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Turbulent Lives of Displaced Haitians:
An Examination into Edwidge Danticat's Work

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Supervisor: David Livingstone, Ph.D.

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Pohnuté životy vykořeněných Hait'anů:
sonda do tvorby Edwidge Danticat

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Vedoucí práce: David Livingstone, Ph.D.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci na téma “Turbulent Lives of Displaced Haitians: An Examination into Edwidge Danticat’s Work” vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího práce a uvedla jsem veškerou použitou literaturu a ostatní zdroje.

V Olomouci dne.....

.....

Kamila Tichá

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Introduction

This thesis aims to focus on the displacement of the main female characters in Edwidge Danticat's two novels, *The Farming of Bones* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. The purpose of my work is to trace the girls' childhood encounters and highlight various aspects of their teenage years while they were dislocated from their home country of Haiti.

Haitians, descendants of many ethnicities, were essentially displaced as a result of colonial rule. It led to tremendous suffering and centuries of unrest that adversely affected the population of the whole island of Hispaniola. By way of referring to characters of chosen novels, I will illustrate how involuntary displacement fueled aspects of struggle with various kinds of dreams, relationships and types of love. It will demonstrate how the loss of a loved one, home country and familiar customs perpetuated the characters' longing to belong.

The Farming of Bones, Danticat's third novel, a highly acclaimed historical fiction, was published two decades ago. The novel explores the life of an orphan girl Amabelle Désir as she matures into a young woman. Further, it narrates her journey in terms of the events leading up to the infamous twentieth century massacre of Haitians living and working in the Dominican Republic, as ordered by the dictator, Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina. The deadly impact of his decision to claim the lives of thousands of innocents profoundly affected the young Amabelle's life. My choice of text was influenced not only by the author's powerful writing, but also by Amabelle's resilience, her will to live in the midst of her love-found-love-lost affair with her soul mate, Sebastien Onius, and the lengthy escape from the life-threatening situations that both preceded and followed the Parsley Massacre.

Breath, Eyes, Memory, Danticat's debut, takes place several decades after *The Farming of Bones*. It was published in 1994 and praised by various American entities. As a young teenager, Sophie Caco is forced to leave her home country and fly to New York City to reunite with her mother, whom she knows only by means of the recorded cassette tapes that she sends to her daughter. Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, a dictator, helmed Haiti at the time leaving the Haitian inhabitants living in constant fear perpetrated by his faithful militia Tonton Macoutes, brutal killers and rapists, the fathers of numerous girls just like Sophie.

Despite dealing with subjects that are difficult to write about, Danticat's work is poetic. Grounded in folktale tradition and aspects of supernatural, her writing makes the tumultuous history of Haiti and its residents more accessible to her readership. It may also engender further interest in an increasing number of recent successful historical novels written by speakers of English from various ethnic groups. Works often set against turbulent and significant historical backgrounds, many of which also carry a political point of view.

The first chapter of my thesis does not concentrate only on a brief history of the island through referrals to the indigenous population and the origins of sugarcane but also on a few men who were instrumental in the lives of the island's inhabitants and whose personas appear in both novels. The second, third and fourth chapters deal with the effects of displacement on the quality of life of the main character Amabelle Désir in *The Farming of Bones*. The fifth chapter transfers the thesis attention to a twelve-year-old Sophie Caco and the second primary text *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. I will demonstrate the similarly devastating effects of involuntary displacement, i. e. immigration.

To better understand the subtleties of and to comment on the ills of the twentieth century Haitian experience in the novels, I chose to examine Michele Wucker's book, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola* as well as Myriam J. A. Chancy's *From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic*. In looking to understand what lies behind the treatment of Haitian nationals portrayed in the primary texts, these exceptional works are deemed irreplaceable. Wucker, a Chicagoan author and commentator, started her career as a journalist. Chancy, a Haitian-Canadian writer, a fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, works primarily in academia. Both women are Danticat's contemporaries. Their emphasis on the history of the island provides invaluable context without which the reader loses the richness of Danticat's writing.

1. Danticat's Biography

Edwidge Danticat is a child of the late sixties. She was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1969. Her parents, first generation immigrants to the United States, departed their home country among the thousands of those who fled the poverty and repression of Duvalier's regime in Haiti at the beginning of the 1970s. She was only four years old when her mother followed her husband, who settled in Brooklyn, New York two years prior. Left behind with her younger brother, Eliab, Danticat lived with her aunt and uncle in a poor section of Bel Air, Port-au-Prince, speaking Creole at home and French at school.

Her relocation to the United States profoundly impacted her teenage years. At the age of twelve she moved to live with her parents in Brooklyn. The years of separation had adversely impacted their relationship. By the time the siblings from Haiti reached the United States, they had two American-born brothers with whom to become acquainted. Albeit, the new neighborhood was ethnically rich and full of Haitians, Danticat had to adapt to the unfamiliar, learn another language and make new friends at school. For a young introverted girl, the experience was difficult, thus her turning to books for comfort was not surprising.

Her parents urged her to become a nurse but her love of writing prevailed. She majored in French literature and earned her Bachelor of Arts in New York City. While at Barnard College, a teenage magazine published her second piece of English writing, which grew into her first novel, a work titled *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. She also holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Brown University.

Before moving to Miami, where she currently resides with her husband and a daughter, she taught creative writing at New York University. Her strong ties to Haiti dominate her work. She frequently explores various kinds of love and strengths of relationships, which deals primarily with themes of displacement, abuse, national identity and the stress of immigration, and sends an undeniably political message. She also explores themes of the various kinds of love and the strength of relationships. At the age of 51, Danticat already has an impressive list of book awards and honors.¹

¹ "Edwidge Danticat," Awards and Honors, Books, Wikipedia, accessed on March 3, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edwidge_Danticat.

2 Historical Background of the Island of Hispaniola

2.1 Indigenous Population

In order to understand and appreciate the detailed references that come through the pages of Danticat's work, it is useful to learn about the complicated history of the island where her novels take place. By briefly summarizing central points of proven facts, along with discovering the spiritual aspects of life in different eras the reader can further interpret her texts.

Oppression and the human drive to profit seem interchangeable. After centuries of settling, stealing, plundering and reclaiming land, this proved to be true for Hispaniola - the second largest and most populated island of the Caribbean Sea. According to various sources it was Christopher Columbus who landed at Hispaniola in 1492 and named it La Isla Española (Hispaniola in its Anglicized form)².

Centuries witnessed the settlement of various tribes, but due to European expansionism and hunger for gold, the future of the indigenous Taíno inhabitants was rather bleak. The text written by the Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica stipulates details regarding the history of Hispaniola.

The island of Hispaniola was occupied by Amer-Indians for at least 5,000 years prior to the European arrival in the Americas. Multiple waves of indigenous immigration to the island had occurred, mainly from Central and South America. Those from the South American continent were descendants of the Arawak, who passed through Venezuela. These tribes blended through marriage, forming the Taíno who greeted Christopher Columbus upon his arrival. It is believed that there were probably several million of these peaceful natives living on the island at that time.³

Wucker in her book, *Why the Cocks Fight* illustrates with numbers. She references that more than 300,000 Taíno were estimated to be on Hispaniola before Columbus landed in 1492. She further denotes that only 60,000 were still alive by the time the Spaniards carried out the first census in 1508. Three years later there were only 33,000 Taíno left, and "six years after

² "Hispaniola island, West Indies," Britannica, last modified by Michael Ray, Editor, accessed March 25, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Hispaniola>.

³ "Hispaniola," New World Encyclopedia, accessed July 2, 2019, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Hispaniola>.

that, not even 12,000.”⁴ Readers might question the relevance of the different estimates and possible discrepancies between online sources and Wucker’s data. However appropriate the approximations are, one sees a rapid decline of the native population after the authorities commenced the records. Unless the inhabitants were old and died of natural causes, such numbers are disturbing. The question is what really happened to the indigenous population at the time of settling, since Columbus himself wrote about the Taíno favorably to the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella. The article In New World Encyclopedia states details about trade.

They traded with us and gave us everything they had, with good will... they took great delight in pleasing us... They are very gentle and without knowledge of what is evil; nor do they murder or steal... Your highness may believe that in all the world there can be no better people... They love their neighbors as themselves, and they have the sweetest talk in the world, and are gentle and always laughing.⁵

High praise of the Taíno however did not prevent the intruders from intentional wrongdoing. It did not take long before the settlers confined the natives to work under atrocious conditions and mostly without food. If the former did not perform as expected they were badly hurt. In 1493, during a second Columbus expedition comprising of seventeen ships loaded with European livestock, and over a thousand future settlers looking to better their lives and gain substantial possessions, Columbus necessitated contributions from the original inhabitants of the island. In an article on Taíno tribes Abdul Rob offers additional trade information.

According to Kirkpatrick Sale, each adult over 14 years of age was expected to deliver a hawk’s bell full of gold every three months, or when this was lacking, twenty-five pounds of spun cotton. If this tribute was not brought, the Spanish cut off the hands of the Taíno and left them to bleed to death.⁶

Wucker further informs of the practices that took place while the colonizers demanded

⁴ Michele Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 65.

⁵ Abdul Rob, “Taíno: Indigenous Caribbeans,” *Black History 365*, written December 16, 2016, accessed March 26, 2019, <https://www.blackhistorymonth.org.uk/article/section/pre-colonial-history/taino-indigenous-caribbeans/>.

⁶ Rob, “Taíno,” accessed March 26, 2019.

valuable commodities, and the indigenous population either refused, or could not comply with the commanding officers' requirements.

In April 1494, Spanish Captain Alonso de Ojeda headed an expedition to the inner reaches of Hispaniola, where he demanded gold of the Indians he met. When one proud Indian chieftain, or *cacique*, refused his demands, Ojeda set his men on the village, seizing prisoners and carrying them back to Columbus at La Isabela, the settlement he had founded on the north coast. Several of the Indians were hanged, as the first of many "examples".⁷

These practices became a validated norm and the punishment of the indigenous population by the white settlers was in many cases encouraged. The presumption was that the natives were worthless, absent-minded beings without any intellect and should be put to work for the greater good of the monarchy and the individuals who were in charge. The natives had a different skin color and no reading or writing skills to prove their value. In most cases they were vilified in the eyes of the entire catholic minority, looked down upon, and mistreated. In addition to the physical cruelties, they were mentally manipulated. As the majority on the island were the peace-loving Taíno, who at the beginning (according to many sources) did not like to retaliate, it was easy to order them to do whatever the colonizers desired. To the colonizers, the colonized were worthless savages; the atrocities perpetuated on the original population were carried out under the veil of Christianity, but really in the name of profit. As time passed, the indigenous population tried to defend their way of life, but every attempt was curtailed. According to Wucker, towards the end of 1495, "the Spaniards had sent their artillery, cavalry, and trained dogs out to quiet the Indians. They took 1600 prisoners and sent 550 to Spain for sale in the slave market of Seville."⁸ Some Indian chiefs attempted to reason with the settlers, but without success. Wucker details the practices that were put in place and which resulted in the population becoming largely extinct within a very short period of time.

One *cacique*, Guarionex, who failed to meet the gold quota, thought he could reason with the colonizers. The real wealth of the Taíno, he argued, was their agricultural skill, which could be used to raise crops in the fertile valleys. (French plantation owners later proved him right when they made their

⁷ Wucker, *Why*, 62.

⁸ Wucker, *Why*, 62.

colony Europe's treasure.) His people, Guarionex offered, could pay with harvests of *yuca*, the sustaining root of the yucca plant. (Boiled *yuca* remains a staple of the Dominican diet.) The gold-crazed Spaniards refused to accept this idea and cracked down even harder on the Indians who failed to meet their quotas. Many of the Indians hiding in the central mountains starved to death. Those who could not escape enslavement in the mines killed themselves by eating raw *yuca*. Cooked, the root was a life-giving staple; raw, it was poison.⁹

Greed perpetuated the colonizers' behavior to the point of extent of mass criminal conduct. In addition to enslavement the indigenous people also battled imported European diseases that they were not accustomed to.

2.2 Displacement of the masses: Sugarcane and the Struggle for Autonomy

To obtain a clear understanding of what sugarcane meant for the world in terms of financial gain, it is relevant to learn where the plant came from and how it reached the island of Hispaniola. Sources indicate that marketable sugar was first produced some 2500 years ago in India and China. According to Glyn L. James it was Alexander the Great who transported sugarcane to Europe.

Alexander the Great took sugarcane from India in around 325 BC on his retreat to Europe. Later, sugarcane reached Spain, Madeira, the Canary Islands and Sao Tomé, off West Africa. While there is no definite evidence of the deliberate movement of the plant to those countries, Columbus certainly took sugarcane to the New World in 1493 on his second voyage from Spain. Attempts to grow the crop in Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic) failed at first, but success was achieved in 1506 in the western part of the island. In 1515 it was taken from Haiti to Puerto Rico and was also introduced into Mexico in 1520.¹⁰

With the sugar cane cultivation and the production of molasses, numbers of mills were established throughout the beginning of the 16th century, which also marked the onset of the infamous African slave trade. One person responsible for bringing manpower from the African continent to the New World was Bartolomé de Las Casas. Wucker describes him to be a friar who came to Hispaniola at the very beginning of the 16th century. Upon

⁹ Wucker, *Why*, 62-63.

¹⁰ Glyn L. James, *Sugarcane*, 2nd Ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Science Ltd., 2004), 4.

realizing what was happening to the original population of the island, and in lieu of defending them, he gave up the land and the Indian slaves that were awarded to him by the Spanish Crown, only to bring misery on others. “In 1517 Las Casas proposed that Hispaniola import slaves from Africa to work on the sugar plantations, arguing that “the labor of one Negro was more valuable than that of four Indians.””¹¹ Spare hands became indispensable as the ground proved to be fertile and the weather conditions more than suitable not only for the production of sugar or natural indigo dye but also for the cultivation of tobacco, cotton and coffee. The colonizers were responsible for the displacement of Africans and other ethnics who were transported to Hispaniola, many in wretched state. Wucker’s thorough research of available data also informs us of the last Indian chief who, in lieu of saving his people, promised to bring the runaway slaves back to their owners.

As the Spaniards brought into Hispaniola fresh supplies of African slaves and forty thousand Indian slaves captured elsewhere in the West Indies, an Indian called Enriquillo led the last effort to free the remaining Indians of Hispaniola. [...] In return for a pledge that the Spaniards would leave the Indians in peace, Hispaniola’s last *cacique* gave his word to drive escaped African slaves back to their plantations.¹²

According to Wucker, “Spanish explorers had abandoned Santo Domingo in search of gold in Mexico and South America, while the French had established sugar plantations to the west.”¹³ By the time the French revolutionaries guillotined King Louis XVI in 1793, the year that marked the abolition of slavery in the colony of Saint-Domingue (Haiti), this well-established settlement became the most lucrative outpost in the Americas. The overwhelming majority of the inhabitants living in the area were slaves ready to claim their freedom.

As time passed, the number of plantations in today’s Dominican Republic declined disproportionately in comparison with those of Saint-Domingue, the French colony, (formerly Haiti - a name Taínos gave to the whole island). Wucker notes the following:

¹¹ Wucker, *Why*, 65.

¹² Wucker, *Why*, 66.

¹³ Wucker, *Why*, 99.

By the late eighteenth century, Saint-Domingue boasted 723 *ingenios* and half a million slaves.”¹⁴ Unlike the east side of the island, where “the sugar industry shrank to nine *ingenios* and eleven *trapiches* worked by six hundred slaves.”¹⁵

(The term ingenio¹⁶ was used for sugar mills powered by human labor. Trapiches¹⁷ were sugar mills powered by animal labor.) The French Revolution of the late 18th century gave the enslaved population of Saint-Domingue hope for autonomy, which finally came in 1804 - fifteen years after the beginning of the French revolt. The colony of Saint-Domingue was revoked and the original Taíno name of Haiti was restored. The slave forces under the command of Toussaint L'Ouverture, along with one of his generals, Jean Jacques Dessalines, fought for their freedom, forming the second self-governing country in the Americas and the first black republic in the world. The newly freed nation had to wait for recognition by the United States for another fifty-eight years until 1862, three years before the institution of slavery became unconstitutional in the United States (as a result of the American Civil War).

2.3 **Legendary Men and African Sprits**

The middle of the eighteenth century was undeniably important for those colonized on the western side of the island, for it marked the beginning of their long-awaited freedom. Although the Haitian revolution did not begin until 1791, an event in 1752 helped establish the immortality of Mackandal, an African slave hauled to Hispaniola from Guinea. According to Wucker, the sugar mill tore off his arm. While severely injured, he managed to escape from the plantation and hide in the mountains of the Massif Central. From there he studied flora, from which he produced poisons and remedies. Wucker stipulates that the legend of the African spirits proclaimed that Mackandal could see the future and was immortal.¹⁸ Six years after his escape he was involved in helping to poison various

¹⁴ Wucker, *Why*, 99.

¹⁵ Wucker, *Why*, 99.

¹⁶ Wucker, *Why*, 257.

¹⁷ Wucker, *Why*, 260.

¹⁸ Wucker, *Why*, 77.

colonizers with the venoms that he had created. His sexual desires, however, led to his downfall. The partner of a woman he had seduced deceived him and revealed his whereabouts to the colonizers. The settlers tried to dispose of Mackandal by executing him in flames. As Wucker continues, the enslaved onlookers witnessed something out of the ordinary. Not only did they see his soul leave his body; allegedly it changed into “a fly”¹⁹ that flew away in lieu of finding afresh devotees to carry on with the revolt. “Later, the slaves believed, he came back in the form of a horde of mosquitoes bringing yellow fever to the French.”²⁰

This example demonstrates that legends seldom die. On the contrary, they can be an important force behind social changes. Not only can they help instigate an uprising, they can also continue its message. Mackandal started a revolt that was inspiring to those who were in desperate need of relief from the continuous atrocities perpetrated by the colonizers. The French Revolution gave impulse for the collapse of the colony and the liberation of the slaves. Over two years after it started, the enslaved on the Haitian side of the island of Hispaniola retaliated. Animal sacrifice according to Vodou rituals strengthened their belief that they could actually help themselves.

[...] the Jamaican-born slave and Vodou priest, Boukman ceremonially slaughtered a black suckling pig belonging to a French plantation owner: “Throw away the symbol of the god of the whites who has so often caused us to weep, and listen to the voice of liberty, which speaks in the hearts of us all,” Boukman said, urging them to cast away the crosses around their necks, as C.L.R. James recounts. The offering of the animal’s blood and songs to the spirits who had come from Africa set drumbeats of revolution throbbing all through the north of Saint-Domingue. The spirits heard the slaves’ supplications and answered: Guede, master of the dead; Ogou, the spirit of war and flames; Simbi, the clairvoyant one and the guardian of water; Gran Bwa, governor of the forest; and a host of their companions.²¹

As the four primary phases of the moon impact the planet, the slaves believed that those four spirits came to their rescue. Not only did they give the masses moral encouragement, they also summoned their strength. They seemed to contribute in providing psychological

¹⁹ Wucker, *Why*, 77.

²⁰ Wucker, *Why*, 77.

²¹ Wucker, *Why*, 77.

guidance, assisting the slaves in the pursuit of their uprising. Allegedly, Boukman's Vodou ritual was instantly followed by a hurricane.

The experience awaiting the population of the western part of the island of Hispaniola turned out to be horrifying. August of 1791 engraved itself into history books as the time slaves were no longer willing or able to tolerate their masters' behavior. "On the night of August 22, Boukman and his men set fire to the plantations of the region. They killed 2,000 whites and destroyed 180 sugar plantations and 900 coffee plantations. The Haitian Revolution had begun. Fire, as Mackandal's devotees predicted, was destroying Haiti's riches."²² The very same families who imposed harsh treatment on the fellow humans who toiled their soil, were murdered. The killings were the result of centuries of oppression.

It is hard to believe that in the days of no communication devices, except for fire and smoke, an event of such magnitude could have been orchestrated and carried out with such precision. The slaves had nothing to lose. Their desperate situation led them to rise and avenge Mackandal's life, as well as the lives of countless others who were tortured to death. Most settlers were merciless tyrants immeasurably hated by the disadvantaged slaves. The uprising set off further manslaughter and the victims again became the enslaved masses. As stated by Wucker, over twenty thousand slaves were killed. "Among them was Boukman, martyred in the cause of freedom. The whites did not risk the chance that he would escape from the fire as Mackandal had. After they executed Boukman, they impaled his head on a spike and exhibited it on the gates of the city Cap-Francais, today Cap-Haitien."²³ Mackandal and Boukman, the two enslaved men, became heroes and earned themselves an armor of immortality.

Enriquillo and Toussaint L'Ouverture are also lauded in various books, whether historical or fiction. An interesting fact is that both men were fortunate enough to be rescued as children. Education was pivotal to them. As pointed out by Wucker, Enriquillo "[...] had been educated by Franciscan monks and baptized."²⁴ She portrays Enriquillo as an indigenous man who led a guerilla-style retaliation against the Spanish in 1519 with five

²² Wucker, *Why*, 78.

²³ Wucker, *Why*, 78.

²⁴ Wucker, *Why*, 66.

hundred rebels in the mountains of the west. “For fourteen years Enriquillo frustrated Spanish attempts to defeat him. Finally, tired of fighting, Enriquillo in 1533 signed a peace treaty. In return for a pledge that the Spaniards would leave the Indians in peace, Hispaniola’s last *cacique* gave his word to drive escaped African slaves back to their plantations.”²⁵ Some people perceived him as a traitor, who caved in to the demands of the oppressors, others have a different opinion. In lieu of saving his people (the remaining original populace of the island) he agreed to something that was, in his mind, a lesser misfortune for his tribe. His core values and responsibilities were to protect and ease the lives of those remaining.

The Dominican writer Manuel de Jesús Galván immortalized Enriquillo in his 1882 historical novel, *Enriquillo*, and, more broadly, set the foundation for the noble Taino as a focal point of Dominican heritage. Mourning his demise and celebrating his legacy, Dominicans resurrected the past and constructed a Taino-influenced ancestry to explain their color. Today, mulatto and black Dominicans call themselves *indio*, and they say that their color is dark like that of Indians but different in quality from African skins. They can identify with Enriquillo because he was Christian.²⁶

Already mentioned Toussaint L’Overture was a weak and rather sickly-looking boy, he was born on the Breda plantation in 1743. Over time he earned a nickname Little Stick. As Wucker details, his parents were slave descendants of a minor African ruler. “Out of pity, the priest Simon Baptiste took him under his care and gave him a Roman Catholic education, teaching him to read and write, and later Latin and the classics.”²⁷ People gave Pierre Dominique a nickname Toussaint. Toussaint “(All Saints), because he had been born on African All Saints’ Day May 20”²⁸, which proved to be appropriate. He was intelligent, accomplished and devoted. Such a combination secured him future possessions; he had been given some land and slaves, but also his freedom. “To celebrate his new status, Toussaint took a new last name, L’Overture (the Opening), for his goal of opening the doors to

²⁵ Wucker, *Why*, 66.

²⁶ Wucker, *Why*, 66.

²⁷ Wucker, *Why*, 78.

²⁸ Wucker, *Why*, 78.

freedom for the slaves.”²⁹ It was a grand idea, also in the legacy of Mackandal as well as the Jamaican Boukman, who instigated the already mentioned inferno of 1791. Toussaint was a principled and loyal man. His devotion shined during the event while he helped his former master, Bayon de Libertas flee.

[...] he drove his former master and family to safety so they could sail, unharmed, for the United States. (His brother Paul took Toussaint’s own family to Spanish Santo Domingo.) When Toussaint returned to the ashes of the plantation where he had grown up, he was ready to leave behind his old life as a plantation worker. With his own family safe in Spanish Santo Domingo, he joined the slave revolution. His education, perseverance, and skill would make him the man who personified the coming revolution. Before long, he headed an army of former slaves.³⁰

A successful general, he fought not only the French, but also the British. Ten years after the slave-generated fires burned the plantations, Toussaint, the Governor, “drew up a constitution that prohibited slavery forever and gave the colony the power to make its own laws without consulting France.”³¹ This extraordinary act of courage was truly revolutionary. Albeit he accomplished the unthinkable, his life was short lived. Eventually he was tricked and betrayed by one of his own men. Imprisoned in France, he died two years later. Allegedly, his last words were: “In overthrowing me, you have cut down in Saint-Domingue only the trunk of the tree of liberty. It will spring up again by its roots, for they are numerous and deep!”³² He was an exceptional leader who predicted the tumultuous future of his peoples and the land he was so fond of. (One character of Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* also spoke these powerful words.)

The news of Napoleon intending to reinstate slavery prompted Henri Christophe (later on King Henry I of Haiti), who deceived Toussaint L’Ouverture for monetary reasons, to join with Jean-Jacques Dessalines, one of Toussaint’s generals, in lieu of driving the French away, which they ultimately succeeded in doing. “The former slaves, previously considered incapable of human thought and feeling, in a single battle reduced

²⁹ Wucker, *Why*, 78.

³⁰ Wucker, *Why*, 78 – 79.

³¹ Wucker, *Why*, 79.

³² Wucker, *Why*, 80.

60,000 French troops to almost nothing.”³³ Even though, the fourteen-year conflict took a toll on Toussaint’s slave army of once 350,000 men, they chased Napoleon away forever.

A year after Toussaint’s death Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a power hungry individual, proclaimed himself Emperor Jacques I. He had his men dispose of every single remaining white inhabitant on the western side of the island. History repeated itself as one blood bath followed another, hatred caused more animosity, and retaliation fueled revenge. In the first half of the nineteenth century Dominican’s won its independence from Haiti and the island was forever divided.

The legendary men and their spirits were not able to guarantee the future of Haiti. For the majority of the people of the first black republic, it was unthinkable to hope for a decent life. Apart from three leaders who were instrumental prior to Haiti’s reinstatement, there were hardly any others worth noting thereafter. The only reason why these men were acknowledged was due to their insatiable greed or desire to overthrow others. Their skillful negotiation practices with the followers, and their ability to dispose of anyone with opposing views, which was manifested in different ways. Over the course of two hundred years, after winning their long-awaited freedom, the everyday inhabitants of Haiti had very little to show for themselves. While the leaders pretended to govern the state, they mostly favored filling their own pockets. Not much had changed for ordinary men and women. They were looked down upon and treated harshly. The inhabitants of the country that did not experience abundance of any kind in the past, now followed in the footsteps of their ancestors in terms of no or very little financial gain.

Paradoxically, the victorious side, the gem of the Antilles, had to pay reparation to a defeated nation in lieu of recognition of their sovereignty. According to available sources, the French government imposed an equivalent of well over \$21 billion debt on Haiti as retribution for the loss of profitable plantations and of the slaves the French owned. This obligation was the price Haiti had to pay in an exchange for the recognition of the new republic. It was only a couple of years after World War II when it was finally paid in full.³⁴

³³ Wucker, *Why*, 80.

³⁴ “External Debt of Haiti,” Wikipedia, last modified August 1, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/External_debt_of_Haiti.

Haiti's tumultuous history, fierce weather and the subsequent frequent political changes planted themselves in the nation's subconscious and seeded its further unrest.

2.4 Involuntary Displacement of People of Haiti: Dictators

The settlement of the island of Hispaniola by the two distinct powers, Spain and France, had terminal effects upon the lives of the original Taíno inhabitants as well as the hundreds of thousands of Africans and people from surrounding Caribbean islands, who were all cut off from their roots. Centuries of unimaginable physical and psychological torment, suffered by all the involuntarily displaced, led to unrest that resulted in a revolt of a grand magnitude. Myriam J. A. Chancy states her outlook on prevailing information regarding the revolution with the following: "In the history books, Haiti's revolution was deemed a violence emanating from the depravity of subaltern bodies and minds, rather than as a *reasoned response* to an unjust and dehumanizing system of enslavement and exploitation."³⁵ This thesis aims to illustrate some additional reasons behind the divide between the Haitians and Dominicans.

After the Haitian revolution until 1822 the entire island was named Haiti. According to, Myriam J. A. Chancy the country's President at the time, Jean-Pierre Boyer, was responsible for Haiti's immense repatriation, high taxes and additional cane production. Eugenio Matibag writes about Boyer's involvement in the sugar cane machinery. He found out that Boyer was instrumental in the agriculture of the neighboring country and, "introduced cane cultivation on a large scale to the Dominican Republic and coffee cultivation to the mountains."³⁶ Dantes Bellegrade observes that laborers were forced to stay on the plantations unable to enter neighboring towns and cities (which is still presently implemented by the Dominican Republic to circumscribe the movement of Haitians *bateye* or cane field workers.)³⁷ Chancy continues that the above practices were once already in effect: "This resembled King Christophe's "corvée," by which peasants were forced to

³⁵ Myriam J. A. Chancy, *From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 34.

³⁶ Eugenio Matibag, *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint: Nation, State, and Race on Hispaniola* (New York: Pelgrave, 2003), quoted in M. J. A. Chancy: *From Sugar*, 57.

³⁷ Dantes Bellegrade, *Historie du Peuple Haitien (1492 – 1592)* (Port-au-Prince: Presses de L'Imprimerie Held, S. A., 1953), quoted in M. J. A. Chancy: *From Sugar*, 58.

render labor to the state to pay off debts, taxes, or legal fines in northern Haiti.”³⁸ (Self-appointed King Christophe’s betrayal resulted in Toussaint L’Overture’s, the leader of the Haitian revolution, imprisonment and death in France.) Ginetta E. B. Candelario writes about the United States involvement in twentieth century Hispaniola.

Both nations were subsequently occupied by the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century, Haiti from 1915 to 1934, and the DR from 1916 to 1924. If the U.S. Occupation was forcibly opposed by Haitians, on the Dominican side it was read as a protective measure against the “Haitian menace” by state officials.³⁹

David Howard continues:

The U.S. Occupation on the Dominican side extended what Boyer had begun in the modernization and exploitation of the nation-state with the support of the oligarchs, leading “to the consolidation of the process of capitalist expansion in the country,” with a disproportionate emphasis on the cultivation, production, and export of sugar.⁴⁰

The United States’ engagement on the island led to further unrest. U.S. federal funds, spent on the military, filled the pockets of the privileged on the American side. In addition, the American-owned sugar industry thrived. Chancy remarks that

this conjoined yet split history would continue with the dictatorships that followed each occupation (and, in the case of Haiti, successive presidents installed by the U.S.), with Rafael Trujillo coming to power in the Dominican Republic in 1930, and François Duvalier in Haiti in 1957.⁴¹

Dismantling of the groups of civilians who protected the ordinary men, women and children of the island of Hispaniola, wrecked whatever protection they had. The American, Dominican and Haitian armies curtailed the slightest disobedience and perpetrated crimes that resulted in vast civilian casualties. Suzy Castor, in her single study, writes about groups

³⁸ Chancy, *From Sugar*, 58.

³⁹ Ginetta E. B. Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*. (Durham: Duke UP, 2007), quoted in M. J. A. Chancy: *From Sugar*, 59.

⁴⁰ David Howard, *Coloring the Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Dominican Republic* (Oxford: Signal Books, 2001), quoted in M. J. A. Chancy: *From Sugar*, 65.

⁴¹ M. J. A. Chancy, *From Sugar*, 65.

of men who, unlike the soldiers, protected civilians.

There is no doubt that the pillar of dependency in both republics was the army. This institution assumed the task of maintaining order, and easy enough task after the marines had disarmed the populace by crushing the *gavilleros* in Santo Domingo and the *cacos* in Haiti, thanks to which operation the masses were left totally disarmed for the first time in the history of these countries. A populace without arms stood face to face with a modern repressive military, educated to support the established regime and trained to nip any signs of budding inconformity.⁴²

It is believed that the United States interference influenced further exploitation of both nations and also intensified divisions between the two nations. According to Chancy “the atmosphere of the U.S. Occupation thus made possible the rise of dictator Rafael Trujillo and the amnesiac climate among the general Dominican population, contributing to the decimation of both Haitians and darker-hued Dominicans.⁴³ The obedient Dominican army, quick to act upon his requests, carried out the massacre of thousands of Haitians in the areas of the northern border of the Dominican Republic. The campaign lasted six days from October 2 to October 8, 1937. Whenever suitable, the army was instructed to use machetes as a weapon of choice to make the killings look as if the laborers were the ones who killed. Robert L. Adams notes that Trujillo remained in the office, largely thanks to his ties with the United States. The Parsley Massacre enriched him.

In the aftermath of the 1937 massacre, which included “[t]he killing of thousands of Afro-Dominican small landowners during the ... ‘Haitian’ massacre [and] freed vast amounts of land on the frontier.” The dictator claimed much of that land for himself, acquiring “more land in the San Juan Valley than in any other part of the country” by 1961.⁴⁴

He had lighter skin and was against everyone with a dark complexion. According to Chancy, this approach was different from his Haitian counterpart, François Duvalier (also referred to

⁴² Suzy Castor, “The American Occupation of Haiti (1915-34) and the Dominican Republic (1916-24).” Trans. Lynn Garafola. *The Massachusetts Review* 15.1/2 (1974): 253-75, quoted in M. J. A. Chancy: *From Sugar*, 66.

⁴³ M. J. A. Chancy, *From Sugar*, 66.

⁴⁴ Robert L. Adams, “History at the Crossroads: Vodú and the Modernization of Dominican Boarderlands.” *Globalization and Race*. Ed. Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas. (Durham: Duke UP, 2006), 55-72, quoted in M. J. A. Chancy: *From Sugar*, 63.

as Papa Doc) who became the president of Haiti towards the end of the 1950s, and passed on the presidency to his son Jean-Claude (also referred to as Baby Doc), who held power from 1971 through 1986.

Duvalier exploited the notion with “*noirisme*,” his own perversion of affirming negritude or nascent pan-Africanism, in order to rise to power and infiltrate peasant and Vodou societies to control the nation. Trujillo did exactly the opposite, denying, decrying, and obliterating blackness as much as possible in the Dominican Republic through a systemic campaign of *blanqueamiento* which, discursively, was designed as a movement against further Haitianization. [...] The dictatorships created an economic dependence that rendered Haitians nothing more than slave labor in the Dominican Republic, a pattern which would extend beyond Trujillo’s regime into Duvalier’s, despite the cane field massacres. [...] the climate of successive occupations and dictatorships created a psychic dislocation which caused Haitians and Dominicans to be further divided from one another, the shadow of history used as a wedge to buttress claims of difference and to legitimize the killing and then exploitation of subsequent waves of Haitian laborers on Dominican soil.⁴⁵

In this thesis it is impossible to list all the important events and powerful entities that influenced Hispaniola’s future. Formerly a part of Haiti, the Dominican Republic declared its independence in 1844. The nations, which comprised of generations of the displaced people, who built an abundance of the world’s wealth, lived under presidents who were either Assembly appointed or self-proclaimed. Some were forced to flee; others were assassinated or overthrown. Vast power, mammon, and the corruption of the two most notable dictators of Hispaniola caused tremendous suffering primarily to Haitians. Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo as well as the Haitian despot “Papa Doc” François Duvalier (and his son Claude, “Baby Doc”,) were responsible not only for amounting further significant debt and a great deal of deaths but also for thousands of people who fled the countries, seeking asylum elsewhere. Poor Haitians searched for a better life in the hostile Dominican Republic by foot, others tried to cross on boats to the United States. Better-situated citizens opted to leave the oppressive system for the United States via air travel. This brief account of Haiti’s past suggests that it had not experienced many encouraging times with the exception of its recognition.

⁴⁵ M. J. A. Chancy, *From Sugar*, 66.

2.5 Price of Sugar: Brief Historical Account that Lead to the Parsley Massacre

Wucker's book provides the necessary insight for understanding the quotations that pertain to *The Farming of Bones*. Her findings concerning the financial dealing of various governments and other business entities, at the expense of the most vulnerable--primarily uneducated workers from Haiti--were insightful and alarming. It is well known that business history is to some extent cyclical. According to Wucker, with soaring unemployment and a bankrupt Dominican government, led by its new President, Ramón Cáceres (who, like many others, was assassinated), lifted all taxes from sugar. This took place shortly after his appointment to office in April 1906. The reason behind his actions was to motivate foreign investment. As a result, Americans bought the majority of the best sugarcane fields along the southeastern coast of the country. Wucker states that he had alternative motives. "His sugar gamble was to pull apart the social fabric of Hispaniola, shifting masses of people around the island and creating pockets of near slavery that survived until the end of the century."⁴⁶ Wucker's book was published in 1999 and not much has changed since. This comment is based on my own experience from visiting La Romana cane fields. The hard labor involved in cutting cane was eye opening, but our brief unofficial visit to one of the bateys was, in fact, shocking. Wucker's explanation of the term batey is informative as she writes the following:

batey: barracks in the Dominican cane fields where cane cutters are housed; these structures are named after the central market areas during early colonial times. El Batey is the name of a community in Sosúa established by Jewish refugees in the aftermath of Trujillo's massacre of Haitians on the border.⁴⁷

Wucker proposed that the American purchases of the cane fields undermined the authority of the corrupt Dominican government; the Americans were in a better position to negotiate. In addition, there was the U.S. nineteen-year occupation of Haiti that began in 1915. This was preceded by the country's social unrest and the assassination of the Haitian president. She addressed the reasons that led to the misfortunes experienced by Haitian migrant workers in depth.

⁴⁶ Wucker, *Why*, 101.

⁴⁷ Wucker, *Why*, 253.

The price of sugar, its peak, and its decline offer vital information connected to the story of *The Farming of Bones*. Wucker also researched the economic impact of the sugar prices. She writes:

By the early 1920s, when world sugar prices reached a new high of twenty-two cents per pound, the U.S. companies running most of the Dominican sugarcane industry were in frenzy to boost production [...] In 1920 there had been 28,258 Haitians in the Dominican Republic; by 1935, a year after the Americans left Haiti and eleven years after they had left the Dominican Republic, the number had nearly doubled, to 52,675 legal residents.⁴⁸

This figure was high, but did not factor in the undocumented workers. The number of those who repeatedly crossed the mountains and came to harvest sugar was far greater, but they did not take the jobs away from Dominicans. The corporations had relied so heavily on their cheap labor, that Dominicans no longer considered cutting cane themselves. “That was “Haitian work,” unfit for native sons.”⁴⁹ In fact, they used abusive terms when referring to their country’s neighbors - whose standard of living, as well as food intake, could not have been lower.

The flow of foreign workers peaked just when the U.S. stock market crashed in 1929, beginning the Great Depression. Sugar prices plummeted. [...] Two years later, the sweet stuff sold for under a penny a pound and stayed that way for ten years. That tens of thousands of migrant workers had come to the Dominican Republic for work and wages now seemed a cruel irony.⁵⁰

From dawn to dusk, day in and day out, the cane cutters (braceros) kept swinging their machetes in the midst of the bones, most of which were taller than the men who farmed them. Bone, was the nickname for a sugarcane stick, and was both the means of survival but also a nightmare for most Haitians who came to the Dominican Republic on the false pretenses of fair earnings. The prospect of making and saving money for their future back in Haiti was too tempting to ignore. By virtue of the speed of news travelling at the speed of a walking man, once in the vicinity of the mill, there was no way of informing those back

⁴⁸ Wucker, *Why*, 102.

⁴⁹ Wucker, *Why*, 102.

⁵⁰ Wucker, *Why*, 102.

home about real conditions there. The cane fields themselves were closely guarded and the silent witnesses to what transpired outside of the mills, were not able to testify. The majority of Dominicans turned a blind eye to the truth concerning the wages of those invading their country. Wucker's further observation explains the Dominican President's explains his further actions.

When sugar prices fell, Rafael Trujillo had already risen to the Presidency from his humble early career as a cane-field guard. As the Great Depression began, Trujillo was well aware that the Presidents before him had fallen from power because they could not deliver prosperity, and he had no intention of letting the same thing happen to him. His plan was to deflect attention from falling sugar prices by focusing on the many workers who had come to the country to support the sugar machine. If Dominicans directed their anger at foreigners, he would become a hero for fighting to keep the intruders out.⁵¹

In her book, Wucker mentioned migration law number 279 (enacted in 1932), which was not only harsh, but also blatantly biased, requiring every person visiting the country to pay a fee. "The decree imposed a tax on all foreigners of \$6 for each entry and \$6 per year of residence--except for anyone unfortunate enough to be of Asian or black-African descent, who had to pay annual fees of up to \$300."⁵² The only people of color allowed to enter the country, were the ones who would not be seeking work, those for whom an annual payment of \$300 did not present any financial burden. The government permitted the entry of wealthy Caucasians and non-Caucasians who brought spending power with them. By signing such a law into effect, Trujillo had hoped to discourage those coming to earn money during sugar cane harvest. It was a provision that aimed to ensure less migration and stricter policies, behind which the government hid their other simultaneous practices, such as corruption and bribery. Wucker's perspective on American companies clarifies the future of Haitian laborers.

The U.S. companies that depended on immigrant labor reacted with alarm. [...], the administrator of the Central Romana sugar corporation paid a visit to Trujillo, [...] the dictator was persuaded to cut a deal: the *braceros* would

⁵¹ Wucker, *Why*, 102-103.

⁵² Wucker, *Why*, 103.

be exempted, a loophole that virtually guaranteed that the majority of sugarcane cutters would remain Haitian.⁵³

This law was just the beginning of Trujillo's plan. Wucker further explains how he continued to protect the Dominican soil from intruders, as Cuba also began denying Haitian sugar cane cutters during the previous decade which had the effect on reducing the number of workers seeking work in the Dominican Republic. The Republic was the target, since there was large body of water separating the two countries except for the river.

In 1933, he passed a law "Dominicanizing" the cane harvest, requiring that 70 percent of workers in the cane fields be Dominican. Again, the multinationals won exceptions, but Haitians working outside the sugar industry paid the price for the lenient treatment of the *braceros*. In July 1934, as the U.S. occupation of Haiti was about to end, the Dominicans deported eight thousand Haitians, in the first of many expulsions.⁵⁴

Throughout the years leading up to the 1937 Parsley Massacre, the sugar cane cutters were not informed of any changes. They did not communicate in Spanish well enough to understand the subtleties of what was going on politically. They only saw what was taking place in their immediate surroundings and were kept secluded from the rest of the world, either on the premises of the American- or Dominican-owned mills. News spread through rumors that could have been true, but also did not have to hold any merit. During the massacre Dominicans killed thousands of involuntarily displaced Haitians, as well those who voluntarily crossed the border to find work on the fields. Trujillo's soldiers did not shy away from using whatever practices necessary to fulfill their orders. In their minds they were dealing with worthless waste. Behind the scenes, however, migrant workers were not the issue, but rather the struggling economy Trujillo was desperately trying to camouflage to remain in power.

⁵³ Wucker, *Why*, 103.

⁵⁴ Wucker, *Why*, 104.

3 *The Farming of Bones*

3.1 **Shadows and Nightmares: Amabelle's Childhood Across the River**

The *Farming of Bones* was first published in 1998 and received an American Book Award for fiction in 1999. The novel primarily focuses on resilience and the strength to carry on living regardless of circumstances. The story is a moving account of lives of displaced Haitian laborers working in the Dominican Republic and it is woven together with many threads of sorrow. These include the social, cultural and political divisions between the nations of Hispaniola, references to many years of unrest, and the role of Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo, in ethnic cleansing at the Parsley Massacre.

Amabelle is the chief protagonist and sole narrator of the story. The novel may confuse the reader at first; the main narrative is told in the first person, yet a great deal of it then moves forward via dialogue between Amabelle and the other characters. The chapters of the book written in bold letters are contemplations of her past, hopes and dreams, and are often intertwined with her lover, Sebastien. They also deal with snippets of her childhood that were spent with her parents in native Haiti. Interspersed with the chapters of the present, they are different in style from the main story line, more poetic in its description. Amabelle's memories of her parents are mostly confined to shreds of disjointed moments that paint a picture of a fairly strict mother, Man Irelle and the always-helpful younger father, Fré Antoine. Except for the sparse revelation of their work as herbal healers helping with births and with people leaving this world, the fragments of their existence are portrayed in the way a little girl would remember. "I see my mother and father and myself. I am with them, a child who still must hold a hand to walk, a child who must look up to talk, to see all the faces."⁵⁵ These early childhood memories accompanied Amabelle throughout her adolescence. They frequently returned to her under a veil of night, along with various nightmares, which deepened her sense of loss and displacement. The parents, whom she leaned on, aided her every step of the way and provided her with guidance in the times of need. Regardless of their financial situation they seemed to be a close-knit unit that always found a way to survive irrespective of their circumstances.

⁵⁵ Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones* (New York: Soho Press, Inc., 1998), 139.

Amabelle involuntarily witnessed their drowning while returning back home to Haiti from the Dominican Republic. The Massacre River--whose name stems from a sixteenth century conflict between Spanish settlers and French buccaneers--marks the northern border between the two countries. The family's seemingly insignificant, ordinary trip to purchase cooking pots, turned into an event that altered her life forever. Along with a number of young spectators, boys who regularly helped to carry people with their goods across the river, she saw her father swept away. The strong current also took her mother, who was clinging to his back. His promise to return for Amabelle was lost amidst cascades her tears. Don Ignacio (also referred to as Papi, the owner of a local estate) and his only daughter, Valencia sometimes ventured to the river for leisure. Coincidentally they visited the place shortly after the drowning, and Valencia insisted on taking the lonely orphan with them to live. This generous display of kindness, however, did not eradicate the void of Amabelle's loss.

The incident was a life-changing event that manifested itself in Amabelle's reoccurring nightmares. These things that resurfaced in her bad dreams, and which are frequently referenced throughout the novel, function as a reminder of her brokenness, and the complexity of her new existence far removed from what she had known. "It's either be in a nightmare or be nowhere at all. Or otherwise simply float inside these remembrances, grieving for who I was, and even more for what I've become."⁵⁶ As much as she appeared to want to forget them, they lingered on and profoundly impacted her future. Rooted in Haiti, she did not seem to be able to let go of her past. Her strong ties with her home country continued to emerge in a strange way, quietly but relentlessly. They persisted with vigor and released their power at night when she desperately needed to rest and sleep.

In her parents' shack in Haiti, Amabelle's imagination invited a shadow on the wall for her to play with. Her unflagging enthusiasm for this silent friend was worrying to her father. Brought up believing in the supernatural, he cautioned her against playing with shadows. Amabelle later confessed that she felt comfortable knowing that her shadow was there. To a poor introverted girl it became a real friend who kept her company. "Playing with my shadow made me, an only child, feel less alone. Whenever I had playmates, they were

⁵⁶ Danticat, *Farming*, 2.

never quite real or present for me.”⁵⁷ Later on those dark, silent, one-dimensional friends coexisted not only as substitutions for the lack of children on the estate, but also as a connection to the world she was removed from.

One shadow was Amabelle’s and the other was Valencia’s. They filled the space of Valencia’s bedroom during their evenings. In some ways, orphaned Amabelle found in Valencia a sister she never had. Similarly, Valencia, found in Amabelle a much-needed companion. Not only were the girls close in age; they both experienced the same dreadful loss. Amabelle (the offspring of former slaves) and Valencia (a child of pure Spanish blood) both longed for their dead mothers. The girls became each other’s confidants. Their company and their words, gestures and reassurances helped them to forget about their sorrow and they became close, as close as a subordinate child could have become to a future mistress of the house. Amabelle recalled how they slipped under Valencia’s covers at bedtime.

Even though she was supposed to sleep in her own canopy bed and I was to sleep on a smaller cot across from hers, she would invite me onto her bed after her father had gone to sleep and the two of us would jump up and down on the mattress, play with our shadows, and pretend we were four happy girls [...].⁵⁸

For them it was natural to fantasize and utilize almost anything that was available. The shadows were no exception, as they provided more than just inspiration for their games. Their ability to improvise enhanced their ability to bond. The imaginary acquaintances connected the girls, strengthened their relationship, and helped Amabelle to forget about her displacement.

Sometimes they forgot themselves as their wishes and promises spiraled into uncontrolled laughter, at which times the housemaid, Juana came in threatening to bring Valencia’s father Don Ignacio (also called Papi), to put the end to their joy. Perhaps it was loneliness that drew the girls together. Even though they had both lost their mothers, they still had one another to fall back on. They did not appear to be concerned with their vulnerability, the human dust-in-the-wind like existence so susceptible to injury. They

⁵⁷ Danticat, *Farming*, 4.

⁵⁸ Danticat, *Farming*, 6.

seemed to feel protected by the environment of the estate. The closeness they shared was one of a kind and it deepened the connection between them. They felt complete in each other's company. Even though Valencia did not lose her home, or country she still searched for someone to fill the void left by the passing of her mother.

At an early age Amabelle was thoughtful and modest. In the evenings, upon an invitation, she left her canopy for Valencia's bed. She was grateful for the opportunity she had been given. Valencia's father's generosity meant a lot to Amabelle. The more time the girls spent with one another, the closer they grew. Valencia appeared more vulnerable. Defenseless, she was a little rose in her father's garden. Shielded from hardship, she had been given everything she wanted. Although possessions essential for growth were always available to her, and there was abundant food on their table, she did not make Amabelle feel less of a person for being an orphan. Unlike Amabelle, who came from a little shack, Valencia had it all. Still, she was taught to share, and though they were from two completely different backgrounds, the girls were inseparable. Surrounded by the height of the protecting walls of the estate, they were entitled to the freedom of misjudgment, an oversight that proved fatal to Amabelle's parents. The wrong evaluation of the situation at the river that day was a grave mistake that ended their lives. They simply wished to get back home, a place they felt compelled to return to, regardless of its appearance. When the river took Amabelle's parents, she became homeless, but the thought of having nowhere to go did not occur to her largely due to her not having the capacity to understand it well at that age. As a teenage woman she retrieved what she could remember and provided a testimony in the present tense.

My father reaches into the current and sprinkles his face with the water, as if to salute the spirit of the river and request her permission to enter. My mother crosses herself three times and looks up at the sky before she climbs on my father's back. The water reaches up to Papa's waist as soon as he steps in. Once he is in the river, he flinches, realizing that he has made a grave mistake. My mother turns back to look for me, throwing my father off balance. A flow of mud fills the shallows. My father thrusts his hands in front of him, trying to keep on course. My mother tightens her grip around his neck; her body covers him and weighs him down at the same time.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Danticat, *Farming*, 51.

Witnessing the disappearance of both mother and father at the same time scarred her for life. No number of tears, shrieks or any type of an uproar would bring them back. Tossing her mother's long-desired cooking pots into the flow of the maddening water could not have lessened the frustration of the occasion. It seemed a natural response to the horrid account of events. Opting for the water, without trying to preserve the life that was granted to her, was not an act of desperation but a salvation from the unknown. Lacking the maturity of an adult, she also chose the river herself as the embodiments of her love, affection and means of survival disappeared into its murky waters. The river was just too dangerous and too powerful. The ropes that they boys tried to throw as lifelines to Amabelle's parents from its banks failed to do their job. But their observance and quick reactions saved the girl from the physical harm she was about to inflict upon herself. Their utterance reminded her of her parents' mortality.

This heartbreaking event proved to be one of several defining moments in Amabelle's life journey. The old one, as she knew it, was transformed. It had vanished before her very eyes. Her instinct only summed up the desire to be with her parents, the only thing that made sense to her at the time. Rather than slowly and naturally gaining independence as a young adult, she was forced to say good-bye to them in an instant, an impossible task for an adult, let alone for a child. The drowning became a heavy burden on her cumbersome journey to maturity, one that she found far away from all that was familiar to her.

3.2 The Relationship with the Adoptive Family

Nebulous images from Amabelle's past came and went as they pleased. They resurfaced sporadically and strived to inform her of her past. It became clear to Amabelle that material possessions, and a place on the social ladder determined not only how the birthing and wake would look, but also one's lifestyle and position in society. Valencia's pregnancy became another test of Amabelle's strength, for she provided more than moral support. Her only childhood friend got married and was to be referred to as Señora Valencia Duarte. Valencia's husband, Pico Duarte, was a highly ambitious soldier interested primarily in climbing the ladder of success in dictator Trujillo's government, and lived away in the barracks for the majority of the time. Señora Valencia did not relocate. She remained living

under her father's roof and her husband moved back and forth between the two locations. By the time of their wedding, Amabelle had accommodated to her new surroundings and the way of life.

Amabelle soon realized that people had aggression encoded within themselves, and that each person dealt with it differently. Some suppressed it and channeled its energy positively; others made it a part of their work regardless of what they were asked to do. The world was a place where the fittest and most capable survived and moved up the social ladder. Señor Pico, an obedient and devoted servant to the state's way of doing things, was no exception. He craved power and dutifully carried out all orders and became an indispensable and sought-after facilitator and executioner. His marriage to the daughter of a respected and prosperous Spanish settler helped him gain a stronger position in society.

Amabelle learned to live among all sorts of people. While Valencia's decision to marry did not appear to be a steppingstone to her happiness, her pregnancy did. Her maternity turned into an unanticipated early labor. "“Ay, no!” the señora shouted through her clenched grinding teeth. “It's too soon. Not for two months yet.” Papi and I both took a few steps away when we saw the blood-speckled flow streaming from between his daughter's legs.””⁶⁰ Decades ago an early childbirth was a nightmare for all. Valencia was not in early labor due to work. She was looked after and kept task-free.

People in panic often do strange things and behave in ways they under normal circumstances, would not. Perhaps out of anxiety, or just mere frustration, Don Ignacio's treatment of Amabelle then was harsh and rather unexpected. When he saw his daughter in pain, he turned pale and while on his way out to bring a doctor, he deliberately pushed Amabelle towards his daughter's bed, as if her loyalty was questionable. This action on his part was probably a defining moment for Amabelle and her world order. She realized that no matter how good of a person she was going to be, she would always be looked down upon regardless of how hard she worked or how well she behaved.

Don Ignacio (also called Papi) and Amabelle had a lot in common. He was the son of a baker and an only child as well. As an adult he was uprooted from his home on the Spanish soil, when he served in the Spanish-American war. (Papi's father, a hard-working principled man who also took care of others, sometimes fed everybody free of charge first,

⁶⁰ Danticat, *Farming*, 5.

before he provided food for his own son.) Amabelle admired Papi. He was a person of substance who gave her nutrition, a roof over her head, and an education when she was left by herself. Out of respect, love, and devotion her actions towards him and the foster family were always truthful and did not need to be questioned.

Childbirth is a colossal task. Without sophisticated medical treatments and modern medicine, women and their children sometimes died in labor or shortly thereafter. Papi's behavior stemmed from his previous loss. It made him act in a way he might have otherwise condemned were it not for the death of his wife and his second newborn years prior. The abrupt shoving of Amabelle closer to Valencia's bed probably demonstrated his frustration and lack of procedural clarity. On the one hand it was a reprehension for her not having done enough at that time of need, for not providing a sufficient amount of attention to his daughter. On the other, though, it set an overall tone for a different race and its subordination, which was to accompany the reader throughout the novel.

The thought of having to perform something one does not have qualifications or experience for is daunting to an adult. Bringing a child into this world without prior practice is an overwhelming responsibility that was entrusted to Amabelle's capable, but very young hands. Seeing a birth for the first time made her physically sick. "I felt the contents of my stomach rise and settle in the middle of my chest when the baby's head entered her canal."⁶¹

It seems as if the author wanted to show not only Amabelle's capabilities and resilience, but also foreshadow the adversities she was yet to overcome. The birth that the women engaged in not only depicted an actual fight with nature, it brought an awareness of need. The way the young women handled the situation surprised, if not shocked, not only themselves, but also Doctor Javier, the family's physician and a friend who was not summoned to Valencia's bed in a timely fashion. What Amabelle achieved made him realize that she would be more useful, and better off, across the border where she could work as a midwife, a profession the country was in dire need of. "I know of only one or two midwives in that region of the border. You are greatly needed."⁶² Doctor Javier could foresee that Amabelle's empathy and recently discovered skills would calm the anxiety of many fearful women. The recollection of what her parents would have done helped to bolster not only her

⁶¹ Danticat, *Farming*, 8.

⁶² Danticat, *Farming*, 21.

own moral, but also the fragile ego of her exhausted childhood friend, young Señora Valencia. Her appreciation for Amabelle was unfaltering and Amabelle's devotion shined though. Her words could not have spoken louder when Valencia praised her actions. "It was you, Señora. You did this."⁶³

Due to the pregnancy complications her mother had experienced with Valencia's sibling years prior, Valencia feared for her life as well as for the lives of her children. Amabelle went out of her way, assisted in a complicated delivery, and saved them all. Though still in her teens, she was in fact very mature. Without losing the connection with herself or forgetting about who she was and where she came from, this dark-colored orphan, who in a way became Don Ignacio's second daughter, was a dutiful servant knowing how to handle herself in times of need.

3.3 Sebastien Onius

The birth of the twins brought about many changes in the young Duarte's household. It did not, however, alter Amabelle's relationship with the love of her life, Sebastien, the only man she knew. Although Valencia still lived under her father's roof in the comfort of the house where she grew up, she was lonely. The absence of her husband contrasted starkly with Sebastian's presence. Sebastien, who was born on the other side of the island in Haiti, possessed a manly figure, hands tried by hard labor, and a face scarred by sugar cane leaves. He provided a sanctuary for Amabelle's frightened soul. Whenever he was absent, she felt sad and incomplete. Luckily, he was always there for her at night, so Amabelle did not have to experience the same loneliness Valencia did. In the midst of their displacement they found sanctuary in each other's arms. She looked up to his persuasiveness the way a child looks up to an adult for approval. His scent reminded her of their closeness, and his voice deepened the desire for his company. He made her feel beautiful, safe and appreciated. Her grief was always met with his compassion. Although he missed his own mother, who lived far away in Haiti, his loneliness was dissolved by Amabelle's calm voice and the truth of her affection. For her part his reasoning made her feel safe and loved. He lessened her pain and tried to minimize her reoccurring nightmares concerning the drowning of her parents. He did it

⁶³ Danticat, *Farming*, 12.

patiently and with utmost love and respect. ““Let us say that the river was still that day.”
“And my parents?” “They died natural deaths many years later.””⁶⁴

Meeting with her parents’ mortality impacted her in various ways. Their sudden death altered her whole life physically as well as mentally. Not only had she lost everyone who was dear to her, she also lost her country. The customs that she had known, as well as the language that she had spoken, were embodied in Sebastien who was convinced that they did not meet by a chance. “Even though you were a girl when you left and I was already a man when I arrived and our families did not know each other, you came here to meet me.”⁶⁵ Sebastien’s reasoning seemed to make her think about alternatives. His words always assisted in quieting her racing mind. From then on it was always just an additional step to lovemaking. His absence made her long for the moments they spent together. The only drawback in their relationship was that time appeared to pass too quickly. Their being with each other felt almost addictive, in the way individuals might feel towards the possessions they do not want to forfeit. It appeared as if the author wanted to show that possessions and prestige could hardly replace love and affection. Their relationship was a source of mutual comfort, but also a reminder of what they had lost.

They shared the memories of their early childhoods in the bare surroundings of their quarters. Amabelle’s long-gone parents as well as Sebastien’s deceased father were the objects of many of their discussions. Whenever they engaged in a conversation about them, they talked about each parent in an inquisitive way. Sebastien shared the history of his father’s loss and asked Amabelle how she remembered her parents to which she replied with admiration.

My father was joyful, contrary to my mother’s quietly unhappy ways. [...] He was always looking for some new way to heal others, searching for cures for illnesses that he had not yet even encountered. Aside from the birthing and healing work he and my mother did together, he spent a lot of time outside the house trying to help other people plow their fields and dig waterways to their land. I was always very jealous of the time he spent on other people’s land.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Danticat, *Farming*, 55.

⁶⁵ Danticat, *Farming*, 55.

⁶⁶ Danticat, *Farming*, 34.

As a young adult Amabelle valued her father not only for his hard work and innovative ways of thinking regarding alternative medicine but also for his helpful spirit. However, as a little girl she was happy with her father spending time away from her because she missed him. The fragmentation of her maternal and paternal attention stressed her to the point where she exhibited jealousy.

Amabelle's feelings for Sebastien grew stronger the more they talked about life. In both cases it was water that caused their parents' deaths. These dramatic circumstances bridged a gap between them and brought them even closer. Perhaps, deep down they knew that their harmonious relationship would not last. Without their home country and the collective being of their people they both appeared to have felt somewhat incomplete, even though all the cane cutters that they came in contact with were Haitian.

After a few seasons Sebastien despised the exhausting labor on the cane fields. He failed to see any future in it. The novel does not explicitly inform the reader whether he wanted to return back to Haiti or not, but the promise he made to Amabelle, as well as to himself, was straightforward. His intentions were for the current season to be his last. He was aware of the fact that he did not earn enough money to support himself and his love. He was determined to find better work that would sustain them both. His honesty was, in a way, admirable. "I don't give you much," he said, "but I want you to know that tomorrow begins my last zafra. Next year, I work away from the cane fields, in coffee, rice, tobacco, corn, an onion farm, even yucca grating, anything but the cane."⁶⁷ Aside from his reassurance about their future, and his promise of change that he was not able to guarantee, the text contains a word that transfers the reader to a specific environment. The term zafra is a local expression for the cane harvest.

Overall, the text is masterfully crafted and authentic. It increases curiosity about the history of a particular era and place. It also creates a bridge between the lives of the novel's elite and the displaced working masses of the cane cutters, some of whom did not even possess birth certificates even though they were born on Dominican soil. They did not exist for the Haitian government but neither were they Dominican. They had no rights and no authority to talk to about their miserable existence because they existed only for the fellow workers who knew them personally. Sebastien represented the thousands who searched for

⁶⁷ Danticat, *Farming*, 55.

better life in a neighboring country. The choice was his. He was issued papers at birth back home, and had a choice to return had he decided to do so. Like every immigrant he sacrificed the familiar for the unknown. But over time there were thousands of stateless people who knew nothing else but the path between the sugar mill and the sugar fields. Those caught elsewhere were severely punished. A remnant of the slavery that the uneducated were subjected to after the reinstatement of Haiti, exists to this day. As many are unaware that these practices still persist, it remains a controversial topic.

4 Life on the Island

Childhood provides a steppingstone to a person's life journey and determines the future patterns of behavior. The time and place of a person's birth; their parents' personalities, education as well as their outlook on life; and their monetary situation, are all building blocks for the next generation's success and failures. Amabelle's formative years represent a short period of time. During this time her experience consisted of getting acquainted with an assertive mother, the amiable actions of her father, a great deal of sorrow, and displacement. At a young age she was forced to part with the life that she knew and accommodate to different surroundings new people. The life she lived in Haiti was simple and unpretentious. Even though her family's resources were extremely limited, thanks to her mother and father she led a happy and fulfilling life. She was just starting to absorb her surroundings. The rules she was exposed to revolved around being honest and truthful. By means of her parents' healing work she also learned empathy. The responsibility they took on for peoples' lives and wellbeing predestined Amabelle to become a carrying, perceptive and sensitive individual; she was the best friend to her wealthy companion and an obedient household help later on in life. Even when circumstances tore her from her roots and planted her in a different country, her kindness and empathy for others prevailed and upon being given a second chance, she was able to flourish.

In a short period of time she had to learn a new language and adapt to a new household. Even though the chain of events haunted her during the silent hours of the night, she learned to appreciate her new existence. Her parents' loss confused her, but also propelled her to grow up fast. After experiencing these life-changing events, not only did she find the love of her life Sebastien, but she also started to recognize life's little pleasures.

They were hidden in his touch and scent, the words he spoke, and even his tears when he laughed. He took pleasure in observing small details. The specificity of people's looks and behavior always made him wonder. He contemplated their actions as well as their thoughts. Parrots repeating words mesmerized him, as did the sound trees made in the wind. Elements of his life were written on his body; the physical calluses and scars matched those hidden inside. He represented Amabelle's life on the island. They lived for the moment, dreaming of the past and wishing for a better future.

4.1 The Relevance of Colors and Space

From ancient times, men as well as women dressed to impress. Whether by using precious metal, expensive garments, cheap cloth, or accessories made out of gems, ordinary rocks, or pieces of wood, people liked to wear something to make a statement. The poorest workers on the Dominican cane fields of the last century wore bracelets made out of coffee beans as protection from dark forces. A bracelet painted yellow, moving up and down a masculine arm that is shiny from perspiration, could also provoke various images of intimacy. Amabelle recalled them at the beginning of the story. "His rough callused palms nip and chafe my skin, while the string of yellow coffee beans on his bracelet rolls over and caresses the tender places along my spine."⁶⁸ To her it was a reassuring ritual, the time when she was fully present and engaged in the intimacy of the moment since she had lost everything else. The closeness of their affair, outlined in several paragraphs of the first chapter, compared the colors of their skin to a spectrum of colors a person can associate with. The beauty of her young body, admired by his eyes, was one of the first references to various tones of black, a color that Haitians are proud of. Sebastien said: "Look at your perfect little face," he says, "your perfect little shape, your perfect little body, a woman child with deep black skin, all the shades of black in you, what we see and what we don't see, the good and the bad."⁶⁹ It appears as if the author wanted to bring attention to how the two nations of the island perceived their skin color in terms of casts, and to show its effects on their lives. The family members of the Dominican household however, viewed the darker

⁶⁸ Danticat, *Farming*, 2.

⁶⁹ Danticat, *Farming*, 3.

complexion with concern.

At the beginning of the novel the author used color references to address Sebastien's lips, unlikely imagery in combination with food and taste. "I can still feel his lips, the eggplant-violet gums that taste of greasy goat milk boiled to candied sweetness with mustard-color potatoes."⁷⁰ The intentions were probably to emphasize the longing for the kind of food they were used to and loved while living in Haiti. It could have also been a reference to the food they had on special occasions, as their monetary situation did not allow the cane workers to eat much. Since people habitually talk about what they relish but do not have, it also seemed to be a reference to food that the field workers would have been grateful for but did not have. The negative indication of purple could also be linked to the destructive forces of a hurricane, the same way as the color indigo (the natural dye extracted from the *indigofera* plant grown in tropical and subtropical climates) which was another cash infused commodity the blacks were displaced for.

On the island of Hispaniola the color of one's skin mattered significantly. The book does not separate black and white in a harsh manner but in a poetic one that suits the overall usage of language. "His hidelike skin instantly paled to the color of warm eggshells."⁷¹ Such a sentence acquaints the reader with the action of becoming pale in a less straightforward way, but it still pinpoints the prominence of skin, and shows that the language used in regards to the owner of the estate will differ from the language used concerning its workers. Similarly, the anticipated heir of the estate was Caucasian. The description of his skin was even more poetic, doubtlessly because he was a newborn baby. "Like Señora Valencia, her son was coconut-cream colored, his cheeks and forehead the blush pink of water lilies."⁷² My understanding of this reference is that it challenges the fortune of most Haitians, as water lilies evoke the lovely work of the French painter Claude Monet. Perhaps it was used as a reminder of the past ownership of the Haitian side of the island. The pitiable history of the enslaved is hard to associate with beautiful paintings. Monet's work is magnificent and lively, unlike the lives of the majority of Haitian children. In view of the fact that Amabelle did not suffer while living on Don Ignacio's estate, her thoughts about the foster family were

⁷⁰ Danticat, *Farming*, 3.

⁷¹ Danticat, *Farming*, 5.

⁷² Danticat, *Farming*, 5.

kind. She could have been rejecting the notion of the subordinate status of her people, but she was true to her feelings about the family. Nobody treated her cruelly and her overall experience was positive, she had no reason to dislike the new family member. She also felt the connection between him, the product of the adoptive family, and herself. Not only did she love his mother, who in a way became the sister she never had, she also cherished their relationship. To say she tolerated the family would be wrong. She did not appear to differentiate between races because she did not encounter abuse while growing up. Don Ignacio, as well as the rest of the Dominican household workers, treated her fairly. She was orphaned and without documents so they could have handled her as their possession. But except for Valencia's husband, they accepted her for one of their own. The estate became her surrogate home even though in her dreams she still longed to belong and returned to her Haitian experience.

Amabelle's observation of the second twin, baby Rosalinda, was poetic too. While pondering her looks, she took into consideration a mixture of colors. "Her skin was a deep bronze, between the colors of tan Brazil nut shell and black salsify."⁷³ Brazilian nutshells are not light in color, neither is the skin of black salsify. Valencia's reaction regarding the color of her daughter's skin was astounding. Fearing the prejudice around her it was clear that she was already anxious about her daughter's safety and future.

Valencia said:

"And my daughter favors you," she said.

"My daughter is a chameleon. She's taken your color from the mere sight of your face." [...]

"Amabelle do you think my daughter will always be the color she is now?"

Señora Valencia asked.

"My poor love, what if she's mistaken for one of your people?"⁷⁴

This was a clear indication that anything can happen on the other side of protective walls to those of dark complexion. When marrying Señor Pico, she probably did not envision that her child could possibly be considerably darker. "With his honey almond skin and charcoal

⁷³ Danticat, *Farming*, 11.

⁷⁴ Danticat, *Farming*, 11.

eyes, he was the one that baby Rosalinda resembled most.”⁷⁵ His skin was not as dark as his daughter’s. His lineage could have been African or Indian, but Dominicans denied African lineage. To them their skin is of aboriginal descent. But trying to alter the course of history and circumvent the existence of the hundreds of thousands of those who were uprooted and transported as slaves to the European colonies from Africa, is absurd. To rationalize the shade of the baby’s skin, Valencia referred Indian nobility and said: ”Would you like to be a princess?” Señora Valencia murmured into her daughter’s face. “She will steal many hearts, my Rosalinda. Look at that profile. The profile of Anacaona, a true Indian queen.”⁷⁶ To what degree African or aboriginal, history cannot deny that the inhabitants of Hispaniola are descendants of both peoples.

Amabelle’s recollection and comparison of the two lands is noteworthy. The images concerned an important place in history for all Haitians - the fortress of Henry I.

From the safety of these rooms, I saw the entire northern cape: the yellow-green mountains, the rice valley, the king’s palace of three hundred and sixty-five doors down in the hills above Milot and the Palais des Ramiers, the queen’s court across the meadow.⁷⁷

The characteristics of the land and the colors she perceived as a child, stayed with her for the duration of her life. What Amabelle saw produced strong feelings, so she remembered not only what she saw, but also what she did and what it felt like at the time. Though far away from Cap Hatien, the area where she was from and where the fortress towered above the trees, Don Ignacio’s estate on the hill evoked recollections of the past. She cherished memories of playing at the fortress when visiting with her father. Majestically erect, it is situated in the middle of a hilly landscape covered with trees and shrubberies. Unlike from Don Ignacio’s house, you could not see the fertile fields close up. Wucker provides background to Amabelle’s perceiving of the citadel as follows:

In the very style of the Europeans that Haiti had expelled, Henri Christophe created a spectacular palace modeled and named after the one the Prussian King Frederick the Great had built for himself at Potsdam. [...] Haitian

⁷⁵ Danticat, *Farming*, 35.

⁷⁶ Danticat, *Farming*, 29.

⁷⁷ Danticat, *Farming*, 46.

legend has it that he then worked twenty thousand men to death building the massive Citadelle La Ferrière, a fortress meant to house men and arms that would keep Napoléon's men from ever approaching Haiti again as they had in 1795.⁷⁸

Hidden in the mist and clouds of rainy days, towering over generations of peasants, it was hard to reach and thus hard to conquer. It looked over the disadvantaged and extremely poor people on the Haitian side of the island. Amabelle's sudden loss and the dislocation from all that she had known resulted in her longing to belong again.

The house stood at the top of a hill with a view of the azure-green mountains in the back and a wide road in front. [...] From the yard I also saw tightly closed shutters of Señora Valencia's room. They were painted indigo blue like most of the main house except for the wraparound verandah, which was the crimson red of Alegría's flame trees at high bloom.⁷⁹

The colorful house could not possibly compare to the enormity of the citadel that left an indelible image in Amabelle's mind. What it lacked in color it exceeded in size. She looked for similarities wherever she could, and described Don Ignacio's house with affection.

4.2 The Significance of Dreams

The strength of the novel--in portraying different environments and nationalities--lies in its organization. The structure is inventive and unusual. The lack of noticeable separation of the past from the present might have channeled the readers' attention into a different direction than intended at the beginning. However, it works well within the text, as chapters in bold type immediately indicate to readers their whereabouts in the thread of the story. Writing about the meaning of adult's dreams is provoking. It appears as if the significance of Amabelle's dreams lies in her longing to belong. The eleventh chapter of *The Farming of Bones* is shorter than others but filled with great deal of information relevant to Amabelle's age at the time she lost her parents. It seemed as if any arrangement of events could surface in anybody's fantasy, as it is common to dream about influential events in a

⁷⁸ Wucker, *Why*, 13-14.

⁷⁹ Danticat, *Farming*, 16.

chaotic manner. On the one hand, they can come across as various images mingled together in a dull and colorless way. On the other, they can represent colorful and adventurous sequences.

The chapter, in its entirety, made me contemplate childhood in its various stages and the irrelevance of emerging thoughts to one's dream. It also brought to the forefront a recollection of childhood's illness. High temperatures might have provoked hallucinating conditions during which Amabelle's subconscious worked in alignment with the negative forces of her psyche. It seemed as if she confronted her feelings through dreams. A sensation of expansion due to the remedies that her mother administered to her while being sick could have been a reaction to their repulsive taste and her unwillingness to accept them. Her fever probably lasted for several days and made her thin and weak, which was apparent from her father's reaction concerning her looks.

The projection of a doll that surfaced in Amabelle's dream read as if it represented a contradictory mixture of displeasure and fondness. The recollection of it appeared playfully childish a first.

My mother makes me a doll out of all my favorite things: strings of red satin ribbons sewn together into the skin, two pieces of corncob for the legs, a dried mango seed for the body frame, white chicken feathers for flesh, pieces of charcoal for the eyes, and cocoa brown embroidering thread for the hair.⁸⁰

However it also associated every item that the doll was made out of with something else that represented not only Amabelle's later life, but also aspects of Haitian history and culture. The red satin ribbons represented the loss of innocence and the beginning of her sexual life. In addition, the red body signified a prequel to the future slaughter of Haitian nationals in 1937. The doll's dark eyes also suggest the dark realism of dreams as well as the dark reality of most Haitians, particularly the paperless cane cutters and their family members who were born in the Dominican Republic but did not exist for Dominican officials, nor for the Haiti's government.

Could the darkness of the doll's eyes possibly have symbolized the near end of the Haitian's lives too? Could they foresee the continuation of their gloomy future? Their darkness could have signified the nation's infinite struggle. The doll is also associated with

⁸⁰ Danticat, *Farming*, 57.

an element of Vodou. In addition, the feather brought up the imagery of merciless rooster fights that are so popular in Haiti, as well as in the Dominican Republic. Was the reference to feathers also a reference to Amabelle's strength as a person, since she fought vigorously and victoriously the way the best roosters (the nation's symbols of strength) do on daily basis.

The doll's appearance could make the reader uncomfortable. Her rope skipping, however, was charming, particularly due to her briskly pulling out her brown embroidered hair threads and using them as a rope. Positive imagery could be skewed by the following quotation, as Amabele said: "Her voice is gentle, musical, but it echoes, like she's speaking from inside a very tall bottle. "I am sure you will live to be a hundred years old, having come so close to death while young."⁸¹ Even though the message might seem consoling, the inwardness of a lanky container and the doll's vivacity, fever and echoing voice of an energetic doll placed into the same compartment, emerge as overwhelming and apprehensive.

The variety of persistent dreams signified Amabelle's inner conflict between her desires and her reality. She had not processed the absence of her parents. Naturally, she wanted them to be alive. The dream's image of her mother probably symbolized closeness. She encapsulated all the protecting features that children look for. She represented not only the nurturing aspect of parenthood, but also safety, assurance and certainty. Amabelle was happy to see her parents in a dream because throughout it they gave her attention along with a present. This contact aided her emotional needs. But waking up from a dream meant their reoccurring loss. This ongoing struggle with their appearance and disappearance exhausted her as she was engaged in a constant clash.

Amabelle had reservations regarding how strict her mother was. The doll was characterized as a colorful element, and it seemed that Amabelle had intense feelings for it. In her dream she kept it close to her and did not want to part with it. "There are times when I want to be a girl again, to touch this doll, because when I touch it, I feel nearer to my mother than when her flesh is stroking mine in the washbasin or in the stream, or even when she's reaching down to plop down a compress heavy with aloe on my forehead."⁸² The dream

⁸¹ Danticat, *Farming*, 58.

⁸² Danticat, *Farming*, 57.

about the doll felt like a compensation for the lack of contact with her mother: Amabelle was only seven years old when found at the riverbank. As a teenager she had reservations towards her mother's strictness but could not have confronted her directly, thus she did it through dreams.

It is apparent from the text that her mother did not give her the same, kind attention that her father supplied. Amabelle wanted a less strict, kinder and often smiling mother. But she found a reason for her conduct in another dream, during which her mother informed her about the harshness of life. She stipulated the need to prepare her for the probable difficulties she was to encounter on her journey. Amabelle found peace in knowing that her mother's conduct was to intentionally prepare her to face various troubles with dignity. She took consolation in identifying her objectives, which were purely loving in nature.

4.3 The Saints of the Island

Throughout the years the usage of a diminutive *virgencita*⁸³ fluctuated. According to a simple online graph from the Collins Dictionary its application was prominent towards the end of the 18th century until about the first quarter of 1800. At that time its utilization dropped but the word became more popular again approximately a hundred years later. *The Farming of Bones* is full of references to saints. They are used to illustrate the differences between Haitians and Dominicans. They also brought to the forefront the religious aspect of the displacement of masses of Africans. In the novel the first calling of a saint came from Amabelle. "Even though I wasn't used to praying, I whispered a few words to La Virgen de la Carmen that the doctor would come before the señora was in agony again."⁸⁴ Out of affection for her foster loved ones, she never mentioned the saints she had discovered. Amabelle did not completely reject the existence of saints. She neglected her prayers but intuitively called upon them for physical as well as psychological assistance in extraordinary situations. They represented an element of help that almost everybody resigns to when nothing else can

⁸³ "Virgencita," Collins Dictionary, HarperCollins Publishers, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/spanish-english/virgencita>.

⁸⁴ Danticat, *Farming*, 55.

be done. One has to ponder why Amabelle chose this particular saint, Lady of Mount Carmel, who looks like Virgin Mary. In my search for more informative explanation, I came across an image of Lady of Mount Carmel and through further reading I deduced that the Lady of Mount Carmel must be the virgin Amabelle referred to as La Virgen de la Carmen, perhaps a mangled name. Lady of Mount Carmel is the saint that is celebrated in Spanish speaking towns on July 16.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel is the title given to the Blessed Virgin Mary in her role as patroness of the Carmelite Order. The first Carmelites were Christian hermits living on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land during the late 12th and early to mid-13th century. They built in the midst of their hermitages a chapel which they dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, whom they conceived of in chivalric terms as the "Lady of the place." Our Lady of Mount Carmel was adopted in the 19th century as the patron saint of Chile, in South America.⁸⁵

In the novel, Dominican women call upon saints frequently. A prime example of such a person was childless Juana, a generation older and a highly emotional housemaid. Happiness or sorrow, she always greeted them with her 'faucets turned on'.

Following the birth of the twins, the young mother was worn out and refused to deal with further emotions. She also felt more connected to Amabelle and lightheartedly declined Juana's presence. The following quotation attests to their friendship and the bond between them. "'Juana will only drown us in more of her tears,'" she chuckled." Amabelle's brisk reply was insightful and playfully straightforward. "'I will ask her to call on the patron saint of tears to stop hers.'" Her invention of the patron of tears proved how versed in saints Juana was. Whatever the reason for Juana and her husband not being able to have children, she accepted it as a punishment for not following the profession her mother chose for her. Running away with her husband and failing to become a nun probably produced unsurpassed guilt. Since she grew up in a convent it was natural for her to have a knowledge of all the saints, and to respect them. Her awareness was foreign to displaced Amabelle, who came from a completely different background not burdened by the rules of Catholicism. She often spoke freely without thinking of the possible consequences. When she asked whether Juana was jealous of Valencia having children, Juana was shocked and said: "Jealous? Santa Ana, the Holy Mother who gives life, what if she heard you?" To which Amabelle replied:

⁸⁵ "Mount Carmel," Wikipedia, accessed April 20, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Carmel.

“If she has ears, then Santa Ana, she’s already heard everything I said.” Juana continued: “The sin’s on your head, then,” she said. “But you’re not a believer.” But Amabelle asked her: “How do you know I’m not a believer?”⁸⁶ Juana was startled, but at the same time, she knew the young woman well enough to realize that her attempt at sassiness was a deliberate approach to changing the course of their conversation, enlighten her heavy thoughts and lift up her spirits. Despite the fact that Amabelle refrained from vocalizing what saints she believed in, it did not mean that she did not believe. Her differentiation and overall silence seemed to mark the contrast between the nations, as suggested by Wucker.

Prohibited by colonial French plantation owners from African worship, the slaves in Hispaniola disguised their ancestral spirits as Roman Catholic saints. Catholic holidays are holy in Vodou as well; the feast days of Catholic patron saints are the same as those of the corresponding *lwa*. Haitian Vodouists are devout Catholics. Their *lwa*, like the saints, all serve one God, known to Haitians as Bondyè (from *Bon Dieu*, in French). But Bondyè is so grand and busy that most life problems are delegated to the *lwa* who serve him.⁸⁷

Wucker further comments on deceased relatives and on how the Vodou religion perceives the occurrence of their death in regards to their presence. She also stipulates the effect on hundreds of thousands of people who were abducted and brought to the island from a different part of the world.

In the worldview of Vodou, the departed ones are always present, despite their physical absence. This makes sense in a culture of people whose ancestors were forcibly taken from their homeland, and whose contemporaries are making their own exodus by choice – to New York, Miami, Boston, Montreal, Paris, anywhere but the misery of Haiti.⁸⁸

Haitians seem to be in perpetual search of a new home. Various tribes having been torn out from their African roots and replanted to a different place were unquestionably influenced by others’ beliefs. The new nation that has emerged from this has struggled for centuries. Danticat’s masterful fusion of history and fiction only attests to that.

⁸⁶ Danticat, *Farming*, 30.

⁸⁷ Wucker, *Why*, 151.

⁸⁸ Wucker, *Why*, 152.

5 Some Lives Matter Less Than Others

In spite of the draining routine of life on the cane fields during the first half of the twentieth century, the time during which one of the primary texts takes place, one group of fellow workers in Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* had fairly stable lives. They knew a lot about each other. Sometimes the information was detailed and included not only knowledge of their current state, but also an account of their past. Their lives, as one might expect, encompassed hard labor, inadequate time to rest, lack of nutrition, no leisure or education, and payments that amounted next to nothing. They lived hour-to-hour, day-to-day. Adults provided help to their young ones, including the orphans; the natural progression was for children to assist in return, they worked alongside the adults. The workers lived in various compounds within the vicinity of Dominican or American owned sugar cane mills called Batey that were (and still are) scattered around the Dominican Republic. *The Farming of Bones* does not use this expression at all. Danticat only differentiates between Dominican and American ownership of the sugar cane mills. One of the reasons for her not using this term is because the word was only established after 1937 massacre. Her writing is poetic, and the sentence structure reveals the origins of the characters. Moreover, even though her story starts in 1937, the term sounds too modern and would disturb her writing style. The novel continues in the aftermath of the massacre; it tells of Amabelle's difficult journey back to Haiti, and continues until Amabelle comes of age. As stipulated in a previous chapter, she worked in Don Ignacio's house, never on the cane fields; it was her lover who did. The issue of manual labor seems appropriate to comment on since it was the primary reason for the displacement of masses of workers who were not born on Dominican soil but voluntarily left their country to work on the sugarcane fields across boarder from Haiti.

One might conclude that manual harvesting of any kind of crop is the cleanest and preferred way to pick produce. However, the conditions the author recounts, in which the laborers lived and the circumstance under which they "got paid" were unacceptable. The advantage of working in an American-owned mill was not the wage but security against deportation. Regardless of the ownership though, the common lodgings, looked like work camps. If the workers were lucky enough, and the weather was favorable and the owners of the mills allowed them to do so, the workers grew yams on a little patch behind their living quarters. These domiciles were the places where some workers were born, but where the

majority of them died. Bare walls, dirt or concrete floors, no beds or any other furniture, such were the places where loved ones met at the end of a long day.

Even though Amabelle and Sebastien were not married, they spent time together whenever they had a chance. She took pride in making his clothes and cooking for him, he provided physical and psychological support whenever possible. Unseen by Don Ignacio, he used to come to visit her room at the estate at night. Their routine meetings were affected not only by the birth of the twins but also by an accident that happened the very same night. Valencia's husband, Pico Duarte's automobile was speeding from the distant barracks and hit one of the cane cutters who dwelled in a nearby compound. The killed laborer was the young couple's friend and Sebastien's co-worker, Jöel. The reason for Sebastien's tardiness was easily explained. He failed to come to Amabelle's room in time for supper because he was walking along the road with Jöel at the time of the accident. She was prepared to go out to look for him had he not reached her room.

When he finally came, they did not engage in a lengthy conversation, so it was obvious that something out of the ordinary had taken place. While looking at him, Amabelle probably thought that the dirt will wash off and the wounds will heal. They did not seem severe enough to cause panic. Besides, he had been hurt many times before and his previous injuries were more serious. However, she could sense that he was concerned with other matters, since he seemed distant. Not only was he full of grief and anger at Valencia's husband, Señor Pico for killing his friend, he contemplated what to do next. With the tropical weather and lack of refrigeration the deceased body had to be taken care of. These workers could not afford to bury their loved ones. Sebastien knew his Dominican employer; he did not care. He explained to Amabelle: "Don Carlos won't pay for a burial."⁸⁹ One can conclude that such occurrences were frequent; in the event of an accident or sickness, there was no help in sight - a person was left to destiny's mercy. The mill owners did not show any gratitude towards their workers. Don Ignacio was different though, and so Amabelle took Sebastien to his storage place and got several planks of cedar wood for Jöel's coffin. Based on how well she knew the man who saved her, she anticipated his positive reaction. She knew that he was an immigrant himself. "Perhaps this was why he often seemed more kindly disposed to the strangers for whom this side of the island had not always been

⁸⁹ Danticat, *Farming*, 48.

home.”⁹⁰ People usually had good reason to immigrate. Whether they were opportunists and wanted to improve their financial situation, or they ran away to escape armed conflict, a fresh start in a distant location was not only tempting but often necessary. Certain individuals had money to invest in new enterprises or worked hard to secure their family’s future, men like Don Ignacio, who as a Caucasian was not disadvantaged. A unifying aspect of their lives was their displacement and at times the longing for their old country.

In the Dominican Republic of the last century, workers who were not born there came to earn money. Therefore, they usually stayed for a number of seasons, mostly indefinitely though (having no money to return home). The wounds inflicted on them and their collective being were psychological as well as physical. It is reasonable to believe that Jöel would not have survived the accident even if medical assistance was available. Had he stayed alive he would have become a burden to the workers’ community. The collective responsibility towards people who did not have enough to provide for themselves was extraordinary. These overwhelmingly positive gestures of kindness did not occur randomly. Help was part of the workers’ DNA. Old women took care of children who became orphaned, younger people tried to help the old ones who were incapable of working.

The oldest cane-cutting women were now too sick, or weak, or too crippled to either cook or clean in a big house, work the harvest in the cane fields, or return to their old homes in Haiti. So they started off every morning bathing in the stream, and then spent the rest of the day digging for wild roots or waiting on the kindness of their good neighbors.⁹¹

The conditions that Haitian nationals had to deal with on a daily basis were dire. Unsurprisingly some laborers were not interested in longevity, such as Mimi, Sebastien’s younger sister. Her utterance, which took place while engaging in the hygiene ritual with other workers at the beginning of the day, was shocking. The morning following the accident was a quiet one, as everyone knew what had transpired. A preceding discussion revolved around Mimi’s employer, Doña Eva’s fiftieth birthday. Mimi said: “I don’t want to live so long,” she answered in her usual abrupt manner. “I’d rather die young like Jöel

⁹⁰ Danticat, *Farming*, 78.

⁹¹ Danticat, *Farming*, 61.

did.”⁹² Her comment had nothing to do with the way the accident occurred. She was not interested in being hit by a car. The remark referred to the element of surprise. To her, a sudden loss of consciousness was more acceptable than living a long life away from home, under harsh conditions, subjected to hard manual labor from dawn to dusk seven days a week. To wait for nearing death at an old age frightened her. She preferred to perish before her body grew old. She did not want to wait like the infirmed, semi-crippled women bathing close to her.

The stream witnessed many events over the years. The trickling water observed men from the community help Kongo, a true leader, and Jöel’s father, wash the blood of his son’s body the night prior. Currently the stream watched this well-build man (who voluntarily came in search of a better life) and was still active on the cane fields, come to terms with his son’s death while washing himself with parsley leaves. Apart from cooking, Haitians used these vegetable tops to clean their bodies.

We used pèsi, perejil, parsley, the damp summer morningness of it, the mingled sprigs, bristly and coarse, gentle and docile all at once, tasteless and bitter when chewed, a sweetened wind inside the mouth, the leaves a different taste than the stalk, all this we savored for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides of old aches and griefs, to shed a passing year’s dust as a new one dawned, to wash a new infant’s hair for the first time and – along with boiled orange leaves – a corpse’s remains one final time.⁹³

This is the first time the novel mentions the Spanish word for parsley, perejil, an infamous shibboleth used to identify Haitian nationals in the Dominican Republic during the 1937 massacre. The event took place primarily, but not exclusively, around Dajabón and the Dajabón river (the Massacre River), which provides a natural, as well as an actual borderline between the Dominican Republic and Haiti in the north of Hispaniola.

5.1 Living with Hardships

Danticat documented the atrocities perpetrated on the laborers during the killing of

⁹² Danticat, *Farming*, 60.

⁹³ Danticat, *Farming*, 62.

thousands of Haitians and Haitian Dominicans in 1937 through masterfully crafted fictitious characters; these were based on the testimonials of an army of real workers who toiled the sugar cane fields of the last century and managed to escape. Her validation against the state's perpetrated violence has its place in helping to eradicate the collective pain that lingers in the common consciousness of Hispaniola's inhabitants. She depicted the event in a more accessible manner, commemorated injustice of it, and paid homage to those who did not escape. The structure of her story is incremental. It seems as if Jöel's accident was not only a reminder of parental strength and an account of how various personalities behaved, but also a precursor to what was to come.

Life on Don Ignacio's estate following the accident changed again, as one of the twins died. The little boy Rafi, Señor Pico's pride and joy, departed silently in his sleep in the middle of the day. Some of the workers thought of it as justice being served. Even Sebastien questioned Amabelle's grief. Despite them knowing each other's backgrounds, he failed to understand her feelings towards Don Ignacio's family. The only cane worker touched by Valencia's sadness was Jöel's father, Kongo. In a way they both made peace with their sons' deaths in each other's presence. An unlikely event took place straight after Rafi's funeral in the early hours of the morning when heartbroken Señor Pico drove away from Papi's estate. A little while later Valencia invited a group of passing workers for a cup of coffee. The majority of the workers ignored her unusual gesture. They progressed towards the cane fields. A group of approximately twenty of them led by Jöel's father, however, accepted the invitation and walked up the hill to the house. As a most respected elder he had a following among the workers. Everybody knew that Kongo was not his official name, but nobody addressed him otherwise. Danticat probably chose the name based on one of the African ethnic groups that were shipped to the island of Hispaniola as slaves. Despite health problems that made walking difficult for him, using a broom handle to support himself he made it up to Valencia's salon, where he paid respects not only to her but to her diseased baby boy as well. He intended to praise her daughter, but Valencia was afraid of his intentions and blocked his hand away from her child.

Kongo grabbed Señora Valencia's extended hand and kissed the tip of her fingernails; [...] He said: "My heart is saddened for the death of your other child," Kongo said in his best Spanish. He released her hand so that she could better grasp her daughter. "When he died, my

son, the ground sank a few folds beneath my feet.”⁹⁴

His actions were courageous, and none of this would have taken place had Señor Pico not left. Kongo was able to make his peace with the family and forgive Valencia for her husband’s inept driving that caused the death of his son, Jöel, far away from his actual home. Despite his mourning, he wanted to make certain that she was aware of his forgiveness. By Valencia extending her initial invitation, she made the first step towards making amends. For her husband such action was inconceivable. It only enhanced his repugnance towards the Haitian workforce. Coming from a poor background himself, he projected his negative feelings onto people from similarly deprived communities. In addition, he was fueled by his devotion to Trujillo, which made him hate the workers even more. “He did not scold her, but once he discovered that she had used their imported orchid-patterned tea set, he took the set out to the yard and, launching them against the cement walls of the house latrines, he shattered the cups and saucers, one by one.”⁹⁵ Any kind of reconciliation was unthinkable to Señor Pico. Trujillo’s orders were summoned in his every move. He could not have even tolerated Amabelle, Valencia’s childhood friend who assisted at the birth of his children. He was fueled by narrow-mindedness and a devotion to the President and his orders. He had detested everyone with darker skin and could not even bring himself to appreciate his own daughter. She was alive instead of his white-skinned son and was of a similar complexion as Amabelle. This became blatantly obvious shortly after Rosalinda’s christening, when those involved left the chapel where the ceremony took place, and Valencia stopped by Amabelle outside the chapel where the workers waited, and proudly presented her daughter to her for a traditional kiss.

I leaned forward and grazed Roslinda’s cheeks with my lips. Her forehead was still wet where the priest had doused it with the holy water. Señor Pico yanked his wife’s arm and pulled her away, almost making the señora drop the child. Rosalinda was startled by the abrupt movement and began to cry as they piled into the automobile for the short journey to the house.⁹⁶

Amabelle’s actions were inconceivable to Señor Pico. Like Sebastien, he did not understand

⁹⁴ Danticat, *Farming*, 116.

⁹⁵ Danticat, *Farming*, 116.

⁹⁶ Danticat, *Farming*, 119.

the kind of friendship that connected the young women. Regardless of information he knew about their past, he could not stray away from the line of duty that was entrusted to him, about which neither his wife nor Amabelle had any idea. He was percussive in following Trujillo's orders to rid the northern region of the county of Haitian laborers. As an ardent soldier obedient to the regime he was fanatical about his mission. The news of a future possible ambush travelled fast among the workers. The reason for the majority of laborers from Don Carlos's mill declining the coffee offer was fear for their own lives.

A week before, a pantry maid who had worked in the house of a colonel for thirty years was stabbed by him at the dinner table. Two brothers were dragged from a cane field and macheted to death by field guards [...]. Poor Dominican peasants had been asked to catch Haitians and bring them to the soldiers. Why not the rich ones too?⁹⁷

The last sentence of the quotation suggests that some lives matter more than others, a cruel observation present in many books written on the subject of slavery and mass displacement of people of color.

By 1937 Haitians who had money had a classy lifestyle. They were treated harshly only if they tried to help poor Haitians, particularly at the time of the massacre, people like Valencia's family's long-time friend, Doctor Javier, who went missing after he organized trucks to transport some Haitians over the Dominican boarder to safety. Sugar cane cutters were peasants and regarded as nobodies. Technically they received some pay, but the wages were so insignificant that the workers were not even able to purchase adequate amount of food with it, which was the only reason for their accumulated debt in the mill's stores where they purchased basic food. The following quotation from the primary text pertains not only to the workers' hunger but also to the conditions they slept in -- unrelated people or lovers, such as Amabelle and Sebastien resided in the same room with somebody else. Amabelle said:

"Did you have bad dreams last night"? I asked Yves. To which Yves replied: "Why do you want to know?" he asked, his Adam's apple bobbing up and down as though it were going to leap out of his mouth He continued: "You want to use my dreams to play games of chance at Mercedes' stand?" Sebastien urged: "We couldn't sleep," Sebastien said. He continued: "You

⁹⁷ Danticat, *Farming*, 114.

were squawking like a crazy parrot all night long.”⁹⁸

Yves spoke briskly. His feelings might have been hurt for another reason, but since the text mentions Mercedes, a Dominican woman who sold produce in her stand on the mill’s premises, it seems that his “game of chance” referred to practices the workers were reduced to, such as amusing or begging (or both) the shop keepers for discounts or store credits on basic foods.

The workers were busy cutting cane yet too poor to own a radio. In addition, there was no record of their existence. A child born on the sugar mill grounds had no birth certificate. Paperless people were denied education, and they were not allowed to move freely but had to remain on the mill’s soil or work on the adjacent fields, which Danticat addresses as well.

The worker said: ”I pushed my son out of my body here, in this country,” [...]. She continued: “My mother too pushed me out of her body here. Not me, not my son, not one of us has ever seen the other side of the border. Still they won’t put our birth papers in our palms so my son can have knowledge placed into his head by a proper educator in a proper school.”⁹⁹

Only one word comes to mind, and that is lawlessness. Stateless people, whose existences were known only to the closest of kin. Nameless men and women subjugated to follow their line of work, persons of color who were not allowed to speak up, those who were not listened to, people who mattered the least. The laborers who perished had no grave where loved ones could grieve their loss. The memory of them existed only in the hearts of those closest to them. At the time when Don Ignacio asked Amabelle to mediate a meeting between Kongo and himself concerning financing his son’s funeral, Kongo had already buried his son in a ravine where he died. Even though considerably old and unable to walk properly, he carried his son’s body by himself to his final destination.

Kongo said: ”I wanted to bury him in our own land where he was born, I did, but he was too heavy to carry so far. I buried him where he died in the ravine. I buried him in a field of lemongrass, my son.” [...] He continued: “It wasn’t ceremonious the way I buried him, I know. No clothes, no coffin, nothing

⁹⁸ Danticat, *Farming*, 130.

⁹⁹ Danticat, *Farming*, 69.

between him and the dry ground. I wanted to give him back to the soil the way his mother passed him to me on the first day of his life.”¹⁰⁰

From his dialogue with Amabelle it was apparent that Danticat wrote not only of Kongo’s son but also of other children. Women working on the cane fields were like the male workers. They cut the cane the same way as their male counterparts. Nobody cared about their pregnancies. The fact that they required help with their child labor concerned nobody but the fathers of their children. The mindsets of those who owned the mills was to ensure that the harvest continued as planned and as swiftly as possible. It was a strenuous and relentless routine. This being said one would presume that even if the workers from Haiti kept flooding across Dominican borders, there was enough work for all of them.

5.2 To Leave or Not to Leave

The northern part of the island of Hispaniola is divided by the Dajabón River, after which the current capital city of the same province in the northern part of the Dominican Republic is named. It is the same river where Valencia and Don Ignacio found Amabelle as a child. Much has happened there and many have perished there too. They perished by the hands of those who carried out the orders of the Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo, once a guard of sugar cane fields.

Rumors pertaining to his plan to eradicate the Haitian laborers were not taken into consideration at first. When the warnings spread, however, even Amabelle started to listen. Upon Sebastien’s marriage proposal and his agreement to return to their native Haiti, she made up her mind to leave the country as well. Initially, she did not listen to Doctor Javier, but when she found out that there were some spaces left in the trucks that he helped to organize, Sebastien went to fetch his sister so they could all leave together and go back to their roots.

It was painful for Amabelle to say goodbye to her foster family, and even harder to part with them. She did not know whether she would ever see them again, therefore she said nothing of her departure at all. Further, she was troubled about Valencia’s health condition and did not want to add to her suffering. “The trucks speeding by worried me, but more

¹⁰⁰ Danticat, *Farming*, 108.

worrisome somehow were the face-sized splotches of blood that I now saw on the back of the señora's dress, stains that were growing wider even as we carried her to her bedroom."¹⁰¹ The word "somehow" was a clear indication of Amabelle's hesitation to leave. She knew that Doctor Javier was packing to depart. After all, he was the one who offered her the midwifery job at a small clinic near the border in Haiti. Even though he was born in the Dominican Republic in a rich Haitian family, he tried his best to switch from Spanish to speak the laborer's language.

Doctor Javier said: "Please listen to me," he whispered in Kreyòl. He continued: "You must leave this house immediately. I have just heard this from some friends at the border. On the Generalissimo's orders, soldiers and civilians are killing Haitians. It may be just a few hours before they reach the valley."¹⁰²

Amabelle's indecision concerned the doctor. He knew that she was influenced by her beliefs with respect to the indispensability of the cane cutters and domestic helps. He also knew that even though she might have heard of the President's plotting, her thoughts were not concerned with them at all. Her opinion of the heads of the governments was not favorable since, according to her, they only wanted to accumulate as much as they could. Doctor Javier knew that she failed to see the bigger picture, which was part of Trujillo's strategy.

Based on her experience in Don Ignacio's house, Amabelle was always ready to give people the benefit of the doubt and believed that there were good people around her. She lived day-to-day and was not concerned with what she was not able to change outside the household. Doctor Javier understood that in addition to her listening to the radio with Don Ignacio and knowing how to read and write, she was a pure soul holding no grudges towards anybody. She was not even hostile towards the mostly absent Señor Pico, who was not missed by anybody from the household when away from Valencia. He spent the majority of his time in the barracks or fulfilling his orders. Doctor Javier's sister, Beatriz who was friendly with the family (whom Pico was keen on and had been rejected by) disliked his ambitions and even voiced it to Valencia. Valencia said: "He's always dreamt that one day

¹⁰¹ Danticat, *Farming*, 152.

¹⁰² Danticat, *Farming*, 140.

he would be president of this country, and it seems to me he would move more than mountains to make it so.”¹⁰³ What could an obedient wife of a dominant officer say to that, especially when speaking on his behalf seemed unethical to her? She was convinced that he was a good, principled man who was following in the footsteps of greatness. In some way, she was like Amabelle, giving him the benefit of the doubt, wanting to believe that he was in love with her rather than just securing his position in society through their marriage. She accepted his work and did not ask questions, but it was difficult for others not to see his blatant indifference towards his dark-skinned daughter, a color that was the result of centuries of mass displacement from the African continent.

His sudden presence in one of the military trucks was worrying, as was the biblical image of Don Ignacio walking along the road with a wooden cross that he made for Jöel’s grave, despite his father Kongo’s refusing of the gesture. The crucifixion of the sons and daughters of the neighboring country had begun as the soldiers threw the workers, who happened to be on the road, on the back of their trucks, to take them up north. Juana said: “I don’t understand it,” Juana muttered. “In the sight of all our saints, we are losing our country to madmen.”¹⁰⁴ The reference was accurate. Nevertheless, one need not forget that the soldiers, to whom she was referring, had explicit orders, which did not trickle down from anyone but the President himself. His primary intention, as mentioned previously in one of Wucker’s excerpts, was to redirect attention away from him and inflame hatred towards the laborers.

The workers outside the houses’ gates and mills and those on the roads were not spared. Along with Doctor Javier, Sebastien, Mimi and the priests from a nearby church, (from where they planned their secret getaway) were all taken. As Amabelle left the protection of Don Ignacio’s house and wandered north to the boarder to find Sebastien, she came across many atrocities perpetrated on her fellow men. Luckily, their mutual friend Yves went along with her and kept her company. These two ordinary people were caught in extraordinary situations and almost lost their lives when they reached Dajabón.

¹⁰³ Danticat, *Farming*, 150.

¹⁰⁴ Danticat, *Farming*, 155.

5.3 They Lived to Tell

The majority of Haitian workers who survived the attack were severely hurt. Some of them were lucky to be helped by Haitian Dominicans, who due to their darker complexion, were also in danger of losing their lives. The steep decrease in sugar prices during the Great Depression and the years that followed, combined with Trujillo's fear of his own removal from office, were what propelled the Perejil action. Soldiers on the front lines carried out the attacks as ordered. Some of them unquestionably believed in Trujillo's gratitude, like Señor Pico, as Señora Valencia mentioned: "He believes, my Pico, that during one of his long evening promenades, the Generalissimo will march into our house, admire my portrait of him, and make a gift of the whole nation to him and our children."¹⁰⁵ Even though I do not understand what the above-mentioned gift meant, and I was not able to find anything in the secondary texts that this might refer to. It appeared to sum up the hopeful wishes of a young, happy mother, who was in love with her husband, and who had no knowledge of his work and what was to come. State matters were not a suitable topic to discuss at the dinner table, nor was it something an army officer would debate in private. According to Danticat's novel, the Dominican parents were proud to call Generalissimo (as Trujillo was referred to) an official godfather to their children.¹⁰⁶ Under such circumstances it was not difficult for them to accommodate whatever he asked, particularly if they were military officials. I am far from defending Señor Pico. However, many soldiers in various conflicts have no choice but to follow orders unless they manage to escape the country (as Don Ignacio did) and relocate to a place where they could not be found or punished for desertion.

Amabelle looked forward to sharing her life with Sebastien. While studying his face in the early hours of one morning she could not help but smile in anticipation of their future as husband and wife. Their lack of worldly possessions did not stop them from relying on each other and cherishing each other's company. For Haitian laborers it was customary not to propose directly, but to send somebody close with the proposal to the woman in question. The following quotation captures not only her observations and

¹⁰⁵ Danticat, *Farming*, 86.

¹⁰⁶ Danticat, *Farming*, 118.

feelings of joy, but also her fear of the unknown.

[...] a smile I couldn't help, tugging at the sides of my face. And slowly as he caught glimpses of me between sips of his coffee, he returned the smile, looking the same way I did: bashful, undeserving, and almost ashamed to be the one responsible for the look of desire always rising in a dark flush on the side of his face. His eyes searched everything around him, the live coals and ashes under the coffeepot, the pebbles opening the soil to fit themselves in, the patches of dirt-brown grass dying from being too often trampled underfoot. When the morning breeze lifted his torn and leaf-stained collar, he pressed it back down with his cane-scarred hands. His eyes surveyed all the familiar details of his fingers, pausing only for an instant when our pupils met and trying to communicate with the simple flutter of a smile all those things we could not say because there was the cane to curse, the harvest to dread, the future to fear.¹⁰⁷

Two shy lovers shared their intimacy, anxious about what the days ahead had in store for them. Not only the ashes under the coffeepot, but also Sebastien's attire and the look of his hands spoke of displacement and extreme poverty. They knew each other so well that they did not have to even voice their concerns. A simple look conveyed their feelings, which the future was taking away from them.

The destiny represented by Señor Pico and his men in the military trucks, wiped away Amabelle's hopes for her future of a loving relationship back in the country she once involuntarily lost. On the way north to Dajabón to search for Sebastien's whereabouts, she met others who struggled to escape to safety. One of them was a man named Tibon, who had survived a fall from a cliff near La Romana, elicited by the militia. "Everyone says the Generalissimo is at the border now. Maybe he's there, waiting to greet us." He spat out his words, pausing for a reply, an agreement, or an argument. Yves looked back to where I was walking next to the two Dominican women, with Tibon hobbling behind us."¹⁰⁸ Knowing what had occurred in her area, why would she continue towards certain death? Perhaps the desire to learn the truth regarding what had happened to Sebastien and his sister was liberating and stronger than everything else. She wanted to find him, to see that he, his sister, the priests, and Doctor Javier were okay. She needed to reunite or to simply be in the midst of these events to prevent the overwhelming guilt that survivors sometimes have,

¹⁰⁷ Danticat, *Farming*, 130.

¹⁰⁸ Danticat, *Farming*, 177.

paralyzed by the chain of events, but not able to stay still, refusing to believe the current situation. That must have been Amabelle's *modus operandi*. She did not want to smell the odor of the burned massacred bodies. She was too distressed to help to bury a hanged family, but she spent her time among poor Dominican voyagers who were looking for the country's border themselves. She wanted to see Sebastien. While doing so she commemorated remnants of her past. At Don Ignacio's she learned all that she needed to know to be at a loss again, without a home, without her adoptive country, heading towards uncertainty, to be displaced all over again, and to have to learn of atrocities that were still to come on a large scale.

It was late morning, and something reminded me that it was Saturday. I thought of past Saturdays spent sitting in the house with Señora Valencia, sewing baby clothes, going through the market stands with Juana, helping Papi in his flower garden, visiting Sebastien at the mill—even after long days when he had to do extra work outside the cane to earn a few more pesos to pay his debts. For so long this had been my life, but it was all the past. Now we all had to try and find the future.¹⁰⁹

The beautiful memories of previous Saturdays spent in a peaceful environment surrounded by members of her foster family kept resurfacing. Amabelle knew that it was hopeless to reminisce of earlier times. She had to focus on what she set to accomplish now, and complete her search irrespective of the outcome. She headed towards a painful future and subsequent activities that she had never anticipated. Paradoxically, no soldiers had threatened her life. It was a group of some ordinary Dominican youngsters on a plaza in the middle of the day, who demanded proper pronunciation of the word parsley in Dominican Spanish. Fortunately, Amabelle lived to tell. The clarity of her first-person narration was simple.

At that moment I did believe that had I wanted to, I could have said the word properly, calmly, slowly, the way I often asked “Perejil?” of the old Dominican women and their faithful attending granddaughters at the roadside gardens and markets, even though the trill of the *r* and the precision of the *j* was sometimes too burdensome a joining for my tongue. It was the kind of thing that if you were startled in the night, you might forget, but with all my senses calm, I could have said it. But I didn't get my chance. Yves and I were

¹⁰⁹ Danticat, *Farming*, 184.

shoved down onto our knees. Our jaws were pried open and parsley stuffed into our mouths. My eyes watering, I chewed and swallowed as quickly as I could, but not nearly as fast as they were forcing the handfuls into my mouth.¹¹⁰

Such degradation was just the tip of the iceberg. The hoodlums, hungry for action, filled the Dajabón square in front of the cathedral that Trujillo was visiting at the time, and engaged in beating people who could not trill their r. In July 2015's online article, *Shibboleth and perejil*, Mark Liberman stipulated phonetic differences and pointed out a widespread mistake concerning r/rolling. He also added Danticat's, as well as Alvarez's, recorded versions of the word, and detailed his phonetic explanation in which one can see the differences between Danticat's weak dental fricative /r/ (not very different from a tap), her voiceless /h/, and an aspirated initial /p/, in contrast with Alvarez's voiced /h/ and unaspirated initial /p/.¹¹¹ Unless one is a phonetician with a well-trained ear, or a native Spanish-speaking Dominican asked to examine the differences, the recordings might not reveal much. Clearly, though, this was the word that determined who would live and who would perish. This word resolved whose corpses the vultures would feed on. "They could not get enough, those vultures, covering the daytime sky like a midnight cloud. If you were not walking fast enough, they would try for your eyes, those vultures. It was as if they could sniff the scent of death on you, those vultures."¹¹² Imagery that undoubtedly haunted not only the Haitians who survived, but also the Dominicans and the rest of the world that learned out about it.

I would like to refrain from further descriptions of the atrocities that were witnessed and testified by those who survived them. Nor would I like to write about the healing process of the individuals or the nation as a whole, or of Amabelle's future in her country of origin. The Parsley Massacre is a part of the nation's collective psyche and will be remembered by generations to come. Amabelle never found Sebastien, neither did she come across his sister, Mimi. Some boasted about their strength afterwards, while evoking the nation's past leaders.

¹¹⁰ Danticat, *Farming*, 193.

¹¹¹ <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=19987>, May 2, 2020.

¹¹² Danticat, *Farming*, 211.

The next speaker bragged: "It would take too much to kill me. I'm one of those trees whose roots reach the bottom of the earth. They can cut down my branches, but they will never uproot the tree. The roots are too strong, and there are too many."¹¹³

These were the words first delivered by a man whose parents were slave descendants of a minor African ruler - a weak and rather sickly-looking boy, Pierre Dominique, born on the Breda plantation in 1743, and imprisoned at the time of the utterance. The man was nicknamed, Toussaïant L'Ouverture, the one educated by the priest, Simon Baptiste. He was to become the man responsible for the abolishment of slavery in Haiti and for the formation of the first black republic in the world.

6 *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

6.1 Learning of live: Mother's Choice

Sophie Caco, the main character of Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* grew up in Haiti. She suffered involuntary displacement at the age of twelve when her mother, Martine, sent for her to come to live with her in the United States. This move dramatically influenced Sophie's late childhood as well as her teenage years. Up until then she lived with her mother's sister, Tante Atie, her sole caregiver. Sheltered from the political unrest and demonstrations of the early 1980 Duvalier's regime, they lived in a small, two-bedroom house across from a schoolteacher Monsieur Augustine, whom Atie was to marry before he left her for a literate woman.

As a young child Sophie seemed mature and aware of her surroundings. Her maturity was manifested in her being helpful and mindful of others. She was also unusually sensitive and understanding of life's nuances. She appreciated Tante Atie not only for her affection, but also for her raw wisdom. The sense of responsibility that became Sophie's second nature, stemmed from Atie's example. She helped around the house and took pride in a clean, leafless backyard, a private place that was theirs alone to enjoy. Her devotion to the rules of the house was exemplary. To protect her caregiver, she sided with Tante Atie's opinions even when her desires deep down were different. Tante Atie said: "You think these children would be kind to their mothers and clean up those leaves," Tante Atie said.

¹¹³ Danicat, *Farming*, 212.

“Instead, they are making a bigger mess.” “They should know better,” I said, secretly wishing that I too could swim in their sea of dry leaves.¹¹⁴ Sophie was happy with her aunt Atie. They were close to one another, and spent time together whenever they had a chance. Sophie knew that the financial assistance she received from her mother, in New York City supported them. “Tante Atie said that only people living on New York money, or people with professions, like Monsieur Augustin, could afford to live in a house where they did not have to share a yard with a pack of other people.”¹¹⁵ Aside from the financial assistance, she knew her mother’s face only from one of Tante Atie’s photographs, and her voice only from the cassette tapes Martine sent over the years. Their separation did not raise questions. The neighbors from the community lived under the impression that Martine took to the world to secure a better future for her daughter, sister and her mother. While that was true, the primary reason for Martine’s absence was unknown to Sophie, along with the details regarding her conception.

In their household profession was everything. Coming from an illiterate background, Tante Atie frequently referred to the importance of education. While doing so she did not forget to remind Sophie that attending school was not common where her mother and aunt had come from. Not knowing how to read and write pre-destined them only to manual labor; they experienced only the hard work of toiling sugar cane fields alongside their parents during their childhood. Sophie tried to encourage her aunt to learn to read and write but Tante Atie stubbornly refused: “At one time, I would have given anything to be in school. But not at my age. My time is gone. Cooking and cleaning, looking after others, that’s my school now.”¹¹⁶ Feeling shameful and too old to learn, she undermined her ability to educate herself. Her fear of failure blocked Sophie’s hopes for afternoon reading practices with Tante Atie at her school. But Tante Atie was at ease with it. “Cutting cane was the only thing for a young one to do when I was your age. [...] As long as you do not have to work in the fields, it does not matter that I will never learn to read that ragged old Bible under my pillow.”¹¹⁷ Childless but protective, she accepted her role as caregiver to her niece. While

¹¹⁴ Danticat, *Breath*, 6.

¹¹⁵ Danticat, *Breath*, 11.

¹¹⁶ Danticat, *Breath*, 4.

¹¹⁷ Danticat, *Breath*, 4.

relatively young, she expressed herself as if there was nothing good awaiting her in her future, but it was understandable, as the daunting prospect of labor in the heat of the day had robbed her of her childhood and of her father, who died on the cane field when working next to her. The country's climate allowed the sugar cane fields to be planted in succession. When one field's crop was about to end, the next field was ready to be harvested. That way the ground as well as the manual labor was fully utilized.

Tante Atie said that, one day while they were all working together, her father – my grandfather – stopped to wipe his forehead, leaned forward, and died. My grandmother took the body in her arms and tried to scream the life back into it. They all kept screaming and hollering, as my grandmother's tears bathed the corpse's face. Nothing would bring my grandfather back.¹¹⁸

The family's past and presence were defined by centuries of poor treatment and the displacement from their original roots; lifetimes of exploitation manifested themselves in their descendants' future. Tante Atie and Martine could not bring themselves to watch Sophie suffer the same way they did. Their firm conviction that education was the key to success reappears frequently throughout the text.

The past taught the village communities to cooperate and help one another while working in the fields as more people could accomplished a greater amount of work in a shorter period of time. "The women would cook large amounts of food while the men worked. Then at sunset, when the work was done, everyone would gather together and enjoy a feast of eating, dancing, and laughter."¹¹⁹ Later this tradition gave rise to potlucks meals that became popular throughout the country. People assembled to enjoy each other's company and to be merry. They felt that such traditions had to be preserved, not overlooked. The children were part of the gatherings and to learned their value, which was essential for the wellbeing of the whole community.

In spite of where they might live, this potluck was open to everybody who wanted to come. There was no field to plant, but the workers used their friendships in the factories or their grouping in the shared houses as a reason

118 Danticat, *Breath*, 4.

119 Danticat, *Breath*, 11.

to get together, eat, and celebrate life.¹²⁰

These meetings were regular. The purpose was that the children be acquainted with one another, form friendships, play and primarily feel a sense of belonging.

The theme of mother-daughter relationships runs throughout the pages of the novel. Its various forms were apparent in Tante Atie's behavior towards Sophie. Even though her biological mother was Martine, the bond between Atie and Sophie was motherly in nature thus Sophie made a card for her for Mother's Day. Atie, overwhelmed by the prospect of Sophie's future move to New York, declined the card in lieu of better handling of the upcoming separation. Sophie learned of her involuntary displacement from their neighbors at the potluck where they immediately bombarded her with all sorts of questions for which she had no answers. She was perplexed and horrified at her sudden parting, as was Tante Atie, whose attempt at a joke did not come out as planned. She said: "I was going to put you to sleep, put you in a suitcase, and send you to her. One day you would wake up there and you would feel like your whole life here with me was a dream." She tried to force a laugh, but it didn't make it past her throat."¹²¹ She believed that Sophie's future in Haiti would be bleak and envisioned a better destiny for her non-biological child in New York. Tante Atie was convinced that had she applied her hard-working ethics well; she could become that doctor the girls dreamed of becoming. She knew that Sophie would be departing on a long journey to the unknown, and wanted to make it as easy as possible for her. But how could a child fully understand what a better future meant, when it did not include her beloved aunt? A person she has known and trusted since she was a baby: the one who looked after her day in and day out, when she was fit as well as sick. Tante Atie declared her love for Sophie as well as for her sister and appealed to Sophie's good-heartedness.

She said: "I would like to know that by word of by example I have taught you love. I must tell you that I do love your mother. Everything I love about you, I loved in her first. That is why I could never fight her about keeping you here. I do not want you to go and fight with her either. In this country, there are many good reasons for mothers to abandon their children."¹²²

¹²⁰ Danticat, *Breath*, 11.

¹²¹ Danticat, *Breath*, 16.

¹²² Danticat, *Breath*, 19.

She wanted to be proud of Sophie and all that she instilled in her. She hoped that her poor but affectionate upbringing would not change her into a grief-stricken, spiteful young she after her departure.

Before Sophie departed for the big world, Tante Atie devoted some time for her to see her grandmother, Ifé. The novel's poetic description of the island's dire poverty is striking particularly during their short trip. "In the cane fields, the men chopped cane stalks as they sang back and forth to one another. A crammed wheelbarrow rolled towards us. We stepped aside and allowed the boys to pass. They were bare-chested and soaked with sweat, with no protection from the sun except old straw hats."¹²³ Grandmother Ifé, was happy to see the visitors, and enjoyed their overnight stay. Sophie admired her cooking skills; in the footsteps of Mackandal she collected leaves and made various teas and natural remedies known only to her grandmother's peers.

As the departure day was nearing Tante Atie's reminders about not crying, and her comparison of the two of them as a strong mountain that does not shed a tear, did not do much. Sophie was not successful in suppressing her tears but her aunt believed that she was like her favorite flower, the yellow daffodil: once taken from its natural habitat in France, the flower had to accommodate to Haitian hot weather and learn how to live in an alien climate. Tante Atie was convinced that Sophie was going to benefit from the move and just like the daffodil adjust to her new surroundings.

6.2 Fear of the Unknown

Not being used to violence or spiteful behavior, Sophie found the beginning of her journey to be confusing and painful on many levels. She witnessed demonstrating students that were severely beaten by the regime's goons, separation from her beloved auntie Atie and a hysterical boy whom she wanted to console but who hurt her in return, as his corrupt father had just been killed. Several hours later she met her estranged and withered mother, who looked nothing like the woman on Tante Atie's photograph. Sophie observed her mother's hefty payment for the delivery of her human cargo, and drove from the airport to their small apartment in a poor neighborhood of Brooklyn in her beaten-up car, where a

¹²³ Danticat, *Breath*, 21.

loose spring dug into her thigh. The change from well-lit bridge and roads leading from the airport, to the miserable surroundings of dark streets littered with uncollected trash bags, flying empty bottles and laying drunkards was shocking. Her mother's casual monologue, and everything that she observed so far was hard to take in. The American dream her mother came here to pursue was nowhere to be seen. Her mother said: "Your schooling is the only thing that will make people respect you, [...]. You have a chance to become the kind of woman Atie and I have always wanted to be. If you make something of yourself in life, we will all succeed. You can *raise our heads*."¹²⁴ Sophie knew that education was pivotal to everyone that she came in contact with. They saw the way out of poverty to be by acquiring the proper reading and writing skills and believed that any future job choice depended on it.

Being alienated from all that she had known she noticed everything around her. Like the previously wet ceiling with once soaked wallpaper that made maps on the walls, and her mother's doll, whose ribbons matched her yellow attire. She was stunned to discover that she did not resemble her mother; and neither did she resemble her aunt. Even more striking was the way her mother treated the doll.

She said: "You won't resent sharing your room, will you?" She stroked the doll's back. "She is like a friend to me. She kept me company while we were apart. It seems crazy, I know. A grown woman like me with a doll. I am giving her to you now. You take good care of her."¹²⁵

Obedient, Sophie tried to fit into her new bed with the doll laying in it too. But Martine moved her silent companion away from the bed, and reminisced about daffodils, her favorite flowers. The flowers bridged the first hours of Sophie's uncertainties. It was the one thing her mother and herself so far had in common.

Sophie missed the island's oral tradition and Tante Atie's storytelling. She was accustomed to her voice and the new tales she would tell. To find out about her father she was told a poetic story. "She told me the story of a little girl who was born out of the petals of roses, water from the stream, and a chunk of the sky. That little girl, she said was me."¹²⁶ Sophie had no recollection of her father and she was curious about him. But her aunt never

¹²⁴ Danticat, *Breath*, 41.

¹²⁵ Danticat, *Breath*, 43.

¹²⁶ Danticat, *Breath*, 45.

told her what happened to her mother. It was not her story to voice. She kept it secret from the child until her mother, sometime after her arrival in New York, told her about a nameless and faceless person who was so instrumental in her life. Her mother: “A man grabbed me from the side of the road, pulled me into a cane field, and put you in my body. [...] I did not know this man. I never saw his face. He had it covered when he did this to me.”¹²⁷ Sophie did not understand her mother’s explanation, but she asked no further questions. Only years later was she able to comprehend an event that marked her mother’s life permanently.

Though she was studious, the school was not Sophie’s favorite place to go to after her arrival to the new world, even though it was in French. Her thoughts were of Haiti and she could not absorb all the changes and turmoil of relocating. She was slowly getting acquainted with English. She also realized how other youngsters perceived Haitians and discovered what kind of degrading names they called them. The whole experience was hard to cope with, and she struggled to assimilate; this type of alienation made her miss Haiti even more. “Many of the American kids even accused Haitians of having AIDS because they had heard on television that only the “Four Hs’ got AIDS - Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals, and Haitians.”¹²⁸ Sophie could not come up with an excuse that would soften her mother’s inflexibility when it came to school’s attendance. She knew that she had to go, but she dreaded every moment of it. She closed herself up and withdrew. Probably autobiographical, Danticat’s portrayal of the Catholic school Sophie attended - where pupils were taught to behave well, offered a contrast to the neighborhood public school, whose attendees called Haitian immigrants “boat people” and “stinking Haitians.”¹²⁹ For an immigrant child with more decency and humility than the native speakers, such behavior was hurtful and puzzling. In addition to suffering verbal abuse outside of the household, Sophie had to master a language that was confusing and awkward to pronounce. Luckily she became accustomed to the sounds and eventually mastered the English language. Sophie’s mother urged: “There is great responsibility that comes with knowledge,” my mother would say. My great responsibility was to study hard. I spent six years doing nothing but that.

¹²⁷ Danticat, *Breath*, 59.

¹²⁸ Danticat, *Breath*, 48.

¹²⁹ Danticat, *Breath*, 64.

School, home, and prayer.”¹³⁰ Sophie was a dutiful child who was robbed of a part of her late childhood and teenage years; she did not enjoy herself the same way her Haitian or American peers did. Like Amabelle in *The Farming of Bones*, Sophie was forced to grow up and accommodate to her new life overnight.

Spending time with her mother at her work was not ideal either, but she recognized how hard her mother worked to support the two of them, as well as her aunt and grandmother in Haiti. Martine was aware of her daughter’s troubles even though Sophie did not voice them, Martine found about them from other mothers and once plainly asked her daughter: ”Am I the mother you imagined?”¹³¹ That was a tricky question for somebody of Sophie’s age who has been uprooted and transported to an unknown place with a new caretaker. Even though accommodating to her current way of life was stressful, and learning the new ropes even more so, she had not lost her kind disposition and eased her mother’s expectations of critique.

6.3 Nightmares and men: Mother’s Choice

The first man that Sophie encountered in the new world was Marc, a man instrumental in her mother’s life and the person behind securing the necessary documents to bring Sophie from Haiti. Kind and thoughtful, he managed to establish himself as a lawyer despite being a first generation immigrant himself.

Sophie said: “When my mother rang the bell, a stocky Haitian man came to the door. He was a deep bronze color and very well dressed. [...] He spoke to her in Creole as he opened the door and let us into his office. [...] On his desk was a picture of him and my mother, posed against a blue background.”¹³²

His presence was reassuring and his manners compelling, a striking contrast from Sophie’s forever absent, violent biological father. Apart from time with Martine and Sophie, and certain aspects of his work, it was Marc’s outings to Haitian restaurants that provided his

¹³⁰ Danticat, *Breath*, 65.

¹³¹ Danticat, *Breath*, 56.

¹³² Danticat, *Breath*, 49.

only ties to the old country and a substitute for his mother's cooking. It was a welcomed escape. The well-to-do patriots of his favorite Miracin restaurant discussed the dire immigration situation in regards to history, while briefly pointing out the United States mistreatment of the inhabitants of their home country. It would never be forgotten. Their reluctance at being lumped into the same group with poor people who tried to immigrate to the United States via beaten-up boats crossed many conversations.

Marc mentioned: "All the brains leave the country," Marc said, adding his voice to the melee. "You are insulting the people back home by saying there's no brains there," replied a woman from a table near the back. "There are brains who stay." "But they are crooks," Marc said, adding some spice to the argument. "My sister is a nurse there with the Red Cross," said the woman, standing up. "You call that a crook? What have *you* done for your people?"¹³³

Paradoxically, more than he could have voiced, but he kept it to himself. Displacement and torment were widely debated topics among the Haitian immigrant communities as well as various nations' wrongdoings that resulted in enslavement of their ancestors. Marc, voluntarily silenced himself since arguing with an aggressive female counterpart was against his nature. His inexperience in dealing with grown up children, apparent from his approach to Sophie, spoke of his willingness to make amends and try to make her feel at home. His reminding her of vast opportunities when it came to various professions fueled her mother's ongoing monologue of Sophie becoming a doctor, and of her need to avoid men before reaching the age of eighteen.

Sophie's attitude towards men was fed not only by her mother's unfortunate encounter of rape when she was sixteen, but also by her mother's examination. Although strong, the generational bonds between mothers and their daughters were repeatedly crushed by the traditional chastity examination of their daughters' virginities.

Sophie's mother said: "When I was a girl, my mother used to test us to see if we were virgins. She would put her finger in our very private parts and see if it would go inside. Your Tante Atie hated it. She used to scream like a pig in a slaughterhouse. The way my mother was raised, a mother is supposed to do that to her daughter until the daughter is married. It is her responsibility to

¹³³ Danticat, *Breath*, 51.

keep her pure.”¹³⁴

This inconceivable invasion of young women’s privacies that undermined their basic human rights, were regular practices.

The second part of the book begins with Sophie’s eighteenth birthday and her relocation to a better and bigger apartment close to her mother’s boyfriend Marc. Yellow, the favorite color of her childhood was replaced by interior decoration in red, suggesting her coming of age. Martine’s almost daily nightmares of rape, and her daughter’s memory of the women’s bodily examinations fueled the mother’s, as well as the daughter’s inability to enjoy meaningful sexual relationships. Spending most of her time by herself, Sophie did not roam the streets of New York looking to enjoy her teenage years. Her reserved nature predestined her to experience dislocation from the American way of life. She was stuck between cultures - one that was unattainably far, and the other that was just out of reach. A neighboring musician, Joseph, a very dark-complexioned African-American from Louisiana became a catalyst for her loneliness. Although shy, she was smitten by the softness of his voice and his ability to play the saxophone and the piano as well as he did.

Sophie said: “Aside from Marc, we knew no other men. Men were as mysterious to me as white people, who in Haiti we had only known as missionaries. I tried to imagine my mother’s reaction to Joseph. I could already hear her: “Not if he were the last unmarried man on the earth.”¹³⁵

Another feature that provided a bond between Sophie and Joseph was his ability to speak Creole. Based on her harsh teenage experience, Martine viewed men as a threat to her daughter’s future (with the exception of clergy, whom she liked). Sophie’s mother said: “I admire priests because they like women for more than their faces and their buttocks, though not all priests are that way.”¹³⁶ Her judgmental nature drove her outlook on every male that was to accompany her daughter. Surprisingly, Sophie, who spent most of the time alone, was a good judge of character. Her depiction of the neighboring man who captured her attention was accurate. “Joseph looked like the kind of man who could buy a girl a meal without

¹³⁴ Danticat, *Breath*, 58.

¹³⁵ Danticat, *Breath*, 65.

¹³⁶ Danticat, *Breath*, 66.

asking for her bra in return.”¹³⁷ Their secretive encounters that started with his initial plea to use their phone, slowly developed into a meaningful relationship. Joseph, unlike Sophie, held on to his ancestral past through music. He found himself not only playing jazz but also slave spirituals. He did not shy away from it but, unlike Sophie and her mother – whose lives were divided between their past in Haiti and their presence in the United States – he embraced it. He was proud of his ancestry. Sophie tried to master the English language, but still sounded like a non-native speaker at times and was ashamed of her inability to make her wish come true. “After years in this country, I was tired of having people detect my accent. I wanted to sound completely American, especially for him.”¹³⁸ Joseph’s work ethics were similar to Sophie’s. Although she had been set a good example by the women from her clan, she, unlike her mother, did not forsake her country of origin completely. Separation of her past in terms of its traditions, was possible thanks to Tante Atie, and the strength of character she helped her to develop. She worked hard at mastering whatever was necessary to get ahead; her sense of duty for pleasing her mother was apparent. She studied for hours. Joseph’s music kept her company during the lonely nights when her mother worked and she was not able to sleep. “He rehearsed day and night, sometimes ten to twelve hours without stopping. Sometimes at night, the saxophone was like a soothing lullaby.”¹³⁹ To his question pertaining to her course of study she voiced her mother’s wishes.

Sophie said: “My mother says it’s important for us to have a doctor in the family.” “What is you don’t want to be a doctor?” There’s a difference between what a person wants and what’s good for them.” “You sound like you are quoting someone, “ he said. “My mother.” “What would Sophie like to do? he asked. That was the problem. Sophie really wasn’t sure. I never really dared to dream on my own.”¹⁴⁰

Joseph showed her that it was possible. Perhaps because he was orphaned at the age of fifteen, or maybe due to his Deep South origins, he understood Sophie well.

Vivid memories of the past came to Sophie when she travelled by subway. “In Haiti,

137 Danticat, *Breath*, 66.

138 Danticat, *Breath*, 67.

139 Danticat, *Breath*, 69.

140 Danticat, *Breath*, 69.

there were only sugar cane railroads that ran from the sugar mill in Port-au-Prince to plantation towns all over the countryside.”¹⁴¹ Her recollections attested not only to Haitian poverty, but also to her fond memories of the past that she was not willing to repudiate. Nor was she ready to forget her mother’s favorite dish of “rice, beans, and herring sauce”¹⁴², a remnant of her mother’s past which she at times cooked for her. Nonetheless, in her quest for life’s happiness Sophie wanted to leave behind the prejudice of her people, that bias that was engraved in her mother’s memory and which she could not shake. Perhaps it was because she lived through times when people looked down on she and her sister, Atie for coming from a poor family in the hills, that she often reminded Sophie of the great land of opportunity that she come to. “She said that in Haiti if your mother was a coal seller and you became a doctor, people would still look down on you knowing where you came from. But in America, they like success stories. The worse off you were, the higher your praise.”¹⁴³ This impressive notion helped to trick Martine’s mind and console her worthiness at times. However, the dreadful nightmares of her rape in Haiti prevailed. She was never at ease, thus she worked nights to prevent the reoccurring ordeal that persistently clanged to her new life abroad.

Sophie secretly continued seeing Joseph while he was back from touring the country playing jazz and spirituals. Despite his excellent education, which would have allowed him to pursue a different line of work, he preferred to be daily submerged in the melodies of his ancestors. Martine reassured her daughter that it was almost impossible to keep secrets from mothers. But Sophie was not the soulless doll that her mother used to take care of in her absence. In spite of Martine’s desire to break ties with her country of origin, she recalled stories from her past whenever the situation called for it. Dreading the loss of her daughter, she tried to manipulate Sophie through stories from Haitian oral tradition. Her constant fear and distrust of men subjected her daughter to the same awful virginity tests that the generations of Haitian women were frequently put through. Trouble-free, submissive and studious, Sophie could not withstand the shame of Martine’s dutiful check-ups. As the time went by, her gentle spirit was crushed because the invasive testing remained a weekly

¹⁴¹ Danticat, *Breath*, 75.

¹⁴² Danticat, *Breath*, 77.

¹⁴³ Danticat, *Breath*, 78.

procedure. “I was feeling alone and lost, like there was no longer any reason for me to live.”¹⁴⁴ Desperately trying to end these humiliating ancestral practices, and to prevent her from further emotional pain inflicted by testing, Sophie broke her hymen with a kitchen utensil. Even though uprooted to the new world, she still did not manage to escape the intolerable tradition of her old country. Her mother’s reaction matched her daughter’s expectations. Blaming herself for not being able to protect her purity, Martine threw Sophie out after failing the test. Through bravery, thought, Sophie hurt herself, she also cut off the awful ancestral past that lingered over the women of their family for generations. She left with Joseph to Providence, RI, and determined not to subject her daughter to such customs should she be lucky to have one.

¹⁴⁴ Danticat, *Breath*, 85.

Conclusion

As a result of colonialism, a political reality, which permanently shifted millions of people around the world, ethnic groups on a number of Caribbean islands became extinct. The island of Hispaniola was one such island. Due to the exploitation of the land and its people, and through the slave labor of hundreds of thousands, the maritime powers enriched themselves for the greater good of the Crown. The slaves endured relentless hard work under unimaginable conditions; they were separated from Indian and African roots, as well as from their loved ones, which resulted in untold suffering. The French colonists had made the western side of the island of Hispaniola a European gem by growing and harvesting sugarcane in vast quantities and supplying the commodity to the world.

After gaining independence from Haiti in the first half of the nineteenth century, the production of sugar also shifted to the Dominican Republic, which then became the major sugar producer. The main forces behind the harvesting of sugarcane were (either voluntarily but many times involuntarily) displacing Haitians. Displacement has short-term as well as long-term effects, and its many causes, forms, and consequences need to be seen in context. By choosing two novels written by a Haitian-American author, Edwidge Danticat, I have hoped to illustrate the difficulties of their main female characters --two Haitian children -- who, due to no fault of their own ended up in foreign countries. They were forced not only to confront their sense of loss, but also to endure alienation and find their own way out of it, while orienting themselves to their completely new surroundings.

My first choice, Danticat's third novel, *The Farming of Bones*, is set in the 1930s Dominican Republic, and accompanies the reader through the tumultuous years that led to a massacre of Haitian nationals in 1937, which was ordered by Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo. My aim was to illustrate how a work of historical fiction (told through the eyes of a displaced child who grew into a teenager) can speak about the lives of displaced sugarcane workers -- all of whom were denied basic human rights, and the similarities and differences between two nations with the intertwined histories.

By also choosing Danticat's first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* I have hoped to depict the displacement and seclusion of another girl five decades later in the totally alien world of New York City. The journey through the unknown, following their displacement, was specific for each of the characters, Amabelle and Sophie. The former witnessed her parents

drown in the river on the Dominican side of her country's border, and the latter ended up with her estranged mother in New York City at the age of twelve. Both were victims of involuntary displacement. Although the stories took place fifty years apart and the girls were of different ages, their conditions and challenges were similar in nature. They both had to mature overnight, learn a different language, and get accustomed to a new way of life far from what they had always known. I hope to have demonstrated that their newly found identities sprung, in part, from additionally acquired awareness, which was forged in struggle.

Dictatorships and the resulting adversities of the above eras are too painful to endure though the factual checks alone; they are more bearable when told by a well-received fictional author. However, to understand and appreciate the texts' nuances, to the point of commentary, particularly in *The Farming of Bones*, I also decided to elaborate on the given history by providing readers with some historical background, for which I mainly used Michelle Wucker's *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians and the struggle for Hispaniola* and Miriam J.A. Chancy's *From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic*. Without reference to these very different books, the complexities of the social and cultural nuances of these two nations would have been impossible to understand. It is for this reason, that the problems of voluntary or involuntary displacement of Haitians are so layered and difficult to discuss, and why novels, written in poetic fictional style such as these two, offer a more accessible vehicle for conveying these complex and tragic stories --historic accounts that have shaped the lives of people from these two nations to this day. It was challenging to read about the treatment of Haitian workers in the past, but also eye opening to discover that this treatment continues to the present day, just a few miles away from the Dominican Republic's all-inclusive holiday resorts. Haitians transported across the boarder are purposefully left without work for a number of weeks under the single pretense of getting them indebted to the high-credit corporation's store on the batey's premises. This practice guarantees that the desperate *braceros* take a job with a worse salary than originally promised. Once the cane cutters are on the fields, with no food or water, the Dominican collectors cheat them out of their earnings. Unless heftily bribed, the collectors leave the harvest on the fields to dry -- to lessen their weight, which decreases the *braceros* earnings, which are calculated per a ton of

cut cane. The assumption that the United Nations can assist in improving the work and living conditions of those displaced rings hollow, as sugar production does not make headlines. Centuries of mistreatment, exploitation, and displacement, therefore continue to linger for these unfortunate souls.

Edwidge Danticat's historical fictional work helps to explain the above stated practices in detail. She sets each of her novels, or short stories, within a particular time and place, and depicts the complexities of various associated issues of displacement. She does not write about the political wrongdoings in an offensive way, nor does she shy away from taboo topics. She masterfully conveys the suffering of her characters, for example, her depiction of virginity, and the responsibilities Haitian mothers place upon themselves to preserve the chastity of their daughters'. So is her portrayal of reoccurring themes rooted in the Haitian peoples' perpetual longing to belong. Danticat wraps her factual findings in a foil of creative writing that is completely her own. She brilliantly unpacks the artificially stirred antipathies toward Haitian people, and illuminates the manifold horrors of their long suffering which has resulted from their many years of displacement.

Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se prostřednictvím hlavních postav dvou románů americké autorky Edwidge Danticat zabývá následky násilného vykořevenění a emigrace. Očima dvou haitských dětí, sirotka Amabelle Désir a Sophie Caco, která nikdy nepoznala svého otce, čtenář sleduje dění nejen na Haiti, ale především ve dvou jim cizích zemích, diametrálně odlišných od jejich domoviny. Účelem mé práce je nejen upozornit na různé aspekty jejich dospívání, ale také přiblížit důsledky koloniální nadvlády a diktatur. Dominikánská republika a Spojené státy dívkám nahradí rodnou vlast. Představují nový domov, soustu trápení, ale i nově prožívanou lásku. Obě jsou nuceny čelit pocitům ze ztráty svých bližních a přizpůsobit se jinému, jim zcela neznámému životnímu stylu, který je často uvádí do nepříjemných nebo života ohrožujících situací.

Dominikánská republika začátku minulého století zaznamenala bouřlivý vývoj. Americká okupace, období velké hospodářské krize a diktatura Rafaela Trujilla vyústila do dlouhodobě připravovaného a řádně organizovaného masakru mnoha tisícovek civilistů převážně haitské menšiny, žijících na severním území Dominikánské republiky podél řeky Dajabón, které bylo po mnoha let součástí Haiti. Tato událost je ústředním bodem vybraného díla *The Farming of Bones*, publikovaného v roce 1998. Amabelle se musí vyrovnat s okolnostmi ztráty obou rodičů, kteří před jejíma očima utonuli. Tato dramatická událost, kterou prožila v útlém věku, následně ovlivní její celý život. I když jí do jisté míry otce nahradí dobře situovaný španělský vdovec, který ji s dcerou na břehu řeky najde a ona není součástí skupiny sekáčů třtiny, kteří v jejím okolí pracují, denně ji s nimi spojuje její milenecký vztah s jedním z nich. Tímto způsobem se čtenář dozvídá o těžkém životě na třtinových polích i mimo ně, na který tato práce mimo jiné také poukazuje. Vykořisťování negramotných sekáčů a soustavné odpírání jejich základních lidských práv je nedílnou součástí vybrané knihy. Většina z pracovníků komunikovala pouze lámanou španělštinou a byli si vědomi jen toho, co se děje v jejich bezprostřední blízkosti. Nedobrovolně izolováni od zbytku světa v cukrovarech a na třtinových polích vlastněných americkými nebo dominikánskými subjekty, neznali nic jiného než chudobu a úmornou práci. Velká většina byla bez státní příslušnosti z důvodu jejich narození již na pozemcích cukrovarů nebo přilehlých polích.

Danticat ve svých dílech zmiňuje historické souvislosti, které vedly nejen k haitské revoluci a vyhnání francouzských kolonizátorů z ostrova, ale také diktátorské režimy. Velmi nenásilným způsobem poukazuje na rozdíly mezi Dominikánci a Hait'any, které z historie pramení. K úplnému pochopení podstaty textů je tedy nutné se s historií obou zemí seznámit. K tomu jsem využila knihu autorky Michele Wucker s názvem *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, stejně tak jako knihu Myriam J. A. Chancy *From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic*. Tato výjimečná díla považuji za nenahraditelná, protože obě autorky způsobem sobě vlastním podrobně přibližují nejen historii a vůdce, kteří ji ovlivnily, ale také osudy mnoha řadových obyvatel ostrova. Wucker, která je původem novinářkou a žije v Chicagu, strávila několik let v Dominikánské republice studiem nejen historie Haiti, ale také zvyklostí lidí obou národů. Chancy, kanadská spisovatelka haitského původu, pracuje především v akademické oblasti. Bez odkazu těchto velmi odlišných knih jsou problémy násilného vykořenění a emigrace Hait'anů obtížně diskutovatelným tématem, protože historie národa je velmi složitá.

Historická fikce je dostupnějším nástrojem pro zprostředkování složitých a tragických příběhů. Špatné zacházení s haitskými námezdními dělníky, jejich velmi těžká manuální práce na třtinových polích a téměř nulové ohodnocení nejsou jen alarmující minulostí. Podobné chování je dodnes tolerováno jen pár kilometrů od dominikánských přímořských letovisek. Romány Edwidge Danticat vysvětlují nekalé praktiky obou vlád zemí ostrova Hispaniola, ale i přístup jejích obyvatel a dlouhodobou emigraci Hait'anů. Velký podíl na tom mají nejen cizí mocnosti, ale i politika cukrovarů situovaných v Dominikánské republice. Danticat zasazuje děj svých románů do konkrétních historických souvislostí. Nepopisuje politické přestupky ani protilidské chování urážlivě, ale ani se nebrání choulostivým tématům. Nejen, že mistrovsky vyjadřuje utrpení svých postav, ale stejně tak zobrazuje opakující se témata vykořenění ve spojení s věčnou touhou Hait'anů někam patřit.

Pro další účely práce jsem vybrala autorčinu prvotinu s názvem *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, která byla vydaná v roce 1994. Děj této knihy je zasazen do osmdesátých let 20. století na Haiti a ve Spojených státech ve městě New York. Tato prvotina, oceněna různými autoritami, staví do popředí následky emigrace dospívající dívky. Sophie, vyrůstající bez

rodičů u tety na Haiti, nikdy nepoznala otce a svou biologickou matku zná pouze z fotografie, vyprávění její sestry Atie a magnetofonových kazet, které jim kromě financí Martine z New Yorku posílá. V této době byl na Haiti u moci diktátor Jean-Claude Duvalier, přezdívaný „Baby Doc“. Za jeho vlády opustilo Haiti velké množství lidí emigrujících většinou do Spojených států. Těch, kteří si mohli dovolit zaplatit za letenku nebylo mnoho, a tak svou cestu absolvovali také v polorozpadlých lodích, z kterých se mnoho potopilo. Obyvatelé Haiti se snažili uchýlit do bezpečí cizích zemí, protože žili v neustálém strachu z příslušníků milice Tonton Macoutes, zabijáků, kteří pod hlavičkou státu páchali těžké kriminální činy. Ovlivnili životy mnoha řadových občanů a znásilnili tisíce žen jako Martine, která Sophii vizáž jejího otce nebyla ani schopna popsat.

Mým cílem bylo ukázat jak poeticky napsaná historická fikce dává nahlédnou do každodenního života lidí nám vzdálených a upozornit na staletí zavedených praktik a problematiku s nimi spojenou. Dílo této americké spisovatelky s haitskými kořeny odráží nejen folklorní tradice ostrova, ale také aspekty náboženských praktik pramenících z afrických kořenů. Hlediska nadpřirozena jsou obratně zasazeny do kontextu knih a podněcují čtenářovu představivost. Danticat nejen že zpřístupňuje historii, ale dává také podnět k přečtení dalších úspěšných historických románů psaných etnickými menšinami.

Od Kolumbova vyloďení, přes španělské a francouzské osidlování, a bouřlivé roky haitské revoluce, která vydobyla svým obyvatelům svobodu od koloniální nadvlády Francie, se ve 20. letech devatenáctého století stal stát Haiti první černošskou republikou světa. Toussaint L'Overture, kterého prostřednictvím svých postav Danticat cituje, zrovna tak jako umění přírodního léčitelství zanechaného otrokem Mackandalem, svědčí o jejich roli a důležitém odkazu obyvatelům Haiti. Pěstování cukrové třtiny se zasadilo o velké utrpení násilně vykořeněných lidí, ale také o nesmírné bohatství námořních mocností. Po pádu francouzské nadvlády potomci sta tisíců dovlečených otroků zažívali tatáž muka na stejných polích, o kterých Danticat píše. Století po revoluci svobodné, ale velmi zadlužené Haiti, stále platilo repatriace Francii, i přes to, že bylo vítěznou stranou. Různé formy fyzického nátlaku a zneužívání, které se v obou jejich dílech prolínají, souvisí nejen s tímto dluhem, ale také s mentalitou postav jejich románů. Danticat, která se narodila v Port-au-Prince koncem šedesátých let 20. století a jejíž oba rodiče Haiti opustili v sedmdesátých letech za Duvalierova režimu, měla dvanáct let, když odjela z Haiti, kde vyrůstala v rodině své tety a

strýce v chudé čtvrti Bel Air. Následovala rodiče do New Yorku a sama prožila odcizení od všeho, co do té doby znala. Ve svých knihách čerpá nejen ze svých prožitků, ale také z bohaté vypravěčské tradice svého národa.

Druhá Kolumbova expedice, která přivezla na ostrov Hispaniola mimo jiné také cukrovou třtinu, která domorodým Taínům nebyla do té doby známa, odstartovala závod za mamonem. Bartolome De Las Casas, o kterém se Wucker zmiňuje, že se zastal původního obyvatelstva, které hromadně vymíralo a vzdal se lidí, kteří mu byli přiděleni na práci, dal podnět k dovozu černochoů z afrického kontinentu, kteří dle jeho slov byli mnohem statnější a tedy schopni vyčerpávající a dlouhotrvající těžké práce. Španělští osadníci, zajímající se především o zlato, se přesunuli jinam, a východní část ostrova byla především chovnou zónou vepřů. Francouzi se ale zasadili o vybudování výnosných plantáží na západní straně ostrova a kromě toho, že velmi zbohatli, výrobou cukru Hispaniolu proslavili. Zasloužili se také o velmi kruté zacházení a týrání otroků, které neúměrně trestali za jakékoli byt' malé pochybení. To vše dalo vzniknout bohaté vypravěčské tradici, kterou Danticat obdivuje a využívá. Praktikování katolicismu a Vudu, zakořeněné v historiích obou národů obývajících ostrov, jsou také častou součástí jejich textů. Využívá náboženská témata nejen k vykreslení děje, ale také k referencím svých postav. Původní etnika z okolních karibských ostrovů, která byla na Hispaniolu odvečena, mají v jejím díle určitou míru zastoupení.

Témata, kterým jsem se ve své práci věnovala, jsou nedílnou součástí autorčiny tvorby. Chudoba a násilné vykořenění, které mají svůj počátek v importu původních obyvatel afrického kontinentu, zrovna tak jako poetické vykreslení krás ostrova, stručný výčet historických událostí a téma emigrace mě ovlivnily v psaní.

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Annotation

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Title of the Thesis: Turbulent Lives Of Displaced Haitians: An Examination into Edwidge Danticat's Work

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Keywords: Edwidge Danticat, Michele Wucker, Myriam J. A. Chancy, orphaned child, suffering, history, displacement, slavery, poverty, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, Haiti, Haitian workers, sugar cane, Parsley Massacre, dictator regime, Dominican Republic, all-inclusive resorts, United States, New York City.

The thesis traces the history of the island of Hispaniola and examines the displacement and treatment of Haitian nationals through Edwidge Danticat's two historical fiction novels, *The Farming of Bones* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. Through the eyes of the main characters - an orphaned Amabelle, and a fatherless Sophie - the thesis illustrates that involuntary displacement fuels numerous challenges and struggles, which manifest in various ways, such as, dreams, difficult relationships, and aspects of love. It demonstrates how the loss of a loved one, and the loss of home country and its accompanying customs, only perpetuates the character's longing to belong. Additional works by: Michele Wucker's *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, as well as Myriam J. A. Chancy's, *From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic*, are deemed irreplaceable in understanding and commenting of the subtleties of the primary texts.

Annotace

Autor: Kamila Tichá, BA

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: Pohnuté životy vykořeněných Hait'anů: sonda do tvorby Edwidge Danticat

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.

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Klíčová slova: Edwidge Danticat, Michele Wucker, Myriam J. A. Chancy, osiřelé dítě, trápení, historie, vykořenění, otroctví, chudoba, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, Haiti, haitští námezdní dělníci, cukrová třtina, Petrželový masakr, diktátorský režim, Dominikánská republika, přímořská střediska, Spojené státy, New York.

Tato práce sleduje historii ostrova Hispaniola a zkoumá vykořenění a zacházení s haitskými příslušníky ve dvou historických románech *The Farming of Bones* a *Breath, Eyes, Memory* americké spisovatelky Edwidge Danticat. Očima hlavních postav, osiřelé Amabelle, a Sophie, která otce nikdy nepoznala, práce objasňuje, že nedobrovolné vykořenění způsobuje četná trápení a podněcuje konflikty, které se projevují různými způsoby jako například sny, obtížnými vztahy, a aspekty lásky. Ukazuje jak ztráta milované osoby, zrovna tak jako ztráta domovské země a jejích zvyků, podněcuje v postavách touhu někam patřit. Další díla spisovatelek Michele Wucker *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, a Myriam J. A. Chancy *From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic* jsou nepostradatelnými pomocníky v chápaní a komentování primárních textů.