LOCATING THE IDEAL HOMELAND IN THE LITERATURE OF EDWIDGE DANTICAT

by

JULIANE OKOT BITEK


A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(English)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

May 2009
© Juliane Okot Bitek, 2009
ABSTRACT

Edwidge Danticat, who has lived most of her life in the United States, retains a strong link with Haiti and primarily writes about the Haitian experience inside and outside the country. For Danticat, the ‘ideal homeland’ is a psychic space where she can be Haitian, American, and belong to both countries. Danticat’s aspiration and position as one who can make claim to both Haiti and the United States somewhat supports Stuart Hall’s notion of cultural identity as a fluid entity and an identity that is becoming and is, not one that is static and was. However, Danticat locates her ‘ideal homeland’ within the Haitian Dyaspora, as a social construct that includes all the people of the Haitian descent in the diaspora, whatever their countries of citizenship. This ideal homeland is an emotional and literary space for continued expression and creation of Haitian identity, history and culture. It is not a geographical space and as such, requires that membership in it engage through text. This paper investigates ways in which Danticat expresses the ideal homeland in her fiction and nonfiction works. I use Dionne Brand, Kamau Brathwaite, Edward Soja and Judith Lewis Herman among others, as theorists to discover this ideal homeland in order to show that Danticat, like many diasporic writers, is actively engaged in locating for themselves where they can engage in their work as they create new communities and take charge of how they tell their stories and how they identify themselves. Danticat’s work is a valuable contribution to the reclamation of the Haitian storytelling tradition which she writes in English to a readership that is wider than the borders of both United States and Haiti, thereby redefining the Haitian borders and indeed, the citizenship of who can claim Haitian-ness by being able to relate to and access her work.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii  
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................... iii  
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................... iv  
Dedication ...................................................................................................................... v  
Chapter I: Introduction .................................................................................................. 1  
Chapter II: Way Finding, Tidalectics, Trialectics and the Literature of Edwidge Danticat ....................................................................................................................... 6  
Chapter III: The Butterfly's Way: Escape and Re-Invention in *Krik? Krak!* and *The Dew Breaker* .................................................................................................................... 25  
Chapter IV: Grief Cannot Silence Us: Tracing Father/Daughter Relationships in *Brother, I'm Dying* and *Krik? Krak!* .............................................................................. 44  
Chapter V: Conclusion: Venn Diagrams, Maps and Other Ways of Writing Literature ......................................................................................................................... 66  
Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 71
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis might have remained firmly inside the realm of imagination if it were not for the persistence, insistence and unwavering support of my supervisor, Dr. Michael Zeitlin, and my committee members Dr. Margery Fee and Dr. Laura Moss. This thesis might not even have made it into the realm of imagination if it were not for Dr. Eva-Marie Kröller who encouraged me to consider studying in the English Department. I am indebted to her for all the great courses and instructors I have encountered by way of this department. The staff at the English Department is always dependable – they are good people.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to my fellow students who were unwavering in their support: Alyssa Maclean, Sylvie Vrankx, Dan Adleman, Joanna Kordus, Jen Lermitte, Amanda Reaume and Sasha Kolopic. To Pat Rose and Andreas Schroeder from UBC Creative Writing, thank you. My friends who are represented by the few I have named here: Nicola Stilwell, Sophia Malczewska-Roper, Kasthuri Moodley, Anakana Schofield, Jane Rukaria, Patrick O’Reilly, Kate Baggott, Amany Al-Sayyed, Barbara Binns, Veda Abu-Bakare, Sharon Licyayo, Jonathan Howard, Suzanne Wallace, Charmaine Harley, Lyse Lemieux, Naomi Wolf, Joanne Komoski and Mary Goldie.

In appreciation of all our kids: Lydia, Jerolynn, Moshi, Koju, Andrea, Adhiam, Jonathan, Paul, Kalina, Lucy, Latoya, Kyla, Serina, Jakerry, Antonin and most recently, Akiyo, and their parents, thank you. Olga and Cecilia, Jane and Davie, thanks so much for the love, the groceries and the stories. For my mother, Caroline Okot Bitek, and for my husband, Richard Jenkins Laloyo, who always believes that I can.
DEDICATION

For all the children of Acholi
We shall all go home some day.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I dreamed once that Edwidge Danticat and I were having coffee together at a café. She was in casual attire; jogging pants, a sweat shirt and her hair was tied in a black kerchief. A stroller with a sleeping child was between us and we were laughing and chatting. We were friends. This dream reveals to me more than a need to have a close friendship with a woman whose work I have admired and studied since I first came across *Breath, Eyes, Memory* as part of a reading list for a graduate course a few years ago. I was attracted to her writing because, like me, Danticat writes of a homeland that has suffered from political violence and natural disasters.

Like me, Danticat is also a child of the sixties meaning she has the same references; she lives in the diaspora and has had difficulty defining a geographical place she can call home – a place of undivided loyalty, where she can belong to her country of birth and claim her country of citizenship at the same time. Danticat writes about the issues that compel me: family, home, identity, diaspora, and Third World politics. When I embarked on the literary journey into Danticat’s work I had no doubt that I would learn much about myself as a writer, a mother and a diasporic woman whose identity swings like a pendulum between Canada and Uganda.

The questions I hoped to answer as I read Danticat were: What does home mean? Where is home? Does home have to be a physical place? Do one’s origins dictate where home is? As I conducted my research, I realized that even though Danticat has spoken often about an ‘ideal homeland’ no work had yet been published on this important aspect of her life. It struck me also, that Danticat’s notion of ‘ideal homeland’ was important because this was the same issue that I have been dealing with most of my life.
I was born in exile and grew up listening to my parents speak of home in a language that was foreign to all our neighbors and friends because it was a Ugandan language, not Kenyan. In grade four, when I asked why we never went to the village for Christmas, like all our friends did, my parents told me that we did not have a village in Kenya to go to. We were Ugandans. We could never go home. Home became an idealized space in my head – where my parents had had such happy childhoods, where someday we’d return to “when things got better.” Things got better after the overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979 and we returned to Uganda in 1980. Two years later, my father died and we went to our village for the first time, to bury him. In 1986, after a violent military coup d’etat my mother went into exile. We left Uganda finally in 1988 and have lived in Canada since 1990, having spent two years in the United States.

I recognize myself in Danticat’s work on several levels. I can identify with the being the half-generation, one who is born in one place and grows up in another; I have, as Danticat says in the introduction to The Butterfly’s Way, “felt guilty for my own physical distance from a country I left as a [child] during a dictatorship that had forced thousands to choose between exile and death” (xv). When we first returned to Uganda, we kept being asked (as I still got asked the last time I was there) “Where are you from?” Whenever I say Uganda, there is an element of disbelief, derisive laughter, a shake of the head. “No, really? Where exactly?” In Canada, where I have lived for almost nineteen years, I still get asked where I’m from. Even though my Canadian passport allows me to claim Canada, again, I get challenged. “No, I mean, where are you really from?” “My country,” writes Danticat, “is one of uncertainty. When I say ‘my country’ to some Haitians, they think of the United States. When I say ‘my country’ to some Americans,
they think of Haiti [...] My country, I felt, was something that was then being called the
tenth department. Haiti has nine departments and the tenth was the floating homeland,
the ideological one, which joined all Haitians living in the dyaspora” (Butterfly xiv). If
one’s country is the place from which to claim culture, a name, an identity, a world view,
what happens when that there is more than one place from which one can make that
claim? For Danticat all diasporic people (whether exiles, refugees, expatriates or
émigrés) retain a yearning for home; even those who have not previously been able to
express it. She writes about second-generation Haitians who feel at home when they go
to Haiti. She also tackles deportation, death abroad, and boat people -- those who either
experience reverse migration or are refused asylum simply because they are refugees. I
know the people Danticat writes about, having been in exile, a refugee, foreign student,
migrant and now citizen of Canada.

Danticat’s work is not limited by any means to a discussion on citizenship versus
homeland. Danticat also writes about family, tradition, history and honor; all steeped in
the backdrop of a violent Haiti. She is mindful, as she admits in an interview with
Victoria Lautman, that violence is not all that takes place in Haiti. People fall in love, she
says, have babies, enjoy their lives and bring up their families in Haiti. It is this sort of
work that adds to the growing body of literature that reclaims the Haitian body out of the
stereotype of the oppressed underclass, the boat people, the sugarcane workers and
carriers of AIDS as they were referred to in the eighties when Danticat moved to New
York to live with her parents.

My aim in studying Danticat’s work was to search for her notion of the ideal
homeland in her work, both fiction and nonfiction, I quickly realized that ‘ideal’ had a
different meaning for every character I came across and I had to accept that while these were creations of Danticat, they were also reflections of her own yearnings. Salman Rushdie has written, “it may be that writers [...] are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back [....] But if we look back, we must do so in the knowledge that we will not be capable of claiming precisely the thing that was lost, that we, in short, create fictions [...] imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind” (Imaginary 428). The existence of an imaginary Haiti is apparent in Danticat’s recollections, but whether or not one wishes to locate their homelands in this imaginary context is another question altogether. Danticat wants to be able to claim both her Haiti and United States at the same time. Where Danticat can claim both countries remains in the written text – where Haiti is as a place to write of, and belong to; English, a language to write in; and the United States, a place to write from. Through imagination, Danticat combines fiction, history, myth, and the oral tradition of storytelling to create a café au lait text which can claim coffee, milk and maybe sugar (or Haiti, United States and writing), but unlike her, cannot be claimed by any one particularity.

In this thesis, I investigate the ideal homeland on three fronts: by location as Danticat’s characters identify it in her fiction; by definition as a place of escape and expression; and in her own life, through her latest non-fiction, through a patrilineal search for origins. This thesis will expand the boundaries of understanding the concept of homeland as it applies to diasporic writers like Danticat who write of one place but live in another. It will also show that writers like Danticat redefine diasporic writing as that which not only looks homeward but also consciously creates a space where home can be
text, a place to engage with others, and to appreciate and remember the physical home that many can never return to.
CHAPTER II: Way Finding, Tidalectics, Trialectics, and the Literature of Edwidge Danticat

What kind of politics remains intact if we are unable to distinguish between real and imagined spaces? Sounds to me that without a guiding principle separating reality from fantasy, a lot of people could get hurt.

Andy Merrifield, “The Extraordinary Voyages of Ed Soja: Inside the Trialectics of Spatiality”

Andy Merrifield worries that by extending perspective to include a thirdspace---one outside the dialectics of the real and the imagined without the benefit of a meso-terrain (a middle space between the real and imagined) -- Edward Soja “falls between two stools” (347), invoking Salman Rushdie’s “sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times that we fall between the stools” (15). However, for Soja, this thirdspace¹ can be considered a “social space seen entirely as mental space, “an encrypted reality” that is decipherable in thoughts and utterances, in speech and in writing, literature and language, in discourses and texts, in logical and epistemological ideation. Reality is confined to “thought things” (res cognito) and comprehended entirely through its representations” (Soja 63). Because, as Merrifield asserts, many people have already been hurt, thirdspace is an opportunity and a tool to escape from the binary of real and imagined spatiality to one that engages both at the same time and can create new knowledge and understanding.

Edwidge Danticat taps precisely into this thirdspace as she reaches out from the marginality of a racialized and oppressed people to haul back a central space from which all people of Haitian descent can encounter the rest of the world. She recognizes the

¹ Homi Bhabha’s notion of third space involves a hybridity that is not attributable to any of the contributing cultures. Danticat’s claim for an ideal homeland involves being able to claim both Haiti and United States.
importance of having to seek how and where the Haitian and especially the Haitian Dyaspora,\(^2\) can be. For Danticat, Dyaspora does not only refer to the diaspora, a scattering of people in the common sense; it also carries with it a sense of alienation whether one might be on home soil in Haiti, or in the United States. She says:

> I meant in another type of introduction to list my own personal experiences of being called Dyaspora when expressing an opposing political point of view in discussions with friends and family living in Haiti, who knew that they could easily silence me by saying, “What do you know? You are Dyaspora” [...] I meant to recall conversations or debates in restaurants, parties, or at public gatherings where members of the dyaspora would be classified – justified or not – as arrogant, insensitive, overbearing, and pretentious people who were eager to reap the benefits of good jobs and political positions in times of stability in a country that they had fled during difficult times. Shamefacedly, I would bow my head and accept these judgments when they were expressed, feeling guilty for my own physical distance from a country I left when I

\(^2\) Dyaspora, according to Karen E. Richman is a “word denoting the discolored skin of rotting fruit [and] is frequently a derogatory word. Danticat’s use of Dyaspora carries within it the disparaging sense of being foreign in one’s homeland as well as being the source of a significant percentage of the economy of Haiti – the notion of being wanted and not wanted at the same time; belonging and not belonging; and shameful at that. This is different from the Phillipino experience for instance, where the economic benefit of diasporic Filipinas (usually from the foreign domestic programs in United States and Canada) is not tied to a disparaging word like dyaspora.
was twelve years during a dictatorship that had forced thousands to choose between exile or death. (*Butterfly* xiv – xv)

While the notion of dyaspora for Danticat is fraught with feelings of shame and being misunderstood, she also recognizes that there are other ways of seeing the complexity of the immigrant in a new culture: “Is it duality or no identity? Is it like the café au lait I drank so much of as a girl? Coffee and milk mixed together, where you blend two distinctly different things together to get a mix that is unlike any other two things separately but can never be split into those pre-mixture entities again” (*Encentruos* 5). However, she sees an identity composed of more than two entities, but not a hybrid creation; she is not café au lait; and certainly, she is not fallen ‘fallen between the stools’ to use Rushdie’s words. “The truth is, I am all these things: Haitian, Haitian-American, a citizen of the Americas, of the Caribbean, Afro-American” (6). She continues on to explain her concept of the tenth department \(^3\) “as the Diaspora of Haiti all over the world. It is not concrete land. It is not a specific state or place, but an idea and an ideal to which we can all belong, where we can still be outside and still be part of the country” (6). She seeks to claim her voice as a Haitian (in the United States) as well as a dyaspora without having to feel the alienation of both labels while at the same time be able to embrace her Haitian-ness without having to give up her American-ness. “There are millions and millions of Haitian voices. Mine is only one. My greatest hope is that mine becomes one voice in a giant chorus that is trying to understand and express artistically what it’s like to

\(^3\) Former president of Haiti, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, is credited with coining the ‘tenth department of Haiti,’ during his inaugural speech in 1991, thereby including the diasporan Haitians as an integral part of Haiti. During his tenure, he set up the Ministry of Haitians Living Abroad which has not been disbanded despite several regime changes (*Handbook* 111).
be a Haitian immigrant in the United States” (Diaz Interview). Is there an audience for this ‘giant chorus’? Is there are place for this chorus to express itself? Can this place be located? How and with what tools? It is appropriate that Soja is a geographer because it is in this chapter that I investigate the applicability of Kamau Brathwaite’s tidalectics and Dionne Brand’s ‘way finding’ both metaphors grounded in the geographic compass, to locate evidence of the homeland that Danticat seeks.

While Soja’s lens – the thirdspace – allows for the possible synthesis of the artistic, the otherwise imagined ideal space of which Danticat speaks, Dionne Brand’s notion of ‘way finding’ can be employed as a tool to identify the way finders and the way to the ideal landscape to which Danticat seeks to belong. Brand’s ‘way finding’ originates from the idea that diasporic Africans have an innate need to find their way back to Africa. In the epilogue to A Map, she says,

But to the Door of No Return which is illuminated in the consciousness of Blacks in the Diaspora there are no maps. This door is not a mere physicality. It is a spiritual location. It is also perhaps a psychic destination. Since leaving was never voluntary, return was, and still may be, an intention, however deeply buried. There is as it says no way in; no return.

4 The need to create a literary cartography of identity in exile is not unique to Edwidge Danticat. The work of Julia Alvarez, the Dominican-born American writer has been studied and recently published as Writing a New Place on the Map (2005) by Kelli Lyon Johnson. Johnson identifies Alvarez’s mestizaje self, one made up of several identities as an integral part of her American identity. The concept of mestizaje is widely associated with Gloria Anzaldúa’s work in Borderlands: La Frontera. Danticat’s ideal homeland however, is one that embraces the physical landscape of Haiti, the Diaspora and the spaces in between.
Accordingly home becomes an uneasy space that is tempered by the need to return to a place that only exists in memory, and as such, a tenuous one with a forgotten location. While Brand’s notion of return is a need exclusive to the descendants of slavery, it is clear that Danticat’s characters know, as people from other diasporas have always known, that they belong elsewhere and that they have a need to return home. The challenge for Danticat and her characters is that returning to Haiti, or indeed remaining there, does not guarantee that sense of belonging. On the contrary, the returnee may become stuck in the process of return, unable to shed the need to return, even on home ground. The process of returning home starts from the recognizing that one belongs elsewhere, finding a way and then looking to belong. Belonging, or not belonging, the binaries between which most of Danticat’s characters operate include people who intersect both landscapes by fitting in more than one place. Soja’s trialectics allows for the creation of spaces outside the binaries and the usual boundaries. The questions become: is there a place to call home for immigrant Haitians outside Diaspora and Dyaspora and is it relevant that there be one?

Danticat, like the narrator Grace from “Caroline’s Wedding” (Krik? Krak!), is a “half-generation” – one who spends her childhood in one culture and then grows up in another (Butterfly xv). When Grace announces the acquisition of an American citizenship, her mother quips, “I don’t love you any less” (Krik? 160). On hearing the same announcement, her future brother in-law congratulates her. “Nations go to war over women like you. You’re an American” (183). The disdain and admiration to Grace’s announcement of American citizenship is precisely the half-in, half-out position that is meant by being a half-generation -- a janus figure, looking outwards and inwards, looking
back and forward, past and present, all at the same time, never contemplating the same 
scene at the once, yet being admired and despised simultaneously. This two-sightedness 
is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because Danticat, like Grace, can claim 
both Haiti and America, English and French (as well as Haitian Creole) languages. It can 
be a blessing to know that “nations go to war over women like you,” but a curse to hear 
get “I don’t love you any less” from one’s own mother. Shame and pride associated with 
both countries often leave the migrant conflicted. Adding to that are the interstices that 
the dyasporan has to deal with -- the intersecting histories of both countries (which have 
more often than not, been more destructive for Haiti and its people); the in-between 
places symbolized by the watery Middle Passage5; the borders, and the airspaces of 
flight. What all these mean is that Danticat, the writer, grapples with the fact that there is 
a community of people like her who must find a place from where they can articulate 
themselves. The fluidity with which Danticat moves within these worlds is reminiscent 
of the sea as a point of departure, but also of an ability to touch various shores, which in 
itself can be a curse. As Dionne Brand describes it:

There is the sense in the mind of not being here or there, of no way out or 
in. As if the door had set up its own reflection. Caught between the two

5 While the Middle Passage is commonly understood to refer to the transportation of slaves to the America 
during the Atlantic Slave, I use it to invoke the memory of the slave trade represented by the Atlantic 
Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. Danticat makes a parallel between the Middle Passage and the experience of 
the boat people: “I imagined the dead of the Middle Passage re-uniting with the dead of this new forced 
migration and the living descendants of both migrations reuniting on the other side (Shaking 27).
we live in the Diaspora, in the sea in between. [...] Our inheritance in the
Diaspora is to live in this inexplicable place. (*A Map* 20)

Even though Grace is not ‘loved any less’ as a half-generation, not quite
belonging may not be as alienating as falling between two stools as Rushdie would have it, because Danticat recognizes that she can make this “inheritance,” this “inexplicable place” a source of creativity. In an essay poem addressed to her mother, Danticat confesses this need for art in her own survival: “I am, as you like to say, trying to make art out of everything. But you must know by now that this is how I have survived” (*Roar*, 195). Clearly, she is not bereft, or ‘stepping out into nothing’ as Brand would have it. Danticat has already claimed much from both her Haitian and American legacies and combined these to establish herself not just as a great story teller in the Haitian tradition but also as a best-selling and multi-award winning writer in the United States. Even though her work has been translated into Haitian Creole, given a high level of illiteracy in Haiti, Danticat’s stories are read on radio.

Danticat’s current roots in Miami, after several years of living in New York, do not belie her close connection with her homeland. She was born in the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince in 1969 to a salesman father and a seamstress mother who left her and her brother in the care of her pastor uncle and his wife while they migrated to the United States. From the time she was four, until she was re-united with them at twelve, she only saw her parents once, when she was seven, and even then, only spent an evening and night with them. She and her brother were adopted into the larger family of her uncle and aunt who had also adopted several orphaned cousins. She writes of this time in her life
both in her fiction, for example, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* which she calls an emotional biography, and in her nonfiction, as she does in *Brother, I’m Dying* and *After the Dance: A Walk Through Carnival in Jacmel, Haiti* as well as in several short pieces that have been widely anthologized and published in literary and popular magazines.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the narrator, Sophie, like Danticat, grows up in the care of a close relative and must join her mother in New York when she turns twelve. In that novel, as in Danticat's own life, Sophie has to learn to speak English, to assimilate amongst other children who tease the new immigrants, often referring to them as 'frenchies,' boat people and AIDS carriers. In *Brother, I’m Dying*, Danticat weaves stories from her own life in Haiti, including the account previously published in the personal history section of *The New Yorker* as “Marie Micheline” that now re-appears in this work as “Giving Birth.” This tide-like telling and re-telling; doing and re-doing are recurring aspects of Danticat’s work and are reflective of an oeuvre that usually depends on the landscape which is not always *terra firma*. Landscapes often evolve from what memory she writes about into seascapes and border spaces that sometimes gets lost inside a time warp which completely destroys and alienates the country contained in that memory. For example, in *Brother*, Danticat describes her first return home to Haiti at twenty one: “There were also monuments to losses everywhere: the charred shanty towns of La Saline and Cité Soleil, the busts and the friezes of the murdered: a justice minister, a campaign financier and a beloved priest among thousands of others [...].” Chunks of Port-au-Prince, I realized, had been wholly assembled and disassembled in my absence” (141). Each loss wipes out the constructed reality she once knew and evolves as a new memory of loss much like the way Amabelle, the narrator of *The Farming of*
Bones, describes her own body: “a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament” (227). Landscape, body and stories are linked in the ways they re-surface in another time, place, memory, voice, like the sea, and often, in another book altogether. In the epilogue to Krik? Danticat writes of the story as a never-ending strain, part of a generational code that is ultimately the responsibility of the writer to document.

It was their whispers that pushed you, their murmurs over pots sizzling in your head. A thousand women urging you to speak through the blunt tip of your pencil [....] These women, they asked for your voice so that they could tell your mother in your place, yes, women like you do speak, even if they speak in a tongue that is hard to understand. (222)

Danticat pays mind to contemporary Haiti as the context in which she writes, thereby doing the work of documentarist and historian, even in her popular fiction. In Dew Breaker, she invokes the names of Haitians from newspaper headlines to lend credence to her narrative and provide a parallel in the new world where the torturers in Haiti and their victims encounter each other in an environment that speaks to a curtailed sense of freedom for the Haitian immigrant. Abner Louima, and Patrick Dorismond, both Haitian immigrants, both mentioned in The Dew Breaker, were brutalized by New York police officers in separate cases that launched their stories into the front pages. Abner Louima was assaulted, brutalized and sodomized by police officers in 1997, while Patrick Dorismond was shot in the chest by an undercover policeman in 2000. As well as contextualizing the story, Danticat adds Louima and Dorismond’s names to a roster that must be repeated as part of the traditional orature she refers to in the epilogue of Krik? as her grandmother braids her hair.
When she was done she would ask you to name each braid after those nine hundred and ninety nine women who were boiling in your blood, and since you had written them down and memorized them, the names would come rolling off your tongue. And this was your testament to the way that these women lived and died. (224)

Abner Louima’s story is recounted in “Seven” in which Dany prepares for and finally receives his wife after a seven-year-long process of immigration. Dany, a Haitian immigrant rents a room in the basement of the man who will turn out to be the dew breaker, as the torturer is referred to. He and his roommates have not gone out dancing much since “a Haitian man named Abner Louima was arrested there, then beaten and sodomized at a nearby police station” (Dew 38). Danticat memorializes Dorismond in the same story: “She switched to a station with a talk show and sat up to listen as some callers talked about a Haitian American man named Patrick Dorismond who’d been killed. He had been shot by a policeman in a place called Manhattan” (45). Manhattan becomes a city in the margins, away from the central metropolis it is in the Western imagination into a strange place that Dany’s wife discovers through a radio talk show.

Discovering one’s place in society, way finding, takes place variously – by radio, conversation, and at the park in the middle of Brooklyn where Dany confesses to his wife that he “came to ponder seasons, lost time, and interminable distances” (51). The park in

6 The title of Danticat’s latest work of fiction, The Dew Breaker comes from choukòt lawoze Haitian Creole for ‘dew breaker’ the name given to the tonton macoutes, the government sponsored armed militia that torturred the populace, often arriving in the early morning (thereby disturbing the dew).
Brooklyn, Manhattan, perhaps all of New York, is re-defined as a place of marginality, of contemplation and brutality – not necessarily the solid and safe haven to which thousands of Haitians have fled over the years to escape the brutality and poverty in Haiti.

New York becomes a place as dangerous to navigate as Haiti was; as the Middle Passage\(^7\) is for those who must come by boat, and especially so for those whose trauma is resurrected in that “place named Manhattan.” Another torturer from *Dew* emerges in the form of Emmanuel Constant, the founder of a Haitian death squad FRAPH (Front pour l'Avancement et le Progrès Haitien) and a confessed paid informant of the CIA. During a church service, the young woman, Ka, believes she recognizes him from the posters all over her neighborhood. In real life, Constant was released by the Clinton administration, thereby escaping a deportation order back to Haiti. In *Dew*, he becomes the source of real tension after Ka’s mother, Anne, becomes aware of her own husband’s secret past as a torturer. The real and imagined worlds intertwine here to create a complex situation (because the reader encounters this information in fiction) while maintaining a particularly insidious terror (because Constant is a real-life figure after all). While Ka innocently points Constant out (she is still unaware of her father’s past), there is the underlying suggestion that other people may be aware of Anne’s husband’s presence in

---

\(^7\) Diedrich, Gates Jr. and Pedersen suggest looking at the Middle Passage as an “a syncretic notion of a space in between that links geographical and cultural regions” (*Imagination* 9). Nicole Waller takes this further when she refers to Danticat’s writing of the Haitian boaters refugees as a re-interpretation of the historical Middle Passage “in terms of voodoo concepts of life and death, material and spiritual realms,” (*Recharting* 61) a notion that I think is incomplete as she does not recognize Danticat’s efforts to reclaim the Middle Passage also as a place of origin and a space in which to re-connect with slave ancestors and African gods.
the church. The torturer’s wife agonizes: “What if it were Constant? What would she do? Would she spit in his face or embrace him, acknowledging a kinship of shame and guilt that she’d inherited by marrying her husband? How would she even know whether Constant felt any guilt or shame? What if he’d come to this mass to flaunt his freedom?” (Dew 81). Danticat’s fiction reflects the circularity of the lives of Haitian immigrants who must live with the torturers from both the old and new world as they define for themselves the encompassing nature of freedom, especially as it is available in the United States to torturers and victims alike.

In this aspect, Dew is an example of Kamau Brathwaite’s tidalectics in the sense that it insists on a tide-like pattern in its narrative even as it emerges and re-emerges in frequent parallels of fiction and non-fiction. Tidalectics is a combination of ‘tidal,’ ‘dialect,’ and ‘dialectic,’ is an acknowledgement of the effect of the ocean and its cyclical and tidal characteristics as important in defining the Caribbean identity. Elizabeth de Loughrey identifies Brathwaite’s tidalectics as a way to “historicize the process by which discourses of rootedness are naturalized in national soil, and to establish a series of external relationships through transoceanic routes and flows” (164). Tidalectics acknowledges both the effects of the sea on a nation’s culture, but also the historical events that took place on the sea as part of the national memory. The physical and poetic relationship between the sea and identity in the Caribbean has been acknowledged by other Caribbean writers, most notably Derek Walcott, but Brathwaite’s tidalectics is a seminal theoretical framework for reading and understanding Caribbean distinctiveness. Of the relationship between the Caribbean and the sea, Derek Walcott says in his 1992 Nobel winning lecture:
It is there in Antillean geography, in the vegetation itself. The sea sighs
with the drowned from the Middle Passage, the butchery of its aborigines,
Carib and Aruac and Taino, bleeds in the scarlet of the immortelle, and
even the actions of surf on sand cannot erase the African memory, or the
lances of cane as a green prison where indentured Asians, the ancestors of
Felicity, are still serving time.

Walcott, like Brathwaite recognizes the importance of including the African
memory contained in the sea along with the genocide of the native Caribbean people, the
exploitation of the land for sugarcane and the indentured workers from Asia (and
elsewhere), in any discussion of being of the Caribbean. Danticat works and re-works
her fiction and nonfiction to include landscapes containing memory. Landscape, in The
Farming of Bones becomes a site of contention for Amabelle, who was a child when she
was discovered on the Dominican side of the Massacre River. She does not feel Haitian,
having been brought up in the Dominican Republic and having all her important
relationships there, even as she is aware of her Haitian-ness over there. She returns to
Haiti to escape the massacres but finds herself a stranger, having no close relatives or
friends there. It is at the river where her parents drowned that Amabelle finds solace.
She ends her story by lying down in the shallow ebb of the river, “looking for dawn”
(310).

This is the same river in which the women from “Nineteen Thirty Seven”
(Krik? Krak!) go to wash their hands to reconnect with the source of their being. “We
came from the river where the blood never stops flowing, where my mother’s dive
toward life – her swim among all those bodies slaughtered in flight – gave her those wings of flames. The river was the place where it had all begun” (41). Again, this is an indirect reference to the Middle Passage, another watery grave where thousands lost their lives and an ocean over which, as Brand has articulated, Africans tried to return: “Stories of Africans flying home to Africa or walking home on the ocean floor abound in continental America and the archipelago […]. There is the story of a woman … [who] climbed the cotton silk tree, and flew all the way back to Africa.” (Door 43-44).

Amabelle lies down in the river ‘where it all began,’ waiting for the dawn, which as the water flows past her body, is a symbolic re-birth into a new future. The “river where blood never stops flowing” can be read as the historical slaughter from the 1937 massacres by the government of the Dominican Republic on the Haitians. It can also be read as the dead from the Middle Passage and as a womb from which the people of Haiti were born. (After all, this is the story of how Marie’s grandmother gave birth to her mother while crossing the Massacre River).

Linking the river to the sea, past to present and Haitian presence at home and abroad is Danticat’s forte. It is here that Danticat can connect, through fiction and imagination, to Soja’s trialectics. Because of her dedication to the lost lives in the Massacre River and the Middle Passage, Danticat allows for a place where characters, and by extension readers, can have dialogue with the spirits contained there. It is important for her that the Haitian experience in America remains inextricably linked to Haiti by ocean, by history, and by story. By establishing, for instance, one place of origin of Haitians as the water, Danticat acknowledges Brathwaite’s trialectics and mirrors Walcott’s poem “The Sea is History:”
Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?

Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that gray vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History. (Star, 364)

Danticat continues the dialogue of the Middle Passage at mass, in “Caroline’s Wedding” (Krik? Krak!) when the priest tells the congregation of “a young woman who was pregnant when she took a boat from Haiti and later gave birth to her child on that boat. A few hours after the child was born, its precious life went out, like a candle in a storm, and the mother with the infant in her arms dived into the sea” (167). The reader is painfully reminded of the first epistolary story in this collection which contains a similar account of Célianne, who jumps into the sea after throwing her dead baby out into the water.

It is no mistake that Danticat’s writing is haunted by the same images. In an essay, “We’re Ugly but We’re Here,” Danticat laments the incomprehensible legacy of the ‘daughters of Anacoana,’ the women of Haiti. In it, she recalls once hearing a similar story in which a woman jumped over the side of the boat on the way to America after her infant child had died. “Mother and child sank to the bottom of an ocean that already holds millions of souls from the middle passage, the holocaust of the slave trade. That woman’s sacrifice moved many of us to tears, even as it reminded us of a slew of

8 Anacoana was a warrior, a poet and queen of pre-Columbian Hispaniola. When the Spanish arrived in 1490, she welcomed them ashore only to be betrayed and beheaded by the Spanish shortly after. She has been immortalized by Alfred Lord Tennyson in a poem by the same name. In both Haiti and the Dominican Republic Anacoana is considered a founding figure.
past sacrifices made previously for all of us so we could be here” (Resistance 27). Here, Danticat relates and connects the historical sacrifices, as a safety net of sorts and a guard from the insecurities that can be haunting when one does not belong. In fictionalizing and replicating this story during mass, on the boat, in an essay and through word of mouth from the survivors of the boat trip, Danticat continues to relocate, redefine and establish the Haitian experience as a reality so that it does not remain in a fixed historical past, or landscape, but is engaged in the contemporary present, unrestricted by physical and national borders, history and regimes. For the daughters of Anacoana, the extent of their legacy spans the reach of the bottom of the sea as well as the horizontal distance on the surface of the earth, everywhere that the women of Haiti can be found. It remains fluid. It can be found in written fiction, in oral stories repeated by candlelight (as her grandmother told them when Danticat was a child), in the stories of the waves and the surf, and the drowned Haitians at the bottom of the Atlantic and Caribbean seas and rivers.

The dead and alive continue to encounter each other more intimately than in the boat where people can only contemplate the bottom of the sea just before they throw themselves overboard or are drowned by the waves. In “Between the Pool and the Gardenias,” (Krik?), a dead baby is picked up off the street by Marie and taken care of until the smell of her decomposing body overpowers her and she is forced to bury it. Marie tells Rose the story of her life, revealing her most intimate secrets including her husband’s infidelities and her failed pregnancies. Rose narrates her own stories silently, by way of Marie’s observations. Aside from the fact that she “was like baby Jesus in the Bible stories they read to us at the Baptist Literary Class” (Krik? 91), Rose is also
intimated to be “like something that was thrown aside after she became useless to someone cruel” (93) despite the fact that “she smelled like the scented powders in Madame’s cabinet, the mixed scent of gardenias and fish that Madame always had on her when she stepped out of the pool” (94). With due credit to Shakespeare -- would this Rose by any other name continue to smell just as sweet? Would this baby, Christ-like, save her mother from her torturous life as the wife of an unfaithful man and one, at that, whose womb has not been able to hold eight pregnancies? Apparently not. This flower, this Rose, this Baby Jesus continues to decompose even as her adopted mother coddles her, cares for her, loves her and tells her stories.

In Rose’s story, the Christian references like baby Jesus, the Hail Mary prayer, the church, are invoked in parallel to the priest of Dew who evokes the Madonna and Child of the boat in Krik?’s ‘Children of the Sea.’ This Rose, like Swiss, the boat Madonna’s child, like the souls at the bottom of the sea, remain dead even as stories swirl around, showing up as intertextual hauntings in Danticat’s work. The one sure way of dealing with the incomprehensibility of unrequited love becomes prayer to the ultimate mother of sacrifice: “We salute you Mother of God. Pray for us sinners, now and at the time of our death. Amen” (Krik? 94) the same way that Agwe, the god of the sea is invoked in that first story. Danticat reclaims the water space from one of forced migration and a

---

9 But not to be outdone is Erzulie, the Haitian voudoun goddess, or loa, who Danticat refers to frequently and often in the same breath as Mary. Erzulie’s suffering originates from the imperfections of man that is manifested in the arrow to her heart and her constant weeping. Like Mary, the Christian mother of God, she bears the weight of the world’s sins. Danticat claims both women, but refrains from a synthesis that would make them a single person. Instead, she opts for a dual reading of this prayer that could to either Mary or Erzulie and can be answered by one, both or neither.
watery grave for the thousands who perished in there into a place of origins, heaven
sometimes, a home for African gods, celebration, empowerment and a life source.

But in order to escape this vortex, or hurricane of events (to borrow from the
terrible watery metaphors that are an annual reality in Haiti), Danticat’s characters can
remain in the silence of their own experiences (as the dew breaker does for much of his
life) or share, as much as they can, in order to make sense of their lives. Myriam
Chancy’s discussion of the need to share as an effect of exile recognizes that “women’s
descriptions of the state of exile in their fiction, poetry, personal narratives, essays and
oral testimonies, is the product of painful insight into their disposssession,” what she calls
an “acceptance of the contradictions inherent in the state of exile” (Searching 6). For
Danticat, the awareness of these contradictions exists inside Haiti and as well, as
evidenced in the stories that are set in Haiti. Krik?’s “Night Women” is told in the voice
of the prostitute mother of a young boy self described as “stuck between day and night in
a golden amber bronze” (84). She goes on to say of her son: “I whisper my mountain
stories in his ears, stories of ghost women with the stars in their hair. I tell him of the
deadly snakes lying at one end of the rainbow and the hat full of gold at the other end.
[...] I want him to forget that we live in a place where nothing lasts” (86). It is clear to
this mother who whose place in society is not fixed on either side of the rainbow, or even
among the ‘ghost women with stars in their hair’ that in Haiti, nothing lasts, except the
stories to pass on.

Dispossession and marginality are not the bane only of exiles. They exist
everywhere as Danticat makes clear -- on the sea, in the sea, in death, life, in Haiti and in
the United States. Danticat creates spaces in her work where the impossible suggests
what is probable and that these situations exist, improbable as they seem, outside fiction.

The point, in the end, is to locate a space outside the imprisoning facts of hard reality (whether this be exile, poverty or trauma) where stories can be shared in order to resurrect and pass on a rich legacy from the second oldest republic in the Americas in order to claim a post-border identity and reclaim centre space from which to encounter the world.

Locating Danticat’s ideal homeland for which Danticat’s characters search in Krik? Krak! and The Dew Breaker, (collections of short stories located in Haiti, on and inside the sea, as well as in the United States) requires readings that seek ways in which going the butterfly’s way may or may not solve the ache for an ideal place to call home. The butterfly’s way, a Haitian expression for migration (usually to the United States), is a journey undertaken to leave behind pain, poverty, and trauma. On arrival in the United States, migrants often meet resistance to their familiar way of life as they embark on their new one. Migration does not always offer a place of solace especially when, as Haitians in United States are well aware, their torturers often live amongst them.\(^\text{10}\) Thus the violence that they may have run away from in the first place is still directed towards them in ways as they ran away from.

Helen Scott describes Danticat’s work as “always aware of the continuing dynamics of imperialism that combine with domestic forces to thwart Haitians periodic mass revolts. [.....] Danticat transforms these realities into emotionally and visually powerful fiction laced with motifs of suicide, dead infants, breeched and stillbirths, scars

\(^{10}\) Emmanuel “Toto” Constant is the founder of FRAPH (Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti), a death squad to kill the supporters of former President Bertrand Aristide in Haiti. He has also claimed to be a member of the CIA. In 1996, the Clinton administration lifted a deportation order against him to allow him to stay in the United States. Until a fraud case against him in July 2008, Constant had lived quietly with his relatives in Queens, New York. Constant is one amongst many characters being watched by TRIAL, an internet watchdog whose objectives it is to: “fight against impunity of the perpetrators, accomplices and instigators of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, torture, enforced disappearances and the crime of aggression.”
and nightmares, all of which symbolize lost hope and political despair, but also of fire, flight, transformation and resurrection that suggests continuous hope for social change and renewal” (30). I argue that the transformation of Danticat’s characters is not only in the telling of such stories but is only complete when they extract themselves from their surroundings and historical positioning in their societies, or by finding a way to express themselves out of the violent and often traumatic positions they find themselves in. 

While butterfly’s way offers an escape from the realities of their lives, Danticat’s characters identify the need to maintain a sense of who they are as they re-invent a reality in which they can retain their authenticity. Michael Dash correctly identifies these characters as “condemned to crossing and re-crossing from one country to another, between the past and the present, dream and reality without ever finding satisfactory answers” (40), but he fails to observe that there are characters locate the answers and pass it on, even though they themselves may not get there.

Getting away, flight -- whether it is in the form of hot-air balloon flying as in “A Wall of Fire Rising”; imagined flight in “Nineteen Thirty Seven”; travel by plane and voices on radio “Seven”; singing in “The Funeral Singer”; and the butterflies in “Children of the Sea” -- offers escape to a place of other possibilities as it allows for a comparison between the place of origin and the probable destination. Danticat notes in a Transition interview that “there is a lot of flight imagery in the myths of people who have been enslaved. As soon as you put limits on people, their imagination takes flight” (115). Even though some characters may not, as Dash notes, find satisfactory answers, they imagine and propel themselves to another way of being in whatever way they can. One way in which this is most often employed is through going the butterfly’s way both as
motif and as travel. This chapter will examine how going the butterfly’s way, flight, allows for the re-invention of place, and sometime that re-invention of the self, to maintain authenticity in *Krik? Krak!* and *The Dew Breaker*.

Narratives of flight in *Krik?* are told in the voices of a prostitute, poverty stricken and underemployed adults and their families, immigrant families in New York, boat people, alleged witches and their daughters, the mentally ill, and the bereaved. Also included are a visual artist, a singer, and a child actor. Including artists among the impoverished and marginalized supports Danticat’s conviction of the role of art in linking the experience of the marginalized out of the real into imagination and historical memory thereby creating empowerment in a reality that can be a challenging and damming place to be. Danticat makes a claim for the restoration of memory through art, so that even as the artists are creating aesthetically pleasing products, they remain engaged in creating

a symbolic journey between the present and the past, a dreamlike memory.

It’s as if these artists are painting their past lives in Ginen, the ancestral paradise. They are painting landscapes that our ancestors must have known – on some level, these artists are subconsciously or consciously familiar with them, like monarch butterflies. (*Transition* 119)

The butterfly in *Krik?* works as a metaphor for inspired escape as well as the sign for news, both good and retains itself as the inspiration for art and expression. From “Children of the Sea,” the young woman writes to her lover on a boat on the way to the United States: “I don’t sketch butterflies anymore because I don’t even like seeing the
sun. Besides, manman says that butterflies can bring news. The bright ones bring happy news and the black ones warn us of deaths” (5). Later in that story, the butterflies become part of a dark landscape representing the vast and seemingly impossible distance shrouded with news of death: “I can’t think about you being there in the waves. My hair shivers. From here, I cannot even see the sea. Behind these mountains are more mountains and more black butterflies still and a sea that is endless like my love for you” (29). In this instance, going the butterfly’s way is not an option for the young woman because she sees death both in the distant mountains and close by when their neighbor being killed. Her escape lies in the letters she writes. She can no longer make sketches of butterflies, once a favorite pursuit. Butterflies have become an ominous symbol, one synonymous with death. She now spends time under the banyan trees where her mother comforts, teaches and confides in her. Her mother tells her that “if we call the gods from beneath [the banyan trees], they will hear our voices clearer” (28). For these two women, like the congregators in “Caroline’s Wedding,” prayers do not stop the news of a boat sinking off the coast of the Bahamas. Her and her lover’s letters become the ways that they can write of their existence which, in turn, is the only way the reader can experience this couple who are separated by distance, violence, and the impossibility of their letters reaching each other. It is enough for these two that they write to each other until they can not. The ultimate proof of their existence and their escape lie in the letters, even though their realities offer no way out of a shortened life for him and unhappiness for her.

Escape, then, is motivated by the yearning for a space which is unburdened or haunted by violence and its ensuing trauma, but which is available as long as one can seek to engage in the imagination as a means to empower and perhaps inspire other
possibilities. The intrigue for Danticat is in "the thin line between being in the fire and
being near the fire – listening to the story and being the subject of the story" (Transition
120). The movement from subject (being in the fire), to artist (as one who creates a new
world) is encapsulated in the transformation by trans-acculturation and transportation of
the characters in The Dew Breaker as they deal with the rupture in their lives by going
and living the butterfly's way. Physical and imagined places come together to provide a
space where re-invention is an important part of homecoming, allowing for transporting
and the creative acts -- writing, singing, sculpting and sewing of one's self into (or
sometimes out of) an existence –without which many of the characters remain invisible
and voiceless in the larger society.

For the artists in Dew, art is first a mode of expression. Ka, from "Book of the
Dead," sculpts only figures of her father because he is her single muse, much in the same
way that her father obsesses about Ancient Egypt. Soon the reader discovers that Ka is
looking for an aspect of her father that she hopes will reveal itself through her carvings in
the same way that her father keeps returning to the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Her
father notes that as a child, Ka only noticed the missing limbs from the ancient Egyptian
pieces at the museum which first inspired her to be a sculptor. He tells her, "Ka, I am
like one of those statues (19)," by way of confessing to an important aspect of himself
that is missing. "One day for the hunter, one day for the prey. Ka, your father was the
hunter, he was not the prey" (21). She realizes that with this confession she has also lost
her subject: "the prisoner father I loved as well as pitied" (31). That prisoner father was a
construction by her parents to hide, or escape from, the reality of a terrible knowledge
which leaves her mute. Ka does not have a narrative voice for the rest of the book, but
can imagine her father’s nightmares. “Maybe he dreams of dipping his hands in the sand on a beach in his own country and finding that what he comes up with is a fistful of blood” (30). The manifestation of this nightmare makes up the rest of the narratives in the book. With that expressed, Ka resigns to become a mask for her father, a living sculpture and a *ti bon ange*, a guardian angel for him (34).

Ka’s art, as a source of understanding and apparent investigation, is no longer relevant when she discovers her father’s secret. Art cannot be an escape for Ka because her father, as she knew him, is an imaginative construction who has always been her single source of inspiration. He now represents the worst of Haitian society, both in the diaspora and locally in Haiti. For the rest of the book, Ka remains a figure from the past that existed before this revelation. The loss of her subject becomes the loss of her mode of expression and her voice. From this information, she can no longer escape — not through art, not through speech. She is trapped between nightmares: her father’s past and the knowledge from the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead which ultimately requires that a person be judged by the weight of his or her heart. She is also trapped in a name — Egyptian for life essence — which makes her a symbol for the man who was a life taker, a killer.

From “A Wall of Fire Rising,” Guy, a young father worries about how his son will judge him after his death. It is important his son remembers him as a man who wanted to fly, not just as a political act, but also as a source of inspiration. Beyond dreams, flight offers possibilities for Guy and his family, away from the legacy he has inherited from his own father. He tells his wife, Lilli:
“You know that question I asked you before,” he said, “how a man is remembered after he is gone? I know the answer now. I know because I remember my father, who was a very poor struggling man all his life. I want to remember him as a man that I would never want to be.” (75)

Guy seeks to escape from his underemployment – only receiving work on that one day to wash toilets in the sugar factory – by closely observing the hot air balloon which belongs to the son of the factory owner as his son studies his lines for a school play from Boukman, a heroic character in Haitian history. The juxtaposition of the son reciting the words of a revolutionary and the father attempting revolution by flying a hot air balloon is terribly ironic because both historical and fictional instances fail.

Guy reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a lighter and a crumpled piece of paper. He lit the paper until it burned to an ashy film. The burning paper floated in the night breeze for a while, landing in fragments on the grass. (62)

Guy flies for a moment, like the burning piece of paper he uses to illustrate flight to Lilli, and then falls to his death on the field. The historical Boukman inspires slaves to

11 Dutty Boukman, a rebel leader of the slave rebellion in 1791 is said to have held a vodou ritual in the Bois Cayman sealing a bind between slave rebel leaders Toussaint L’Ouverture and George Biassou. Danticat infers that the chant of “A Wall of Fire” is an imagined re-writing of Boukman’s words. This is supported by David Patrick Geggus who discusses the Bois Cayman ceremony in chapter 6 of Haitian Revolutionary Studies.
fight for their freedom even though that rebellion is eventually quashed. The importance of these parallels lies in the propulsion and empowerment for others to take up the fight and pass on the stories. In the Bois Cayman revolt led by Toussaint L’Ouverture, and inspired by Boukman, the fight for freedom is eventually taken up through a series of other slave revolts that eventually lead to the independence of Haiti in 1804 as the first Black republic and, to date, the only country from which slave revolts led to national freedom.

Like Boukman et al, Guy attains a lasting legacy. In both instances their survivors are empowered with the knowledge of other possibilities. Guy’s name resurfaces in “Between the Pool and Gardenias” in which Danticat reveals that Marie is the god-daughter of Lilli, Guy’s wife “who killed herself in her old age because her husband had jumped out of a flying balloon and her grown son had left her to go to Miami” (94). That she commits suicide in the twilight of her own life speaks, on one hand, to the haunting of her husband’s failed flight, and, in the other, her understanding that her life is her own to take when she pleases. For Carmen Nge, Guy’s suicide is a “conscious act of interruption” different from Celianne’s12 suicide which she calls “an act of power,” even though both, according to her, are political acts (Postcolonial 205). Nge recognizes that Guy’s story will be remembered in the image of fire which, for Nge, is “a collective symbol of resistance” reflected in the words the young boy’s dramatic piece

---

12 Celianne is the young mother in Children of the Sea (Krik? Krak!) who follows her dead baby overboard after she is forced to throw it into the sea. After her baby dies, the link between her homeland and the United States is broken while the sea offers itself as a place of reconciliation with her dead child.
and title of the story "A Wall of Fire" (200). Even so, the highly personal nature of
Guy’s suicide speaks to his need to leave a legacy that his son can be proud of.

Listen to this Lilli. I want to tell you a secret. Sometimes I just want to
take that big balloon and ride it up in the air. I’d like to sail off
somewhere and keep floating until I get to a really nice place with a nice
plot of land where I could be something new. I’d build my own house,
keep my own garden. Just be something new. (73)

However, Guy is remembered by Marie who inherits from Lilli and Guy the
knowledge that she has the power to escape from her own life. Marie is also the daughter
of the narrator in "Nineteen Thirty Seven" who recounts the story of her mother’s escape
in 1937 from a massacre along the river of the same name that borders the Dominican
Republic.

On that day so long ago, in the year nineteen thirty seven, in the Massacre
River, my mother did fly. Weighted down by my body inside hers, she
leaped from Dominican soil into the water and out again on the Haitian
side of the river. She glowed red when she came out, blood clinging to
her skin, which at that moment looked as though it were in flames. (49)

Marie’s grandmother’s flaming skin is an immediate reference back to the piece of paper
Guy uses to demonstrate flight to Lilli.
When Lilli rebukes her husband for wanting to fly, he replies, “You’re right Lilli, you’re right. But look what [God] gave us instead. He gave us reasons to want to fly. He gave us the air, the birds, our son” (68). Guy lives with his wife and son in a slum by the sugar factory which is also the town’s main employer. Sugar in Haitian history, as in the history of the Americas and now, maintains within its production a legacy of pain, exploitation and addiction. Guy’s connection with the sugar factory is linked to “Monkey Tails,” from The Dew Breaker, where Romain, the son of a wanted macoute “paraphrases Voltaire “‘C’est la prix qu’ils mangent du sucre en Europe,” […] That’s the price of their eating sugar in Europe” (152). He goes on to explain, “I tell you that in Europe they eat sugar with our blood in it” (153). Danticat reaches back into eighteenth-century Europe to connect the French philosopher with the addiction to sugar, the exploitation of the Haitian masses and sugar’s relationship to the macoutes through the governments of countries like Haiti where it is grown. By implicating the sugar-consuming reader and greater society, Danticat strengthens her argument for finding reasons for people like Guy to escape.

To make matters worse for Guy and his family, the owners of the factory are “eccentric ‘Arabs,’ Haitians of Lebanese or Palestinian descent whose family had been in the country for years” (60), suggesting that the foreignness of the factory owners are a better indicator for success in Haiti even though families like Guys’ have provided ‘blood sugar’ to the rest of the world for at least three centuries. This is Scott’s “the inescapable weight of the past as it bears down upon people in the present” (29). The inescapable weight, I might add, includes the sugar consumer (some of whom are readers) who must
shoulder some responsibility for the on-going brutality in the life of people who live in the shadow of the sugar farms and their dependents -- like Guy and his family. Guy tells his wife, "Pretend that we live in a time of miracles and we believed in them" (67).

Eventually Guy flies into a miracle, and to his death. His wife insists that his eyes be left open so that he can always "look at the sky" (80). The possibility for flight then, depends on the character who can rally whatever is in his or her surroundings to fire up, as it were, an imaginative break-away. The combination of God-given imagination and inspiration is particularly useful for Guy given the position that he finds himself and his family in, even if his flight ends in death.

Flight as escape in "Nineteen Thirty Seven" for which the women are imprisoned is a gesture to 'the return,' extensively discussed by Brand as a diasporic wish to return to Africa.

There are many stories, fables, and secrets in the Diaspora about the way home to Africa [...] Stories of Africans flying home to Africa or walking home on the ocean floor abound in continental America and the archipelago. Africans born in Africa were said to know how to fly. If when they arrived in the Americas, one legend has it, they did not eat salt, they could fly back home. Salt would weigh them down or turn their blood [...] One may not call these ways practical but they certainly suggest a mastery of way-finding. So much so that no known map is necessary, nor any known methods of conveyance. Except escaping the body. (A Map 43-44).
This necessary escape propels actions such as those women are accused of in "Nineteen Thirty Seven" (a nod back, also, to the witch trials of seventeenth-century Salem). The need for flight is an intergenerational one. "Our mothers were the flames and we were the blaze. We came from the bottom of the river where blood never stops flowing, where my mother’s dive towards life – her swim among all those bodies slaughtered in flight – gave her those wings of flame. The river was the place where it had all begun" (Krik? 41). Again, Danticat invokes a watery grave, reminiscent of the Middle Passage. The narrator awakes to a memory of "the crystal glow of the river as we had seen it every year when my mother dipped my hand in it" (48) – Danticat’s symbol of hope.

Butterflies resurface as hope in "Night Women" in which a prostitute narrator describes herself as "stuck between the day and night in a golden amber bronze" (84). Inside this halo, she clearly recognizes her position and eventually her son’s position in a place where "nothing lasts" (86) except perhaps a life-long struggle to escape poverty and oppression. She wants him to forget the elusiveness of their existence by the use of fantastic images to enrich his dreams. She wants him to think about "A hat full of gold," "a stream of glass clear hibiscus," "dreams of angels skipping over his head," even as one of her clients spends the "rest of the night with his breadfruit head rocking on my belly button" (87). Her son is "like a butterfly fluttering on a rock that stands out naked in the middle of a stream" (85). He is a beautiful creature, who while he is still hers remains untainted still because he "does not know that one day a woman like his mother may judge him by the whiteness of his teeth" (87), evaluating, perhaps, his economic bracket, or health from his appearance, as she does her customers. Someday the boy will become
a man and truly belong to the place where “nothing lasts.” Both Guy and the prostitute mother know that theirs is “a place where nothing lasts,” but know that possibilities exist outside that reality. They both escape through their imagination.

For Beatrice, the bridal seamstress in the story by the same name, nightmare reveals itself in the presence of the dew breaker who she believes follows her to every neighborhood she moves to. Student journalist Aline, sent to interview Beatrice, recognizes that there is a bigger story than the “SEAMSTRESS RETIRES” which is what her boss wants her to write. Aline has “never imagined that people like Beatrice existed, men and women whose tremendous agonies filled every blank space in their lives” (Dew 137). In discovering Beatrice’s secret, Aline aligns herself with Michel, from “Monkey Trails,” who finds out that his friend Romain is the son of a tontons macoute on the same night that he discovers his own father is Monsieur Christophe, the neighborhood big shot. How does one maintain the balance between revealing the trauma while respecting other individuals and their relationships? Ka and Aline’s dilemma is deciding what to do with the information as they practice their craft: does one reveal what one knows just because one knows? Michel decides that he will not let his mother feel like a liar. He plans to lie to his unborn child and say that his grandfather “lost himself to something ‘political’” (164). Aline decides to dedicate herself to write about people like Beatrice. Ka remains lost in her father’s revelation and resigns herself to her role as a mask for him. Ka can no longer escape through art or through voice. She remains trapped in her role as her father’s mask.

Exposing one’s story as a way of getting out from under the burden of that knowledge requires that one has a mode of expression and an audience to receive or
encounter it. Amy Novak seeks to deal with these questions when she asks how “the present listen to marginal voices in writing histories of national trauma? How do the silenced testify to trauma? With what voice and to whom?” (*Arizona* 95) The point for Novak, is that in having an opportunity to “voice undocumented stories and to redress injustice by communicating on a personal level to its listener or reader, testimony and testimonial literature remains a powerful narrative form; however […] troubled by the problem of address for no one hears [the] story” (95). This is also the problem of Michel, Ka, Aline, and Beatrice. Their having a skill, the need and the opportunity to give voice to the horrible injustices suffered in the past does them little good if there is no one to take the story seriously. Aline, who is determined to write about stories like Beatrice’s, still has to come to terms with the fact that her editor might reject her angle and she may have to find an audience on her own. She has her own secrets to deal with but is determined to find her own way out from the burden of her secrets. Aline’s flight happens through the telling of stories of people like Beatrice. The importance of redressing injustice by communication, as Novak notes, is only one aspect of the healing process. The tragedy remains if, as she goes on to say, the story is repressed and silenced. “And yet, […] silence should not be equated with the lack or nonexistence of an event, for inside silence voices clamor to be heard; repression is not forgetting” (93-94).

The closing pages of *The Dew Breaker* deal precisely with this dilemma – what is to be done with the repressed information that escapes especially if, by repressing it, there had been a chance at a freedom of sorts (the way Anne, the dew breaker’s wife, makes sense of her own life)? “There was no way to escape this dread anymore, this pendulum
between regret and forgiveness, this fright that the most important relationships of her life were always on the verge of being severed or lost, that the people closest to her were always disappearing” (242). It has been a fleeting freedom for Anne who has remained ‘free’ by looking for miracles and retaining a strong faith “that atonement, that reparation, was possible and available for everyone” (242). She believes in the complete control of their daily rituals so as not to attract any undue attention towards her family.

What Anne is most afraid of however, is that she lacks the ability to “decipher all the details and make sense of them” (240). Already, she has spent many years believing that the coded and unsaid between her and her husband would allow them never to cross the gulf that made her brother the last prisoner that the dew breaker encountered. “He endorsed the public story, the one that they preacher had killed himself. And she accepted that he had only arrested him and turned him over to someone else. Neither believing the other or themselves. But never delving too far back in time, beyond the night they met” (241). Her faith in the unspoken silence between them and the silence in which they bring their daughter up is what buoys her through the years. Now she realizes that the salvation of the relationship between her and Ka lies in dialogue. “Anything to keep talking” (242), or singing, or flying, or sculpting, or painting, or chanting, or any of the activities that the characters in the do to express their longing to escape.

So like Ka, Guy, and Marie, Anne resorts to her imagination to create a perfect situation; one in which she would have the opportunity to tell Ka the truth. “She had imagined the two of them, just the girls, on the ocean, on a cruise liner: or some other place from which her daughter couldn’t escape. But here they are, thousands of miles apart and not even looking at each other as she attempts an explanation” (239).
In Anne’s mind, the truth can only be faced in an imprisoning situation, mirroring Brand’s assertion that the body is the prison and the only escape one can make is by reclaiming and cleansing it (45). But Anne remains trapped, as it were, in her own nightmares the same way that that her daughter imagines that her husband is too.

It wasn’t that she thought that the fat man was her half-brother, the one who’d disappeared in the sea so long ago, that this girth, this vastness was something the youngest child in her family had garnered from his lost years of inhaling seawater and weeds. It wasn’t that she thought that he’d emerged from the cemetery, enlarged by the bones and souls of other ghosts […] It wasn’t that she thought of what she’d be doing when that question finally came. Like her husband, she thought she might be on a trip. (238-239)

As a young woman, Anne had suffered from epileptic fits that sometimes allowed her clairvoyance. After her brother’s death, the attacks stopped, as did her clairvoyance. Having kept secret of her husband’s unfortunate past, and refused to discuss the real possibility of his responsibility in her brother’s death, Anne has nowhere to turn to. She cannot escape her body. She cannot escape the secret, having no way to explain it. Paradoxically, Anne has been living in the time of miracles – the same one that Guy wants Lilli to imagine. The ultimate miracle she needs is the one which will allow her to escape from the weight of the secret she bears and keep her daughter at the same time. Herman suggests that the only way for Anne to recover is to find some kind of solidarity which according to Anne’s lifestyle may not be possible to get. “To hold traumatic
reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and that joins the victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers, and family” (3), none of which Anne has by the end of her narrative. The only person she can ally with is thousands of miles away, with her daughter, and he is the perpetrator. The alliance that has kept her and her husband together is the knowledge that their daughter need never know what happened back ‘there.’ Ka is their American child – questioning, defiant sometimes, but always respecting that her parents do things the Haitian way. Ka represents the impossibility of cross the chasm between Anne and her husband -- it cannot be crossed. Anne’s brother and last surviving sibling is the last prisoner of her husband. Her failure to confront her husband means that she has now lost her daughter. Ka is lost in the dead tone of the telephone, and with that, Anne loses her last living relative.

Anne’s solidarity is best established with Nadine, the nurse from “Waterchild” who cannot find a way in which to express her trauma of having had an abortion she regrets. For Nadine, like Anne, the telephone is out of the question, as is writing. She examines and re-examines the letter from her parents, looking, as it were, for evidence of their empathy which is not apparent. She shuts out her parents and her ex-lover. She does not confide to any of her workmates, which leaves her essentially alone, like Anne, and like basenji, the kind of dog who cannot bark (69). Eventually Nadine creates a shrine inspired by what she understands is a Japanese way to honor unborn children. It comprises a pebble in her favorite glass filled with water next to the micro-cassette tapes containing messages from her former boyfriend; a re-creation, in fact, of the “Children of
the Sea" — in which messages are never returned and the bottom of the ocean, like the pebble and the cassettes, contains bodies and memories of the dead, like Célianne’s dead baby at the bottom of the sea. But as Judith Lewis Herman asserts, “Atrocities refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work [...] Murder will out. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims. The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma” (Introduction).

Danticat offers the act of reading as a gesture of hope and as the space in which the victim can “proclaim them aloud,” thus resurrecting the oral tradition where a community traditionally gathered to listen and to tell stories in an exchange that allows for the temporary escape from reality, and from the burden of secrets which would then allow for flight. Anne and Nadine find their voices and an audience for their stories in text. Without any more speech attributable to them, both women’s experience and traumas still have an opportunity to get out of the fire is, and into this textual space. They can still be heard.

Writing and reading, then, become a progression of the traditional oral/aural exchange and a place where those trapped by their secrets can find a space for fantasies to be acted out, secrets, as violent as they can be, to be revealed, and ghosts to be calmed. The act of reading the stories from Krik? Krak! and The Dew Breaker allows the narrators and characters to become narrators; to ‘get out of the fire,’ as Danticat would
have it, to engage in the story telling, become artists and creators of their life stories.

Including and fictionalizing non-fiction creates an opportunity for the people “who were singing, searching for meaning in the dust. And sometimes, they were talking to faces across the ages, faces like yours and mine” (Krik? 223). Appropriately, Danticat’s reference to the face can be read doubly as the readers’ faces, or the faces of people like her, Haitian and female. As a reader, it is fitting that the opening story of Krik? Krak! be an epistolary correspondence between two people who will never read the letters. Their expressions, written and not grimaced as it were, are only available to the reader or readers who are undefined by location or background or gender. This creates a reading community, a much bigger receptacle for the expression of the overwhelming pain that Ka, Anne and Nadine, for instance, experience by their inability to say what they need to say. In the end, Herman’s fear of the prevalence and insidious nature of secrets need not be a threat to the survival of the victim muted by circumstance. By circumventing the story-telling culture through literacy to include a reading public, the reality of individual Haitians (out of the oppressed masses), and the Haitian tradition of speaking the self into existence will help to enrich the ideal space that Danticat has carved out by writing of that existence to an inclusive audience.

We raise our glasses, broken and unbroken alike, to the terrible days behind us, and the uncertain ones ahead. (Dew Breaker, 80)

Locating Danticat’s origins in Haiti and her emotional connections to the two men who raised her is an integral part of her search for an ideal place to call home. Danticat has regularly explored father/daughter relationships in fiction but now investigates them in a nonfiction text in which she searches for, and finds, her origins. Readings of father/daughter relationships in her fiction alongside her own relationship is an extraordinary opportunity to see the writer as a creator and daughter. This chapter looks at Danticat’s ideas about origins through her patrilineal relationships to her father and uncle in Brother, I’m Dying, and in the father/daughter relationships she has written about in her fiction, primarily in Krik? Krak! and The Dew Breaker.

Danticat’s Brother, I’m Dying, a book she refers to as a nous-moir, is written for her father, Mira Danticat, and Uncle Joseph Dantica, because, as she says, “they can’t” (26). Her father’s diagnosis of end stage pulmonary fibrosis means that “he doesn’t have any air to spare” (BID 10) and her uncle, having undergone a tracheotomy to speak by aid of a machine, loses his mechanical voice box at a most critical time – when he has to convince American immigration office that he has a credible fear of returning to Haiti. With a ‘breath-less’ father and a ‘voice-less’ uncle, Danticat, as daughter and niece, makes a textual record of the experiences of both men, in part because they cannot, and in

---

13 In an interview with Writers on Record with Victoria Lautman, Danticat refers to Brother as an ‘us-moir,’ nous-moir, as opposed to memoir, because as she says, it is ‘our’ family story.
part because they are part of a rich legacy that must now depend on her skills as a writer for documentation.

Danticat’s rendition of *Brother* is particularly harrowing because, as in the situation of the other fathers and daughters in her work, the awful backdrop of violence and injustice suffered by Haitians that Danticat has spent so much of her writing on is a consistent and integral part of the story. An examination of Danticat’s role simultaneously as daughter, writer, researcher, and translator will show how Danticat searches for, finds, and documents her origins.

A ‘lacuna of loss and dispossession’ as Carole Sweeney describes the recurring situation of Haiti, is where Danticat’s family finds itself from the end of the summer of 2004 into 2005 when her uncle and father die a few months from each other. Haiti tailspin into more violence and Hurricane Jeanne wreaks havoc in the already damaged country, killing over seven hundred people. It is from this lacuna that Danticat writes about her patrilineal origins. Compelled and haunted by her father’s and uncle’s experiences, Danticat writes to honor them as well as to add her family’s legacy to the cultural history of the Caribbean which Martinician writer and critic Edouardo Glissant calls a forgotten one. Caribbean history, Glissant claims, is “a struggle without witness, the inability to create even an unconscious chronology, a result of the erasing memory in all of us” (62). An examination of father/daughter relationships in Danticat’s work, both fiction and nonfiction, in the context of Glissant’s assertion will make it clear that Danticat’s work is not a faithful disciple of this theory – her history is by no means a forgotten one. She uses oral narratives, myth, memory and documents as evidence of record keeping and history within families. In her own her family’s experience with
death, identity, homeland and belonging alongside Glissant’s theory, one can ultimately read *Brother* as one tragedy in the Haitian experience.

Danticat, who is well known for her work on mother/daughter relationships,\(^4\) has, on occasion, inserted a strong father’s voice in the lives of some of her female characters. In this paper, the father/daughter relationships in *The Dew Breaker* and *Krik? Krak!* take centre stage to compare with Danticat’s own experience as the daughter of Mira Danticat and Joseph Dantica, the two brothers who raised her.

In writing of this harrowing period Danticat continues in the story-telling tradition of the Caribbean to add to, reclaim and re-create a family’s history and to show evidence of ‘struggle with witness.’ The struggle in this context is the seemingly impossible situation Danticat finds herself in in the summer of 2004. Writing *Brother* is Danticat’s “attempt at cohesiveness, and at re-creating a few wondrous months when [my father’s and uncle’s] lives and mine intersected in startling ways, forcing me to look forward and back at the same time” (26). In these months, Danticat experiences transience in the deaths of both men, and the birth of her daughter, Mira, in the months between.

Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw suggests that for writers like Danticat, transience is a

\(^4\) *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Danticat’s first collection of short stories, deals with four generations of women and the interplay between sexual and political trauma in their lives. She dedicates that book to “the brave women of Haiti, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, cousins, daughter, and friends,” but immediately distances herself from the allegations of writing for all Haitian mothers. “Of course, not all Haitian mothers are like your mother. Not all Haitian daughters have been tested, as you have been” (236). See Eileen Burchell’s “As My Mother’s Daughter: *Breath, Eyes, Memory*” and Jana Evans Braziel (“Défilées Daughters: Revolutionary Narratives of Ayit (Haiti), Nanchon (Nation) and Dyaspora (Diaspora) in Edwidge Danticat’s *Krik? Krak!*”

46
burden, but it may also be a gift and a place in which to find home. And home for Myriam Chancy is “not only a place but also a state of self-understanding to which we return time and again in order to see and know ourselves for who we are forced to endure” (*Searching* xxii). It is obvious that that ‘state of self-understanding’ for Danticat is a textual space, and a home where she can make, in her words, ‘an attempt at cohesiveness.’ Being American, Haitian, a daughter, niece and expectant mother in 2004 - 05, within this lacuna, Danticat finds her stability as a writer threatened in part because of the conflicting expectations within these roles.

Nevertheless, writing becomes a place where she can engage with the past and present at the same time. Through writing, Danticat learns to transcribe and translate her family’s existence and experience. When her father buys her a typewriter as a twelve year old, she recalls him telling her that she would now be able to “measure her words,” to “line them up neatly” (*Brother* 119). She believes that her father meant that literally. “He and I both had a slightly crooked cursive handwriting.... Still [those words] feel like such prescient gifts to me now, this typewriter and his desire, very early on, to see me properly assemble my words” (119). With the blessing of her father to write and translate (as she does for her uncle – from lip-reading to Creole, and later when she reads her father’s letters, from Creole text to spoken Creole), Danticat re-works her texts with a sense of orality, that even read silently, can be heard and so creates a space in which she can reclaim and honor the Haitian tradition through writing and by documentation.

*Brother, I’m Dying* begins with a Paul Auster quotation as the epilogue: “To begin with death. To work my way back to life, and then, finally, to return to death,” reflecting Freud’s: “If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death” (300). Indeed,
*Brother, I'm Dying* begins *in medias res* -- Danticat literally has to prepare for the death of her father. From this dramatic situation, Danticat works her way back through flashbacks, memories and documentation. Her insistence on minutiae adds to the rich detail that she presents on the life and past of Uncle Joseph, but manner in which she hones down the plot to the second details works like an arsenal — showing and the quick passage of time, racing to his death at the detention centre as a number-- Alien 27041999

For instance:

At 10.03 p.m, my uncle Franck received a call at his home in Brooklyn (220).

At 11.00 p.m., my uncle was given some chips and soda again (221)

At 11.45 p.m., he signed a form saying his personal property was given to him (221).

At 4.20 a.m., my uncle and Maxo were transported to the airport's satellite detention centre (221).

Increasingly, everything to do with Uncle Joseph becomes reduced to forms, measurements and time.

His vital signs were checked again at midnight, then at 1.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. the next day, when his temperature was 96 degrees, his heart rate a dangerous 114 beats per minute and his blood pressure 159/80. At 9.00 pm he was given another IV and 5mg od Vasotec to help lower his blood pressure. By 11.00 a.m. his heart rate had decreased to 102 beats per minute, still distressingly high for an eighty-one-year-old man with his symptoms. (238)
And yet Joseph Danticat is a man with a history, a well-earned reputation, a family who loves him, a person with a valid visa and reason to want to be in the United States, and a man who loved his country so much that he never considered moving to the United States to be close to both his brothers but only visited on several occasions over thirty years. Danticat’s *Brother* is a map legend for the reader to understand that for every Haitian asylum seeker, there is a multiplicity of reasons to explain his or her need to leave their country, which is to say, not all dreams are made in America.

*Frè, map mouri,* brother, I’m dying, the words of Uncle Joseph as he reveals the diagnosis of throat cancer to his brother, also a cry for the international community to recognize the dire situation in Haiti. While violence, instability and nature’s wrath have long been a mainstay for Haiti, Haiti is also Danticat’s homeland; clearly a place for inspiration and solace from the chaotic political dilemma she finds herself in as an American citizen of Haitian descent.

Danticat, similar to the characters in her fiction, looks to Haitian history, myth, and culture to contextualize the lives of her father and uncle as they live out their last months. She recalls the stories her grandmother used to ward off death, the ones that explained death and the brushes with death encountered by Uncle Joseph on the brink of death when he was stricken by throat cancer and another time, when Danticat was six years-old and her uncle had malaria. The intimate history of Haiti and the United States plays out in the Danticat family as it does in countless other families in the recollection in which her uncle remembers how, as a boy, he watched the US marines use the head of a dead Caco rebel as a football. *In Brother,* Danticat weaves the lives of migrant Haitians and their relatives at home with the way that international and historical relations play out
in their lives. Uncle Joseph, as she notes, is born during the American occupation of Haiti, and dies incarcerated in an American detention centre having spent his life in the shadow of American foreign policy. However, this inspired document is more than the story of the two most important men in Danticat's life. It is about brothers, which Danticat has experienced as the only sister to three brothers; and about these two particular brothers; and by extension, the brotherhood of nations, so to speak.

Throughout Danticat's writing, it is clear that one of her intentions is to write the Haitian experience into existence, to make individuals out of masses and hordes; the refugees, the boat people, the AIDS carriers and other ways that Haitians have been stereotyped, particularly in the American context. Indeed, "Children of the Sea," from *Krik? Krak!*, her first collection of short stories, was inspired by boat people in Guantanamo Bay where Danticat volunteered as a Creole translator and assistant for a charity organization.

While I was with this family and other refugees in Providence, one thing kept coming up over and over again: when they were at sea, what they were most concerned about was disappearing without a trace. They were extremely worried that no one would remember them or think of them again [...]. What I wanted most to convey in this story was this intense fear of being forgotten, of not having one's memory honored, as well as the joy of being recognized on the other side, which both groups had faced. (*Shaking* 43-44)

Honoring the memory of her uncle and father in *Brother*, belies the fact the Danticat has been gesturing to this as far back as *Krik? Krak!* In that book, Danticat names the old man on the boat in “Children of the Sea” after her father and both uncles.
I ask him for his full name. It is Justin Moise Andre Nozius Joseph Frank Osnac Maximilien. He says it with such an air that you would think him a king [....] I must throw my book out now. It goes down to them, Cèlianne and her daughter and all those children of the sea who might soon be claiming me. I go to them now as though it was always meant to be, as though the very day my mother birthed me, she had chosen me to live life eternal, among the children of the deep blue sea who have escaped the chains of slavery to form a world beneath the heavens and the blood drenched earth where you live. (Krik?27)

In this passage, the narrator sanctifies the text by offering it to the ‘children of the sea’ – who include all the drowned in the Middle Passage. He throws his book into the sea – a book containing in part, the names of an old man who Danticat names after her father and uncles. Having already consecrated her father’s and uncles’ names, Danticat writes Brother as a sanctified account with which she can gesture back towards the unvoiced ancestors from the Middle Passage even as she deals with the challenge presented by the impending deaths in her family and life with her pregnancy. Danticat experiences the deaths in her family as the epicenter of a larger tragedy, as her homeland disintegrates further into chaos and the country of her citizenship continues to singularly abuse and mistreat her fellow Haitians.15 Mostly, Brother is an extension of Danticat’s

15 On Progressive.org, Danticat has written extensively on her views on the American immigrationssystem that has different rules for different nationalities clamoring for asylum as refugees from the Caribbean. According to Danticat, Haitians are routinely incarcerated and eventually returned to Haiti while Dominicans and Cubans are given asylum even though they all arrive via the same route, usually by boat.
foray into the father/daughter relationship that she began in *Krik?Krac!* and followed through in *The Dew Breaker*.

In *Dew*, Danticat explores the relationship between an artist and the self-confessed torturer, her father. While the artist, Ka, is devastated by her father’s revelation and her consequent alienation from her mother, Ka’s father takes comfort in knowing that he named his daughter Ka, after the Egyptian word for life essence—she is a symbol of life and hope for him. In *Brother*, Danticat becomes her father and uncle’s Ka. She belongs with both men, is the daughter of both. During his first visit to New York, her father Mira presents the children proudly to Uncle Joseph. “‘Do you see your children?’ My father blurted out as though he’d been waiting a long time to say it” (129). Both men refer to Danticat and her brothers as ‘your children.’ Years later, Mira tells Uncle Joseph: “‘Your daughter,’” my father said teasing my uncle. “And she doesn’t even tell you you’re going to be a grandfather’” (*Brother* 159). It is clear that Mira fully recognizes Joseph as another father to his children, not only as an uncle.

As the daughter of both Mira and Joseph, Danticat, has also been the communicator between the two men, first, as the reader of her father’s letters for her uncle, and then as a lip-reader for him before he acquired a voice box. It has taken a lifetime of training for Danticat to become a translator, a transcriber and a writer for them which she now must do to present *Brother* as a document for posterity. The fear of not being remembered, especially after losing one’s ability to speak for one’s self, need not

She believes that this rule is racially motivated to exclude the darker-skinned refugees from becoming American.
be an issue for Danticat’s father and uncle. She receives their stories first hand, as she has been doing all her life and records them.

Ka, though, wishes that her father had not confessed to her: “My life would have gone on fine without my knowing these types of things about my father” (Dew 26). But would she have been fine in her ignorance of her family’s past? Undoubtedly, Ka is newly traumatized by her father’s disclosure, and as the American-born daughter of a Haitian immigrant, she feels doubly alienated because her parents have purposefully taught her that Haiti is a distant place of strangers and kept her away from that country. Ka does not know of any of her relatives in Haiti. Her father constantly lies about the place of his origins in Haiti. What Ka will never know is that she is haunted by her maternal uncle’s last thoughts -- this uncle being the last prisoner of the man who would later become her father. That she does not know of this uncle is clear, having never been told, but nevertheless, she knows this:

Maybe the last person my father harmed had dreamed of moments like this into my father’s future, strangers seeing that scar furrowed into his face and taking turns staring at it, avoiding it, forcing him to conceal it with his hands, pretend it’s not there, or make up some lie about it to explain. (Dew 32)

Ka is aware but does not know for a fact that these were her uncle’s last thoughts. This awareness inhabits her like a genetic code because no one else is privy to the uncle’s last thoughts, and there is no other way she should know this. This sort of knowledge,
knowing without knowing, is an illustration on Danticat’s part to show that there is value in the innate information whose sources cannot be independently verified. Ka’s body is a container for memory that can be tapped for information\textsuperscript{16}. Moreover, her parents have never discussed between them (let alone with her), that her uncle is in fact the last prisoner of her father. In his dying moments, the uncle thinks about the terrible wound he has inflicted on the face of the dew breaker.

The wound on the fat man’s face wasn’t what he had hoped; he hadn’t blinded him or removed some of his teeth, but at least he’d left a mark on him, a brand that he would carry for the rest of his life. Every time he looked in the mirror, he would have to confront this mark and remember him. Whenever people asked what happened to his face, he would have to tell a lie, a lie that would further him from the truth (\textit{Dew} 238).

Even though Ka is unaware of just how much she is haunted by her mother’s brother, it is important that she also has a strong sense of justice because she has the information from both the ‘hunter and the prey’ within her. Unlike her father who defines himself clearly as the hunter, and her mother who knows that her brother was the prey, Ka carries within her the thoughts of both hunter and prey. Her mother, Anne, interprets Ka’s sense of fairness as “righteous displeasure” but ultimately Ka is the carrier of stories from both her father and her uncle. Danticat, also a carrier of stories from her maternal uncle and father, has a strong sense of justice.

\textsuperscript{16} Walcott’s assertion that the landscape and the seascapes are all repositories of memory can be extended to the human body who may know without knowing what stories it holds.
I see the sharp inequality between how Haitian and Cuban refugees are treated. Both groups come here because their lives are equally desperate. But on arrival, the Haitians are incarcerated, and some are immediately repatriated, whereas Cubans get to stay and are eligible for citizenship. [...] And recently the Attorney General made another astonishing claim, that there were Pakistani terrorists possibly coming on these boats from Haiti. No one has ever seen a Pakistani coming on a boat from Haiti yet. Ashcroft couldn’t even name one case. (Barsamian Interview)

She is indignant, but does not let her resentment stifle her writing. Danticat is, after all, a regular columnist for Progressive.org for which she writes to maintain awareness of the situation in Haiti for her readers. She writes in Brother, about being part of a delegation of observers organized by the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Centre who go to Krome Detention Centre.

They were Haitian “boat people” and in addition to their names identified themselves by the vessels on which they’d come [...] How can we be sure they’re not younger, I’d asked one of the lawyers in our delegation, if they came with no birth certificates, no papers? The lawyer answered that their ages were determined by examining their teeth. I couldn’t escape this agonizing reminder of slavery auction blocks, where mouths were pried open to determine the worth and state of health. (Brother 211-212)
As offended as Danticat is by what she sees, and how it connects these migrants with the experience of slavery on the one hand, and terrorists on the other, Danticat is not afraid to condemn the injustice of the situation. The dire treatment afforded her uncle is reflected in part through the title of one of the chapters in Dew: Alien 27041999. Her uncle’s file number is reminiscent of the Nazi death camps and is a critique of the way in which the American immigration system dehumanizes asylum seekers.

Dew’s Ka, on the other hand, disturbed as she is by the allegations that her mother knew all along about her father’s past as a torturer, refuses to give her mother a chance to explain. For her, it is clear that having known of her father’s transgressions her mother should have left him. Staying with Ka’s father implicates her mother in his guilt: “At what point did she decide that she loved him? When did she know that she was to have despised him?” (Dew 23). What Ka does not realize is that Anne is bound to her father by the untold secret between. Anne has always known, unlike her daughter, the destructive nature of the secret that now threatens her family and understands more than anyone, what it means that Ka resigns to being a mask for her father.

Danticat is aware of the nuances and paradoxes that exist in relationships. Of her uncle’s situation she writes, “Now he was finally exiled in death. He would become part of the soil of a country that had not wanted him” (Brother 251). She quotes her father saying, “If our country were ever given a chance and allowed to be a country like any other, none of us would live or die here” (251). In fact, her grandfather, Granpè Nozial, was a member of the Caco, a resistance militia that fought against the American

---

17 Danticat’s original gesture towards the Caco is in her naming of three generations of a family of women in her first book, Breath, Eyes, Memory. Caco, as she notes in that book, is also the name of a red-breasted
occupation at the beginning of the twentieth century. Ironically, Danticat notes, her uncle would be “the dead prisoner of the same government that had been occupying his country when he was born […] In essence he was entering and exiting the world under the same flag. Never really sovereign, as his father had dreamed, never really free” (250).

Danticat takes up the challenge that began two generations ago by her rebel grandfather and writes to expose the treatment of her uncle’s incarceration as an example of thousands of Haitians who have sought and been denied asylum in the United States. She will not, like Ka, however, resign to becoming a mask, a ti bon ange, a good angel (DeW 34). Brother requires that Danticat be the advocate for these two men who can no longer fight for themselves and indeed for all the brothers and sisters of Haitian descent. In this fight, she unwittingly gets caught in a limbo that victimizes her part-American, part-Haitian family, and therefore makes her and her family part of a political system that perpetrates the same injustice.

Limbo, a Caribbean dance in which one must dance under a horizontally held rod which is lowered ever closer to the ground until the dancer can no longer get under it, becomes a way in which to read Brother, as Danticat narrates challenge after challenge in the months after her father’s diagnosis of a fatal disease. I use limbo also with an understanding of it as an in-between space and a purgatory of sorts. Limbo18 as a dance

---

18 For Guyanese writer Wilson Harris, limbo is a metaphor for the creativity and resilience of the Africans who underwent horrific experiences in the hulls of the ship during the Middle Passage. In this sense, limbo, as evidence of Danticat’s creativity and flexibility is apparent as is Wilson’s reclamation of limbo as
and as purgatory combines both as a very difficult place to be in because it requires a flexibility as well as patience; skill and faith, all of which Danticat employs in tackling the difficult subject of her latest work. It is also the style in which she writes this *noumoir*, starting *in medias res*, making it apparent to the reader of a whole lifetime and a secure family background preceding the moment of her father's diagnosis at a Brooklyn clinic, and working backwards with increasing speed to its lowest point -- when Uncle Joseph's asylum interview begins: "An interpreter had trouble understanding my uncle's voice box, so Officer Castro asked my uncle to move closer to the phone. As my uncle leaned forward, his hand slipped away from his neck and he dropped his voice box" (232). That Uncle Joseph has no voice without his voice box is not taken into account; neither is the fact that he has documents proving the dire situation he fled from, nor that he has a valid visa to visit the United States, and a family outside the detention centre who would have happily and easily interpreted his words for him.

However, Danticat's family story is only one among many stories of tragedy in the experiences of Haitians in America. From *Krik? Krak!'s "Caroline's Wedding," Caroline and Gracina's father dies of prostate cancer (prophetic of her own family who would be dealing with a fatal disease in America). In this story, Danticat focuses on how the Haitian tradition demands the bereaved family behave after the death of a patriarch. As in her other works, Danticat interweaves her family story with Haitian history and locates it in contemporary politics by the use of myth, memory and the oral tradition. Caroline and Gracina have been instructed by their mother to wear red panties in order to

---

discourage the advances of her father and other male spirits during the night. Gracina and Caroline refuse to believe that spirits can transform from having been caring parents to sexual predators. They insist on being available to their father, however he should come to them; a fact that they keep from their mother, but share between them. Their father does appear in their dreams several months after his death.

We would each have the same dream: Papa walking in a deserted field while the two of us were running after him…. We kept this dream to ourselves because we already knew what Mama would say if we told it to her…. She would … warn us that the day we caught up with Papa in our dream would be the day that we both die. (Krik? 170-171)

In the days before Caroline’s wedding their father appears in their dreams again, after the sisters re-affirm defiance in the belief that wearing red panties would keep their father away.

We had always worn our black panties instead, to tell him that he would be welcome to visit us […]. We continued to wear black underpants as a sign of lingering grief. Another reason that Caroline may have continued to wear hers was her hope that Papa would come to her and say that he approved of her; of her life, of her choices, of her husband. (Krik? 172)

It is clear that the sisters desperately need to hear from their father. They reject the Haitian tradition of bereavement and as Americans, subvert and re-invent it by wearing black underwear to invoke their father’s spirit in order to hear his voice and have his
presence in their lives. Gracina recalls that their father remembered everything and reproduces a litany of memories -- from their grandmother’s death to what their father used to eat; stories of migrant travel to the Bahamas and the Dominican Republic in search of employment; riddles, jokes, and childhood games that involved trapping fireflies in match boxes (Krik? 177-179). The anxiety of the sisters to remain in touch with their father is buoyed by their mother’s belief that “in dreams we travel the years” (189). In telling dreams, stories are shared, connections are made and re-made, and tradition does not die even if people do.

Even though Krik? Krak! was first published in 1991, Danticat has remained consistent the idea of dreams as a way to communicate, to keep families together, and most importantly, as a vehicle for transferring family and social memory. This is also true for Dew’s Ka. “I imagine my father’s nightmares. Maybe he dreams of dipping his hands in the sand on a beach in his own country and finding that what he comes up with is a fistful of blood” (30). Even though Ka does not share her father’s ‘country,’ and beliefs, she becomes the carrier of nightmares, which represented textually and narratively becomes a documented legacy of her family.

Danticat narrates her father’s single dream of his brother, her Uncle Joseph. “My father told me that he dreamed of him only once […] In my father’s dream…my father actually makes it there on time to ride in the ambulance with him and hold his hands as the paramedics drill the tracheotomy’s hole in his neck” (Brother 268). This dream is indicative of her father’s yearning to have been able to support his brother in his time of...

19 Previously Danticat explains that the tracheotomy was performed as an emergency measure by the paramedics so he could breathe (Dew 42).
need. In Mira Danticat’s narration of the dream to his daughter (and her writing of it in turn), it is evident that for this family, the need to be together, especially in bad times, transcends time. Indeed, it is true that, as Caroline’s mother says, ‘in dreams, we travel the years,’ but it is also true that in dreams we can re-imagine our better selves, a quality that is needed to maintain hope in dire and sometimes hopeless life circumstances.

Danticat explores transformation as a trope in father/daughter relationships in “The Funeral Singer” from *Dew*. In this story, the narrator explains how she became a funeral singer: “The first time I sang in public was at my father’s memorial Mass. I sang ‘Brother Timonie,’ a song whose cadence rises and falls, like the waves of the ocean.... And later people would tell me that my sobs reminded them of the incoming tide. From that moment on I became a funeral singer” (175). Beyond her incredible talent, what is remarkable about the funeral singer is her ability to translate funeral singing into empowerment. She decides that funeral singers have a choice about when to sing; that her performance is not bound by death and funerals: “I made a choice that I’d rather stop singing altogether than sing for the type of people who’d killed my father” (179). Having made the choice not to sing at the palace, the funeral singer escapes Haiti to a new life in New York where, as she shares wine with her fellow migrants. She feels as though “I’m drinking blood, not the symbolic blood of the sacraments, but real blood, velvet blood, our own blood” (179). For the funeral singer, there is a clear link between the bloodshed in Haiti that is inescapable and her father’s experience as he was tortured by the *tonton macoutes*: “When my father returned, they’d turned him into an ugly old man. The next day he took his boat out to sea and, with a mouth full of blood, vanished forever” (172). In the moment of drinking blood, the funeral singer is in effect drinking the blood that
was in her father’s mouth, and as a Haitian, tasting the violence that continues to be inflicted on her fellow citizens over there. Inevitably, the funeral singer and daughter, having become a woman refugee, transforms yet again into a politically aware human being who maintains a psychic link to Haiti.

Ultimately, ‘Brother Timonie,’ the song that her father taught her to sing, and the song with which she makes her inaugural performance as a funeral singer, becomes a blessing, and an anthem, complete with a political message. “Brother Timonie, row well, my friend. Don’t you see we’re in trouble? Brother Timonie, the wind’s blowing hard. And we must make it back to land.... Brother Timonie, Brother Timonie, we row on without you. But I know we’ll meet again” (166, 181). The funeral singer and her friends toast the night: “And for the rest of the night we raise our glasses, broken and unbroken alike, to the terrible days behind us and the uncertain ones ahead” (181). It is from her father that the funeral singer becomes politicized and inspired to make a decision that will make her think critically about who she associates with and how important it is to maintain a cultural link with and a love for Haiti, despite its political chaos.

Danticat’s Brother, like the funeral singer’s political education, is also a testament to the politicization of Danticat through the stories of her childhood, for instance, of her grandfather’s involvement with the Caco. When Uncle Joseph discovers that the man married to his adopted daughter Marie is a tonton macoute and is mistreating her, he decides to rescue her from that marriage: “He decided that no matter what the risks, he would go there and bring her home” (83). He tells of how he appealed to a man who might have been his daughter’s father in-law: “Father, for your hair is white enough and you’re old enough that I can call you father, please help me, another father, free my
daughter from her bondage.... Please father.... do me only this one favor. Forget you ever saw me, but I am not leaving without my daughter and her child” (84). The impassioned plea is for the daughter he had adopted after his friend and former boss never returned from a job search in the Dominican Republic.

Uncle Joseph risks everything to save Marie Josephine from the clutches of a violent man who has abandoned her in a shack, beaten, feverish, and malnourished: “He wrapped her body in his arms, thinking that she felt the same to him now as when her father had placed her in his arms as a baby, trusting that he would look after her, that he would always keep her from harm […]. ‘Papa,’ she whispered her mouth now so close that her breath burned his lobes. ‘Papa, even though men cannot give birth, you just gave birth tonight. To me’” (86). These are the kinds of fathers Danticat knows and writes of, fathers who will risk their lives for their daughters; fathers who give birth to adult daughters. This narrative is a painful revelation to the reader to discover that this vulnerable old man at Krome was once such a superman; he was, in fact, Superman to his daughter. It is particularly painful in the context of the eventual reduction of Uncle Joseph into a series of numbers, measurements and filled out forms, as discussed earlier. This is a multiple loss – for America, for Haiti, for Danticat’s family and ultimately for the reader who understands that even such heroes are not automatically afforded respect. It is important to Danticat that she claims and acknowledges this kind of love as part of her legacy, one that she can reach back into for memories to sustain her in the future. Later, when Danticat takes a picture of her father holding her daughter, he tells her, “Now even when I’m gone... the name will stay behind” (257). Uncle Joseph establishes his
name in Danticat's memories of such stories, even as her father's name remains in the
naming of her daughter Mira, after him.

By the end of Brother, Danticat is bereft and unable to make sense of the fact that
both men are now buried in the United States and not at home in Haiti. Danticat exhibits
the same symptoms of the girl in a story narrated in the last pages of Brother. It is told by
an old woman to help a bereaved young woman whose father has recently passed away—
she loves her fathers too much. "It is not our way to let our grief silence us," the old
woman says, providing comfort and the impetus that drives Danticat to write in the first
place. She will not let her grief silence her.

Danticat can then comfortably refute the aspect of Glissant’s theory in which he
observes Caribbean history as one which is unable to "create even an unconscious
chronology" because Danticat's search for history does not depend on an unbroken link
back to history, but rather a circular one in which history is everywhere. History is in the
contemporary atrocities and injustices meted out by the tontons macoutes. It is in the
fisherman songs like "Brother Timmonie." It is also in the act of leaving, of risking
everything to become part of the statistics that wither survive the boat ride to Miami, or
survive the eleven-week English classes, after which the funeral singer will go return to
Haiti, "to join the militia and return to fight" (Dew 180). In "The Funeral Singer," Haiti's
history is a haunting rather than an absence. History reveals itself in the bloody mouth of
a tortured fisherman, in the wine glass of his daughter years later, and in his song which
after becoming a funeral song, morphs into an anthem that inspires a woman to return
home and become part of the resistance.
The parallel thoughts that transcend time and bodies is an example of the strategies Danticat employs to show how experiences can be remembered and articulated outside the verbal realm, something she hopes that can be real in her family.

Every now and then I try to imagine [my father and uncle] on a walk through the mountains of Beausejour.... And in my imagining, whenever they lose track of one another, one or the other calls out in a voice that echoes throughout the hills, Kote w ye frè m? Brother, where are you? And the other one quickly answers, “Mwen lò. Right here, brother. I’m right here.” (Brother 269)

It is important that Danticat retains, through her writing, the unique connection that can only be between fathers and daughters, telling and living, both personal and political. Brother is not only a documentation of her family’s struggle, it is also a biting critique of the situation Haiti remains in, two centuries after the declaration of independence, making it, as has often been noted, the first Black republic in the world. As Danticat advocates for her father and uncle, she also advocates for Haiti and Haitians everywhere. Danticat, bereaved daughter, who loved both her uncle and her father so much, would do herself much good to remember what the girl in the story acknowledges to the old woman by repeating her refrain: “it is not our way to let our grief silence us” (Brother 267). Danticat will do well to remember those words in her grief. She is the daughter of fierce, proud and independent-minded people. Brother is her latest and best testament to that.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION
Venn Diagrams, Maps and Other Ways of Writing Literature

Edwidge Danticat’s ideal homeland is only part of a conversation that has been occurring in migrant, postcolonial, exile, diasporic and other literatures in which home is complicated by circumstances like politics, distance and accidents of birth. Her ideal homeland is distinctly different from other expressions of a place to call home because she does not advocate for the creation of a new space, or a hybrid place, but imagines one, a floating island, that is neither closer to the United States nor to Haiti. Imagining this space is possible through a trialectic lens, as I discuss in the first chapter of this paper because it requires the combination of imagination, literature and the cartography of an existing geographical map. This floating island can be located in Danticat’s work through her characters as they express a need to escape from the complications of their own lives, where they escape to, and through her own search for origins as she does in her latest work – a memoir based on the lives of her father and uncle.

The beauty of Danticat’s ideal homeland is that it is inclusive and is as different an experience for every reader of her work as it is different for her various characters. The unifying principle in this ideal homeland is that it becomes a place to express one’s self and one’s culture without having to give up the aspect of the self that no longer resides in the place that was once called home. The implications are far-reaching. For one, it redefines how migrants are better able to see themselves – as an avenue to embrace both aspects of their citizenships without unnecessary compromise or guilt; for another, it extends the boundaries of understanding migrant literature as not “falling between the stools” as Salman Rushdie would have it or creating a new hybrid as Bhabha would. In this homeland, Rushdie’s ‘imaginary Indias’ is as valid a place as the real
India is (wherever that might be) as long as it allows for self-expression and engagement inside one’s culture. Danticat’s ideal homeland adds a new dimension to the model of a Venn diagram that would incorporate intersecting cultures (Bhabha), and remain outside the cultural home spaces (Rushdie), and yet be both at the same time, encircling the Venn with a bigger circle. Combining several elements (imagined, physical, textual and historical) to create a new space for expression means that people no longer need to feel bound by the restrictions of political and geographical boundaries.

Danticat is not the first or only one to advocate the need for a new space in which to express one’s culture. Literary cartography has been explored by other contemporary writers including Gloria Anzaldúa, who has argued for the border space as a valid one that would follow Bhabha’s argument in which a hybrid culture is created when cultures meet. Anzaldúa’s *mestizaje* is much appreciated by Latino and Chicano literatures in the United States because, like Danticat’s ideal homeland, it liberates people from ideas of being stuck in an either/or dichotomy – it allows for a new way to be both and neither at the same time. I did not include Anzaldúa’s mestizaje in understanding Danticat’s ideal homeland because *mestizaje* is defined as the creation of a new state of being, one that acknowledges the fluidity of the new self, a new language or new languages (Spanglish, English, Spanish), which Anzaldúa uses interchangeably, and employs without apology. In this aspect, Anzaldúa and Danticat agree – one needs to be one’s self without apology. Danticat writes in English (without apology), but she still feels the need to translate from Creole, Spanish, or French inside her text, for the English reader.

*Mestizaje* would not have been appropriate for this paper because it is the inhabitants, rather than the newly created space, that become the place of fluidity,
incorporating all origins and all languages or origin. Further study of effects of the ideal homeland on its inhabitants might be a natural extension of this topic. I imagine that in future, the ideal homeland may have to invent a new language that is able to express both countries as they claim both borders. In this regard, Danticat’s ideal homeland has much to learn from Anzaldúa’s mestizaje.

Dionne Brand, whose ‘way finding’ is an integral part of locating the ideal homeland in Danticat’s work, has written about the complexities of belonging and not belonging in her fiction and nonfiction. Brand believes the experience of alienation by diasporic Africans -- who in her definition are limited to African descendants of slaves -- stems from the fact that there was never an intention to leave in the first place, and so every journey and every location is haunted by the need to return to a place that is long lost in history. Her Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging acknowledges, in the same spirit as Edouardo Glissant, Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite, that the Atlantic Ocean is part of a map that needs to be re-drawn in order to properly narrate the histories of the Caribbean, but she locates the place of anxiety in the threshold of the door, the metaphor for the last steps taken into the slave ship. Danticat does not remain in that anxious place. For her, the African diaspora are all children of the sea, with the Atlantic Ocean holding common ancestors that can be claimed by Africans on any side of that ocean. The ideal homeland, therefore, is also a place where we can hold conversations even with the lost voices from the Middle Passage.

The appeal of Danticat’s ideal homeland crosses several borders beyond the United States, Haiti and the diaspora where Danticat writes from because it speaks directly to displaced people – whether they are displaced by war, economics, health,
death or otherwise. One does not need to let go of an important aspect of one’s being just because one is no longer located in that original space, or, for that matter, even alive. Being able to express one’s self and explores one’s culture, despite the distance or other problems of accessibility is an integral part of being creative. While Danticat’s proximity and accessibility to Haiti allows her to return frequently there, not all artists are able to do the same and as such, are stuck with whatever resources they have where they are, and their memories of home. What that means, in terms of the ideal homeland, is that there must be a wide range of aspects as to what home means.

As with _dyaspora_ being the tenth department of Haiti, no matter how much each _dyasporan_ has to contribute to Haiti, the ideal homeland must accept different levels of what it means to belong to more than one home. After all, Danticat grew to maturity in the United States and would have had a different take on life in Haiti had she grown up there. This by no means undermines her memories of Haiti. It just means that diasporic Haitians experience Haiti differently, and in this space, in this ideal homeland, that’s okay.

In the final analysis, I believe that Danticat’s homeland gestures towards a double-edged acknowledgement. Not only do the inhabitants of this space have the ability to claim both homelands equally, their homelands also need to claim them wholly, without reading the hyphen in their identities as a problematic space, but as people with much more to contribute to their new countries of citizenship. This is particularly appropriate in the global condition in which people are much more connected than they have ever before been, and in which finances and familial connections are unrestricted by political boundaries. As in the case of Haiti and Uganda, a significant amount of both
countries’ budgets depends on diasporic remittances back home. As well, in Danticat’s case, as with writers like Dionne Brand, Myriam Chancy (all Caribbean writers whose work are part of the bibliography in this paper), there is a great deal of pride to be taken from their countries of origin. These writers belong to both places, and they fit in both places. Danticat, for instance, is also the consummate American writer, writing about a new frontier and challenging ideas about what it means to be American in America today. She is a Caribbean writer, an Antillean writer and a Haitian writer, who reclaims voices that were lost in the Middle Passage and helps recover and write the history of the Caribbean as a place of more than conquest, slavery and exploitation.

If there is a last word, it belongs to the one character that most applies to Danticat: Amabelle, from The Farming of Bones, who belongs to no one, but lays down in a river that borders two countries to wait for the dawn. Indeed, Danticat belongs to no one, but also belongs also to all who claim her. Amabelle, like Danticat, is able to tell her own story and does so in a new space, one that is based on a painful shared history, but also one which is inclusive and healing.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


---. “Marie Micheline: A Life in Haiti.” *The New Yorker.* 83:16 (11 June. 2007) n.p

---. “My Turn in the Fire: A Conversation with Edwidge Danticat.”


---. *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women’s Stories of Survival and Resistance*


DeLoughrey, Elizabeth. “Roots and Routes: Tidalectics in Caribbean Literature.”

*Caribbean Culture: Soundings on Kamau Brathwaite.* Ed. Annie Paul.


Trescott, Jacqueline. “In a 1937 Massacre the Writer Found a Fable for Our Times.”


