciousness. It dramatically changed the way I thought about Haiti and about the origins of its socio-political turmoil. It deepened my understanding of self and, from then on, my Haitian identity became more a crown than a burden. I was of a royal people, and no disaster, no political strife could make me feel otherwise. As I believed in the "each one, teach one" mentality, I wanted to share with the world my catalyzing agent, my own precious gem, however the book was not as easy to engage with for many of the people I wanted to read it. The "average" marginalized American does not quaff in the sea of academic literature and jargon-induced literary works. Either way, I

decided that I want to be my own historian and endeavored to discover the advantage of writing rebel literature, be it fiction or non-fiction. I *do* believe the genre of fiction is engaging to the young people of color I wish to continue working with. Liberatory literature and revisionist historical fiction supplies the same information as non-fiction and dense works, only with an imaginative twist.

Imaginative fiction better illustrates a socially just world; as such a world does not currently exist. This is because fiction writing allows the author to imagine how her/his aspirations for change can materialize. Black women's novels, then, not only redefine the ways we understand Black womanhood but they also help us re-imagine the ways we view ourselves as Black women and the world. In my African American Anti-Colonial Literature class, I found that other scholars agreed.

In W.E.B. Du Bois' 1926 essay "Criteria for Negro Art," he writes:

> "Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the novels and essays they have written. What would people in a hundred years say of black Americans? Now turn it around. Suppose you were to write a story and put in it the kind of people you know and like and imagine"(Du Bois 1926).

In writing my thesis, I examined the use of fiction to create counter-hegemonic ways of understanding oneself and to promote socio-political consciousness. This research is important to me because I aim to learn to use this method of inculcating historical knowledge with the use of the creative and imaginary in order to educate members of my community and more.

In figuring this out it I have found it important to ask myself—as one, according to KaaVonia Hinton, would of Black feminist literature—four questions:

How do Danticat's characters define and value themselves? How do they resist race, class, and gender oppression? How do they negotiate and define family and motherhood? And, lastly, how do they use language as a form of resistance? (2004, 61). In pages prior to this one, I have begun to answer some of these questions.

In my thesis I have attempted to understand how a global Black feminist consciousness relates to three novels of Edwidge Danticat. Danticat, as a transnational Haitian woman, has lived much of her life in the United States. In coming to the US at age nine, and honing her craft as a writer in American institutions, she has used fiction to give voice to the stories of Haitian and Haitian-American women. Aspects of Black, Third World and Haitian feminisms can be seen in her work, because she has lived these experiences and because her literary aesthetic and devices as well as the subject matter speak to aspects to those women of color experience. My thesis is my interpretation of the interplay between Black feminist theories and Danticat's revisionist historical fiction. I argue that at this intersection exists rebel and liberatory literature.

In writing liberatory literature, Haitian women writers make "literary attempts to produce empowering images of Haitian women [and] critiques of the cultural norms that have so disempowered [them]" (Chancy 1997, 7). As such, this literature is "engaged in counter-colonial (counter-hegemonic) discourse" (Chancy 1997, 8) it qualifies as rebel literature because "the theory of resistance literature is in its politics" (ibid). In quoting Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature*, Chancy writes that "the Haitian woman's novel as [a] resistance narrative 'is not only a document,

[but]…also an incident' of both Western literariness and Haitian literariness" (Chancy 1997, 10). It is often, as is the case with Danticat's works, a retelling of true narratives of Haitian women's resistance.

The erasure of Haitian women's role—and the roles of other women in the global south—in the production of their nation has been largely ignored. It is, therefore safe to assume that "[p]erhaps one of the reasons why the existence of feminism in the Third World has been contested is [that] the women's lives generally and women's political activities specifically go largely undocumented" (Chancy 1997, 39). Third World feminism, and more specifically Black and Haitian feminism, do, however, still exist; the theories appear again and again in fiction form as well as non-fiction form. I believe that examples of their non-fiction form may be found in Danticat's works.

Edwidge Danticat writes about Haiti through the eyes of her women, she plays *griotte* and pantomimes their silent struggles, writing them visible so that they, and the world may change. Her works affirm the principles of both Haitian feminism and Black feminism and therefore articulate the stories of Black, low-income women written out of Haiti's history. Her works also use Black women's experiences as that from which Danticat centers and validates her stories. In doing this, I believe Danticat creates a feminist reading of Haitian history. These creations are examples of rebel literature and liberatory literature.

In finishing her novels, one is left to view that which is usually deemed political as being transient and the political as also being personal.[37] This is a technique of Haitian women writers. According to Marie- José N'Zengou-Tayo, Haitian women writers, "[l]ike their (male) fellow writers, women writers are concerned with the social, economic and political circumstances of their country" (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998, 136). The main difference in the literature of Haitian women writers is that they and their works "concern themselves with politics…when this impacts on their private lives" (ibid). Edwidge Danticat does this and more.

Deborah McDowell writes, that Black feminist critics ought to "consider the specific language of Black women's literature, to describe the ways that Black women writers employ literary devices in a distinct way, and to compare the way Black women writers create their own mythic structures" (McDowell 2000, 176). Danticat's mythic structures in these novels involve trees, butterflies, water, fields, and other aspects of nature. The language she uses, in working with these elements, aims at voicing a story, a history if you will, of love and living in spite of the threat of physical, economic and sexual violence. A "thorough articulation of the Black feminist aesthetic", McDowell continues, will lay "the cornerstone for a sound" (ibid). This sound articulates Danticat's values Black women as agents of knowledge and agents of change. With this sound she portrays the worlds and identities of her Haitian women characters and those of the women who inspired them.

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[37] A major tenet in Black feminism, this refers to the idea that politics and political realities reverberate in the personal attributes of one's life.

In the end, Danticat's works narrate stories where mothers and daughters—or women in general—reign dynamic, powerful and supreme. Her Haitian women characters assert roles of protector, majestic forces, revolutionary leader, truth demanding political figures, and spiritual and moral instructors—roles generally given to men. As Heather Hewett believes that, "in its foregrounding of the presence of oppressive gendered narratives, and its reclamation of Erzulie as an alternative model of motherhood, Danticat's [*Breath, Eyes, Memory*] considers the possibilities of feminist revision" (Hewett 2009). Her other novels do similarly using other means. The revision is exemplified in the imagery, word choice, and positionality of the characters. Throughout her novels also exist "[t]he images of infanticide, abortion, and infant and maternal mortality" (Braziel 2004, 83). Danticat uses these images to portray a "literary reflections on a present-day Haiti in which the lives of mothers and children are frequently imperiled by poverty, hardship, and political unrest"(ibid). She reinvigorates these images with notions of strength and love so as to re-frame ideas about the agency of subjugated women and allow their survival narratives to truly be powerful and liberatory.

The novels are in in line with Black feminist theory as they show how the political outer realm affects the protagonists' personal world. Barriteau declares that Black feminist theory simultaneously problematizes public and private spheres. It, she writes, "[l]ike radical feminist theory…is concerned with patriarchal relations in the private domain. However, unlike radical feminism, black feminism goes on to demonstrate how racist relations follow black women into the private realm and in the process reconfigure their household and intimate spaces very differently" (Barriteau

2006, 19). It is clear that many Haitians in these stories are oppressed by violence, but it is mainly the women who are not only oppressed by physical violence, but also by sexual violence. Their femininity makes them easy victims of rape and sexual brutality in addition to being easy prey for the normalized beating and killing practices of the political regimes. The public domain inhibits the personal security.

Danticat's works articulate the multilayered oppression Haitian women face. In Haitian women's literature, Chancy writes, "the novel most often serves as the vehicle through which identity is articulated and affirmed…imagination is rendered factual rather than false, a key to the real rather than its mere shadow" (Chancy 1997, 12). The women in her novels are agents of knowledge and the reader is made to witness the state of violence under which they struggle to survive. In order to enact this survival they must unite, and share their love and wisdom. Danticat's literature intertwines the importance of love, knowing one's ancestral history, and defining one's own reality and purpose. Self-definition, imagination, and historical knowledge allow Haitian women writers to attempt to transform their lives, their characters and their counterparts' oppression.

Much, if not all, of Danticat's writings are political and aim to not only include women in the telling of history, but in doing this—and more—to also bring about social justice. For Haitian women, activist and writer Beverly Bell argues, "[s]imply changing dominant ways of seeing and of canonizing history cannot transform the forces and structures that threaten or thwart the survival of poor Haitian women…Yet altering the way these women, and others in similar positions, are

viewed and understood in the world is a first step toward changing the relations of power that determine the conditions of their lives" (Bell 2001, 3). It is my belief that Danticat's works pursue similar aims. In changing historical narratives, in order to show the importance and agency of women, Danticat adds to the foundation upon which we Haitian women can change power relations and change our circumstances for ourselves. In so doing, her works also show references to works by other Caribbean and Black American feminist authors.[38] Thus, I believe that they belong within the Black and Haitian feminist discussion.

Black feminist theory helps to understand how Danticat's works do this because it assists in the reading of her stories. The theory helps validate the methods, the themes and patterns, the emotion and the subjects she uses in writing her works. Black feminism helps to show the emotive nature of the literature, the individual struggles, and the non-western epistemology that does not dichotomize mind and body, real and spiritual. Black feminist literary criticism, then, must be deconstructive and "interpret or interpenetrate the signifying structures of the dominant and subdominant discourse in order to formulate a critique and, ultimately, a transformation of the hegemonic white and male symbolic order" (Henderson 2000, 361). Regarding this task, Black and feminist writers, according to Collins, reveal "new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality" (Collins 1990, 221). This theory aligned with Haitian feminism helps Danticat

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[38] Such authors include Toni Morrison, as I have shown previously and Paule Marshall as it relates to Marshall's concept of kitchen poetry that Danticat refers to in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*.

reconfigure a history that will place women in dialogues about nation and identity building alongside men.

Haitian feminism helps one to comprehend the political nature of literature. It may be used in reading Danticat's work so as to understand the way the political is personal. In the Haitian women writers' tradition, politics are written about mainly as they relate to the personal. As stated before, Haitian women's literature, then, "should be read as a literature of revolution" (Chancy 1997, 6). Danticat's literature is no different. Literature of revolution/ rebel literature is revolutionary because it proposes "a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression" (Collins 1990, 221). Danticat's works also ensure an "embracing [of] a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, [which, then,] re-conceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance" (ibid). More specifically, as Chancy puts it, the writers of this brand of literature work to tell "it like it [was or is] so that it can no longer be repeated" (1993, 164). The standpoint epistemology offered by Haitian feminism is important to the realm of knowledge production, the institutionalization of knowledge and the understanding of truths. These truths lie only with the testifier and while it may be hybrid and fragmented by failing memory and trauma, by virtue of the honest intensity of the suffering expressed it is inherently authentic (Kaussen 2008, 211). Danticat's works make clear that the work of truth, testimony, confession and "letting the wound speak" await political realization in social change and psychosocial, political, and transnational decolonization (Kaussen 2008, 215). After reading said works, the task of creating further change is left to the reader.

In undertaking this research endeavor, I wanted to understand just how historical knowledge is inculcated through fictive liberatory literature. I wished to use this knowledge to be better equipped in making the diverse histories of people left out of History accessible, informative and creatively expressed. I now know that a key part in this great feat is using the experience of oppressed people as the criterion of meaning and the basis upon which I express truths. I also now know that I must make these narratives comprehensibly human in hopes that they show the power and beauty of counter-hegemonic, counter-colonial, and socially just ways of living. To begin to do this, I must start, as Danticat shows, with showing human relations as they relate to love, dreams, and memory. I need also show the ways human existence asserts itself in relation to pain and oppression, politics, activism, and quotidian realities as well.

Danticat politicizes the personal and fictional renditions of Haitian women's lives. In that it is political Danticat's writing, "points to a new way of intervening at the juncture between cultural production and political praxis" (Nesbitt 2010, 74). It is not, however, "[a] programmatic manifesto" (Nesbitt 2010, 82). Instead, she "brings the compelling force of an unrivalled poetic sensibility and micrological sensitivity for suffering to testify to the destruction of human possibility and to recover the persistent splinters of hope lodged in the wreckage of post-Duvalierist society" (ibid). Danticat uses fiction to entice the world's imagination and to liberate our notions of what kinds of solutions are, in fact, possible. This, as Du Bois shows, is what Black writers should aim to do, regardless of their ethnicity; they should all play griottes and griots and give our struggle voice while pantomiming Black struggle and beauty.

As an interdisciplinary major, African American studies ties the knowledge bases of many different fields of study in order to coalesce a broad picture that documents the lives of Black people. In my thesis, I have attempted to do similarly through the use of Edwidge Danticat's literature, Haitian socio-political history, and Black, Haitian and Third World feminist theories and literary analyses. Black people are a Diasporic people and any research on us can attest to this. As such, Danticat's work should exist in Black American, Afro-Caribbean and Black Diasporic cannons and discussions about Black womanhood and all that it relates to. This is because the Black fictive women characters—and the true-er narratives they represent—attempt to self-define, be self-determined, and be recognized as righteous counterparts to all who endeavor to also build the nations within which they reside. The literature written about them and their quotidian acts of resistance help to create counter-hegemonic ways of understanding oneself and to promote socio-political consciousness. The personal is political as are the many acts of daily resistance. In this way, literature can help spark revolution. As an avid reader of Black and subaltern women's narratives, I believe that said insurrection starts within. I dream, live, write and organize imagining a social just world and waiting for an out-of-body revolution.

vi.

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