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The Trialectics Of Transnational Migrant Women's Literature In The Writing Of Edwidge Danticat And Julia Alvarez

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THE TRIALECTICS OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT WOMEN'S LITERATURE IN
THE WRITING OF EDWIDGE DANTICAT AND JULIA ALVAREZ

by

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DEDICATION

To my daughter, Zelma Violet Eastman, and my husband, Jason Todd Eastman.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the University of South Carolina's Women's and Genders Study Program for recognizing my research with the Harriott Hampton Faucette Award. I express my sincere gratitude to the University of South Carolina's College of Arts and Sciences and the Russell J. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Foundation for awarding me the Bilinski Dissertation Fellowship.

ABSTRACT

While a considerable critical field has developed around US Latino writing, due to the historical, cultural and sociolinguistic barriers between the two nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, critical investigations of these migrant literatures are often not bridged, but rather isolated into respective Haitian-American and Dominican-American designations. My comparative, critical framework defines the interactions between gender, culture and the diverse spatial coordinates from the island of Hispaniola, the Atlantic and the United States. The carefully differentiated objects of study that I articulate in each chapter offer a desirable interdisciplinary orientation inclusive of gender theory as well as cultural studies. I examine three iterations of transnational women's writing using work by renowned writers Edwidge Danticat (Haitian-American) and Julia Alvarez (Dominican-American). Chapter one focuses on an analysis of migrant women's subjectivity in the *Bildungsroman* or coming of age novel. Chapter two investigates race and gender in novels that recreate historical events in the migrant homeland Chapter three links works of non-fiction with the author's varying transnational social justice initiatives. Each chapter compares and contrasts the framing of transnational literature of the Caribbean-American with a specific interest in gender, culture and spatial coordinates from the island of Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), the Atlantic and the United States.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 MAKING THE SELF AT HOME, IN A HOME AWAY FROM HOME: CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN MIGRANT WOMEN’S TRANSNATIONAL <i>BILDUNGSROMAN</i> IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT’S <i>BREATH, EYES, MEMORY</i> AND JULIA ALVAREZ’S <i>HOW THE GARCIA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS</i>	5
1.1 FROM THIRDSPACE THEORY TO THIRTING AS OTHERING	10
1.2 TRANSNATIONAL AGENCY THROUGH LIBERAL FEMINISM AND GENDER THEORY	19
1.3 DEPARTING FIRST SPACE: LEAVING THE HOMELAND	26
1.4 ARRIVAL TO THE HOME AWAY FROM HOME	34
1.5 SCHOOLING IN THE RECEIVING CULTURE	39
1.6 TEENAGE AND EARLY ADULthood: MAKING OF THE SELF, GIRLS INTO WOMEN.....	50
1.7 CONCLUSION: ANTI- <i>BILDUNGSROMAN</i>	59
CHAPTER 2 TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT WOMEN’S PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY: GENDER AND ETHNICITY AS A CRITIQUE OF CARIBBEAN NATION FORMATIONS IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT’S <i>THE FARMING OF BONES</i> AND JULIA ALVAREZ’S <i>IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES</i>	71
2.1 AMABELLE AND MINERVA: PROTAGONISTS’ REALIZATIONS OF FIGHT AND FLIGHT	78

2.2 AMABELLE’S FLIGHT: RETURN TO HAITI DURING THE PARSLEY MASSACRE	80
2.3 THE PLIGHT OF MIGRANT SUGAR CANE WORKERS	95
2.4 REVISITING FEMINIST SPATIALITIES IN THE MIRABAL SISTERS’ STRUGGLE AGAINST <i>MACHISMO</i>	106
2.5 CONCLUSION: NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF CARIBBEAN GENDERED AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES	119
CHAPTER 3 TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT WOMEN’S SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN NON-FICTION: EDWIDGE DANTICAT’S <i>CREATE DANGEROUSLY</i> AND JULIA ALVAREZ’S <i>A WEDDING IN HAITI</i>	125
3.1 SOCIAL JUSTICE, TRANSNATIONAL WRITING AND SPACE	127
3.2 RETURNING FOR HOPE: DANTICAT RESPONDS TO THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2010 EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI	128
3.3 ALVAREZ’S JOURNEY ACROSS THE BORDER AS A MEDIA EVENT	131
3.4 SPATIAL AND ETHNIC TENSIONS: UNGRIEVABLE LIVES	138
3.5 DANTICAT’S SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES	142
3.6 ALVAREZ’S SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES	154
3.7 CONCLUSION: WRITING IN CONCRETE AND CYBER SPACES: CRITIQUES AND SIGNS OF HOPE	167
CONCLUSION: DEFINING AND CONTRASTING FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD SPACES WITHIN THE TRIALECTICS OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT WOMEN’S WRITING	171
WORKS CITED	177
WORKS CONSULTED	182

INTRODUCTION

My dissertation is situated at the intersection of various fields, specifically, gender, racial and ethnic studies, US literature and Caribbean cultural studies. The commonalities and differences linking Haiti and the Dominican Republic are multi-faceted. I contribute to the understanding of these interconnections by using a lens of women writers to explain how it functions as a tool to reread the ethnic, cultural and spatial dimensions of this common history.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I center on Danticat's and Alvarez early novels, to examine how they take up the genre of the *Bildungsroman* (coming-of-age novel) to develop the process of migrant identity formation as a struggle, as the site of perpetual questioning and reinvention of home and identity. Here, my critical perspective is original in its articulation of gender with the multiple spatialities brought into play by migration, analyzing how private and public spheres interact with the geographic coordinates of the Caribbean, the Atlantic and the United States. I argue that the novels *Breath, Eyes and Memory* (Danticat) and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (Alvarez) exemplify transnational struggles, specifically, the difficulty in achieving subjectivity in the woman migrant case. Both protagonists live in their respective homelands as children. They migrate with family and experience adolescence and adulthood, or "the coming of age" in the United States. I analyze and add to existent criticism on transnational studies through the lens of gender and space (including private

vs. public spheres and geographic coordinates of the Caribbean, the Atlantic and the United States) to make a case for the ‘anti-*Bildungsroman*’ in which the protagonists overcome struggles but continue to search for a place to call ‘home’ and question their identity as women who waver in a third space, a transnational identity which exists between cultural and gendered practices (traditionally called ‘gender roles’).

The critical lens that I adopt in the second chapter builds on the latter but also shifts its focus. If in the first chapter, transnational literature took shape through a negative rewriting of canonical literary modes of writing identity, the second chapter analyzes how possible tenets for transnational literature are established and affirmed by way of a rereading of specific historical process. Taking as a starting point Haiti and the Dominican Republic’s shared state-sponsored violence and the racial and ethnically based oppression that the Dominican Republic visited on Haitians, my interpretation of Danticat and Alvarez’ novels uses these historical events as a frame to analyze how they redefine notions of citizenship and womanhood. Danticat’s novel *The Farming of the Bones* focuses on a Haitian peasant woman’s perspective as a displaced victim of the Dominican massacre of Haitians during the Trujillo regime, whereas Alvarez’s novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* recounts the experiences of Dominican sisters who conspire against the Trujillo regime and end up imprisoned, tortured and murdered. Using these historical events as a frame in conjunction with the cultural study *Why the Cocks Fight: Haitians, Dominicans and the Struggle for Hispaniola* by Michelle Wucker, I flesh out how literature acts as a transnational mechanism to reinterpret these national histories through their link and points of contact, as Danticat and Alvarez, now residing permanently in the United States and writing almost exclusively in their second language,

English, for a global audience, re-appropriate and re-imagine gendered cultural experiences and spaces, giving voice or testimony to otherwise silent, marginal history from their homelands.

The third and final chapter of my dissertation again shifts the focus while establishing continuities with the critical lens and insights developed in the previous chapter. Situating Danticat and Alvarez within the cultural field of minority writing in the US, this chapter examines the non-fiction works of these authors, analyzing how they each utilize their person, their “fame” to speak out for issues pertaining to their homelands and the United States. While this corpus is differently challenging and problematic from their works of fiction, since it inevitably leads readers to examine their own practices of consumption of migrant narratives, it is also a crucial part of the richness and rigor of the critical articulation that is unique to my work. It furthers the scope of my dissertation and broadens it to also include how these works relate specifically to a US audience. In each case, I examine non-fiction books to gain perspective on how Danticat uses this mode in *Create Dangerously* to practice activism for cultural awareness of other lesser-known Haitian writers and artists, using her status as migrant writer as a vehicle for a more plural definition of her homeland which garnered international attention in the aftermath of the 2012 earthquake. My reading of Alvarez’ recently published testimonial book *A Wedding in Haiti* furthers my understanding of the racial and ethnic coordinates that frame her rereading of Dominican history, as she focusses on Haitian lives in her homeland, giving form and voice to a population that had been relegated to the margins of the national narratives, even while being such a crucial part of it. These two works of non-fiction are macro and micro

examples of transnational literature which have a dyadic effect as they self-disclose while educating and promoting awareness to motivate and inspire an English-reading public on the struggles of Haitians and Dominicans and migrants within these two nations and the United States. I build upon the same theoretical frame from the first two chapters as I examine how these works of non-fiction examine questions of gender, space and cultural practices. This chapter is the culmination of the triad or trialectic of migrant women's writing. This chapter does not give primacy to non-fiction, but rather examines the progression from fiction to non-fiction in the transnational work of the authors. The third tier of transnational literature has been largely undocumented in recent criticism. My study makes these two works of non-fiction more accessible to other academics who seek to understand migrant transnational literature and the recent trends in literary production by these authors.

CHAPTER 1

MAKING THE SELF AT HOME, IN A HOME AWAY FROM HOME:

CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN MIGRANT WOMEN'S TRANSNATIONAL *BILDUNGSROMAN* IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S *BREATH, EYES, MEMORY* AND JULIA ALVAREZ'S *HOW THE GARCIA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS*

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, child protagonists Sophie Caco and Yolanda Garcia migrate to the United States from their respective Caribbean homelands, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The novels center on the protagonists' journey into adulthood as migrant women and the difficulties they face in achieving subjectivity or 'making themselves at home' in the United States. The challenge for the migrant to become the self in the new host home, or in the 'home away from home' provides a framework for exploring the quest for selfhood. Written from a child's point of view, these novels provide an account of the interrelations between acculturation and subjectivity, opening a window onto the turbulent transition from adolescence to adulthood for first generation female migrants. I accordingly categorize these novels as transnational women's migrant literature but also as a revision of the classical *Bildungsroman*, or coming-of-age narrative. My comparative analysis of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* analyzes these transnational revisions of the *Bildungsroman* focusing on the role of space, linking transnationalism and the revision of the *Bildungsroman* in 'making the self at home' or achieving

subjectivity in a transnational setting, fleshing out what I conceive of as transnational agency.

The transnational setting is understood as being displaced from the ancestral home in the receiving culture, in a 'home away from home'. I posit that the domestic sphere or 'home away from home' in the receiving culture is a third space, a transnational site that is both real and imagined, where expectations, norms and values of the ancestral and receiving cultures clash and converge. In this spatiality that functions as a triad, the first space is the ancestral homeland as imagined by the protagonists through childhood memories and periodic visits or 'returns' to the principal homeland. The second space is the public sphere of the receiving culture, specifically, New York City. The third space is then the blending of these two spheres conceived as the transcultural interactions that occur primarily in the private sphere of the home in the receiving culture. The third space is the 'lived' space and is conceived as a "strategic location from which to encompass, understand and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously" (Soja 68). The third space is the location where transnational agency becomes a possibility, shaped and informed by the triad of spatiality.

I conceive of third space as a counter space or "space(s) of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning" (Soja 68). Gender and identity are paramount to the third space in the 'home away from home.' The home has historically been critiqued as the private or 'women's' domain. In this chapter I reframe the home through a feminist and transnational lens. The domestic sphere is commonly understood as the space where cultural values and national mores are perpetuated by raising children or rather, by creating citizens who will carry

out their duty of maintaining traditional values and patriarchal culture (Strehle 1-3). In the ‘home away from home’ this process is altered. Using as a conceptual framework the transnational third space of ‘home away from home’ as the site of the migrant woman’s transnational *Bildungsroman*, I outline how, in the situation of first generation female migrants, the function of the home is complicated by the migrant family’s attempts to instill the traditional values and practices of the ancestral culture on female children.

I explore how the norms of the private space are violated by the new, transnational context where spaces have “site-specific definitions of decorum” (Goldman 33) that are challenged when the receiving culture’s practices and values enter the ‘home away from home’. In both novels, the newly settled migrant home is first governed by a socio-cultural and historical context from the sending Caribbean culture, constituted primarily by the parents’ definition of appropriate behavior and practices imported from the homeland. Throughout the young girls’ journey into adolescence, the home space slowly evolves into a transnational home, becoming an increasingly culturally complicated and dense site. This process occurs not only on the level of self-understanding in their new social and cultural environment, but also on the level of the home space as outside cultural influences enter through schooling, socialization and familial interactions with others, in ways that affect the parents as well. The home then becomes a contested space for first generation migrant families, as parents and children navigate the values of both sending and receiving cultures.

As I focus on migrant women’s experiences, this chapter examines the young protagonists’ subjectivity through a feminist lens, understanding that coming of age is marked by gender-based practices, choices that ultimately guide women’s life

trajectories: the pursuit of formal education, career, marriage and family. I argue that Sophie and Yolanda's fictional accounts construct the foundation for a literary genre that I call transnational migrant women's bildungsroman. Through migrant women's engagement with the third space, a possibility for agency is opened up via the 'home away from home' which manifests in a split understanding of the adult self, created in part, by the inability to meet or live up to the cultural expectations for women in both the ancestral Caribbean and the receiving US. This agency often crystalizes as negative because the protagonists fail to meet the expectations set by their parents, extended family, romantic partners and friends. Yet in failing to live up to these expectations, they do not give up but instead redirect their lives by becoming agents, deciding which paths to take, even if they are ultimately not the best paths to embark upon. This is a fundamental aspect of the transnational migrant women's coming-of-age tale to learn from one's mistakes and persevere in the face of challenges.

Subjectivity, or the 'making of the self' beckons specifically to the *Bildungsroman*. However, the transnational migrant version of the *Bildungsroman* departs drastically from the classical model. Whereas the classic *Bildungsroman* culminates in the male protagonist's accomplishments, proving that a stable sense of identity has been achieved, in these transnational revisions of the classic *Bildungsroman*, there is no 'happily ever after.' Instead, the novels end ambiguously, leaving unanswered questions about the protagonists' fate (Bolaki 2011).

Danticat and Alvarez's protagonists contest traditional Caribbean cultural practices dictated for women, and in doing so, call attention to the process of being psychologically and psychically uprooted and re-grounded, of "rethinking home and

migration in ways that open out the discussion beyond oppositions such as stasis versus transformation, presence versus absence” (Ahmed et al 1). By narrating the experiences of female migrant children and their families as they attempt to establish themselves in New York City while maintaining strong physical and familial ties to the Caribbean, these novels problematize the process of coming of age or making the self at home, away from home in a transnational migrant context.

These Caribbean-American female child protagonists give voice to women’s coming of age experiences typically ignored or untold in Caribbean-American literature. At the core of each novel is an exploration of what makes a child a woman, where and how this occurs, and to what end. These questions are answered and evidenced in both novels through the protagonist’s personal and familial struggles. That the protagonists are both women from the Caribbean who are marginalized as minorities and who speak English as a second language calls to the idea that these are not typical tales from mainstream American WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) and usually male-centered culture. Despite all the challenges they face as migrants and as women minorities learning the English language, the protagonists come of age, but moreover they come to terms with the choices they have made, the choices that were made for them as migrants, to understand how this disruption altered their own self-understanding and subjectivity through a process of transnational agency.

Cognizant of their instability, stuck between two cultures and searching for a place to call home, Sophie and Yolanda move metaphorically and also spatially and temporally, back and forth from the ancestral Caribbean to the receiving culture in the United States in an attempt to figure out who they are and also where and how they can

make themselves at home' or become themselves, as adults. In this chapter I detail how the ambiguity of living between spaces and never truly feeling at home or at ease in either one is a destabilizing aspect of the protagonist's transnational experiences. This ambiguity is turned on its head and conceived as an opening-up of space, a possibility to lay claims to selfhood through agentive means, a self-imposed redirection of their life course.

1.1 FROM THIRDSPACE THEORY TO THIRTHING AS OTHERING

In *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places*, Edward Soja develops a concept called 'Thirthing-as-Othering' by drawing on the third space theory first proposed by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*. In my study, I draw on Soja's proposed "trialectics of space" in its suggestions that space is not singular but rather multiple and constituted between the tensions that link these different spaces. I conceive of transnational migrant women's literature as occupying a multiplicity of spaces: diaspora, feminism and marginality, for example. I see beyond a bicultural analysis and avoid only labeling Danticat's writing Haitian-American and Alvarez's Dominican-American, since I seek to retrace Haitian and Dominican cultural practices and spaces in my literary analysis, examining how they become transnational within that broader term created as a triad, the 'home away from home'. This allows me to bridge these separate categories without breaking them apart. Space in the novel becomes a triad, other to the dyad of first (ancestral homeland) and second (public sphere of receiving culture) spaces or binary oppositions. Drawing on Soja's 'Thirthing-as-Othering' as outlined in *Thirdspace* grounds my understanding of transnational migrant women's alternate social reality as one that is both real and imagined for the protagonists.

By examining space through a triad of social realities 1.) Ancestral homeland, 2.) Receiving culture public space, and 3.) Private domestic sphere in the receiving culture, I reject the reductionist concept of 'biculturalism' which does not successfully engage all three spaces. Only critiquing two social spaces, homeland and receiving culture, a 'bicultural' analysis limits the complexity of cultural interrelations that transgress in the private domestic sphere the third or 'home away from home' space.

The protagonists of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* exist in social spheres distinct from their homeland or the receiving culture which is a third space, different yet dependent upon the first space, their ancestral homeland and the second space, the new space of the receiving culture. I conceive of these spaces through Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, originally published in French in 1974 and translated to English in 1991, and in Edward Soja's *Thirdspace* which, published approximately two decades later, critiques and expands upon Lefebvre's ideas. Both thinkers aim to conceptualize space as both socially real and imaginary and to critique how space is socially produced instead of defining it exclusively as an objective reality. Third space is "different yet encompassing and partially dependent upon the other two (first and second) spaces" (Soja 69). Although the third space is primarily encountered in the 'home away from home' in the novels I critique, it also encompasses a multiplicity of spaces because this concept of space is more than a material idea or construct, but a sociality that encompasses the subject that cannot be entirely separate or displaced when the social actor moves from one location to another.

The protagonists experience third space in their everyday interactions as transnational migrants inside and outside of their home. Although many of these third space experiences occur in the private sphere or 'home away from home' they also have third space experiences in the public space of the receiving culture. Third space is portable, it goes with them like a suitcase of ideas and perceptions that are always with them.

The novel's protagonists experience events that occur in the third space as transcultural interactions where they use their (in)ability to communicate in English and their (lack of) cultural knowledge of the sending and receiving cultures. They invent what they do not know about the receiving culture, for example, when speaking English through circumlocution and generalizing based on previous experiences and knowledge, to attempt to make sense of the new cultural space. For example, when Sophie arrives at the airport in New York City, she does not have the cultural knowledge from her ancestral first space Haiti nor the vocabulary from English to describe the baggage claim conveyor belt. Instead she calls it "suitcases...on a moving mat" (39). As she walks with her mother in her new neighborhood for the first time, she does not recognize that a man is homeless and describes him as "a man sleeping under a blanket of newspapers" (43). In similar fashion, Yolanda confuses one concept she has learned at school for another she had heard of but not anticipated, her first snowfall. She immediately recognizes the snow as "radioactive fallout" (167) that she learned about as part of her school's air-raid drills. Upon witnessing her first snowfall as a pupil in class she exclaims "Bomb! Bomb!" (167). In these instances the transnational experience is shaped by a space full of encounters that delight, shock and confuse the young protagonists, as they blend together

their own cultural knowledge from their ancestral homeland to the new space around them.

These perceptions of space are coming from a child's perspective early in the novels, and the narration of these encounters becomes more complex and intricate as they enter into adulthood. Later in adult life, Yolanda writes a note to her husband trying to explain why she is ending the marriage and attempting to justify to herself why her marriage to an American man failed. She has trouble articulating in words what she understands and is caught up in a triad of her "head-slash-heart-slash-soul" (78). She decides to go back to her parent's house, to her 'home away from home'. She does not yet recognize what she needs to remedy her sense of failure and loss. She opts for both time and space away from the receiving culture life that is unsatisfying to her. Yolanda could not be her authentic self with her husband who had a different cultural understanding of marriage and relationships "she didn't want to divide herself any more, three persons (Yolanda, Yoyo, and Yo or Joe) in one Yo" (78). The multiple names that she bears are indicative of her lack of subjectivity. She is Yolanda in her ancestral culture, Yoyo, an endearing nickname and child's toy in her receiving culture, and Yo, the Spanish pronoun for "I" but also the male shortened form of Joseph, "Joe" indicative phonetically of the way that "Yo" is heard by native speakers of the English language. Yolanda's problematic name and associated nicknames are indicators of her fractured identity in three spatialities.

The variations of Yolanda's name are examples of how space is experienced concretely in everyday situations, for example, not having control of your identity, in Yolanda's case, having several nicknames which have been imposed upon her, but also

through relations of power, the marriage where she cannot exert herself through communication to bring about the kind of marital satisfaction she desires. In “The Subject and Power” Foucault posits how power is experienced by subjects as an action (not in passivity) in unequal relationships where one dominates another, making that other inferior and powerless (Foucault 219-220). Although Foucault uses a binary opposition (one must exert power over the other) to explain power in “The Subject and Power” I valorize his concept because of its recognition of a multiplicity of ways that one can respond to power. Relations of power occur one incident at a time, not by a rule of law or ‘Power’ (with a capital P) but rather "a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that 'the other' (the disempowered) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, *a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up*" (Foucault 222).

Sophie and Yolanda experience these types of relations of power as both migrants and as women who early in adult life, recognize that they have failed to successfully direct their own life course. Their unhappiness stems from leaving their homelands, then later leaving their families in the second space receiving culture, and finally, leaving the lovers whose relationships promised to help them become themselves outside of ancestral and familial spaces. When they leave these relationships, they are free to experience themselves away from the watchful eyes of their families and their lovers. It is in these critical moments that they become agentive beings, choosing to direct their lives on their own terms. For both protagonists, this results in a necessary return to the ancestral

homeland as well. It is during these returns that they choose to step outside of themselves, critique their situation to gain a sense of self. In order to find that sense of self, they must leave the receiving culture and return to the ancestral homeland by themselves as adult women. When Sophie and Yolanda are on their own, in their ancestral homeland, they are able to reflect upon space and their place in it, and have their first agentive moments which enable them to renew their promises to themselves about what they need to redirect their life course.

The transnational space inhabited by women migrants is other to the first and second spaces, but moreover it is an opening of a new social reality or “Thirling-as-Othering” (60). Soja insists that thirling as othering does not serve only to counter binary oppositions in order to resolve them with a third term- there is not an assumption of a “holy trinity” (61) but instead a “cumulative trialectics that is radically open to additional otherness, to a continuing expansion of spatial knowledge” (61). Soja writes extensively on how thirling-as-othering plays out in the work of Black American feminist bell hooks, and this analysis is applicable to migrant women’s transnationalism in literature as well. Soja explains that the thirdspace has been opened up for exploration by “people (especially women) of color” and describes how writers (such as my choices, Danticat and Alvarez) are “re-awakening...the powerfully symbolic spaces of representation, of struggles over the right to be different, to a new politics of location and a radical spatial subjectivity and praxis” (Soja 84).

Although Soja is more philosophical than literary, he does evoke a specific literary example to support thirdspace theory. The concept of thridspace is exemplified through a critique of Jorge Luis Borges’ short story “The Aleph”. Soja explains that the

ways in which Borges conceptualizes the existence of the Aleph is a “point of departure” (54) for understanding thirdspace. Transnational agency as I conceive of it is an application of a third term, thirthing-as-othering, with thirdspace theory.

The short story “The Aleph” begins to unfold as the narrator, Borges himself, receive a phone call from a friend who explains to him that he has an Aleph “the place where, without admixture or confusion, all the places of the world, seen from every angle, coexist” (Borges 281). At first, the narrator is overwhelmed and overjoyed by his friend’s discovery, but he quickly becomes pessimistic about it when he realizes the impossibility of explaining and/or sharing the Aleph to/with others because, “Every language is an alphabet of symbols the employment of which assumes a past shared by its interlocutors. How can one transmit to others the infinite Aleph, which my timorous memory can scarcely contain?” (Borges 282). For the narrator, the Aleph transcends language when understood as a space where the totality of existence is viewed simultaneously from every imaginable point in both physical space and time, but cannot be separated, or broken down into singular moments or fragmented pieces because “the enumeration, even partial enumeration of infinity-is irresolvable” (Borges 282). If the Aleph is one simultaneous intact, unbroken mirror, then reality as humans normally conceive it would be an endless array of pieces, fragmented or broken mirrors. These broken mirrors distort what they reflect, while the Aleph would be a seamless, clear image. As the narrator implies, the Aleph challenges the human mind because it is not readily available or easily accessed, making understanding such space comparable to working on the restoration of a shattered mirror of endless pieces without ever truly being able to grasp the image being created. It would be as if one sees the mirror but

acknowledges that there are an infinite numbers of pieces and therefore no clear view, no end result. The story details how the Aleph is within reach, “It’s right under the dining room in the cellar” (Borges 282) but at the same time, completely inaccessible.

The big picture is that there is no big picture, but rather, a series of pictures which overlap and converge. The narrator implies that the limit of human language is part and parcel of this problem. Most cultures and therefore most humans, conceive of a limited linear understanding of time and space- past, present and the speculative future. If the language humans have to describe their understanding of time and space is thusly limited, it is a logical conclusion that language may be a reflection of this limited understanding of time and space. How then, is Borges as narrator able to grasp and share, in some form, the complexity of the Aleph? His understanding indicates there is a possibility to find a way for this knowledge to be transmitted to others, a glimmer of hope to escape the state of unknowing. In “The Aleph”, Borges uses his literary genius to both critique humans’ inability to see beyond two realms, time and space, and at the same time, challenges humans to believe in a third space which is accessible yet transcendent.

Borges’ suggestion in “The Aleph” is facetious in the sense that the reader may be deceived into thinking that humans cannot experience the Aleph, that they cannot move beyond a dyad into the realm of a triad- a third way of understanding and viewing through space as a construct both dependent upon and distinct from the social and historical. In “The Aleph” language is constructed as insufficient in that it is largely linear and cannot encompass the totality and enormity of the space/time continuum, or in the narrator’s words, “language is successive” (283) not ever-present, all-encompassing and simultaneous like the Aleph. Yet language is the only tool available and therefore

must be turned on its head, made 'queer'. By accepting the label which has been imposed upon it and proving it is actually an empowering act to embrace it, queering of space will move comprehension beyond binary oppositions into third space "the place where, without admixture or confusion, all the places of the world, seen from every angle, coexist" (Borges 281). Soja reiterates this point adding that Borges' Aleph is "also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen and understood" (Soja 56). The point that Soja makes in using "The Aleph" to ground the thirding-as-othering theory is:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. Anything which fragments Thirdspace into separate specialized knowledges or exclusive domains-even on the pretext of openness. (56-57)

Thirdspace theory therefore is compatible with contemporary feminist thought that rejects binary oppositions, much like the notion of linear and continuous time and space, related to modernity and progress that is critiqued by Borges in "The Aleph", conceived as generally unfavorable and often even dangerous categorizations that can lead to polarization amongst and between groups- for example, black/white, gay/straight, global south/global north, third world/first world. The task of contemporary feminism at the dawn of the 21st century has in many ways, been an effort to search for a third, a fourth, a fifth, a sixth etc. term to add as a category of analysis in order to bridge the

gaps, or at the very least promote a perspective that engages marginal others. As products of the late twentieth century, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1992) certainly espouse the tenets of liberal feminism. Topics in the novel such as women's rights to equal opportunity and access to be agents in their lives, for example, exalting women's right to university education, and questioning supposed truths about femininity, marriage and motherhood. A woman need not be beautiful, marry or bear children in order to be a woman, nor to lead a fulfilling life.

1.2 TRANSNATIONAL AGENCY THROUGH LIBERAL FEMINISM AND GENDER THEORY

Both novels feature protagonists whose life stories provoke a contemporary vision of liberal feminism in their quest to stake a claim to a form of subjectivity which I conceive of as transnational agency. Whether inadvertently or intentionally, the novels are examples of feminist literature in their message that women be afforded the same opportunities in life as their male counterparts. In liberal feminism there is no longer a push to recognize women and minorities as equal to white men but instead to focus on quality of life which includes access to resources to secure a humane standard of living.

As Barker and Kupier point out in "Gender, Class and Location in the Global Economy" globalization has changed the way resources are distributed around the globe. In this new era, one's race, ethnicity, sexual and gender orientation, and location, deem certain humans as either deserving or undeserving of basic human rights (ch.4.29).

Although philosophically crucial to make evident women's oppression under patriarchy, the next logical move beyond the dyad of man vs. woman as 'Other,' was to include all others in the concept of 'Other.' Initially, the term 'Other' was constructed within the context of the first world, or a Westernized understanding that did not include minorities

and therefore did not accurately frame the struggle of all ‘Others.’ ‘Otherness,’ in a liberal feminist context, is also becoming a queer term when used in a context which turns its original meaning into a way to fight against the very terms that constitute it. For example, in the Occupy Movement that began in 2011 in Madrid, Spain and later that year took to the streets of New York City, had global repercussions. The global use of the slogan “We are the 99%” was initiated as a catchphrase to deconstruct the dynamic that 1% of the human population who have access to wealth and therefore power and resources, should control all people. The term is then turned inside out to designate the majority of ‘Others’ as not the marginalized minority but rather as the great majority of those who are disenfranchised culturally and economically. This is just one real world application of the conceptualizations of transnational agency.

To return to the philosophical reference to the ‘Other’ it is necessary to recall that the term gained prominence in feminist theories as a result of Simone de Beauvoir’s seminal work *The Second Sex*. Her observation that “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” carries a phenomenological and existential message that in that being ‘Other’ to man, the concept of woman is rooted in inferiority to male supremacy and dominance. As previously discussed, the term ‘Other’ is no longer an ostracizing term but a reality for all people who are not white heterosexual males. Liberal feminism recognizes the social and cultural boundaries to one’s selfhood in the face of prejudice and patriarchal culture that favors being both white and male. Working against these boundaries on a cultural level is what I conceive of as transnational agency or a form of postmodern agency first made evident in the work of Judith Butler. Upon critiques that *Gender Trouble* (1990) espoused a philosophy of gloom and doom for selfhood, Butler reexamined her earlier

arguments and almost a decade and half later penned *Undoing Gender* (2004) where she posits that although difficult to achieve, there are possibilities for rearticulating the societal and cultural boundaries to agency and selfhood.

To develop my idea of transnational agency, I draw on Butler's understanding of the concept of the 'unreal' from *Undoing Gender*. If subjects exist in a space that is unintelligible to outsiders, these subjects are rendered 'unreal' to others. Since sociality creates being, or rather, one cannot exist without social terms that define what it is to be human, oppression by lack of human recognition occurs in both the first and second spaces for the migrants. Because the migrants are no longer part of their ancestral culture by way of space, they are removed from the place where they belong, they have not changed in and of themselves, but space has contaminated their identity as they are now viewed by the new receiving culture as 'unreal'. If one is 'unreal' verbal and physical threats are always present. This is evidenced in the texts by the racial epithets the young migrants are called at school, for example "Spic" and "Stinking Haitian" as way for those in the receiving culture to contaminate their identity mark them as less than human.

As Butler postulates in *Undoing Gender* when humans are not even considered to be real or to be human beings, subjectivity becomes null and void.

To be called a copy, to be called unreal, is thus one way in which one can be oppressed. But consider that it is more fundamental than that. For to be oppressed means that you already exist as a subject of some kind... But to be unreal is something else again. For to be oppressed one must first become intelligible. To find that one is fundamentally unintelligible is to find that one has not yet achieved access to the human. (218)

Butler's concept of the 'unreal' subject addresses the problem of transnational migrant agency at its root: what good is agency to a subject if one is not even considered to be part of society? Space is social, and society is comprised of not only subjects, but by spatiality in those shared spaces. Therefore, in order to be an agentive being, one must be recognized as human by the very society that defines the culture.

How then, does a subject become recognized as real or human in the receiving culture? Both Danticat and Alvarez enable their protagonists to connect intimately to the receiving culture second space through romantic relationships with men. The young women have no true friends or female companions outside of their families. Yolanda has her three sisters and Sophie eventually develops friendships with women in group therapy. Yet the catalyst for both women's quest for a sense of self later in life is rooted in their unfulfilling romantic relationships with men. This could be the author's way of reflecting their biographies in the novels, or perhaps it is a symptom of the sexist culture that stipulates women should 'marry up' the ladder of social class in order to improve their economic and social standing. In the case, the marriages are to men who are "American" not Haitian or Dominican.

The marriages are unsuccessful for both protagonists due to problems with sexual intimacy and cultural differences which affect their ability to effectively communicate their desires to their partners. But these unions are necessary for the novels to succeed in allowing the migrant women to become subjective beings by releasing themselves from their family's homes in the United States. These relationships then, are not as important for the romantic idea of love as they are for the romanticized version of becoming the self

by breaking away from strong familial ties and in turn, making a temporary connection to the receiving culture and space.

These troubled romantic relationships function as catalysts to transform the protagonist's subjectivity by providing a space for them to examine their selves and the cultures and spaces where they have developed a sense of belonging, even if this belonging is only partial. Migrant transnational agency is the possibility for the migrant, through the 'in-between' state of transnationality, to address ideology, to become both human and gendered, albeit from a marginal space. If this form of agency can be likened to an opportunity rather than a complete opening, it is a cracked window, a defect in the larger structure, not a complete transformation of a powerless subject into a fully agentic one. Therefore, this is not to argue that one can fully ever step outside of the box or contest that which has already constituted the self before the experience of migration, but to explain how, in their reworking of these constitutive bases transnational subject positions offer an altered perspective of what it is to be recognized as human. Intimate relationships and marriages offer a space for rearticulation of the self, to begin a process of becoming the self in the second space receiving culture.

In *Undoing Gender* Butler explains how the social norms which constitute all subjects preexist and predetermine our recognition but also offer the possibility of agency:

We do not negotiate with norms or with Others subsequent to our coming into the world. We come into the world on the condition that the social world is already there, laying the groundwork for us. This implies that I cannot persist without norms of recognition that support my persistence;

the sense of possibility pertaining to me must first be imagined from somewhere else before I can begin to imagine myself. My reflexivity is not only socially mediated, but socially constituted. I cannot be who I am without drawing upon the sociality of norms that precede and exceed me. In this sense, I am outside myself from the outset, and must be, in order to survive, and in order to enter the realm of the possible. (32)

Although Butler questions if one can ever truly become themselves, she introduces the concept of rearticulation, or a remaking of the self in order to begin a process to “resignify the basic categories of ontology, of being human, of being gendered” (38). I argue that this process is transnational agency in the novels, and that this process occurs in the third or private domestic space. Butler’s theory of rearticulation or ‘remaking of the self’ offers a glimmer of hope, the possibility of enacting an agentic process in a seemingly doomed situation. Although Butler is weary of claims of agency, in *Undoing Gender*, she asserts that agency, although “riven with paradox” (3), becomes possible through understanding how one is constituted by a social world. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler ‘troubled’ or made difficult the notion of one’s gender requiring adherence to rigid roles or “conceptualized categories... as the foundational illusions of identity” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 46) and also problematized the idea of “doing gender” by theorizing performativity, in *Undoing Gender* Butler goes beyond the limitations of gender identity and performance to detail how gender can be equally ‘undone.’ If gender is undone, a person becomes unrecognizable, unable to live in a social world. The sociality of gender is also the spatiality of gender. According to Butler in *Undoing Gender*, gender is not a literal performance but rather a “practice of improvisation within

a scene of constraint” (1), a way of doing things in a certain space, utilizing the social terms that enable that performance, meaning that one does not “do” one’s gender alone, but rather that one is always “doing” gender with or for another” (1). In Butler’s view, the terms that make up one’s gender are highly social. External to the self and preexisting within the self, these terms are “beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author” (1). The terms that define gender are thus outside of oneself but also crucial to one’s insertion within sociality. Differentiating between first, second and third spaces is a way to more closely examine how that sociality is enacted in the case of transnational migrants since gender is always already there in these spaces, in service to cultural norms in a spatial sense as well. Gender exists in consort with desire. Although gender and desire are not one and the same, they are linked and, as Butler argues, not easily separated. One’s gender has inscribed upon it “desires that do not originate with our individual personhood” (2). As gendered beings, we are therefore both constituted by norms of desire and dependent upon them for our survival in a social world. Gendered beings are expected to desire in a certain way, for example, the heterosexist norm that a woman desire a man and vice versa. In the transnational migrant novel, the desire is conceived also a desire for the receiving culture. Intimate partners who are from the receiving culture are secured by the protagonists in order to lay claim to the second space where they do not fully exist. In both novels, these attempts fail.

When one cannot fulfill or carry out the desire prescribed by their gender and their culture, they risk social exclusion or what Butler refers to as an ‘unlivable life’ (2). This theorization is relevant in the analysis of protagonists Sophie and Yolanda because although heterosexual and desiring of men, as a result of their traumatic upbringing and

early adulthood, they struggle to enact the so-called appropriate desire in their ancestral and receiving cultures, their lives become temporarily unlivable and border on the brink of destruction. In Sophie's darkest hours, she makes a choice to challenge her situation, returning to Haiti to confront her past. When Yolanda is on the verge of self-destruction, she is institutionalized by her parents, but later recovers and like Sophie, returns to her ancestral homeland to make amends.

1.3 DEPARTING FIRST SPACE: LEAVING THE HOMELAND

Transnational migrants' fractured sense of self (subjectivity) is rooted in spatial displacement from one nation and one cultural space, creating a linkage between space and subjectivity. Transnational agency is located in the third space where the latter and the former merge, in the home away from home. In both novels I read space to define the beginning, middle and (open) end of this process. As a revision of the *Bildungsroman*, I begin with a critique of space rooted in the event that forces change in the protagonists, the departure from the ancestral home.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie's departure from Haiti at age 12 begins with her acknowledging her suitcase, a physical object that has immediately transformed the space in the home she shares with her maternal Aunt Atie. The suitcase is a symbol of her leaving the village of Croix-des-Rosets for a new life in the metropolis of New York City. Sophie accidentally finds out that she is leaving home to join her estranged mother in New York City during a community potluck dinner. The news is spread by well-intentioned but nosy neighbors and quickly reaches Sophie's ear, much to the disappointment of her caregiver Aunt Atie, who had wished to discuss the situation privately with Sophie. When Sophie hears this unexpected news she wants to return to

the privacy of her home immediately to escape the chatter and watchful eye of her neighbors who openly demand she and her aunt be happy and count their blessings that she gets to leave Haiti.

When Sophie returns home with Atie, she questions her about why she did not tell her the news. Atie responds, “I was going to put you to sleep, put you in a suitcase and send you to her” (16-17). The concept of a traveling suitcase of such stature had never been a part of Sophie’s life up until then. For Sophie, the suitcase does not represent a journey but instead a departure, her leaving her aunt, the only mother she knows for the biological mother that abandoned her shortly after her birth. Sophie is keenly aware of how “The living room seemed filled by the suitcase” (27). Sophie reflects on how the large suitcase makes her impending migration impossible to ignore, “I had somehow told myself that I would be around for more potlucks, more trips to my grandmother’s, even a sewing lesson. The suitcase made me realize that I would never get to do those things” (27). The suitcase represents a drastic change in space. It marks the entrance of the second space, the receiving culture, into the first space, the ancestral home. The suitcase becomes the material reality of Sophie’s departure from Haiti.

On the morning of Sophie’s departure, her aunt transforms the home space marking the last breakfast with her niece as a ceremonious event. Objects normally reserved for company, a lace tablecloth and fine china, adorn the breakfast table. Sophie is primed for the occasion as well, after washing she is instructed to use one of her aunt’s white towels that are normally reserved for company. She is to dry her body before she is dressed in specially starched underwear and a brand new gown her aunt had tailored for her to wear on her journey. The circumstances of her migration are difficult for both

Sophie and her aunt who have lived as mother and daughter. The formalities of using special objects in the home space signal the formality of the occasion. Their use also is an attempt to change a somber departure into a moment of celebration, a graceful farewell.

In *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, departure becomes a reality in an abrupt fashion without any time to process what to pack in a suitcase and even less time for formal good-byes. Yolanda and her three sisters, Carla, Sandi and Fifi, have lived under the threat of migration in the Dominican Republic for many years due to their father's involvement in attempts to bring down the country's dictator Rafael Trujillo. For the Garcia sisters, the possibility of leaving home was always hanging in the air, waiting to be officially declared. Still, when the day arrives that the Garcia family must flee to the United States, Yolanda and her sisters are unprepared and somewhat unaware that they will not return home.

The space of the home is immediately altered by the announcement that today is the day. After receiving the news, the four sisters are sent to their rooms to pack. They are in a state of shock and cling to one another "They stood in a scared little huddle" (215). Before their departure the sisters have an encounter with the family's long time Haitian housekeeper, Chucha. While Chucha represents an authority on the subject of migration, she is also somewhat suspect because of her cultural difference, specifically her ethnicity as a Haitian and for her practice of voodoo. Yet the girls listen attentively as she tells them her own story of forced migration, "When I was a girl, I left my country too and never went back" (221). As Chucha prays aloud while embracing the girls, they all weep, releasing a cathartic response with a spatial description, "we could feel an ending in the air" (221). Contrary to the idiom 'to be up in the air' which expresses

uncertainty ‘to feel in the air’ means there is a consensus that something is imminent. In the case of the young Garcia sisters leaving home, this has significant ramifications for them as the ending is no longer a far off possibility but a reality put into motion by words and feelings that fill the home space.

In the remaining passages of the chapter, the story returns to the now empty space, still charged with emotion. Chucha becomes the omniscient narrator, describing the family’s fate as a “troublesome life ahead” (223) in “a bewitched and unsafe place where they must now make their lives” (223). She emphasizes the spatial degradation of the exterior of the home how “the grass will grow tall on the unkempt lawns...hanging orchids will burst their wire baskets...the birdcages will stand empty...the swimming pools will fill with trash and leaves and dead things” (222-223). Chucha envisions the interior of the home eventually destroyed and poached by *guardias*, corrupt police, who will smash windows, steal and strip the home of its belongings (223). Chucha’s narration links the exterior and interior spatial descriptions of the home to the emotional suffering to be experienced by the family as a result of the forced migration, “I see their future, the troublesome life ahead...but they have spirit in them. They will invent what they need to survive” (223). The invention of what they need to survive is what happens in the third space in the ‘home away from home’ through transnational agency. Although Chucha’s character may appear to foreshadow, the novel is narrated in reverse chronology and the reader already knows that these predictions did indeed materialize in the lives of Yolanda and her sisters.

In both *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, the protagonists ‘invent’ themselves through transnational agency. Their childhood in the

homeland is forever part of who they are, but it becomes a space that is simultaneously idealized and demonized. It is idealized as a place where culture and family are authentic, where Sophie and Yolanda are cut from the same fabric as the people they love. But they also demonize the first space ancestral home for instilling traditional familial roles in raising girls. Sophie's family is plagued by the cultural practice of "testing" to ensure the continuation of physical virginity for family honor, while Yolanda's family expects she and her sisters will eventually return to the Dominican Republic permanently to marry and raise a family. In both cases, what is most important to migrant parents is that their daughters remain chaste and pure, educated properly, to be primed to become wives and mothers. Even if both families expect their daughters be educated, education is not how they define the value of a woman. Living up to their respective cultures' myths of feminine beauty and subservience to a future husband in order to be suitable partners is more valuable than a formal education. The education is a cultural means to an ends. This is truer for the Yolanda than it is for Sophie. Sophie's mother has never married and envisions Sophie's role as a career woman. Still, she is obsessed with making sure that Sophie not date or have any interaction with the opposite sex until she turns eighteen.

Once both protagonists understand the cultural and moral codes that place them in a situation of powerlessness against their impending fate, the ancestral homeland loses some of its luster. When the protagonists become teenagers they experience the limitations of their gender which are culturally imposed. The young women 'invent' a third space in the 'home away from home' that empowers them to take control of their physical bodies and also their futures, in doing so they transnationalize themselves and the spaces where they live.

The plots center on how the daughters and their families cope with departing from the ancestral homeland and adjusting to a new life in the receiving culture. Through the protagonists' journey both ancestral and receiving cultures are critiqued. But it is in the privacy of the home away from home, that the parents struggle to transfer their respective Haitian and Dominican cultural values onto their children. They end up making cultural compromises with their daughters and become increasingly tolerant of American culture entering their homes.

Protagonists Sophie and Yolanda hail from different nations and come of age during different decades of the twentieth century. Alvarez's narrative spans almost four complete decades from 1956 through 1989 while Danticat's is narrated primarily over a twenty year period during the 1980s and 1990s. Yet the two migrant's novels both feature protagonists leaving the same island of Hispaniola during politically turbulent periods and end up in the United States, in New York City. Both novelist's protagonists are pressured to remain committed to their ancestral culture to please their families, and their own personal desires to not only understand themselves but also to develop a sense of self through the only means available to them, acculturation in the United States. Each author bases their fictional protagonists' histories roughly on their own biographies.

There are many similarities between Edwidge Danticat and her fictional protagonist Sophie. Danticat, born in 1969, migrates to the United States in the early 1980s during the "Papa Doc" Duvalier regime, the same timeline that she creates for Sophie. Having remained in Haiti with her siblings while both of her parents migrated to New York, Danticat is raised by her aunt and uncle for several years before joining her parents and a new sibling born in New York. Although fictional Sophie has no siblings,

no living or present male role models, no uncle and no father, the protagonist's life is somewhat similar to the author's biography. As children, both witness Haiti's AIDS epidemic during an extremely politically turbulent period in which the government used violence and intimidation tactics to silence opponents, including murder and rape. Sophie's mother, Martine, migrated to the United States in her late teenage years, soon after giving birth to Sophie.

This detail of the novel is politically and culturally significant because Sophie "might have been" (139) a child of rape by an anonymous paramilitary police officer popularly called *Tonton Macoutes*. The name stems from a *Vodou* (Voodoo) monster who violently terrorizes its victims in the same fashion as the paramilitary officers. Danticat's novel thus speaks to the cultural and political experience of her country's situation in broad terms through the story of one family. Danticat adds an afterward to the second printing of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, in 1999. She address the Haitian communities both in the US and Haiti who levied criticism due to the novel's portrayal of the Haitian cultural practice called *testing* which features prominently in the novel. The afterward is a personal letter of gratitude addressed to her fictional protagonist explaining that the novel was a intended to be a story of one family's experience and was never meant to be understood as the reality of all Haitian women. Instead, Danticat views her novel as a "journey of healing...that you (Sophie) and I have been through together" (236).

In similar fashion, Julia Alvarez also reflects on the "journey of being a writer" (296). In a writer's note added to the 2011 edition of *How the Garcia Girls Lost their Accents*, she explains her creative process and how "the stories come out of living a rich, committed life" (296). Alvarez's biography begins in the United States as she is born in

1950 in the United States, but returns to the Dominican Republic with her family as an infant. She spends the first ten years of her life in the Dominican Republic and migrates to the United States in 1960 at age ten under the same circumstances as her fictional Garcia family. The family was threatened due to the father's involvement with a foiled coup to overthrow the Trujillo dictatorship. Alvarez admits there are similarities between herself and her protagonist Yolanda, explaining her writing is a "way to process experience or make meaning of my life" (294). At the same time however, Alvarez has been careful to distance herself from admitting that her novel is entirely autobiographical, arguing "fiction tells a different kind of truth, the truth according to feelings rather than just the facts" (295).

Due to their similar protagonists and plots the novels enable a rich comparative analysis. However, the differences in the protagonist's lives show the contrast in their migrant experiences. Although both Sophie and Yolanda are young girls who are forced to leave home at an early age, their personal *Bildungsroman* plots begin with several differences that set their life trajectories apart from an early age. Sophie comes from a peasant family in the Haitian country-side, while Yolanda comes from a wealthy family that lives on a compound outside of the capital, Santo Domingo. Sophie migrates to the United States alone at the request of her mother who has been an absent figure, residing in the US since Sophie was an infant. Sophie arrives at the Port-au-Prince airport in a cab, amidst riots in the streets. Yolanda is with her three sisters when she migrates, she and her family are whisked away to the airport in a limousine provided by the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), who is responsible for helping the family escape from the island. Despite their differences of race, class and ethnicity, and family makeup in

the act of migration both girls become transnational migrants, perceived ethnically and racially as inferior to their Anglo peers. Both are harassed and threatened with racial epithets when in the public eye. Both try to please their parents who want them to remain true to their ancestral cultural ways until puberty, when they begin to develop a sense of self which deviates from their parent's wishes.

1.4 ARRIVAL TO THE HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Upon arriving at the baggage claim with a flight attendant, Sophie is reunited with her suitcase and her estranged mother Martine. Martine is, for all intents and purposes, a complete stranger to Sophie, having migrated to the United States when Sophie was only an infant. All Sophie is familiar with is the sound of her voice from the recorded messages she sends on tape cassettes to her and Atie. Sophie's only visual image of her mother prior to that moment was an old photograph. Upon meeting her mother in the flesh, Sophie reflects that not only do she and her mother look nothing alike, Martine "did not look like the picture Tante Atie had on her night table" (42). Instead she has aged in the same way Haitian laborers do, "as though she had never stopped working in the cane fields" (42). Sophie's observation that her mother no longer resembles the picture is not marked by disappointment, it is simply a comparison of two images. Yet Sophie is immediately aware of the fact that she and her mother look nothing alike. This reflects a larger issue that manifests throughout the novel. Sophie is a child of rape, and as her mother will later explain, "A child out of wedlock always looks like its father" (61). Sophie's face is a symbol of Martine's violation which brings her back to her ancestral Haiti, to the reason why she left home, and back into a painful space in her life which she has not yet reconciled.

Sophie's initial culture shock is narrated through the disinterest for the mother who has uprooted her from the life she never dreamt of leaving in Haiti. When Martine asks, "Am I am the mother you imagined?" (59) Sophie responds ambiguously, "For now I couldn't ask for better" (59). Her attitude toward her mother is one of neutrality at first, the reaction of an emotionally vulnerable child who was told she must be respectful to her mother, but does not yet trust the woman who gave birth to her as she is essentially a stranger. Sophie desperately wants to return to Haiti, to "shrink myself and slip into the envelope" (50) of a letter that her mother is sending back home.

It is "overcast and cool" when Sophie steps outside of the airport and into her first New York City dusk. They cross the street and arrive at Martine's vehicle. Sophie is hesitant to "climb onto the tattered cushions on the seats" of her mother's automobile, "a pale yellow car with a long crack across the windshield glass" and "paint...peeling off the side door" (41). When she gets in and sits down, "the sharp edge of a loose spring was sticking into my (her) thigh" (42). The sharp edge of the spring is a visible threat, the very reason why Sophie does not want to get into the car. She knowingly puts herself into an unsafe space. Sophie's first impressions of the city through the passenger seat of the car are marked by discomfort with the darkness of the city and the fear of the unknown, of going 'home' with her mother.

As they leave the airport driving on the highway into the city, night falls and Sophie observes "Lights glowed everywhere". But as soon as they enter Martine's neighborhood "All the street lights were suddenly gone. The streets we drove down now were dim and hazy. The windows were draped with bars; black trash bags blew out into the night air" (43). The receiving culture second space is described as uninviting,

foreshadowing the difficulties Sophie will encounter. But moreover the people in the new space are also described as antagonistic and even dangerous, “There were young men standing on street corners, throwing empty cans at passing cars. My mother swerved the car to avoid a bottle that almost came crashing through the windshield” (43). As a somewhat reluctant passenger in car that makes a “large grating noise as though it were about to explode” the spatial setting also foreshadows the difficulties that lie ahead in Sophie’s new life with her psychologically unstable mother. Sophie observes that her Haitian-American neighborhood is full of “people who seemed displaced among the speeding cars and very tall buildings” (52). She is confused by her new community of Haitians who “walked and talked and argued in Creole” (52) just like the Haitians from her village, Croix-des-Rosets, within the metropolis of New York City.

In *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* there are no details of the Garcia family’s initial arrival to New York City. Yolanda’s perceptions of the new space are given slowly over time as she and her sisters share their accounts one by one. The first year of Yolanda’s life in New York City is marked by her feeling out of place at school. During the first year the family relocates several times from apartment to apartment and eventually move into a small home on Long Island. Yolanda’s impressions of the receiving culture are slowly revealed as she and her sisters each tell their own story of homesickness and feeling out of place. They all echo the same rejections by their peers at school as they are continually verbally and physically threatened.

During her first year as a migrant, Yolanda is given little time to adjust to new physical spaces as the family is uprooted into multiple living spaces. After eleven months of living in the city, they move to Long Island “so that the girls could have a yard to play

in” (151). This yard pales in comparison to their tropical property in the Dominican Republic described by Carla, the eldest sister as “the lush grasses and thick-limbed, vine-laden trees around the compound back home” (151). In addition to homesickness, the sisters are ridiculed at school by their peers and attacked with racial epithets such as, “Go back to where you came from, you dirty spic!” (153). Carla is picked on by a group of boys who taunt her by throwing rocks at her, and pull at her clothing exposing her body while insulting her “No titties” (153) and “Monkey legs” (153). Yolanda rallies to be removed from school, explaining to her mother, “We’re not going to that school anymore, Mami! You want us to get killed? Those kids were throwing stones today!” (135). Yet Yolanda’s complaints are quickly thwarted by her mother who explains, “In this country, it is against the law not to go to school. You want us to get thrown out?” (135). Even Yolanda is old enough to understand that the family has no place to go, that they cannot return to the Dominican Republic due to the ongoing political unrest that was the very reason why they left as political refugees protected by the C.I.A. She and her sisters must face their fears in the uninviting school space by finding a way to make do with the challenging situation.

Yolanda seems to be adjusting well to her new space until she confuses one cultural concept for another. Not accustomed to the winter in a northern climate, she describes the onset of the season through as “cold.dark.frosty when I followed my breath to school” (167). Yolanda is made especially aware that she is the only immigrant in her fourth grade Catholic school classroom. Due to her learning English as a second language, she receives special instruction by the teacher, she is “put in a special seat in the first row by the window, apart from the other children” (166). Yolanda’s immersion

into American school culture of the 1960s begins with her learning how to participate in the school's "air-raid drills" (167) which begin with an "ominous bell" (167) signaling that the children must "file into the hall, fall to the floor, cover our heads with our coats, and imagine our hair falling out and our bones going soft" (167). Yolanda describes her confusion at school when she believes that radioactive fall-out is coming down from the sky. "I saw dots in the air like the ones Sister Zoe had drawn – random at first, then lots and lots. I shrieked, "Bomb! Bomb!" (167).

Of interest as a spatial reading in the novel in the first year for the Garcia family is the journey to school for the eldest of the four sisters, Carla. She describes the walk spatially in the new urban setting as it correlates to both her lack of identity and sense of displacement. Carla is experiencing the onset of puberty when she arrives in the United States. Her corporeal and mental transformation are described spatially through her observation of the city landscapes as "infinitesimal differences between the look-alike houses: different color drapes, an azalea bush on the left side of the door instead of the right, a mailbox or door with a doodad of some kind." (152). She ascertains that the houses, much like herself and her sisters, are the same, only marked by insignificant superficial distinctions. This relates directly to her desire to differentiate herself. Carla constantly tries to escape her siblings and distinguish herself as an individual. When her parents finally give in to her request to attend a public school instead of the private Catholic school with her sisters, Carla must walk over a mile to reach her bus stop. Carla's solitary walk to the bus stop for school has a mile stretch that is "deserted farmland" (152). The walk then winds back to the urban setting with a "sharp right down the service road into the main thoroughfare" (153). Carla is frightened by the walk to the

bus stop, but insists on asserting herself as distinct from her sisters by spatially distancing herself from them.

1.5 SCHOOLING IN THE RECEIVING CULTURE

Upon arrival to the United States the protagonist's mothers insist that their daughters receive the best education available within their financial means. Laura Garcia speaks English and is familiar with the United States, having traveled to the country with her affluent Dominican family many times before migrating. She steps into a leadership position in the family in the United States because her husband lacks both the linguistic and cultural capital to make educational decisions for his daughters. He focuses on transferring his successful career as a physician from the Dominican Republic to the United States where his medical license is not even recognized, he must start from the bottom and work his way back up. She focuses on making sure her daughter's needs are met.

Sophie's mother Martine Caco is a single mother who migrated to the United States twelve years prior to her daughter's arrival. Based on the upward mobility she has experienced through learning English and working "two jobs" and "even longer hours" (65), she has great expectations for her daughter. Coming from a life of poverty in Haiti she has experienced firsthand the transformational power afforded to migrants through hard-work and perseverance. She wants her daughter to have the added benefit of a formal education.

These two migrant mothers are deeply committed to their daughter's education and proper upbringing in the United States. The mothers insist that their daughter's education take place in religious private schools as opposed to public schools. Private

schools are conceived of as safer and more appropriate spaces for young girls to keep them from the temptations of misbehavior in the receiving culture. Yolanda's mother refuses to let her daughters attend public school because it was where "juvenile delinquents went and teachers taught those new crazy ideas about how we all came from monkeys" (152). In similar fashion, Sophie's mother Martine picks a private school that is culturally Haitian that will protect her from too many American distractions. She sends her to a school that "had guaranteed my mother that they would get me into college" (66). Their mothers believe that a private religious institution, a rigid, controlled space rather than a more porous, open public arena for education is the key to upward mobility and success in the United States. Yolanda and Sophie are destined for greatness in their mother's eyes.

Their devotion to their daughter's futures is evident. When Yolanda begins to excel in school and is recognized by her teachers, Laura boasts that Yolanda will make her family famous or, "be the one to bring our name to the headlights in this country" (143). Sophie's mother has similar confidence in Sophie explaining she wants her to, "get a doctorate, or even higher than that" (58). Both mothers are convinced of their daughter's ability to achieve their full potential in the United States through a proper education that instills religious values and honors their family traditions in that same vein. Maintaining the honor to the ancestral family name in the United States is a migrant value that is perpetuated throughout the novels. Martine shares with Sophie that she once had high hopes for herself

The mother's desire for their daughters to achieve greatness does not make the process of adjusting to the new social and cultural spaces any easier. Although both

mothers speak English at home with their daughters which helps them with their schoolwork, the hurdle is much more embedded in the process of acculturation rather than a purely linguistic ideal of success acquired through mastery of the English language. The private school space is the quasi-public locus of social activity for the young protagonists who have no other way to access the receiving culture outside of school without their parent's watchful eyes. They narrate other experiences in the new receiving cultural space such as dining in restaurants, shopping in stores, attending cultural events and tours of places of interest in the city, but the girls are almost always supervised by their parents for these outings. School is the only place where they have the possibility of being themselves in a separate identity outside of the intimate home space. Yolanda takes full advantage of this but Sophie remains solitary. Her mother's control is so complete that even in the physical school space she is unable to release herself from her mother's tight reigns. She has little to no social interaction with others until after graduating high school.

Although both protagonists attend private institutions, even the transit to and from school is much more open than the domestic sphere where they spend the majority of their time with their families. The values and norms of the receiving culture enter into the private schools through American-born teachers and students. This is more of a reality for Yolanda than it is for Sophie, who attends a school that adheres to instruction in French following a formal Haitian educational tradition.

In the third space 'home away from home', where their parents continue to live by the cultural traditions of their sending Caribbean cultures, Sophie and Yolanda slowly begin to question and quest for the new material, cultural products and practices in the

United States. But during their initial adjustment period acquiring such experiences and material items are not easily facilitated because the spatial settings of their lives are tiered into three divisions that overlap, family life, religious education and the accompanying non-secular education at school. Both Sophie and Yolanda attend private religious schools which attest to their family's cultural expectations that they be instructed in the ways of their church's belief systems. Sophie attends the co-educational Maranatha (Aramic for Our Lord) Bilingual Institution, while Yolanda is enrolled in several co-educational catholic schools throughout the years but eventually is sent to a prestigious all female boarding high school in Massachusetts with her sisters.

As children adjusting to a new life in the United States, Sophie and Yolanda trust that their parents know what is best for them and that their parent's expectations are well-intentioned. They are aware that their parents want them to learn English quickly. However the point of contention, where both protagonists part ways with their parent's goals for them, is on the role of assimilation, for example, to what extent and how speaking English should play out in the development of their identities in the United States. Both of their parents fear their daughters will become too Americanized and no longer value their homeland's traditions. For example, this manifests for Yolanda when she has trouble understanding her father in Spanish after only living in the United States for a short time, "Yoyo and her sisters were forgetting a lot of their Spanish, and their father's formal, florid diction was hard to understand" (142). "The problem boiled down to the fact that they (the daughters) wanted to become Americans and their father-and their mother, too, at first-would have none of it" (135). Sophie complains that due to her schooling in French, she only gets to practice speaking English with her mother, "I

answered swiftly when my mother asked me a question in English. Not that I ever had a chance to show it off at school” (67). In the beginning, their parents only expect them to learn English as it relates to their formal religious education and schooling, not to enable them to assimilate to American culture.

As time progresses and they transition into more independent teenagers, Sophie and Yolanda both long to belong to something other than home and school. They are eager to acculturate in order to be a part of society, to have connections with others who appreciate and understand them more fully as human beings not as daughters and students. The novels narrate how they spend their formative, coming of age years from adolescence to adulthood searching for a stable sense of self. Yet the spatial split that they experience as a result of their child migrations to the United States is no minor obstacle to be hurdled. This overlapping theme is the impetus of both novels and although *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, beckons more to Sophie’s journey of reconciling with the past, with first space ancestral sending cultural values in order to effect self-understanding of change in her own life, Alvarez’s novel, especially the title, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, suggests that there is a clear cut moment or an answer to the timeless question of those learning a second language and living in a new culture, When will I be understood? When will I become intelligible to others, recognized as not only a speaker of English, but as someone who is a part of this community, society and culture? Sophie agonizes over how her accent marks her as outside of the receiving culture, lamenting “After six years in this country, I was tired of having people detect my accent. I wanted to sound completely American” (69). In reading the novels through

space, it is evident that language is one of the divisions in space that signals a struggle with the protagonist's process of self-understanding.

The different spatialities in the novels exhibit how acculturation is socially compartmentalized in three separate but overlapping spheres. The protagonists speak English at home with their mothers and English at school, but are also still enmeshed in the cultural mark of their ancestral languages by way of their accents. Unable to erase the mark and influence of their first space ancestral culture through way of language, third space is not limited to the private domestic sphere, but carried throughout the second space receiving culture through the verbal and physical interactions that take place there, always still marked by that first space. Yolanda and Sophie begin to understand that their place in the receiving culture will always be outside of the center, that they will exist in the periphery as transnational migrants. By understanding their struggles, they are able to make choices that open their futures up to other possibilities not envisioned by their mother's dreams and ambitions.

Yet this path is a solitary one. Although Yolanda has her three sisters at home to help her combat loneliness and homesickness in her transition to her new life in the United States, Sophie only has her mother who is deeply troubled psychologically and lives almost exclusively in the Haitian-American community, negating any authentic link to American culture because she both detests and resists it. Martine exists almost entirely within the Haitian-American community and only interacts with non-Haitians in her workplace as a nurse's assistant. She works two jobs, one during the day and one during the night, and is therefore barely ever at home. Sophie is aware upon her arrival to the United States that she is not part of her mother's new life or space. She observes, "I was a

living memory from the past” (56). She realizes that her mother wants to make amends with her by bringing her into her life and giving her opportunities she never would have had in Haiti, but she still resents her for uprooting her from Haiti and her beloved Aunt Atie. Sophie is a dutiful, respectful child, but she is also unable to relate well to her mother due to the high expectations she sets for her. The concept of the “American Dream” is completely foreign to Sophie, resulting in a gap in understanding what exactly her mother hopes she achieves. Martine demands that Sophie “concentrate when school starts, you have to give that all your attention” (60). Both Sophie’s lack of a connection to her new space and her mother are evidenced throughout the novel.

Sophie describes the six year time period that she spends attending school as solitary and somber. Although she never complained about schooling in Haiti, her distaste for school in the receiving culture is obvious immediately. In New York, Sophie attends a French and English institution with other Haitian migrant children. Although she resides in the United States with her mother, her education is still very much a formal Haitian one. She is unable to differentiate herself from her peers and cannot draw a clear line between her Haitian and American identities. Her subjectivity remains stagnant during her secondary school years. She describes her school space with disdain, “I hated the Maranatha Bilingual Institution” (66) because “It was as if I had never left Haiti” (66). When she was told she would be migrating to the United States, her Haitian community assured her there would be much more opportunity for her in the United States, and claimed she was lucky for the chance at a better life. Instead, she becomes disillusioned by the fact that she has to attend a school that is all too similar to her experience in Haiti.

Sophie rejects the school environment for several of reasons. First and foremost is her general apathy towards the pursuit of formal education that is evidenced by her lack of interest in the grandiose goals her mother sets for her. When she is asked what she would like to be when she grows up by her mother's boyfriend, Marc, her response is "I want to do *dactylo*...I want to be a secretary" (56). Her mother immediately corrects her for not aspiring to a more lucrative and prestigious career. Martine speaks for Sophie, clarifying to Marc that she "is too young to know" (56) what she wants to do when she grows up. Instead of cultivating her daughter's personal interests, she inserts her own ideal career for Sophie that she "be a doctor" (56). Martine firmly believes that Sophie will be the first family member to have a successful career in the United States. Yet Martine's optimistic remarks are swiftly debunked by Marc who suggests Sophie should reconsider her goal of becoming a secretary because "there are a lot of opportunities in this country" (56). Marc suggests that Sophie may achieve more than the role of an administrative assistant. Yet Sophie's status as a transnational migrant, the space of the receiving culture sets boundaries for the road to success for those not born in the country. Marc is not overly optimistic about Sophie's future and is perhaps reflecting upon his own experience as a Haitian-American lawyer in New York City. Whereas his career would have been highly respected in Haiti, in the United States he assists Haitian migrants with the legal process of becoming citizens and is each day reminded of the difficulty of achieving social upward mobility faced by those who are not born in the country.

Despite Sophie's lack of interest in schooling, she does study hard to keep her mother's dream alive that she will become the first physician in the family. Yet she is not

passionate about her education, she is merely going through the motions, doing what her mother demands. Instead of her opportunity for education and schooling giving her a sense of place in the new culture, she is more disconnected from the social American space because she attends a school that she believes to be a (false) replica of Haiti. It is understandable that she harbors resentment toward her mother for controlling her education so closely. For Sophie, the school space does not allow her to acculturate to the United States in any way. She has no avenue to enter the American space, for example, no extracurricular activities, no friends and definitely no boyfriend until “she is eighteen” (56). The typical American teenage experience of participating in social activities with peers is nonexistent for Sophie as she is completely controlled by her mother’s mandate that she attend school and come directly home each day in order to keep herself pure. Her mother foreshadows this mandate upon her arrival to the states explaining the social control she will exert upon Sophie who “is not going to be running wild like those American girls” (56).

Due to Martine’s insistence that Sophie be educated in the Haitian school, she is unable to have a voice or space of her own. Without the freedom to become acquainted with the cultural practices of her new receiving space culture, she lives in two spheres, the school, which she defines as an extension of Haiti, and her home, which is completely controlled by her mother’s delusional ideal of Sophie being simultaneously an exemplary Haitian student while pursuing the American dream. Instead of becoming an American, Sophie is stuck in a Haitian identity which she perceives as a fake, an unreal, a copy of Haiti in the United States. She describes the monotony of her educational experience, “All the lessons were in French except English composition and literature classes” (66)

and complains that she never gets to speak English at school and is only allowed to practice in the private sphere home away from home one on one with her mother. Martine instills fear in Sophie to learn English quickly by explaining that if she did not learn, “American students would make fun of me, or even worse, beat me” (51). These threats are immaterial seeing how Sophie never interacts with Americans. The mixed message that Martine sends her is that she acculturate by learning English but stay true to her ancestral practices in all other arenas of life.

In the instances that Sophie does encounter other Americans, she is in a public space, walking to and from school. Yet these are also framed as potentially dangerous encounters because her matriculation at the school marks her a migrant. It taints her as someone that American school-age children cannot associate with due to her ethnicity, race and migrant status. In addition to the inside space of the school being too constraining, when she and her peers are outside of the school they are marked as “the Frenchies” (66). She and her classmates are uncomfortable outside of the school space, “cringing in our mock-Catholic-school uniforms as the students from the public school across the street called us “boat people” and “stinking Haitians” (66). For Sophie, school does not allow her access to the receiving culture. Instead, she is physically trapped in Haiti within the second space. She describes her six years at this institution as nothing but “School, home and prayer” (67). Although bound for college, Sophie will ultimately reject postsecondary education and turn to a romantic relationship with an American man to escape her mother’s tight reign of control.

Yolanda's educational experiences are vastly different from Sophie's. In the ancestral homeland she had struggled at academics, but in the receiving culture she used school as place where she could assert her voice as a young writer:

Back in the Dominican Republic growing up, Yoyo had been a terrible student. No one could ever get her to sit down to a book. But in New York, she needed to settle somewhere, and since the natives were unfriendly, and the country inhospitable, she took root in the language (at school). By high school, the nuns were reading her stories and compositions out loud in English class. (141)

In the beginning, even though Yolanda and her sisters are bullied and harassed by other children for being different as migrants, school eventually evolves into an opening into the receiving cultural space. Yolanda begins to reflect on her exposure to literature and poetry of the American tradition, and she soon internalizes her own sense of freedom of expression as espoused by poets such as Walt Whitman. When she is asked to write a speech for her ninth grade school assembly, she works diligently to incorporate literary and cultural information into her prose. During this writing process she has her first moment of personal accomplishment when, "she read over her words and her eyes filled. She finally sounded like herself in English!" (143). Unlike her parents who lived their lives fearful to speak due to suppression of speech enforced by Trujillo's secret policemen, Yolanda is able to express herself artistically and slowly over time, begins to develop her own voice as a writer. This also leads to meaningful interactions with her teachers and American born peers. She strikes a balance where she is able to understand that which differentiates her from her classmates but still develop a sense of belonging.

Although Yolanda's parents first complain that she and her sisters "wanted to become Americans" (135) they soon see the value in allowing the four girls to have certain liberties in their education. Although Yolanda's parents live in fear that their daughters are becoming Americanized too quickly, they have strength in numbers, with four daughters up against two parents, there is no way to completely control all of them or keep them from the receiving culture's influences.

1.6 TEENAGE AND EARLY ADULTHOOD: MAKING OF THE SELF, GIRLS INTO WOMEN

As teenagers, Sophie and Yolanda's former lives in the Caribbean slip further away from memory. Sophie still longs for the company of her aunt and is uncomfortable in the presence of her mother. Yolanda misses the freedom she had to run and play and explore with her friends, especially her closet friend, a male cousin. The lonely winding city streets cannot compare to the lush tropical compound of her childhood, complete with extended family and servants to take care of her every need. In New York City, both Sophie and Yolanda live in close quarters, first in apartment buildings and then in small homes. They attend private schools. They both learn to speak English through schooling and the support of their mothers who also speak English. They quickly become transnational, wanting to know or at least become acquainted with other Americans who reject them on the surface of their linguistic and ethnic differences. Their parents struggle to let go of their daughter's 'islandness' evidenced by their inability to release the ideal that they will grow up and marry men from their respective homelands. Sophie and Yolanda do not let go of their island identities but rather merge their cultural differences from ancestral and receiving cultures. Their inability to completely break ties with their

ancestral culture and space is evidenced by their desire to return for visits to their homelands for extended, open ended periods of time.

In both *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*, the protagonist's parents decide to leave the homeland and the children must come along, in a dramatic modification of the standard dynamic of the migration story when compared to stories of adult migration exemplified in Danticat's *The Farming of the Bones*, protagonist Amabelle flees the Dominican Republic to her ancestral Haiti during the state-sponsored massacre of Haitians. In the memoir, *Brother I'm Dying*, Danticat's uncle flees Haiti as a political refugee, only to end up detained and later dead, from medical neglect in a Miami immigration detention center. In Alvarez's, *In the Name of Salome*, the protagonists migrate from the Dominican Republic, to Cuba to the United States and back for both political and personal reasons. Although the choice does not always lead to a better outcome, the choice is in the hands of the adults.

The child protagonists of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* are forced to migrate; they are uprooted and displaced. They must find a way to reground and undergo a process of homing in the United States, all the while confronting the partial loss of their ancestral homeland. As children, their powerlessness is directly linked to their inability to control their bodies and movement through space, which in turn affects their subjectivity. This manifests most clearly during adolescence, when both Sophie and Yolanda are under strict corporal regulation imposed by their parents.

Yolanda is not allowed to interact with the opposite sex unless she is accompanied by a "chaperona" (123) a female chaperone. According to her family, she

should finish high school, go back to the island and marry a Dominican man from the same upper-crust social caste as herself. Yolanda rejects this idea on the grounds of her feminist ideals, and even more so after having witnessed her sixteen year old sister Fifi date a macho Dominican who controlled her every move, even taking a book out of her hands and telling her that reading “is junk in your head” (120). Yolanda and her sisters intervene in the relationship by allowing Fifi and her boyfriend to get caught without a chaperone. Although Yolanda and her sisters feel remorse at having betrayed their sister, they agree it had to be done, noting, “She thought she could be all island. We know better” (131). The observation about the inability to completely possess ‘islandness’ here is gendered, as Yolanda and her sisters refuse to let Fifi become an island girl, a concept that has become for them, due to their influence from American cultural values, a negative trope of becoming pregnant, being forced to marry, and sealing her fate as a Dominican, closing off any opportunity of returning to the US. Here, the island culture is represented as being a culturally antiquated space with traditional roles for women. Yolanda and her sisters reject this role and opt for a more Americanized version of womanhood.

Yolanda may believe vehemently in progressive ideals for women, but she still struggles with her sexual self. Even when Yolanda escapes her parent’s watchful eyes in college, she finds herself unable to engage in sexual intimacy with her long-time boyfriend who eventually breaks-up with her. When she later marries a white American she is unable to maintain the marriage for long. She suffers a nervous break-down and her parents put her in a psychiatric facility. When her parents question what happened between her and John, Yolanda explains, “We just didn’t speak the same language” (81).

The language that Yolanda refers to is both gendered and transnational. Her husband could not understand or make sense of her as Dominican-American woman. This relates back to the linguistic mark that language bears on migrants as experienced by both Yolanda and Sophie who try desperately to get rid of their ‘accents’ when speaking English. In this case, Yolanda’s situation evidences that the accent is a superficial marker for something that is much more profoundly cultural, her identification as belonging to two separate cultural realms. Neither one of these cultural spaces, the ancestral sending culture nor can the new space receiving culture align with her thirdspace identity as a transnational migrant woman.

Sophie’s situation of self-identification is challenged when her ‘home away from home’ becomes an intolerable space due to her deteriorating relationship with her mother. Once her mother, Martine, suspects that Sophie is dating, she begins to perform a ‘test’ on her daughter, attempting to verify her daughter’s continued sexual purity each night by sticking her pinky-finger into her daughter’s vagina to see if her hymen is still intact. Although Sophie eventually stops her mother from further abuse by breaking her own hymen with a pestle, in a fit of rage, she ends up mutilating herself. “My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. It was gone, the veil that always held my mother’s finger back every time she tested me” (88). Although this act of liberation temporarily frees Sophie from her mother, it proves ineffective at ridding herself of the damage testing has done to her. Sophie continued to suffer the social and cultural implications of the test, as evidenced later, when, in her marriage, Sophie cannot separate the abuse of testing from sexual intercourse. The horror that sexual intimacy evokes for Sophie is the same as the test, she explains “it gives me such nightmares that I have to bite my tongue

to do it again” (156). Sophie wants to experience her desire, but is unable to do so without associating it with testing, a direct reminder of her mother’s abuse.

In these difficult coming of age experiences, both Sophie and Yolanda undergo a cultural and spatial split resulting in a lack of subjectivity and fragmented identity. Although they do retain part of their Caribbean ‘islandness’, they are no longer merely Haitian or Dominican, but Haitian-American and Dominican-American, and also confronted by the third space on the hyphen between these two national designations, a defining mark without formal meaning that evokes ambiguity but must be accounted for in order to understand the attempts to lay claim to agency and subjectivity as adults.

In these novels the cultural practice of ‘making yourself at home’ is complicated by the transnational setting. Such a request is often bestowed from host to a guest, asking one to become comfortable and relaxed in a private domestic space that is not one’s own. Here, the idiom evokes the possibility for the migrant to become the self in the new host home, or “home away from home” and provides a framework for examining transnational migrant women’s subjectivity in a feminist context.

In a feminist framing of the home, the domestic sphere is not the domain of women simply because it is a private space. This is exemplified by cultural practices and traditions that women perpetuate amongst each other within the home, without the presence of men, but in service to the maintenance of patriarchy. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie returns to Haiti as a married mother, not certain if she wants to return to the United States. She is questioning her identity, and specifically, cannot comprehend why women in her family have permitted her to be physically and psychologically abused. Sophie’s aunt, Atie, explains how she opposed this abuse, and recounts how she,

like Sophie, failed to live up to the rigid expectations for Haitian women. Atie, like Sophie, was instructed, in her home, to carry out the national duty of women according to Haitian tradition:

They train you to find a husband...they poke at your panties in the middle of the night, to see if you are still whole. They listen when you pee, to find out if you're peeing too loud. If you pee loud, it means you've got big spaces between your legs. They make you burn your fingers learning to cook. Then still, you have nothing. (136-137)

Based on evidence presented in the novel, the 'they' that Sophie's aunt refers to, are actually other women, who, are in charge of monitoring their female family members in order to ensure they are virgins and can one day successfully marry. Martine explained to Sophie upon her arrival to the United States that, "The way my mother (Grandmother Ifé) was raised, a mother is supposed to do that to her daughter until the daughter is married. It is her responsibility to keep her pure" (60-61). Sophie's Tante Atie, refused to comply with these rigid rules. She always fought the tests, "she used to scream like a pig in a slaughterhouse" (60). She never marries, eventually turns to alcohol to soothe her psychological pain, and the text alludes to an extremely taboo, late-in-life lesbian relationship with Louise, a family friend.

While in Haiti, Sophie confronts her grandmother as to why this intergenerational violence persists. Her response offers little comfort to Sophie, "From the time a girl begins to menstruate to the time you turn her over to her husband, the mother is responsible for her purity. If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring her back to me" (156). Thus, the novel evidences

how a transnational home can continue to be the site of Haitian nation building to perpetuate the subjugated roles of women even in a family where there are no living male family members, as is the case with Sophie.

In the situation of first generation child migrants, the function of the home is complicated by the transnational context in which it exists, or in a “home away from home” where the migrant family attempts to enforce traditional values and practices of the ancestral home culture on female children, while simultaneously positioned against the influences of the receiving culture.

Yolanda also returns to her homeland, without truly knowing if she will go back to her life in the United States. Narrated in reverse chronology, Julia Alvarez’s *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* opens with a 39 year-old Yolanda arriving to her native Dominican Republic after a five year hiatus in the United States. Yolanda is immediately reminded that she does not measure up to the feminine Dominican ideal by her cousin who, upon laying eyes on her, mockingly sings the Miss America pageant theme song then proceeds to critique her thinness and hairdo. Yolanda does not deny that she has become, on the exterior, Americanized. Not only does she lack the proper stylish, coiffed appearance of a woman born into the upper crust of Dominican society, she is uncomfortable conversing in her native language, Spanish.

Yolanda’s exterior flaws and inability to speak Spanish fluidly are merely surface-level distortions of her true self, a woman raised in the third space, somewhere in the fluid yet insulated zone between the Caribbean and the United States, in-between cultures. These perceived shortcomings that her Dominican family critiques, are not who Yolanda is but rather, articulations of the body which she could very easily perform with

a bit of practice and effort. Yolanda's exterior, the visual and verbal cues which her Dominican cousin points out to her are significant in that they signal how she is other to the women in her family yes. Yolanda realizes that the exterior differences mirror her inner struggle and are actually interior, her way of not understanding herself and her place in her two very distinct worlds, the USA and the Dominican Republic. Yolanda compares her US life to the life of her Dominican counterparts. The self-proclaimed feminist-thinking Yolanda is wary of their traditional Dominican gender roles as wives and mothers. To this degree, these women lead lives with which Yolanda is not comfortable. As a teenager back in the Dominican Republic for the summer, Yolanda recalls how she and her sisters "don't even try anymore to raise consciousness here" (121) citing that it would "be like trying for cathedral ceiling in a tunnel" (121). She recalls how her aunt Flor denounces feminism to her, exclaiming, "Look at me, I'm a queen...My husband has to go to work every day. I can sleep until noon, if I want. I'm going to protest for my rights?" (121). At the same time, however, that she critiques their dependence on patriarchal values, Yolanda understands that these women do wield a type of power; they are in charge of their domiciles, children and servants. This is parallel to the type of power that results in abuse perpetuated by the Caco women (mothers on daughters) in Sophie's family.

These women are at the very least, the authorities of their home life whereas Yolanda has no authority over any person or thing. She has no power over others. Yolanda is also aware of what living among two cultures has disrupted and disturbed; she and her sisters have paid a hefty price for their American transformations, noting their failures in marriage, domestic life, careers and other professional endeavors. Yolanda

returns to the Dominican Republic because she wants to reintegrate into her native culture but not completely, and not through superficial or traditional means. She does not want to change her exterior as her cousin recommends. She does not want to marry a Dominican man and become a mother and head of household. Her desire to reclaim her Dominican identity emerges in her craving for guava fruit. She wants to eat and ingest and therefore lay claim to part of the island, the part that is sweet, easy to digest, and will have no ties to her conflict with her personal feelings of inequity as a failed woman in the eyes of her Dominican family. The fruit is a symbol of the island culture from which Yolanda is ostracized and simultaneously, it is also a harmless symbol of the goodness of the island that she desires to feel within herself yes. By consuming guava fruit, Yolanda can become one with the island. Yolanda must go on a quest; to forage, secure and consume the fruit. This evidences her rejection of superficial Dominican practices in which for example, her aunt and cousins are housewives who are estranged from any participation in the economy or production of any kind, other than child raising that perpetuates that same system in which they are entrenched.

Since the island has become a space which Yolanda no longer inhabits or belongs to completely, she wants a chance to reconnect with her land. She believes that by traveling alone by car on a quest for the sweet and juicy guava will fill her Dominican void. She invents herself a solitary quest for fruit to consume and therefore become part of the island, filling her digestive tract with the fruit of the island and thus, in some small way, reclaiming her island identity. Yet Yolanda is unable to complete the quest without relying upon her transnationality. This evidences how her identity is stuck in the 'home away from home' or third space; she is neither completely American nor completely

Dominican, which becomes clear when she is put in a precarious situation. After finding, foraging and consuming the guava fruit with the help of local boys, she is struck with the harsh reality that she cannot wash away the years of acculturation in the United States. When her car breaks down in the middle of nowhere and she needs help, she pretends not to be Dominican, but American, hoping that if she acts as a tourist, she will be given mercy instead of being robbed and raped by the two men who offer to fix her flat tire. In this powerful opening story of the novel, Yolanda is forced to accept that her identity is transnational, located in the third space 'home away from home' of Caribbean-American migrancy, of her Dominican and American identities.

1.7 CONCLUSION: ANTI-*BILDUNGSROMAN*

In this chapter, I argue that protagonists Sophie and Yolanda in the novels *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* exist in a third space or 'home away from home' as transnational migrant women. The third space is simultaneously a material site and an imagined site where social and cultural interactions from the sending and receiving cultures clash and converge. This chapter seeks to understand the process through which Sophie and Yolanda become subjective beings and asks how the novels culminate in these third space 'selves'?

Sophie and Yolanda enter into a third space when they migrate to the United States as children from Haiti and the Dominican Republic, respectively. They exist within third space from that point onward as they navigate the cultural and social realities of their ancestral homeland and receiving culture. Although third space primarily manifests in the home away from home, it is also portable, much like a suitcase that travels with them wherever they go. As they enter adolescence and later adulthood, Sophie and

Yolanda's sense of self continues to be influenced by mixed messages regarding their value as women from the sending and receiving cultures.

To live up to their parent's expectations, they must become educated and pursue a career. Yet to experience fulfillment in their private lives, they yearn for romantic relationships. They each choose to marry American men instead of Haitian- or Dominican-born mates, as their parents anticipated. Their parents are disappointed in their choice of partners because it conveys to them that their daughters have become 'Americanized.' At first, these romantic relationships offer refuge from the complicated 'home away from home' third space, but eventually the protagonists yearn for their familiar ancestral culture as they become disenchanted with their American husbands, unable to come to terms with the cultural differences and problems they have expressing emotional and physical intimacy. The relationships ultimately do not cure that which ails them—they need to find themselves on their own terms, and they do so when they return to their ancestral homelands.

The novels are set during the second half of the 20th century, a period when more traditional roles for women were acceptable and desirable in both Sophie's and Yolanda's families in their respective homelands. Sophie's ancestors were essentially peasants with no formal education, and therefore no means to seek a college education. Sophie was to be the first medical doctor in her family in accordance with her mother's aspirations. In Yolanda's upper class Dominican family, women were educated through secondary school but university study was prohibited. Yolanda's mother believed that her daughter would bring the de la Torre-Garcia family name to prominence in the United States. Her mother always supported her academic endeavors, attending her poetry readings and

waiting for the day she would be discovered for her poems. Although the mothers are supportive of their daughters, their encouragement is also a form of control. The daughters reject their mother's plans for them by either refusing to comply as in Sophie's case, she never attends college, and in Yolanda's case, she at least temporarily gives up her dream of becoming a famous poet. Their mothers had hoped for them to achieve the American Dream through education to bring honor and prestige to their families. When Sophie and Yolanda are not fulfilled by their educations and careers, they turn to the more traditional roles for women of romantic love and wifely duties. Unfortunately, these roles do not bring them happiness either. Their inability to be comfortable in either space—the American dream of a fulfilling career, and the traditional role of becoming wives and mothers, evidences their in-between state of existing in the third space.

I interpret these outcomes for both protagonists as partially critiquing their ancestral culture's traditional views on the role of women, but also as a revealing look at migrant perspectives of the US women's movement which encourages women to seek higher education and career for fulfilment, alone or in addition to marriage and family. Although the idea that women can achieve happiness and balance in their lives through education, career, marriage and family is never outright questioned in either novel, neither protagonist is able to achieve all of these goals: a stable, rewarding career and a well-adjusted and happy personal marital/family life. The quest to achieve balance and happiness in the novels also demonstrates the difficulty of existing in third space living between two cultures in the 'home away from home,' but existing fully in neither. Sophie and Yolanda struggle to assimilate into American society and to maintain a cultural

connection to their heritage while also creating new connections in their receiving culture.

In addition to being migrant women who speak English as a second language, Sophie and Yolanda are perceived as ethnically distinct from their American-born peers. Neither protagonist has a close American-born female friend in the novel. Their romantic relationships with American men are troubled. They only relate to members of their family or other migrant women. These novels highlight the complexity of both sociality and subjectivity for Sophie and Yolanda revealing the pressures that can force them to eventually give up on the notion of ‘having it all’ in terms of a formal education, career, marriage and family. At the end of each novel, there is a limited form of agency in each of the protagonist’s lives as they accept themselves for who they have become as adults—i.e. neither entirely “Haitian/Dominican” nor “American.” Through trial and error and some overtly negative yet formative life experiences, both Sophie and Yolanda are able to better understand themselves and take action to redirect the course of their lives.

I have outlined how the home or the private, domestic sphere has been traditionally considered the domain of women, but functions in the novels as the space where national mores are perpetuated in order to create obedient and functional citizens. In the migrant transnational context, the home becomes the site/place where children struggle to find balance between the traditions of the sending and receiving cultures, making the home a culturally contested site driven by the influence of patriarchal culture from the Caribbean and the US. In both novels, the second space of the United States is lauded as the place where girls become educated, productive citizens able to pursue

careers and make their mark for their families as the first generation of women to be successful. Yet the United States is also blamed for the corruption of teenage girls where young adults are “running wild” (Danticat 56) or being sexually promiscuous. My feminist reading of these novels has examined the insistence on women’s sexual purity and explored the ways in which the parents reinstated patriarchal values from the homeland by restricting or granting access to various social spaces outside of the home. The competing values of the sending and receiving cultures make the ‘home away from home’ third space a site of both formation and conflict. Even with the restrictions of women’s sexuality that stem from the homeland, Yolanda and Sophie still envision the ancestral first space as a kind of utopia. They question ‘what could have been’ if they had never migrated to the United States as children.

When Yolanda returns to the Dominican Republic as a middle-aged adult, the narrator’s observations about her life are anything but flattering, “There have been too many stops on the road of the last twenty-nine years since her family left this island behind. She and her sisters have led such turbulent lives—so many husbands, homes, jobs, wrong turns among them” (11). Yolanda compares her life to that of her aunts and female cousins on the island to nostalgically evoke the idea of how much easier life would have been if she never left. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* is narrated in reverse chronology, therefore the closing of the novel foreshadows the struggles a young Yolanda will face in her adult life, “I grew up a curious woman” (290) plagued by recurring nightmares “over some violation that lies at the center of my art” (290). From an early age, Yolanda believes herself to be a writer. As an adult, she must violate her art by making a living by teaching. Her art, in this case poetry, does not enable her to

dedicate herself completely to what she believes to be her calling. Yet despite this deeply personal struggle, throughout the novel from childhood to adulthood, Yolanda proves that she does not give up, that she is self-sufficient and able to direct her own life course, to pick herself up when she falls.

Because the novel ends ambiguously, there is no moment where Yolanda is free from her subjective struggles, but there is a moment of self-critique and realization where she understands that she cannot be fully Dominican or fully American. There is no sense of doom and gloom, but rather an openness toward the future. This is reflected in two images of femininity Yolanda encounters in the Dominican Republic: the first, a dark-skinned Dominican woman who works at a road-side stand selling refreshments, and the second, an image of white woman on an advertisement for an American product that is hanging on the wall at the road-side stand. The white American woman represents who Yolanda denies herself to be, but in her reality as an affluent Dominican born woman raised in the United States, she is much more closely related to the fictitious white woman than she is to the dark-skinned, lower-class Dominican woman. The juxtaposition of these images at the end of the novel and the beginning of Yolanda's journey are a critique of her personal struggle with her identity. By returning to the Dominican Republic with the notion that she might not return to the United States, Yolanda rejects the American ideal in favor of the Dominican one. Yet after her experience of helplessness when her car gets a flat tire in the middle of no-where as she is forging for guavas in the Dominican countryside, she realizes she is more closely aligned with the US version of herself, but that she cannot fully become either. This is evidenced by the novel's narration in reverse chronology because the structure of the novel shows- at both

the beginning and the end of the novel- that the third space situation is always present, has always existed for Yolanda.

The struggle that young Sophie will face is foreshadowed at the beginning of the novel as well, when, before departing Haiti for the first time as a child, Aunt Atie explains to Sophie, “Your mother and I, when we were children we had no control over anything. Not even this body” (20). In using a neutral descriptor “this body” instead of “my body” to refer to her own body, Atie suggests that even as an adult, she never regained control of her body. This is Sophie’s first warning that she will have consciously try not to lose sight of herself. Later, but before Sophie’s departure, Atie also explains to Sophie that some people do not have agency to direct the course of their lives, and it is because their ‘Maker’ (God) picks them to carry burdens. She explains, “if you see a lot of trouble in your life, it is because you were chosen to carry (it)” (25). Foregrounding Sophie’s story with her bond to Aunt Atie in Haiti as the trusted adult who provides care, love and advice through cultural knowledge sets the novel up for Sophie’s life in the United States full of sorrow and solitude. As a child Sophie is powerless, but in her adult life, she becomes stronger by gaining the knowledge that forces beyond herself—not necessarily God as Atie would have it, but instead, gendered cultural norms—have constituted her. The only way to rid herself of them is to disavow them and move forward, to continue on a journey of healing from the psychological and physical abuse of her mother’s intergenerational practice of ‘testing’ and all the other suffering she has endured as a result of the ‘tests,’ her inability to enjoy physical intimacy with her husband, and the eating disorder she developed after being uncomfortable with her post-pregnancy body.

Yolanda's story begins in stark contrast to Sophie's. Yolanda and her family must flee the country because they are in physical danger. Sophie must leave because she has an absent mother in the United States who abandoned her at birth but wants to reclaim her. Yolanda's entire family is in danger of being executed at the hands of her country's secret police force because Yolanda's father is implicated in an attempted coup against the country's dictator, Trujillo, she and her family depart the country abruptly, having only minutes to process what is happening, leaving the very same afternoon. Yolanda, unlike Sophie, has little time to think about the fact that she is leaving. What Yolanda knows of the United States she has learned from her grandmother, who brought her expensive gifts from the US and told her stories about her grandiose shopping adventures in the New York City. Sophie however, had several days to think about her departure and no familiarity with the United States, except unsolicited advice from her nosy neighbors who ramble on to her about the seemingly endless 'yellow brick road' of opportunities that growing up in New York will afford her. Sophie never buys into the American Dream, it never means anything to her because she never incorporates herself into American society in the same way that Yolanda does. Yolanda is immediately indoctrinated into the myth of America as the land of opportunity and greatness, both at home from her father, who juxtaposes the US against the Dominican Republic, and in school. Yolanda excels as a student. Sophie despises school and struggles to maintain a strained relationship with her mentally ill mother who wakes up screaming in her sleep every night, having the reoccurring nightmare where she is raped by a stranger, Sophie's father.

Another key difference in Sophie and Yolanda's experience as children is the frequency of their returns home to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. While both families are economically unable to afford travel, Yolanda has wealthy family members in the Dominican Republic who can provide for her. Sophie desperately wants to return to her Aunt Atie immediately upon arriving in New York. When Sophie and her mother send a package to Atie the first morning after her arrival to the city, she reflects, "If I had the power then to shrink myself and slip into the envelope, I would have done it" (50). Sadly, she is unable to return for many years, until she is an adult. The reason for Sophie not returning is made clear by her mother who explains clear her place is in New York with her and "Sophie, I will never let you go again" (49). Inversely, Yolanda and her sisters are sent back to the Dominican Republic for short durations and entire summer vacations by their parents usually as a punishment for becoming too Americanized. Unlike Yolanda, Sophie never gets to take a second glance at the home she left. She trudges through her life in the United States waiting for something positive to happen.

Sophie's existence is much more somber, solitary and negative than Yolanda's because throughout her childhood, Sophie struggles more and more with her longing for Haiti and has little pleasure in her life in the United States. Reversely, Yolanda has a much stronger support network in the United States because she migrates with immediate family members, her mother, father and three sisters. She is frequently the teacher's pet at school and excels in this environment despite being ostracized and bullied by other children for being different, as non-white and migrant. Sophie's life is described as her going along with the motions of her routine, her schooling, studying and church services

with her mother. Whereas the educational space in the receiving culture is freeing for Yolanda, it is restrictive for Sophie.

Sophie never truly ‘rebels’ against her restrictions, she simply puts a stop to her mother’s oppressive and abusive treatment. As a teenager and young adult Sophie begins to experience what Atie had forewarned, the struggle for control over her body. Although a glimmer of hope shines for Sophie as she begins an intimate relationship with her much older African-American neighbor, Joseph, who is in love with her and wants to marry her, her relationship with him causes an onset of downward spiraling events. Sophie’s mother Martine feels compelled to begin performing the damaging ‘tests’ where she inserts a finger into Sophie’s vagina to see if her hymen is intact, to ensure her continued sexual purity. Sophie is not in a sexual relationship with Joseph and her mother’s inability to trust her word destroys what was left of their mother-daughter relationship. Sophie can no longer endure the tests and arrives at her breaking point where her only option to escape the testing is to end it herself with a pestle. She grinds herself away as she would a mix of spices or herbs, knowing her altered flesh will make her fail her mother’s test. When she fails the test, she is kicked out by her mother, then runs off to marry Joseph. She becomes impregnated the first time they have sex, gives birth and becomes a mother and finally returns to Haiti with her infant daughter. Sophie will return a second time, at the conclusion of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, for her mother’s funeral. Although Sophie and her mother are able to reconcile their relationship before her mother’s suicide, the last sequence of events in the novel is more important for her subjectivity because this is where she finally confronts her emotional struggles that began with her departure from Haiti as a child. Instead of staying at her family’s side as they

lower the coffin into the ground and begin to bury her mother, she runs to the sugar cane field where her mother was raped to confront this space. She releases the pent up rage and aggression in the presence of her aunt and grandmother who follow her to the field. Sophie does not become an agentive being in this moment, but the symbolic act of confronting the space where she was conceived in an act of rape strengthens her resolve to right the wrongs in her life. This experience allows her to move forward. Sophie's 'breath, eyes, and memory' remain the guiding forces in her life. She uses her breath to speak out against the cultural practices that have damaged her family in her therapy group. She makes observations with her eyes about her ancestral and receiving cultures, and her vision for the future where she is an agent of change who will not allow the cultural practices that damaged her subjectivity to continue in her daughter's life. Her memory is that of her ancestral Haiti and strong bond to her Aunt Atie, and her difficult coming of age and in the United States, especially the memory of the women in her family who struggled before her, her now deceased mother, her aunt Atie and her grandmother Ifé. She breaks the cycle of intergenerational violence of the test and forgives her grandmother and mother for perpetuating it. Yet her future is still open to whatever choices she will make moving forward.

Yolanda's story concludes more ambiguously but in some ways just as powerfully as Sophie's in regards to this chapter's examination of the duality of self and the third space location of migrant women's subjectivity. Yolanda, like Sophie, is in her ancestral homeland at the novel's end, but not in a place she must confront like Sophie, but instead a place she is unfamiliar with- she drives away in the novel, going down a new path in a different part of the country, perhaps to discover a different aspect of who she is and

where she wants to direct her life course. Although in this closing scene Yolanda is not surrounded by family members comforting her, she is in the presence of two powerful female archetypes- the dark-skinned Dominican peasant and the white American woman on the advertisement. Yolanda observes the two distinct female figures in a way that beckons to her own subjectivity- she is neither woman but she is connected to both of them as she embodies a place in-between them. Before her she embarked on her solitary journey toward the Dominican coast to look for guava fruit, her aunts warned her that she might not make it on this journey. She could be kidnapped, raped and even killed. None of those events transpire, but Yolanda still ends up relying on her Americanisms to get help, and seemingly out of a potentially dangerous situation when her car gets a flat tire. The last we know of Yolanda, is that she gets in her borrowed car and drives away, down toward uncertainty, as her aunts had warned a “steep and slightly dangerous descent to the coast” (14). “In the glow of the headlights” (23) Yolanda makes out the image of the white American woman on the advertisement and the dark skinned Dominican peasant woman. Yolanda’s driving away from the images of these two women evokes the sense that she is done with comparing herself to Dominicans and Americans. That she is going to forge a path on her own, even if her friends and family feel it is too risky, too dangerous, and too unconventional.

In this chapter, I have provided evidence to support my claim that the novels *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* are what I conceive of as migrant transnational women’s *Bildungsroman* in that they chronicle the struggle for subjectivity in the third space from childhood to adulthood, revealing the many obstacles faced by the migrant women as they come of age in the United States. Unlike

the classical *Bildungsroman* of the 18th and 19th centuries, this type of revised *Bildungsroman* does not culminate in an ending that is overtly positive, nor do they end in complete failure or death like many of the 20th and recent 21st century novels of the *Bildungsroman* genre. Instead, they end with what is conceived of as a temporary return to the ancestral homeland and an accompanying life-altering experience that challenges but solidifies the protagonists' sense of self. These experiences enable the release of negative emotions about the self and consequently lead to acceptance and a newly opened space of opportunity for change and agency. The ending of the migrant woman's *Bildungsroman* more accurately reflects the experience of third space because unlike the other types of *Bildungsroman* that result in either complete formation or destruction of the self, the migrant experience is always doubled. The double consciousness of sending and receiving cultures merges into a third self which manifests in the third space. In the migrant woman's *Bildungsroman* there is a cautious optimism for the future that is not divisive but rather fully inclusive of the multiple dimensions of the protagonist's subjectivity.

CHAPTER 2

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON HISTORY:

GENDER AND ETHNICITY AS A CRITIQUE OF CARIBBEAN NATION FORMATIONS IN EDWIDGE

DANTICAT'S *THE FARMING OF BONES* AND JULIA ALVAREZ'S *IN THE TIME OF THE BUTTERFLIES*

In *The Triangles of Women's Transnational Migrant Literature*, this chapter is centered on the second term in the trialectic or triad, the ancestral home. I show how Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of the Bones* and Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* develop a didactic dimension by repositioning and reclaiming women's voices in history from a migrant position. Focused on the island of Hispaniola from the point of view of adults who came of age and have lived the majority of their lives in the United States, Danticat and Alvarez's historical novels stake a claim to their own ancestral memory, culture and history by writing in a space of migrancy in the US.

This chapter addresses how notions of transnational migrant womanhood are fleshed out in two historical fiction novels, *The Farming of the Bones* and *In the Time of the Butterflies*. I support my argument concerning transnational migrant womanhood with gender and diaspora theory specific to the Caribbean and include elements from an analysis of the cultural construction of space. Notions of transnational migrant womanhood are explored through the novels' treatment of specific spaces and spatial dynamics. My close readings focusing on the woman-centered texts that interlace history

with fiction through women's retelling of significant events that reconfigured the sociopolitical and cultural interactions between these two nations on the island of Hispaniola- the Parsley Massacre in 1937 (also called "El Corte") and the events leading up to the end of the Trujillo Dictatorship in 1961.

Historical fiction by women writers reinserts women into the historical record through literature and it also allows a space for questioning Caribbean identity in relation to issues of culture and society and gender and ethnicity in questioning how Caribbean identity is culturally and socially constructed in ways that favor the consolidation of an (racialized) ethnic identity over any exploration of gender dynamics. In *Notions of Identity, Diaspora, and Gender in Caribbean Women's Writing*, Brinda Mehta details how Caribbean women's writing addresses but transgresses established notions of womanhood:

These authors interrogate questions of migration, transnationalism, identity, intellectual production and creolization through a diasporic lens. This perspective provides the necessary framework for their *feminist contestations of patriarchy, political and social disenfranchisement, citizenship, exile and cultural dystopia* in their countries of origin as well as the European and American diasporic metropolises. (1)

Mehta's assessment of Caribbean women's writing accurately introduces the themes in *The Farming of the Bones* as *In the Time of the Butterflies*. By building upon contemporary Caribbean theory, Mehta's work details the unique space occupied by Caribbean migrant women's writing. Caribbean migrant women's writing illuminates topics and questions left outside of a predominantly masculinist analysis such as the

“feminist contestations of patriarchy, political and social disenfranchisement, citizenship, exile and cultural dystopia” (Mehta 1) as women’s issues specifically. The seminal works of leading theoretical/cultural studies of the Caribbean such as Fernando Ortiz (*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*) Antonio Benítez-Rojo (*The Repeating Island*) Edouard Glissant (*Caribbean Discourse*), Stuart Hall (“Cultural Identity and Diaspora”) Paul Gilroy (*The Black Atlantic*) do focus on identity, creolization, diaspora and gender and have, in many regards, laid the foundation for understanding the sociocultural complexities of the Caribbean. Metha critiques these theories however because they “fall short of explaining the complicated nuances of diaspora and the important variables of gendered difference” (4).

Because this is a feminist analysis of Caribbean women’s writing, I understand these author’s characterizations of Caribbean identity, culture and society as a point of departure, taking into account the concept of the influence of men’s writing about the Caribbean. In doing this, I do not aim to outright critique scholarship on the basis of the gender of the author, but rather, to identify it, question it and provide an opportunity to take into account the unique ways in which Caribbean women contribute to a canon of scholarly work as well.

In interpreting Danticat and Alvarez’s novels, I develop a feminist critical perspective keeping with Metha’s broader call for a discussion of the Caribbean from the point of view of feminist, social and cultural issues. More specifically, my analyses redefine migrant authors as Caribbean women who reclaim their islandness by producing a revisionist “spatialization of history” that revisits spaces and spatial dynamics in ways

that challenge how previous theorizations of Caribbean identity have obscured gender dynamics and defined ethnicity.

These spatial dynamics include the focus on the border area between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Danticat's protagonist Amabelle's flight from the Dominican Republic to Haiti, the sugar cane plantation and the persecution and forced removal of the Haitian migrant sugar cane workers. In Alvarez's novel I focus on the spatial division of the Mirabal sisters or Butterflies' lives between the public (revolutionaries and spies) and private (wives and mothers) spheres. In addition, I examine the novels as historical novels, because they retell a version of specific events that transpired on the island of Hispaniola over roughly two and a half decades of the Trujillo regime, specifically, The Parsley Massacre of 1937 and the events leading up to the end of the Trujillo dictatorship in 1961. The plots of each novel are somewhat fictionalized yet dependent upon the aforementioned historical events. What makes these novels distinct is the centrality of women's protagonism and of their version of events and testimony, each of which tend to be expressed in a spatial figure that challenges the homogeneity of each island-nation's cultural and social dynamics and definitions of national identities.

In *The Farming of Bones* Danticat recreates the hardships of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic during the Trujillo regime. The novel opens in 1937, the year of the Parsley Massacre. The president of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo devised a plan to get rid of the "Haitian problem" there were too many Haitians in the Dominican Republic for his liking. His goal was to 'whiten' the country. Trujillo was known to be a sympathizer of both Mussolini's fascism and Hitler's Nazism (Wucker 51-52). The day

before the massacre officially begins, he gives an enigmatic speech to a large group of Dominicans in Dajabón, a town bordering Haiti, accusing Haitians of stealing cattle in the region. He proclaims that he, as president, will ensure that Haitians pay for their crimes. In fact, he announces that 300 Haitians had already been killed in near the town of Bánica, a border town south of Dajabón, because they had been deported and then illegally returned to the Dominican Republic.

Trujillo's propaganda was effective as he convinced Dominicans that Haitians were encroaching in the 'white spaces' outside of the sugar cane fields and entering villages and towns and therefore needed to be exterminated. During the brutal massacre that ensued, Haitians were sought out and persecuted, maimed and killed primarily with machetes but also by beatings, hangings and stabbings. Trujillo did not want to kill Haitians with bullets as this would provide evidence that his military was involved. The massacre formally lasted a week at Dajabón on the watery border that separates the two nations, aptly named the Massacre River. In other areas of the country, the killing of Haitians continued for another week. The death toll has been estimated between 17,000 and 35,000 (Wucker 47-51).

In Danticat's fictionalized version of the massacre, Amabelle, the protagonist, escapes the massacre halfway through the novel and flees to her ancestral home, Haiti. The first half of the novel chronicles Amabelle's life as a Haitian woman who is a domestic servant in the Dominican Republic on the border with Haiti. She is orphaned at a young age when her parents drown while attempting to cross the Massacre River from the Dominican Republic back into Haiti. Amabelle is left on the Dominican side of the border and is found by a Spanish born Dominican and his daughter. She becomes a child

servant for this wealthy Dominican family (Danticat 91-92). Amabelle grows up with this Dominican family as a companion and servant to the lady of the house who is roughly the same age as Amabelle. She will leave her Dominican family to escape being murdered during the Parsley Massacre and live to tell her tale of survival. The novel then shifts focus to the pain and suffering Amabelle endures throughout her life as a result of this horrific event that forces her to return to Haiti to escape Trujillo's state-sponsored violence targeted at Haitians.

Alvarez's novel is also centered on the damaging effects of the Trujillo regime, but her novel is both intergenerational and intertextual. Alvarez pens the imagined past lives of the Mirabal sisters beginning with their childhoods and continuing up until their deaths. The novel is intertextual because it is also set in the present, where the focus is on the one surviving Mirabal sister, Dedé, who speaks to a Dominican-American woman journalist who travels to the Dominican Republic in search of the truth about the three Mirabal sisters who were imprisoned and later murdered by Trujillo's secret police. The crux of the novel centers on the sister's adult lives during their involvement as spies against Trujillo, their imprisonment and eventual murders.

Alvarez recreates the Mirabal sisters' lives in her novel using fact-based fictionalized first-person accounts. She details how the sisters were able to occupy a dual role as wives and mothers by day and revolutionary spies by night, plotting to take down the Trujillo dictatorship. Chronicled in the novel and also in the historical record, Trujillo eventually devises a plan to rid himself of the Mirabal sisters, making their brutal deaths look like a car accident. When the truth about their 'accident' comes to light, Dominicans are outraged. The Roman Catholic Church disavows Trujillo for the first

time in his thirty year reign. Dominicans believe that the sister's deaths at the hands of Trujillo was 'the last straw.' He is assassinated months after the Mirabal sister's deaths (Wucker 70).

While thematically distinct and using differing narrative approaches, these two novels are parallel in that they both focus on and recount the difficulties experienced by women during distinct phases of their life that correspond to the years of the Trujillo regime which began in 1930 and ended in 1961. It is considered a dark period in both Dominican and Haitian history, especially given the violence visited upon Haitians during this time. These novels have a didactic function as they reinsert women's experiences into the international and transnational history and memory of the past.

While Danticat creates a fictional protagonist and Alvarez fictionalizes the lives of real victims of state-sponsored violence, both authors' creative writing/interpretation are inspired by memory that is not their own, but rather a common ancestral and social memory of a space to which they have a profound connection, but from which they are distanced in the material and subjective sense since they have come of age and lived the majority of their lives in the United States. In these novels they stake a claim to, and reclaim their sense of Hispaniola 'islandness'. In *Out of Bounds: Islands and the Demarcation of Identity in the Hispanic Caribbean* Dara Goldman introduces the concept of 'islandness' by characterizing it as a globalized cultural imaginary that is both a state of mind and a state of ancestral belonging. It is more akin to a third space existence (neither completely immersed in one ancestral or receiving culture) than to a state of belonging or a physical anchoring in a location. Goldman proposes that in the Caribbean nationality does not form identity, but that identity stems from a sense of belonging to a

specific cultural expression. Danticat and Alvarez stake a claim to their ‘islandness’ (Goldman 48-49). They are able to stake a claim by taking up the history and memory of the island of Hispaniola (even while understanding the distinctive points of Haiti and the Dominican Republic).

From this perspective then, I discuss how the concept of islandness informs ancestral memory in these novels. The novels are informed by a distinct, representative voice that stems from the migrant authors’ positioning both within and outside of the island-nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. This inscribes them within the third space, giving them a portable sense of self that allows the writers to have a unique understanding of both cultures, their ancestral homeland as well as the receiving culture in the United States. In the case of the author’s autobiographies, neither writer considers herself the true voice of their ancestral nation or the US. But their external positioning allows them to zero in on spatial dynamics and spaces that challenge the closure of the nation and the region. They critique the gendered, ethnic constructions of identity that are developed from that perspective. These authors revisit spaces and spatial dynamics to posit the importance of gender and ethnicity, and the interrelation between the two, in shaping Caribbean history and society.

2.1 AMABELLE AND MINERVA: PROTAGONISTS’ REALIZATIONS OF FIGHT AND FLIGHT

Transnational migrant women writers’ historical fiction novels revisit traumatic events to restore novels restore women’s rightful place in history and inspire positive change for the future. In the opening of chapter of *In the Time of Butterflies*, one of the Mirabal sisters, Minerva, already aware of the Trujillo regime’s human rights violations in the Dominican Republic such as murders, torturing, and wrongful imprisonment of

Trujillo dissenters, expresses her discontent with the fact that the Dominican political system is run completely by men. Much to the displeasure of her mother and father, she wants to become a lawyer because “it’s about time we women had a voice in running our country” (10). Minerva has a revelation about the difference that being a woman has made in her life simply by vocalizing to her father that women have their own way of doing things. Instead of “cosas de hombres (things a man does)”, she says “things a woman does” (92). As soon as she vocalizes this affirmation of the power she has created for herself in recognizing that women do things too (i.e.: are not just passive beings but ‘doers’), it transforms the way she views her place in Dominican politics and society. Minerva explains, “And as I said those words, my woman’s eyes sprang open” (92). It is at this point in the novel that Minerva will start ‘doing’ or becoming actively involved “fighting” as an anti-Trujillo activist and later, as a spy. She will take on the stereotype that women only tend to private home life affairs, she will stand up and for what she believes; that her country should be free, not ruled by a corrupt dictator.

In *The Farming of the Bones*, Amabelle hears rumors that the Dominican army is leading an uprising against Haitians. All Haitians will be killed and should flee the country and return to Haiti at once. There are two factions of Haitians in Amabelle’s Dominican village, one comprised of the Haitian priests and followers who come up with a plan to escape, the second, a group of sugar cane cutters who refuse to leave and decide to stay and fight. Amabelle belongs to neither group at first, she remains skeptical and believes the news of the uprising to be a rumor. She has lived with a Dominican family since she was orphaned as a young girl, and cannot conceive that Señora Valencia, who considers Amabelle to be like a sister to her, and her father, Papi, would allow her to be

killed. Yet Amabelle is soon convinced that the uprising against Haitians is real, when she recognizes it is a territorial battle, “At this point it was a matter between our two countries, of two different peoples trying to share one tiny piece of land” (147).

Amabelle agrees to join the group with the priests who plan to flee the country. She will meet her fiancé, Sebastien, and his sister, Mimi, at the church and travel back to Haiti. Sadly, this encounter the last time she will ever see Sebastien. Amabelle’s escape from what is now known as the Parsley Massacre and her crossing the border back into her ancestral Haiti and later, her search for Sebastien and Mimi will define the rest of her life.

Amabelle’s story differs from Minerva’s in that she is not fighting or spying directly against Trujillo. What Amabelle’s story does is personalize her flight from the Dominican Republic and her struggle for survival during the Parsley Massacre. The novel explores whether it’s possible to rebuild some sort of normalcy in life after this life-altering tragedy. Reading the traumatic experiences of a woman protagonist featured in history or literature debunks the myth that women do not participate in or create history. Danticat’s approach to retelling the story of The Parsley Massacre through the eyes and memories of a Haitian migrant woman is inclusive of the sugar cane cutter’s flight and plight as well, strengthening her discussion of the dimension of persecution based upon the Haitian ethnicity. Haitian identity is thus constructed as a negative trope which is a critique of the Dominican nation but also, of Haiti for not acting to protect its citizens.

2.2 AMABELLE’S FLIGHT: RETURN TO HAITI DURING THE PARSLEY MASSACRE

The border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is the site where the Parsley Massacre take place. In *The Farming of Bones*, the spatial dynamic of this site is evidenced by Amabelle’s flight from the Dominican Republic to Haiti. In order to ensure

her survival during the massacre, her only option is to swim across the river that her parents drowned in when she was a child. She must revisit this trauma from the past as she returns to her ancestral home under the threat of death. The fluid border that separates the Dominican Republic from Haiti is the Massacre River. The river's original Taino Indian name was Guatapana. But the river was renamed after the Spanish killed thirty pirates there in 1728. The river again earned its violent name in 1937 during the Parsley Massacre when "the blood of innocent Haitians flowed freely into the water and transformed the border into a memory to forget, to flee" (Wucker 44). Both the river and the Parsley Massacre appear repeatedly in *The Farming of the Bones*. The river and the massacre are central to the formation of the plot and the culminating action of the novel, and also give testimony to women's experiences in history. The novel is anchored in the events of the Parsley Massacre as it describes Amabelle's life, before, during and after the massacre. While the first half of the novel focuses on Amabelle's life as a migrant housekeeper in the Dominican Republic, after the Parsley Massacre, the narration shifts to her attempt to physically and emotionally recover from the massacre and create a new life in Haiti.

In the chapter "The Massacre River," Wucker argues that, although the Massacre River is not the only geographical border that separates Haiti from the Dominican Republic, it is "the psychological border" (44) because "the memory of what happened at the Massacre River in 1937 [The Parsley Massacre] is still vivid in the minds of the islanders. Even now it is nearly impossible for Dominicans and Haitians to think of each other without some trace of the tragedy of their mutual history that took place that year" (44). In 1937, the self-appointed president of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Trujillo,

was seven years into his dictatorship that would last over thirty years until his assassination in 1961. In *God and Trujillo: Literary and Cultural Representation of the Dominican Dictator*, Ignacio Lopez-Calvo reiterates novelist Mario Vargas Llosa's sentiment that Trujillo had a "unique relationship" (67) with the citizenry of the Dominican Republic, "commonly characterized by their unconditional support and adoration, despite his villainous personality" (67-68). A primary example of this is the Parsley Massacre at the Massacre River where Trujillo "ordered the slaughter of Haitians who had crossed over to the Dominican side or who had always lived there" (Wucker 44). In essence, Trujillo combined his anti-Haitianism with the cult of personality that he had developed for himself by instilling fear into the hearts of all Dominicans. This led his people to tacitly allow, if not outright support, his attempt to ethnically cleanse the nation of Haitians. The number of Haitians murdered during the Parsley Massacre is unknown, but estimates are in the tens of thousands. The Dominican populace not only went along with Trujillo's plot to get rid of Haitians by assassinating them, they attempted to make the massacre look like a popular uprising by using machetes to kill Haitians instead of guns, as the latter would have signaled the involvement of the military and attracted the attention of the international community. Trujillo had been trained by the United States Marines during the US occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1934, and in 1937 his presidency was still favored by the US. As Lopez-Calvo explains, "the dictator was able to colonize the soul and locate the weakest points of almost everyone around him in order to bring out the worst in them and make them his accomplices" (68). If Dominicans condoned the massacre, it likely is not because they were all in agreement that the country should rid itself of Haitians, but more likely because of Trujillo's

manipulation techniques. Speaking out against Trujillo was like signing a death sentence for oneself. In Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, the Mirabal sisters recount tales of many deaths of Trujillo dissenters, and eventually they themselves are murdered for challenging his authority.

After *The Farming of the Bones* protagonist Amabelle survives the Parsley Massacre, she considers the symbolism of parsley in the cultures of the Dominican Republic (Spanish language) and Haiti (Kreyòl language). Haitians were identified and persecuted based on their pronunciation of the Spanish word for parsley, *perejil*, which includes sounds that they did not pronounce in a Spanish way. In an interview on National Public Radio's program *Tell Me More*, Julia Alvarez and Edwidge Danticat discuss the Parsley Massacre and explain the difference in Spanish and Kreyòl pronunciation of the word parsley:

Danticat: "there is a difference in the way Dominicans and Haitians trill the 'r'."

Alvarez: "We (Dominicans) trill the 'r' and the Haitian-Kreyòl has a wide, flat 'r' pronunciation." (Alvarez and Danticat)

Trujillo's power over the Dominican Republic populace is strengthened by a shibboleth, their verbal affirmation that they correctly pronounce the word parsley in Spanish while Haitians do not. The verbal test of nationality reinforces the perception that Haitians are lesser as human beings. By using the word parsley to identify Haitians, Dominicans distinguish themselves as superior to Haitians and slaughter them because they are not part of their national racialized identity (white and Spanish-speaking) as envisioned by Trujillo. While there was a troubled history between Haiti and the

Dominican Republic during the 1930s there had been no disputes between the nations. There was however, lasting resentment that Haitians had occupied the Dominican Republic from 1822-1841, which ended almost a century before the Parsley Massacre. As part of the global Fascist ascent of racialized thinking, Trujillo's Haitian xenophobia and policy of "Dominicanization" of the border directly escalated the anti-Haitian sentiment at the time of the massacre (Wucker 104).

The symbolism of a parsley as a cultural trope is aligned with a negative Haitian identity. Odette, who had been traveling with Amabelle's group fleeing the Dominican Republic to Haiti, dies crossing the Massacre River, in between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. She weakly utters her last word, parsley, *pèsi* in Haitian-Kreyòl, not Spanish. Maybe Odette dies from ingesting too much water crossing the Massacre River into Haiti, or maybe she dies of the heartache of watching her husband make it to the shore, only to be shot and killed by Dominican soldiers from the bridge on the Dominican side of the river. Did Odette speak the word in her native tongue as opposed to Spanish as a final act of contestation, to reaffirm that her Kreyòl pronunciation of the term was correct and acceptable, therefore reifying her own identity? Amabelle reflects that perhaps Odette says the word not to plead for her life, but more of a "provocation, a challenge, a dare" to the Generalissimo who hoped to cleanse his nation of Haitians (203). Amabelle's thoughts then lead her to further consider the significance of Odette's last word, *pèsi*, and the meaning of life, which are forever changed for her after the Parsley Massacre and the crossing of the Massacre River:

Love? Hate? [...]Was it because it [parsley] was so used, so commonplace, so abundantly at hand that everyone who desired a sprig

could find one? We [Haitians and Dominicans] used parsley for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides. Perhaps the Generalissimo [Trujillo] in some larger order was trying to do the same for his country. (203)

Amabelle's reflection introduces her thoughts on parsley with universal experiences, as something that both Haitians and Dominicans relied on in their daily lives, indicated by her use of 'we.' Amabelle is still, until that moment, somewhat part of a Dominican family that she only left days before. Now that bond is forever gone as she contrasts the portrayal of parsley as differentiating the two communities (Dominicans and Haitians). After the massacre and death of her travel companion Odette, she understands the fact that she is no longer part of the Dominican community.

For Amabelle, the Massacre River is a third space, as it is representative of the in-between state where she is lost, found and also where she experiences loss again during the Parsley Massacre. Three significant events transpire at this border river zone in the novel. First, it is the site where Amabelle becomes orphaned. As a child, she helplessly watches on as her parents drown crossing the river. Second, it is the site where she is found by a Dominican man who takes her in as both servant and companion for his daughter. Third, it is where Amabelle flees from the violence of the Parsley Massacre to return to her homeland of Haiti. All three events mark dramatic changes in her life, and place her in an in-between state and space, both psychologically and nationally, between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Before crossing the river during the massacre, on her flight from the Dominican village where she had lived in Alegría, she reflects on her memory of Dajabón, the border town on the Massacre River in the Dominican as “a place I remembered as a barely developed town, a place I had not seen since I was a child. Now I imagined it full of people like us [Haitian migrants] searching for loved ones, mistaking the living for the dead” (183).

This description aligns with the portrayal of the region surrounding the Massacre River as a third space, an in-between place that confuses Amabelle in-between the first (Haiti) and second (Dominican Republic) spaces, even confusing the living for the dead. Amabelle’s understanding of her own life and the lives of her fellow Haitians can be seen in terms of Judith Butler’s conceptualization, as “not grievable” lives and therefore as “spectral” lives (Butler 31). For Butler, certain lives are deemed to be “liveable” and thus grievable as they are recognized publicly with obituaries, graves, funerals and memorials. Other lives are unrecognized. These are the lives of those on the margins of society and they are ‘spectral’ because they do not carry relevance in the center zone of society, they exist only in the periphery.

Even when Amabelle internalizes that her life in fact, is not grievable, she does not lose all hope, evidenced by the fact that she continues to search for her lost fiancé for many years. Years later, when the news that Trujillo has been executed arrives in Haiti, Amabelle celebrates with other Haitians in the town center by dancing publically (270). To her, the Haitian lives that Trujillo took still mattered, and she is overcome with joy that the dictator responsible for so much Haitian human suffering is now gone for good.

The events leading up to the Parsley Massacre are critical for understanding why Amabelle risks her life to cross the border. In the Dominican Republic she lives with a family who she believes would protect her from the uprising, but she eventually is convinced that, if their survival were threatened because they employed a Haitian, they too would turn against her to save themselves. She is convinced of this by the sugar cane cutters who tell her not to trust the family, especially because the lady of the house is married to an army general. This sense of betrayal by the very family that took her into their home when she was orphaned and helpless is difficult for Amabelle to accept. Yet she trusts her fiancé Sebastien who hopes to make it across the border to Haiti and bring Amabelle with him to his mother's house. When Amabelle finds out that Sebastien and his sister, Mimi, have been arrested and taken away by Dominican soldiers, she decides she has no choice but to cross the border because "there is a chance of finding Mimi and Sebastien there" (165). She makes the choice to trade her adoptive family for her Haitian one, however she does this knowing that there is only "a chance" to find Sebastien.

At this point in the novel, Amabelle is left with little choice but to flee in order to escape the Dominican government's uprising against Haitians living in the country. She hears from friends that soldiers are actively patrolling her Dominican village and arresting all Haitians to take them to an undisclosed location. Amabelle's old cane cutter friend, Kongo, instructs her on the route she must take in order to stay away from the soldiers, "You follow the stream up the mountains. There are grottos and caves to sleep in at night" (161). He then explains she will come back down from the mountain and cross the Massacre River, advising her that the river is "most shallow near the bridge" (161). Getting to the border will be dangerous, so Amabelle travels with Sebastien's

cane-cutting hut-mate, Yves, who “did not have much hope” of finding Sebastien and Mimi in Haiti (165). Amabelle’s journey from her Dominican village back into Haiti is not simply a tale of her crossing the border back into her homeland. It is a tale of loss and human tragedy, of escaping with only her physical life left to claim, while her emotional life is all but destroyed, as she no longer has her Dominican family nor her fiancé.

The journey begins, as Kongo had instructed, with Amabelle and Yves walking up the mountain all night. The first sign of danger on their journey occurs when they witness two Dominican soldiers leading oxen pulling a cart of dead and half-dead bodies. These bodies are those of Haitians who have been assassinated with machetes. When Amabelle and Yves come out of their hiding spot after the soldiers are out of sight, Yves remarks, “At least we survived the night” (169). On the second day of their journey, Yves and Amabelle are joined by others who are fleeing from the massacre. There are the sisters Dolores and Doloritas, who are Dominican and do not speak Kreyòl. A cane cutter, Wilner, and his wife, Odette, and another cane cutter by himself, Tibon, who is severely injured and recounts the gruesome machete attack that he escaped by jumping off a cliff into the ocean. When the group joins her and Yves, Amabelle reflects that “each person’s story did nothing except bring you closer to your own pain” (177).

The group travels all day and then settles to rest for the night. They wake up to the sight of a fire and the stench of burning bodies coming up the mountain-side from the town below. The smell reminds Amabelle of an event from her youth. Amabelle remembers how, after a hurricane, the Generalissimo (Trujillo) had demanded that bodies be burned in order to avoid the spread of disease. Now, the bodies that are being burned are those of Haitians who have been assassinated simply for being Haitian, for being on

the wrong side of the Massacre River (181). The bodies burned after the hurricane were casualties of an act of Mother Nature, whereas the currently burning bodies were innocent Haitians who had been slain. Their bodies were considered expendable, further indicating how Haitians in the Dominican Republic live an unlivable and ungrievable lives.

At this point in their journey to the border, the men in the group decide that they must part ways with the Dominican sisters, Dolores and Doloritas, because, as Haitians on the run, it is too dangerous for them to travel with Dominicans. Amabelle does not want to leave them, but considers the linguistic consequences explaining that “If they were asked to say “*perejil*,” [parsley] they could say it with ease...if we [Haitians] addressed the sisters publicly in Dajabón, someone might hear and at that moment decide that we should die” (183). The Spanish word *perejil* is used to distinguish a native speaker of Spanish from a native speaker of Kreyòl. Amabelle’s concern about the litmus test correlates foreshadows the events of the day when she will be attacked during the Parsley Massacre in the novel.

The next violent encounter happens when the group arrives at a “small deserted settlement of thatched huts and wood cabins” (185) and soon find out that its inhabitants have been dismembered, their body parts hanging from the trees by bull whips (186). These Haitians had been murdered and cut into pieces, left outside of their own home as a warning sign. This brutal act further reinforces the idea that the Haitian identity and body has become dehumanized by Dominicans. Amabelle and her group leave the gruesome site, thinking it best to continue on their journey to try and make it to Dajabón before nightfall.

When they arrive in Dajabón at nightfall, Odette and Wilmer leave the group to seek help, hoping to encounter a friend who will give them refuge for the night until they can cross the border in the morning. Finding a large celebration in front of the cathedral and hearing that Trujillo is rumored to be inside, Amabelle, Yves and Tibon attempt to get through the crowd unnoticed but a group of young men moves toward them with handfuls of parsley sprigs chanting “*pereijl*.” Amabelle is recognized as Haitian immediately because of her appearance. Not only do they see her tattered clothing, dirty and ragged from days of traveling, but they see her dark skin, and they see her companions who look just like her. They are attacked by the young men, who capture them and carry them through the crowd, waving the parsley in front of their faces and shouting, “Tell us what this is” (193). Amabelle believes she could say the word to save her life if she had to do so, but she never even has the chance to try. At this point, Amabelle must confront the reality that she is not, at least by her outward appearance, accepted by Dominicans. Having lived in their country for the majority of her life, she is instantly transformed into an unwelcome guest who should not be there. She will either die or be forced back into her Haitianness from the outside that demands a strict relocation across the border. Amabelle and Yves are thrown onto the ground, forced to sit on their knees as the parsley is stuffed in their mouths. Amabelle describes the horrific scene:

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 ... I told myself that eating the parsley would keep me alive. (193)

Parsley, which for Amabelle, had always been conceived as abundant and nourishing to both Haitians and Dominicans, becomes a linguistic marker and a divisive symbol. The angry mob that has formed begins violently attacking Amabelle and Yves, kicking and throwing rocks at them. Amabelle rolls herself into a ball, trying to get away from the physical assault inflicted upon her:

I screamed, thinking I was going to die. My screams slowed them a bit. But after a while I had less strength with which to make a sound. My ears were ringing; I tried to cover my head with my hands. My whole body was numbing; I sensed the vibration of the blows, but no longer the pain. My mouth filled with blood. I tried to swallow the sharp bitter parsley bubbling in my throat. Some of the parsley had been peppered before it was given to us. Maybe there was poison in it. What was the use of fighting? (194)

The parsley is a dividing line for Amabelle. Moving from an object of nourishment to an object of violence against all Haitians. The act of being forced to eat the parsley aligns with Amabelle's changing perceptions about her own identity. Previously she had lived as a migrant house servant in the Dominican Republic and felt connected to her adoptive Dominican family, no doubt placing her in-between these two cultures. Now she is forced to digest parsley and with it, the idea that she is no longer able to exist in the culture that once welcomed her.

The attack on Amabelle ends when Trujillo leaves the church where he had just delivered an anti-Haitian message. The crowd dissipates, trying to follow the general in his car as he departs the border town. Wilner and Odette find Amabelle and Yves and

drag them to a hiding place in a house where they pay money to stay for the night. They do not stay long because they are warned that Dominican soldiers are still actively looking for Haitians in the neighborhood. Yves and Amabelle are both badly injured. Amabelle learns that Tibon, the cane cutter who joined the group at the same time as Wilner, Odette, Dolores and Doloritas, has been killed. She regrets not being able to take his body for properly burial. Yet she can barely walk herself, let alone drag a corpse along. Amabelle describes her pain and injuries:

I shivered from a fever slowly rising from the hollow of my bones. My chipped and cracked teeth kept snapping against the mush of open flesh inside my mouth. All the pain of first being struck came back to me. I reached up to touch my misshapen face. (197)

Amabelle's physical wounds do not let her forget the main reason she has embarked on this journey, to search of her beloved Sebastien and his sister, Mimi. Although she can barely speak because her lip is "as big as a melon" (196), she tries to ask the group if they can go the fort on the border to look for her fiancé and his sister. She thinks the Dominican soldiers might be holding them there because Kongo had explained that this is where he used to be taken on the multiple occasions he had been sent back into Haiti for being an illegal migrant worker in the Dominican Republic. The group cannot understand Amabelle because her speech is "blurred and incomprehensible" due to her injured lip (199).

As the group makes its way to the Massacre River where they hope to cross the border to safety, they hear corpses being dropped into the water from the bridge. They enter the water and the corpses begin to float past them. Amabelle looks at one dead

man's face to make sure it is not Sebastien. As they cross the river, Wilner is shot and Odette almost drowns. She will die shortly after Amabelle and Yves make it to the river bank.

These fictional recreations in *Farming of the Bones* exemplify part of the broader historical and sociocultural theorization of the Caribbean. Marked by resistance against violence and the struggle to fight for one's right to survive, Amabelle's tale about barely surviving her journey back into Haiti at the Dominican border during the Parsley Massacre is reflective of the darker side of the concept of transculturation as a theoretical approach that attempts to define and characterize the uniqueness of the process of identity formation in the Caribbean. The Parsley Massacre may not have been the first tragedy in Amabelle's life, but it is the impetus of instability and chaos in the novel.

The fictional recreation of the Parsley Massacre and the crossing of river that divides the island of Hispaniola into the two nations, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, is central to the culminating action and plot of *The Farming of the Bones*. The Caribbean is an ethnically and culturally diverse region still troubled by a colonial past including the decimation of native populations, slavery and voluntary migration by other ethnic groups (for example, Indian and Chinese population). Cuban scholar Benítez-Rojo's seminal work *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the postmodern perspective*, conceives of the Caribbean as a meta-archipelago where history and cultural processes are circular, looping "syncretism, acculturation, transculturation, assimilation, deculturation, indigenization, creolization, cultural *cimarronaje*, cultural miscegenation, cultural resistance, etc." (32). These cultural processes are not inherently negative but are at odds with any discourses and conceptualizations that define identity and the nation as finite

and stabilized. The events of the Parsley Massacre not only demonstrate the desire of Dominicans to rid their nation of dark-skinned Haitians of African descent, but also exhibit the continual processes that Benítez-Rojo stipulates in his work. However these processes are presented in a negative context in the novels, as opposed to Benítez-Rojo's contextualization as celebratory cultural phenomena. The processes are binary pairs: syncretism (the blending of cultures) versus acculturation (becoming attuned to a culture that is not one's own), transculturation versus assimilation and deculturation versus indigenization and creolization. Danticat is especially critical of the deculturation of Haitians and the degradation of the value of their human lives.

Amabelle's narration of the events of the Parsley Massacre in *Farming of the Bones* can most accurately be interpreted through flight from her receiving country, the Dominican Republic, which is actually expulsing her not as a former slave, but as a migrant worker because of the Trujillo regime's threats to kill Haitians if they stay. In terms of cultural *cimarronaje*, Amabelle and her companions are fleeing not as actual runaway slaves (*cimarrones*, the act of fleeing is *cimarronaje*), but as envisioned slaves who are viewed as contributing to the corruption and pollution of a pure Dominican culture envisioned by Trujillo (Welman-Cisneros 126). Yet in fleeing, the Haitians do show resilience and also resistance to Dominican characterizations of them as racially inferior that they save their lives. They flee the country even though they have lived the majority of their lives as servants and cane cutters for the Dominicans. They survive the massacre but lose all the stability of their lives and return to their ancestral homeland that is no longer a home to them in Haiti. It is here that the notion of space and the

importance of the cultural imaginary for both the historical account and the literary recreation of the border come into view.

2.3 THE PLIGHT OF MIGRANT SUGAR CANE WORKERS

The lives of the Haitian sugar cane workers in the Dominican Republic is framed by three symbols, cane, harvest and an uncertain future “there was the cane to curse, the harvest to dread, the future to fear” (Danticat 131). It is difficult to imagine the shared history of Haiti and the Dominican Republic without sugar. In fact, the history of the island would be markedly different if the labor-intensive crop had not been introduced to the island during the colonial period. Sugar cultivation brought slavery to the island which in many ways still endures today, although in a different form of *braceros* being “leased” to the Dominican Republic under government contracts. The economic divide between Haitians and Dominicans is compounded by race as an identifiable marker of Haitians. The racial tensions between Haitians and Dominicans combined with the Dominican’s need for migrant Haitian labor on the sugar cane plantations has always marked the difference in national designations and is the main reason for The Parsley Massacre.

Cane cutting for the production of sugar has been an integral part of the Caribbean cultural landscape since colonial times. During that period, slaves were brought from Africa to fuel the production of sugar because unlike the native populations, Africans adapted to the hardships of work on the plantation. Not surprisingly, the cultivation and production of sugar on the island of Hispaniola has long defined Haitians in the political, economic and sociocultural tensions on either side of the island. Dominicans developed a certain nationalistic and racist attitude towards Haitians when

they were occupied by the Haitians for twenty-two years, from 1821 until 1844.

Dominicans do not celebrate independence from Spain, but rather, “Every February 27, it reminds itself that it fought off its neighbor, Haiti, to become an independent nation” (Wucker 40). This fact, combined with the rise and fall in demand for sugar in the US market has also influenced these relationships. Of the varying cultural phenomena that make the Caribbean unique, the long history of sugar is deeply rooted in the culture of the island. The labor that produces that sugar has always been people of African descent, first slaves imported from Africa, and later Haitian migrant workers.

Due to the racialization of cane cutting in the Dominican Republic, the nation continues to devalue Haitian migrants’ lives and allow policies which mimic modern day slavery on the basis of perceived race and nationality. The geopolitical border that demarcates a separation between Haiti and the Dominican Republic thus becomes both a real and an imaginary space that is marked by the transit to and from the Dominican Republic by cane cutters. The process begins with a demand for workers to harvest sugar cane in the Dominican Republic. Those who cross the border from Haiti into the Dominican Republic or in Kreyòl “Dominikani” for this arduous work are considered temporary invitees, or immigrant laborers. Being that dark-skinned Haitians of African descent are those who migrate, a cultural belief has developed in the Dominican Republic that racializes this type of work by classifying it as non-suitable and relegates it to being thought of as racialized work not suitable for lighter-skinned Dominicans. Yet the relationship of both necessity and repulsion that Dominicans have with Haitian migrant laborers is evidenced in the events of the Parsley Massacre. During times when sugar production is high due to international markets (mainly the US), Haitians are allowed in

and out of the Dominican Republic to work in the cane fields. Yet when sugar prices drop and production slows, Haitian laborers are often deported back to Haiti, or even worse, killed.

In *The Farming of the Bones*, Edwidge Danticat creates a community of Haitian migrants living in the fictional Dominican town of Alegría. This collective character allows her to explore contemporary issues pertinent to violations of human rights, blatant abuse of governmental and military power, and the dehumanization of a nation of migrant people on the basis of their racialization. At heart, the novel is also a love story that lives mostly in the memories of protagonist Amabelle, who had wanted to marry Sebastien. This love was lost to a violent attack on migrant workers from Haiti who did nothing other than exist in a space that one day rendered them unwelcome. The true beauty of the novel lies in the human dignity and love in the relationship between a cane-cutter and a house servant, a love that endures until death, when one would hope the two will meet again.

The cane life in Krèyol is, “travay tè pou zo, the farming of bones” (Danticat 55). The bone is the sugar cane stalk, but it also symbolizes the human bones and bodies that labor to cut it down and functions as a way to refer to the deadly and precarious facets of working as a cane cutter. Cane cutters are pushed to their physical limits in the grueling and dangerous conditions of the harvest. In *The Farming of Bones*, the bones also represent the hollow echo of memory, the longing for lost loved ones, Haitians migrants in the Dominican Republic who do not survive the Parsley Massacre, also called *El Corte* (literally translated to English as “The Cutting,” even if the expression is also understood by Dominicans as The Harvest of Sugar Cane). The title *The Farming of Bones* is a

simple metaphor for cutting sugar cane, but, moreover, it is an analogy for the shared struggles of the Haitian migrant community in the Dominican Republic reflected in the novel who are rendered voiceless and powerless. The Parsley Massacre is also a farming of bones, as Haitian bodies were cut down with machetes, the very same tool they use to harvest sugar cane stalks in the fields.

Portrayals of the Haitian migrant community in the novel specifically include Haitian women who were also cane cutters. These women toiled their lives away in the cane fields, only to become “too sick, too 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” (61). Although sugar cane cutting is generally considered men’s work, women cut cane too. These “old cane-cutting women” are described as mutilated and unfit for any paid work. The farming of bones or cane cutting has left them with only the bones in their crippled bodies. Amabelle observes, “One was missing an ear. Two had lost fingers. One had her right cheekbone cracked in half, the result of a runaway machete in the fields” (61). Instead of living out their golden years in comfort with their families, these women are forced to bond together and become beggars, foraging food and relying on their Haitian migrant community and “the kindness of good neighbors” (61).

In the novel, Danticat speaks out and on behalf of a disenfranchised community and the cane cutters’ struggle to survive. As a woman writer born in Haiti and living in the United States, Edwidge Danticat is telling the cane cutter’s transnational story of suffering through a female voice and experience. Although the novel is not overtly political, it deals with the troubled relationship between the Haitian and Dominican governments and critiques the treatment of Haitians by their own government. The novel

is the story of Amabelle, but also her communal struggle, as she part of a community of migrant Haitian men and women, the powerless people who are constantly faced with the threat of violence. The inclusion of the community of sugar cane cutters and their characterization in function of their precariousness is key to Danticat's position as a transnational writer. In *Toward a Latina Feminism of the Americas*, literary scholar Anna Marie Sandoval observes how transnational stories provide "intellectual value and function as a form of productive practice, politics and community" (98). Thus, by linking Amabelle's situation with Haitian men who are racialized and subjugated, Danticat strengthens her position on the overall oppression of the Haitian community.¹

The novel's depiction of Haitian cane cutting communities in the Dominican Republic revalorizes a specific historical situation. The novel's Haitian migrant community in the fictional town of Alegría is comprised of families whose only place in that society is as almost invisible, members of its periphery. They are cane cutters, street vendors, domestic servants and clergy members at the local Haitian church. Marked by their dark skin and Kreyòl language, these migrants struggle to survive on the margins of society. During the time period of the massacre, even if migrants wanted to return to Haiti, they must find a way to make the long difficult journey safely back to the border at the Massacre River.

When whisperings of the Parsley Massacre reach the ears of the migrants from Alegría, three groups form: some choose to stay, others choose to flee openly in groups,

¹ This is in accordance with liberal feminism's critical understanding of victims of oppression in society. Liberal feminism values the humanity and life experiences of all gendered beings, including men, when subjugated by various forms of oppression such as racism and patriarchy. See Evans, Ed. et al, *The Sage Handbook of Feminist Theory: Part I: Epistemology and Marginality* for further reading.

and others flee through the mountains with the cover of night. Once it is apparent that Haitians are being killed if they flee openly will not be deported to Haiti, but instead rounded up and killed, the only choice is to remain and face certain death or flee. Those who attempted to flee openly were captured by Dominican soldiers and never heard from again. Those who fled clandestinely and survived faced an uphill battle to reclaim their human dignity after the Parsley Massacre, having lost loved ones in the violence. In Amabelle's case, she had no real home, no resources, and it was out of the kindness of Yves and her family that she did not become another statistic of the massacre. When Amabelle arrives with Yves at his home in Haiti, his mother asks, "Who is this woman? ... Where are her people? (226). Yves says nothing. He knows that Amabelle has no people, orphaned three times, first by her parent's death, then by her adoptive Dominican family who would likely not have been able to protect her during the massacre, and lastly be her fiancé, Sebastien. Sebastien had fled openly from the massacre with his sister and was never found. Amabelle had planned to meet Sebastien and flee with him, but by the time she arrived at the planned meeting location, he had already been taken away. In turn, she fled through the mountains, survived the massacre and returned to Haiti. Amabelle then dedicates her life to trying to piece together what happened during the massacre, to find out what has become of Sebastien, living in the past through memories and dreams of the life that was foreclosed by the massacre.

At the opening of the novel, Sebastien is a young cane cutter, having only participated in four harvests. He and his sister left their mother in Haiti with the idea that they would save money during their time in the Dominican Republic and eventually return home. When Sebastien learns that there is an uprising against Haitians sweeping

the Dominican Republic, he agrees to meet with other Haitians from the community, including his fiancé Amabelle, at the church and flee the impending violence from Trujillo's unofficial/official decree to rid his country of Haitians. In that moment, Sebastien resigns himself to returning to Haiti without any saved income. He explains to Amabelle, "I'm tired of the harvest and all the cane ... Perhaps it's time to see my mother. My mother, she did not think I would be gone this long" (147). Even before rumors of the impending massacre arrive in Alegría, Sebastien declares, "I swear it to you Amabelle, this will be my last cane harvest ... Next year, I work away from the cane fields, in coffee, rice, tobacco, corn, an onion farm, even yucca grating, anything but the cane" (55). The misery of cane cutting is not just a physical one, but as Sebastien expresses, it is a psychological one. Sebastien confesses his deep feeling of the loss of humanity to Amabelle:

Sometimes the people in the fields, when they're tired and angry, they say we're an orphaned people. They say we are the burnt crud at the bottom of the pot. They say some people don't belong anywhere and that's us. I say we are a group of vwayajè, wayfarers ... because that is what we are. (56)

As Sebastien implies, cane cutters are displaced even within their own migrant communities. They are not welcomed as guests in the country where they work the fields. They are considered wayfarers because they belong nowhere other than in the field, lost amongst the tall stalks of sugar cane. They are transient because they hope to return home but lack the resources to do so. In the cane fields, they find enslavement, both physical and psychological.

Sebastien's tale is representative of a cane cutter who has come to understand his place in the exploitative system and wants to escape it. He has hope that he and his fiancé, Amabelle will be able to return to Haiti and be married. He dreams to live a life of dignity with the woman that he loves. The fact that Sebastien's dream is never realized is both the greatest sorrow of the novel and its most realistic element. Most cane cutters never leave that life, or they die trying to do so. Brinda Mehta argues that Danticat's characters in her novel *The Dew Breaker* suffer "permanent psychological and physical scars as memory's indelible imprint. At the same time, they try to find a curative language that articulates this pain and suffering" (88). The characters in *The Farming of Bones* also exhibit these traits—Sebastien tries to comfort Amabelle by asking her to speak to him about her memories and dreams, thus curing her of her maladies and bad memories of her parent's death. Yet Sebastien is scarred himself, physically from the cane and emotionally as he is deeply troubled by his position in life and haunted by the death of his father in the great hurricane of 1930. It is implied that he migrated to cut cane because there was no way for him to provide for his mother and sister in Haiti. He is physically scarred by cane-cutting injuries all over his body, especially his face and hands. The novel's opening pages give descriptions of Sebastien's face and hands focalized through Amabelle's touch and sight, "the cane stalks have ripped apart most of the skin on his shiny black face, leaving him with crisscrossed trails of furrowed scars" (1) and "his rough callused palms nip and chafe my skin" (2) because his "palms have lost their lifelines to the machetes that cut that cane" (1). Sebastien's is an example of a Haitian body merges with the cane as he labors to cut it apart, he is also cut and scarred.

Tragedy is also what brought Amabelle to the Dominican Republic following her parent's drowning in the Massacre River when she was a child. She has repeated nightmares about their death, which she describes as a situation she cannot escape, "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" (2). After the Parsley Massacre, Amabelle becomes physically scarred as well. She has lost her parents and her fiancé and lives in her memories of the past, trying to make sense of all the violence and suffering she has endured in her life. Although the novel's ending could have varied interpretations, it is my belief that Amabelle commits suicide in the Massacre River where she asks for release from life: "I looked to my dreams for softness, for a gentler embrace, for relief from the fear of mudslides and blood bubbling out of the riverbed, where it is said the dead add their tears to the river flow" (310). It is fitting the Amabelle would return to the Massacre River to end her life, her parents died there when she was a child and of course many other Haitians perished there during the Parsley Massacre. Amabelle's final statement suggests that by the end of her life, Amabelle chose death over her memories and nightmares that she preferred to be "nowhere" rather than continue to live in the past, instead of always being present while absent. She physically dies in-between Haitian and the Dominican Republic in the water, thus putting an end to her in-between state of mind.

In *Why the Cocks Fight*, Wucker interviews cane cutters similar to Sebastien, men entrenched in a system that disavows their humanity, leaving them little choice but to continue to cut cane or return to Haiti where the prospects of finding work and ensuring survival are grim. Wucker's account gives credence to the fictionalized story of Sebastien

and Amabelle, as both are set in the late 1930s, though Danticat's novel was written in the late 1990s. This fact is in consonance with how little has changed regarding the inhumane conditions for migrant Haitian cane cutters and their families in the Dominican Republic over the last several decades and into the 21st century, as illuminated in both Danticat and Wucker's seminal writing on the topic.

The concept of space on the island of Hispaniola is marked in large part by the movement of Haitians into the Dominican Republic for the production of sugar. Haitians do not usually want to leave Haiti, but they do so on the basis of false promises about the amount of income they can generate if they leave home to become cane cutters. There is also a history of the Haitian government selling Haitians to the Dominican Republic to cut cane, a modern-day version of slavery which continues in the 21st century. While many Haitians choose to leave their side of the island, they do so based on false information. Upon arrival to the Dominican Republic, they soon find out there is no fortune to be made. As Wucker explains:

Isolated in the bateyes, the *braceros* [Spanish for "laborer" and used to refer to migrant cane cutters in the Dominican Republic] see no future beyond the waving stalks of sugarcane. They hardly exist on paper. Their children have no country. They are lucky if they get medical treatment. They have no hope. Dominicans will not do the work they do, and most Dominicans hardly blink at the subhuman treatment meted out to the immigrants. The cane cutters are animals, says Dominican common wisdom. They are good for labor and no more, worth consideration only to make sure they do not leave the bateyes [sugar cane plantations] and

spread their dirty diseases, their inferior culture, their black, black skin.

What concern is it that the Haitians do not receive proper medical care?

They chose to come to Dominikani [Krèyol for the Dominican Republic].

What matter if Dominicans brought them here? They agreed to come.

(113)

The production of sugar cane in the Dominican Republic is thus premised on a false promise, a lie that only serves to benefit Haitian government officials who sell Haitians to the Dominican Republic through government contracts with the owners of the Dominican sugar plantations. For those Haitians who sacrifice their freedom in order to serve in the production of sugar, their lives become a cycle of misery and hopelessness, in which they make very little money in exchange for arduous and difficult manual labor they cannot escape unless they leave. Conversely, if they return to Haiti, it is a gamble as to whether or not they will be able to secure paid work. In addition, most have their national identification documents confiscated by Dominican officials when they arrive in the Dominican Republic and have no proof of their identity. For those who bring their family or create a family in the Dominican Republic, they become nationless people who have no legal documentation to prove who they are, let alone which country is their place of birth or nationality. Thus, leaving the life of the cane cutter is little more than a dream for most of the workers who understand that even if they were allowed to return to Haiti, they will likely have even less opportunity.

One character in *The Farming of Bones*, Tibon, a Haitian cane cutter who, attempting to escape the Parsley Massacre, joins Amabelle's group trekking through the

mountains, understands this deceit on behalf of the Dominicans but also blames the Haitian government for not being able to provide for its citizens: “There are so many of us [Haitians] here because our own country—our government—has forsaken us” (177). Tibon is a character who functions as an interlocutor, critiquing his own country for the situation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. He explains, “Poor people are sold to work in the cane fields so our own country can be free of them” (178). His assessment of the situation before him is realistic and prophetic, considering the violence and, ultimately, his murder at the hands of angry Dominicans: “When you stay too long at a neighbor’s house, it’s only natural that he become weary of you and hate you” (178). The cultural perception of Haitian cane-cutters as overstaying their welcome is as much related to the global supply and demand for sugar as to Dominican hatred for Haitians. According to Trujillo’s logic, there were too many Haitians in the Dominican Republic and not enough foreign demand for sugar 1937. When Dominican demand for sugar went down, Haitians were literally cut down. Haitians cane cutters who were lucky enough to escape the massacre crossed back into Haiti. Danticat includes these different versions of the outcomes of the massacre. Sebastien and Tibon who did not survive and Amabelle who does. Many years after the massacre, Amabelle takes her own life, perhaps because she no longer could live in the in-between spaces of her memories and nightmares.

2.4 REVISITING FEMINIST SPATIALITIES IN THE MIRABAL SISTERS’ STRUGGLE AGAINST

MACHISMO

If Amabelle is a protagonist who takes flight in order to survive, then the Mirabal sisters are protagonists who survive by fighting and confronting spaces prohibited to them: the public sphere, the domain of macho men. Unlike Amabelle, the Mirabal sisters

are trapped and cannot flee, their only option is to remain as wives and mothers, or to fight the dictatorship. They choose to do both.

Both novels center on women's interpretations of their identities within spaces within the Caribbean. They question the masculinist Caribbean's theorization of gender and ethnicity by critiquing the Trujillo dictatorship directly. *In the Time of the Butterflies* reinvents the lives of the Butterflies, the code name for the Mirabal sisters, lauded as both martyrs and national heroines in the Dominican Republic since their murders in 1960. As is often the case with historical tragedies, their lives and deaths were told and rewritten time and again, solidifying the Butterflies' place in the Dominican national history. Illustrating how the memory of historical events evolves over time, these stories contain partial truths, influenced by official histories, witness testimonials and community lore that coalesce to create new interpretations of the Butterflies' lives presented both in history and in literature as historical fiction. Since the Butterflies exist in historical memory as both heroines and victims, it is unsurprising that one division stands out in the fiction and scholarship surrounding their lives and participation in the underground uprising against Trujillo: their duality as women (marked by their gender and socio-political status as wives and mothers) and revolutionaries (marked by their participation in clandestine spying activities) is often expressed as mutually exclusive facets of their identities or as a binary opposition. The Butterflies were either "innocent wives or mothers, victims of Trujillo" or "revolutionary spies." Was this construction of their identity simply more palatable to audiences who wanted to hear their story? Was it easier to construct homogenous prototypes than complicated heterogeneous characters? Writing about historical figures who go against their society's prescribed gender ideals

poses a particular challenge, especially when it comes to writing them as characters created for entertainment value. In penning *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Alvarez was preoccupied with the difficulty of understanding why the women had risked their lives. She asked the question, “What gave them [the Butterflies] special courage?” (323). Looking back to the 1950s when the Butterflies were most active, the idea that women could, in that time period, in fact, belong to both realms, the private and the public, could be both the woman and the revolutionary, was quietly revolutionary in and of itself. Julia Alvarez captures this facet of their identities and makes it convincing.

The Mirabal sisters’ bridging of the private and the public spheres in a way that did not completely question prescribed roles for women in the 1950s makes it challenging to cast retellings of the legend of the Butterflies. They did not completely abandon their roles as mothers when they became revolutionaries, but they did destabilize it by their work as activists. In this way they were subversive to their role as wives and ultimately aimed to destroy patriarchy on a broader scale by destabilizing Trujillo. Hiding in broad daylight was the only way that the Mirabals could become anti-Trujillo sympathizers as anyone who critiqued the dictatorship was immediately imprisoned or killed. Julia Alvarez’s historical novel recreates the lives of the Mirabal sisters, showing how they lived traditional lives by day, hiding in broad daylight as wives and mothers, while by night they became revolutionaries, attempting to help a secret underground group find a way to infiltrate the Trujillo regime in order to bring a new form of government to their nation. In this regard, they were simultaneously unheroic when cast in the traditional roles for women in their everyday lives, yet extraordinary super-women and in line with feminist ideals when considering their active roles as spies.

Memorializations of the Mirabal sisters' life stories have hinged upon these two seemingly divergent and opposing roles of housewives and political spies. The appreciation and valorization of each role has informed the controversial production of altered versions of the sisters' lives.² In response to social and cultural demands, the legend of the Butterflies has been recast in accordance with the two dominant feminine archetypes in Latin America that characterize woman as either ethereally virginal (the Virgin of Guadalupe) or as promiscuous in their social involvement (la Malinche). These retellings, therefore, characterized the Mirabal sisters by positing that they could only truly embrace one form of femininity but not both. They could either be wives or mothers in the private domestic sphere or become heroines who attempted to topple the Trujillo regime in the public sphere. I argue here that the Butterflies did in fact belong to both of these spheres, and that this has complicated how history has memorialized their lives. *In the Time of the Butterflies* is a novel that embraces the radical idea that during the first half of the twentieth century, Dominican women were capable of dualities, of being wives, mothers and revolutionaries.

As a non-fiction example of how the Butterflies were received as accidental martyrs, I turn to Michelle Wucker's *Why the Cocks Fight* which describes the Mirabal sisters' legend in the context of their private-sphere roles of domestic wives and mothers:

Trujillo's downfall came not long after he ordered *the brutal murder of three sisters, Minerva, Patria and Maria Teresa Mirabal, who were*

² Dedé, the only surviving Mirabal sister, became the spokesperson for the Butterflies after their death. *In the Time of the Butterflies* casts her person in the same light as spokesperson, but just as life sometimes becomes a fiction for those who survive a tragedy, Dedé's authoritative voice and efforts to memorialize her sisters properly could not stop the social and cultural tendency to develop altered versions of the Mirabal sisters' lives. See *The Story of the Mirabal Sisters* for an interview with Dedé's account.

married to dissidents working to bring down his dictatorship. The Mirabal sisters were returning from a visit to their imprisoned husbands on November 25th, 1960, when Trujillo's thugs forced their car off the road, killed the women, and pushed their car off a ledge to make it appear that they had died in a crash. The Mirabal sisters became martyrs, the center of a new legend that overshadowed Trujillo's, their death uniting the country in disgust. The Roman Catholic Church, which had thus far gone along with Trujillo's rule, now distanced itself from the dictator. (69-70)

My emphasis on "the brutal murder of three sisters, Minerva, Patria and Maria Teresa Mirabal, who were married to dissidents working to bring down his dictatorship" restates the more common version of the Butterflies' lives that in line with the characterization of the private sphere as separate, an overly simplistic casting of the Butterflies as women who were murdered, victims of the Trujillo regime.

As Wucker's work evidences, however, each version of their lives as traditional women in the private sphere and as revolutionaries acting in the public sphere hold some truth. In Wucker's version of events, the Mirabals were simply being 'good wives' visiting their husbands in jail, and it was a shock to the public that these wives and mothers would be murdered for this reason. This version of the Mirabal sisters unified Dominican society, including the Roman Catholic Church. Had the Mirabal sisters been immediately recognized for their revolutionary role, perhaps their deaths would have seemed more legitimate (any Trujillo dissenter is writing their own death warrant)? Would there have been less cause for alarm if their reputation was that of only being

revolutionaries and not wives and mothers? The answers to these questions are debatable. But the aspect of the legend that cannot be refuted is that the sisters became martyrs when they paid the ultimate price with their lives on November 25, 1960, a date that is commemorated each year by the United Nations and various countries in the Caribbean and Latin America as the International Day Against Violence Towards Women. Yet violence against women is commonly understood as domestic violence, not the corrupt state-sponsored violence that killed the Butterflies. Even this commemorative day obfuscates the political importance of the legend of the Butterflies.

In the Time of the Butterflies is the only historical novel written from a woman's perspective about the Mirabal sisters, and it is the only one that successfully captures the Butterflies' duality as both traditional wives and mothers and as revolutionary martyrs. Alvarez explains that her work is fiction, "A novel is not, after all, a historical document, but a way to travel through the human heart" (324). Yet her fiction is purposeful and didactic: "I would hope that through this fictionalized story I will bring acquaintance of these famous sisters to English-speaking readers" (324). As an author, Alvarez has authority on the topic from her familial past, a personal connection to the Butterflies' history, not only because she is Dominican-American, but moreover, because her father was involved in the same anti-Trujillo activities as the Butterflies. When Alvarez's father's involvement with these underground activities came to light, he and his family left the island under CIA protection and were exiled to New York City, technically as political refugees. Although Alvarez was only a child when this occurred, she fictionalizes the life-changing exile event in *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*

and also gives a personal, non-fiction account of how the Mirabal sister's deaths affected her in real life as a child in the postscript of *In the Time of the Butterflies*:

Almost four months after our escape, three sisters who had also been members of that underground [the same as her father's] were murdered [...] when as a young girl I heard about the "accident" I could not get the Mirabals out of my mind. On my frequent trips back to the Dominican Republic, I sought out whatever information I could about these brave and beautiful sisters who had done what few men—and only a handful of women—had been willing to do (323).

What the sisters had been willing to do, was give their lives in order to free their nation from a thirty year (thirty-one years by the time Trujillo was executed) rule of tyranny.

Many "revisions" of the Butterfly's lives have been written and critiqued over the last few decades by those who did not consider the limitations for women during that time period. *In the Time of the Butterflies* addresses the need to clarify that the Butterflies were feminist leaders in their own regard. The second wave of feminism, which would bring women many of the rights already held by men, did not exist during the lives of the Mirabal sisters. In fact, the second wave of feminism is often cited as officially commencing the year the sisters were murdered, in 1960, when the birth control pill was legalized for women by the Federal Drug Administration in the United States, an event that had little significance at the time for women in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Before birth control became readily available for women, the control of reproductive rights was out of their hands, a lack of agency compounded by the gender norms at play in the Latin American context. The Mirabal sisters came of age within the

confines of an extremely conservative dictatorship in a traditional Caribbean culture of *machismo*. In order to properly conceive of the underlying arguments in *In the Time of the Butterflies*, the role of machismo in the story must be explored. Although machismo is commonly defined as practices of Caribbean and Latin American men that display a form of hyper-masculinity, exactly what that hyper-masculinity entails is often a gray area for non-feminist scholars. Since machismo is related to men's power as exhibited through virility and strength, social class is no barrier to being macho. This means that even men without economic means or wealth can still be powerful within their communities as long as they embrace a type of sexuality that enables them to have sexual relationships with multiple partners outside of their marriage, usually with sex workers, or, for men with financial means, girlfriends who are provided for economically with housing and a stipend to pay their living expenses. Machismo is a harmful cultural practice for both men and women, as it limits the spectrum of all gendered relationships with overtly sexual behaviors expected of men while women are confined to marital sex for the purpose of reproduction.

In addition, machismo, as an exaggerated form of westernized patriarchy, dictates that men be the head of household and have the authority over the wife and children. Silvana Paternostro's in *In the Land of God and Man: Confronting Our Sexual Culture* details how machismo often entails a lax attitude toward physical and emotional abuse in relationships as wives often have no way to protect themselves as they lack the power and negotiation skills (Paternostro 83). This is damaging to the entire family, especially to children, who learn to accept and internalize the ideals of *machismo*. Boys develop an attitude of privilege when it comes to sexual pursuits with women, learning that it is

acceptable if not encouraged to have sexual encounters outside of marriage to prove one's virility, and girls develop a negative attitude about men's sexual practices, which they internalize as a dislike for men's attitudes about sexuality and the family more generally (Hirsch 1227-1237).

This scenario plays out in the novel in the lives of the Mirabal women as almost all the men in the novel have extramarital affairs. The Mirabal sisters are especially devastated however when they find out their father is a macho who has four illegitimate daughters with another woman. *In The Time of the Butterflies* features two prominent patriarchs who exhibit this type of behavior. The first patriarch is of course, Trujillo, who as dictator of the country has an official wife but also many girlfriends he houses all around the island nation in secret homes to raise his illegitimate children. The Mirabal sisters first learn of Trujillo's extramarital relationships when he handpicks one of their schoolmates, a girl only seventeen years old, to be his next conquest. Naïvely, the young woman submits to Trujillo and ends up pregnant with his child. This greatly disturbs Minerva, who later becomes one of Trujillo's objects of affection as well. Minerva is the most politically active of the four sisters, and she refuses to comply with the dictator's sexual advances, even slapping him for touching her inappropriately when she is forced to dance with him at a government function her family is obligated to attend by the regime. Alvarez's Minerva describes her reaction stating, "He yanks me by the wrist, thrusting his pelvis at me in a vulgar way, and I can see my hand in an endless slow motion rise—a mind all of its own—and come down on [Trujillo's face]" (100)—a visceral and reactionary move that will have grave consequences for her family.

Minerva's father, the patriarch of the Mirabal sisters, is eventually imprisoned because Minerva refuses to comply with Trujillo's sexual advances. He dies of a heart attack while in prison. Years earlier, Minerva had discovered that her father, the second patriarch in the novel, had a girlfriend and a second family as well. Thus, her father's imprisonment and death due to a rejection of machista practices in which he had formerly engaged are ironic outcomes that emphasize the far-reaching effects of machismo. When the daughters from her father's second family show up at his funeral, the youngest Mirabal sister, Mate, is greatly disturbed by the fact that her father had betrayed their family in this way. She exclaims that, "I hate men. I really hate men" (118). Alvarez's move to expose machismo and patriarchy as harmful to women and men in this novel is clear. She acknowledges the practice of machismo in regards to men's sexual relationships which also becomes an analogy for the political struggles against Trujillo, the ultimate dictator-patriarch who attempts to sexually conquer Minerva.

By reinventing the lives of the Mirabal sisters as partly existing in the domestic sphere, where the wife and mother of children exist, Alvarez is not just maintaining a sense of traditional roles for women, but is also portraying the Mirabal sisters as respectable women who took seriously their duties of being wives and mothers. Alvarez also emphasizes that the Mirabal sisters went into these arrangements for romance and love, not to climb the social ladder or to prove anything to their families. Minerva and Mate were involved in revolutionary activities when they met their husbands, who were also anti-Trujillo activists. Patria and Dedé the elder sisters, and their husbands were not involved directly in the underground group plotting to overthrow Trujillo at first, but they eventually join Minerva, Mate and their husbands. As sisters and wives, the four women

evolve together and use their influence and power gained through their revolutionary activities with the support of their husbands to help push forward the goals of the underground spy cell. Without the aid of their husbands, the Mirabal sisters would have found it difficult to move forward with their revolutionary activities given the resistance to allowing women in these political roles outside of the domestic sphere. In his chapter titled “Women, Class Resentments and the Politics of Revenge,” López-Calvo acknowledges that *In the Time of the Butterflies* rewrites the Mirabal story in a way which allows the reader to “observe the Butterflies growing up and becoming agents of their own history” (88). Accordingly, in Alvarez’s version of the legend, the Butterflies married partners willing to participate in these activities with them for the sake of the freedom of their country, not because they wanted to prove something to someone or fulfill a personal vendetta against Trujillo.

What the Mirabal sisters “wanted to prove” was that they could participate actively and as equals with men to complete their main objective- bringing down Trujillo. They wanted Trujillo dead not because of the ways in which they had suffered on a personal level (Father Mirabal dies in prison, Minerva is not allowed to graduate law school), but for the betterment of their country as a whole. Another point that shines through in Alvarez’s version of the Mirabal sister’s lives is her portrayal of traditional Caribbean and Latin American wives and mothers as sexually repressed women who enable the tradition of marital infidelity as a suitable practice for men. Mother Mirabal finds out that her husband is having an affair long before her daughters learn of the situation. To cope with her sense of loss from the adultery she makes a religious pilgrimage to a location where there had been sightings of the Virgin Mary, stating, “We

women in the family need the Virgencita's help" (55); however, she remains silent on the affair throughout the novel. Sex that is not intended for procreation is not allowed by the Catholic Church. A good Catholic wife has sex to procreate. Her husband then eventually strays, and she asks the Virgin Mary to help her cope. This is a classic example of how machismo is even integrated into religious thought in the culture. Women outside of the home, prostitutes or girlfriends, are allowed to enjoy sex by virtue of their social location. Men prove their manhood by controlling women, so that even men of power and high status must continually seek out new women to conquer.

An overriding theme presented in *In the Time of the Butterflies* is women's imprisonment, both literal and figurative, contrasted with men's freedom, be it sexual or otherwise, constituted through their degree of participation in the macho culture. The result, unfortunately, is that women are restricted and harmed whether or not they choose to submit to machista ways. *In the Time of the Butterflies* implies that Trujillo eventually grew tired of Minerva Mirabal and her evasions of his desire. He did all he could to make her back down, not letting her graduate with her law degree, and the egregious act, sending her father to prison where he eventually dies of a heart attack. If her father's death in prison and the imprisonment of the Butterflies as well as their husbands was not enough to bring Minerva down, then she had to be permanently silenced through death.

As outlined in this section, Alvarez's novel's focus on the Mirabal sisters does not highlight the shortcomings of being gendered as traditional wives and mothers, but rather focuses on how the Butterflies' form of political activism was a feminist act of contestation to the dictatorship, patriarchy and machismo. Though only loosely based on the autobiographies of the Mirabal sisters, the novel that Julia Alvarez has created is one

that expresses the struggle of women living in a traditional culture of machismo. In the novel, the Butterflies position themselves in accordance with feminist ideals but maintain domesticity as married women with children. The Butterflies do not subscribe to a form of feminism that rejects these roles. Working within a culture of machismo, the sisters grapple with questions ranging from the quotidian to the deeply philosophical, ranging from the right to wear pants instead of dresses, to religious faith, marital infidelity and access to postsecondary education for women. Minerva, for example, petitions Trujillo for entrance into law school. While he allows her to study law, he does not allow her to graduate and become a lawyer. She had appealed to his vanity for praise and glory when she said to him, “you gave women the vote in 42’. You encouraged the founding of the women’s branch of the Dominican party. You’ve always been an advocate for women” to which Trujillo responds, “That I have,” only to turn his interest in Minerva back to his sexual conquest, calling her a national treasure and stating, “Perhaps, I could conquer this jewel [Minerva] as El Conquistador conquered our island” (98-99). Reminding us that women are objects of desire and only hold interest for sexual pleasure, Alvarez’s Trujillo is markedly not pro-woman. Trujillo is the stand-in for the ultimate macho. Minerva is trapped by him and can only reach her goals if she submits to him. She refuses.

The Butterflies were second wave proto-feminists. They were wives and mothers, but due to their position of living under an omniscient, paternal dictatorship, their plight was urgent and compelling, forcing them to remove themselves from their domestic zones of comfort, for better or worse, and to stand up against oppression for all people of their nation. Their specific feminist goals such as Minerva’s desire to become a lawyer, were subsumed under a universal desire for freedom. Instead of focusing on women’s

rights alone, they focused on the more urgent needs of the nation. Alvarez will never have an answer to her question as to what gave the Mirabal sisters' special courage, yet her novel does open up a space for the discussion on the complex role that women play in directing the course of their lives and influencing change. The legend of the Butterflies in the regard, is an extremely positive one.

In the Time of the Butterflies shows that feminism is a multifaceted practice. One that all women, even those embedded in traditional roles or wives and mothers, can embrace. Alvarez's novel is the only literary work that tells a version of the Mirabal sisters' story as reimagined by a woman writer. Defining these two points—the feminist practices and tactics of the Mirabal sisters within a traditional society for women, and the authorship of the novel by a Dominican-American transnational woman writer—grounds my argument that Alvarez's novel has reinserted women's experiences and voices back into the discourse of the *Trujillato* (or Trujillo era), shedding light on a moment of change in a Dominican society fraught with machismo and rigid gender roles for men and women.

2.5 CONCLUSION: NEGATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF CARIBBEAN GENDERED AND ETHNIC IDENTITIES

In this chapter, I have shown how these two authors challenge the negative constructions of Caribbean women and exclusionary definitions of ethnic identities. I have demonstrated that the novels intersect historically and culturally with one another since, although they do not 'dialogue' directly, they are fictional recreations of real events showcasing women's experiences in the 20th century dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. My close readings of these two novels show how a spatialized conceptualization

of Caribbean identities that takes into account gender and ethnicity can be linked, in turn, to the ongoing sociopolitical and cultural changes and struggles of Caribbean peoples as well as migrant workers and migrants in the diaspora in the United States. My close readings focused on a spatial and feminist interpretation of specific passages that showing how they add a different perspectives and experiences (often left out or ignored) in a predominantly masculinist discourse of the Caribbean.

Danticat and Alvarez rewrite the history of their homelands in *The Farming of Bones* and *In the Time of Butterflies* as in a compelling and interesting way where gendered and ethicized Caribbean identities, familial ties and intimate relationships are at the core of each novel's plotline, made historical by the frame of the Trujillo regime, evoked in references to the Parsley Massacre and the murder of the Mirabal sisters. The novels examine and retell these two significant historical events in part as globalized cultural imaginaries and in part as national memories. The transnational migrant authors carry out three primary functions through their writing. First, they give voice to women's untold stories. Second, they pay homage to their ancestral homeland through storytelling from a space of migrancy, in a sense, reclaiming what they have lost as migrants and showcasing what they have gained through the power of storytelling. Third, they effectively share their stories on an international scale by make their homeland's history accessible to a world-wide readership by writing and publishing in English. The success of both novels is evidenced in Danticat's novel winning the American Book Award (1999), and Alvarez's being made into a film for the Showtime channel (2001).

Why do Danticat and Alvarez, as migrant writers, use the historical novel to critique the nation? On the one hand, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is useful to

conceptualize the spatial link to national identity. For Anderson, national identity is expressed through cultural attachments and a sense of belonging to a specific place and sense of time. This belonging is linked to affect and is not limited to the space where one resides. On the other hand, Anderson excludes women from the public sphere in his affirmation of comradeship and fraternity. Anderson claims that nations or imagined communities “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is the fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (7). Because both novels describe the lives of their protagonists as being under the assault of the Trujillo regime. This dictatorship is expressed as damaging to the island of Hispaniola and its inhabitants as a whole, but also damaging in the discrimination against Haitians and women. These two identities, one ethnic and the other gendered, are not part of the idea of the nation because they are viewed as inferior to Trujillo’s national identity (white and male). This is related to the intertwining of gender and nation that Danticat especially highlights in her focus on Amabelle and the sugar cane cutters.

The novels critique national identity through non-belonging. This is evidenced by the spatial dynamics in the novel. In the *Farming of the Bones*, the space of non-belonging is exhibited in Haitian’s flight from the Dominican Republic, the Dominican plantation's exploitation of foreign Haitian labor and the Haitian cane-cutter's hopeless migration, and even Amabelle’s eventual return to Haiti to a space that is not her own with Yves, her lost fiancé’s former cane cutting hut-mate, and his mother. At the end of the novel, twenty-four years after returning to her nation as a survivor of the Parsley Massacre, Amabelle

reflects on her life and her negative sense of self through memory and space, “I couldn’t escape myself because I had nowhere else to go. I didn’t have the strength to travel in search of distant relations...I didn’t even know if they would recognize me if they saw me” (270). Amabelle’s lack of desire illustrates the impossibility of setting forth in search of her relatives. This is counter to her perseverance in her forced journey across the border during the massacre. Since Amabelle refuses to take another journey to find her family, she can only return to the site of her trauma. By expressing that she could not journey in her own country to find herself, because her own family would not know who she was and therefore not care about her, Amabelle justifies her life of loneliness without a husband or a family to call her own. She was able to rebuild a life for herself in Haiti, but not one that allowed her to restore her sense of self and belonging to her homeland after what she lost due to the Parsley Massacre.

The nation is also critiqued through spatial dynamics *In the Time of the Butterflies*. The separation between public and private spheres becomes evident when the Mirabal sisters must live as wives and mothers by day in the private sphere and but by night, they join the realm traditionally reserved for macho men in this secret albeit public sphere. Although they hide their public sphere going “underground” as spies, they are eventually caught, punished and imprisoned, and then erased from the national space when they are murdered and their vehicle is driven off a cliff to make it appear that it was an accident. Even the surviving sister, Dedé, refuses to believe that her sister’s deaths enacted change, “I’ll say it once and only and it’s done. Was it for this, the sacrifice of the butterflies? (318). The *this* that Dedé refers to is the critique of the nation, “the free elections, bad presidents now put in power properly, not by army tanks...our country beginning to

prosper” an evocation that ends with a description that critiques the Dominican Republic’s current status as a Caribbean tourist attraction, a negative version of the construction of Caribbean identity based on its geography as an island: “the coast a clutter of clubs and resorts. We are now the playground of the Caribbean, who were once its killing fields” (318). Although she spends her entire life memorializing her sisters, in the end, Dedé does not believe that their deaths changed anything in the Dominican Republic. *In the Time of the Butterflies* the Mirabal sisters do confront Trujillo. Yet their story ends in their defeat. The Mirabal sisters fight to the death against the Trujillo regime and end up murdered. Later, when the circumstance of their murders are revealed to the Dominican public, they become martyrs and national heroines for their efforts to bring down the Trujillo regime.

The novels are about women’s lives in the midst of social injustices and upheavals, conflict and physical violence resulting from persecution from alignment or commitment to one’s imagined community. They illustrate the negativity of the state and in doing so, also highlight the negative constructions of identity for women and ethnic minorities. The novels detail women’s ways of both coping with and intervening in the tragic events in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Both novels explore human suffering while questioning what, if anything, is the value of living a life marked by violence and solitude with only glimpses of happiness embedded in loneliness and loss.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT WOMEN'S SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN NON-FICTION:

EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S *CREATE DANGEROUSLY* AND JULIA ALVAREZ'S *A WEDDING IN HAITI*

If the first two chapters of this dissertation have examined how Danticat and Alvarez explore their lived and ancestral experiences through literary means, this final chapter looks at how the authors integrate social activism in non-fiction and social media into their literary careers. Both authors write in varying genres of literature ranging from the novels studied in this dissertation to collections of short stories, poetry, juvenile literature and even illustrated children's books. Their literary personae transcend the pages of their books as Danticat has acted in films and Alvarez's *In the Time of Butterflies* was adapted into a film for the Showtime television network (2001)³. Both make public speeches and appearances in the US and in Haiti and in the Dominican Republic to support migrant causes as well. They have appeared together on numerous occasions for interviews and book readings and even co-authored op-ed pieces in US newspapers. Danticat's and Alvarez's work as writers sets the stage for their activism to explore how their nonfiction work uniquely addresses and frames issues concerning the peoples of Haitian and Dominican diaspora in the US and homelands.

³ Danticat has written, narrated or acted in a number of documentaries and films. See *Beloved* (1998) *Poto Mitan* (2009), *Stones in the Sun* (2012) and *Girl Rising: Haiti* (2013)

This chapter culminates the triad examined in this dissertation. The first two chapters have outlined the migrant woman's *Bildungsroman* or coming of age novel in a third space and the multiplicity of Caribbean identities through the lenses of gender and ethnicity in a spatialized examination of historical fiction novel. In this chapter I focus on one book by each author, Danticat's *Create Dangerously* and Alvarez's *A Wedding in Haiti*, and also in relation to examples of each author's self-disclosures (posts) via social media (Facebook) as a vehicle for the promotion of their social justice initiatives, which I characterize as a form of consumable media, another type of non-fiction for their English language readership and global fan base. The consideration of transcultural spatial dynamics in both types of non-fiction (books) and (social media) reveals the connections these authors share with other writers, activists and their English-language readership, and creates another type of third space in 'cyber space,' a seemingly infinite transnational and supra-national network. My interest in these writers' cyber- and social media use seeks to understand how cyberspaces can have an effect on material space.

In recent years, the explosion of social media on the internet has evolved into a welcoming but untraceable space that is challenging to map. Social media is prismatic, offering a seemingly endless array of paths to link individuals and groups to those with similar interests. In a 2014 survey of adult Facebook users, the Pew Research Foundation found that 39% of Facebook users (Facebook users comprise 58% of the US adult population) are connected to or 'friends' with people they have never met (Duggan et al. 5). In the act of becoming a Facebook user's 'friend' or 'liking' a Facebook page (expressing a preference to view content from a particular group or individual and also to be connected publicly to the content through one's profile information) the social media

site will then recommend multiple pages that contain similar content. This algorithm developed by Facebook continues to recommend pages from what could be an infinite number of suggestions of pages with similar content. For the users this is far from a passive act, as they still control social media consumption by deciding what they will click on by “liking” or “following” and interacting with the contents of these specific pages and posts (Cheney-Lippold 169). This process allows groups of people with common interests to connect with one another in ‘cyber space’ in a meaningful and communicative way, independently of whether they know one another personally - they can send and receive messages as well as post content and write public comments. Danticat and Alvarez both use Facebook in order to promote their social justice initiatives, to advocate for groups they are aligned with, and also to connect to others with similar interests.

3.1 SOCIAL JUSTICE, TRANSNATIONAL WRITING AND SPACE

In this chapter I discuss *Create Dangerously* and *A Wedding in Haiti* as examples of how novels function in a third space to address concerns of migrant groups in the US and in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Second, I refer to posts from their social media pages to support my claim that they have tapped into a community of readers and fans which serves to further proliferate their messages globally. Their messages’ successful reception in the third space constituted by the internet in social media is evidenced by the numerous respondents/participants who voice support, ask questions and spread these messages on their own social media pages.

The two works of non-fiction that I examine are of interest to Danticat’s and Alvarez’s English-language readership because they reveal the author’s lived experiences

in an open and compelling way. Because both authors have an English-language readership and have proven, through their writing's commercial success, they are able to use their authorial celebrity to promote the causes that mean the most to them: helping migrants in the US and the people of their homelands, including/particularly exploited laborers and undocumented Dominicans of Haitian descent. Both authors provide the historical context for understanding the current situation of their homelands. They explain how Haiti and the Dominican Republic have struggled to recover from corrupt governments, economic declines, environmental degradation and natural disasters that have resulted in widespread poverty and suffering. Both *Create Dangerously* and *A Wedding in Haiti* address these concerns.

3.2 RETURNING FOR HOPE: DANTICAT RESPONDS TO THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2010

EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI

Having established careers as novelists primarily in fiction, Danticat and Alvarez take the risk of writing non-fiction, perhaps because they have become reliable narrators in the eyes of their readership, but moreover because these are issues that they feel must be recorded and shared from their perspective. This is an extension of their work in historical novels which reinserts women into the Caribbean space in ways that open up a critical access on gendered and ethnic perspectives: migrant women's voices will not continue to go undocumented. It is important to note that both Alvarez and Danticat are cautiously hopeful. Their work is marked by this hopefulness in the face of many, many obstacles for the migrants, Haitians and Dominicans who they represent or speak about/on behalf of in their work. This is reflected best in both author's response to the earthquake in Haiti.

Danticat, for example, made it a point to return to Haiti as soon as she possibly could after the earthquake of 2010. In *Create Dangerously* she gives a first person account of what she experiences in Port-au-Prince three weeks after the earthquake. She testifies for the nameless voices of the completely destroyed city streets, translating Kreyòl to English so that English-language readers have non-media influenced (i.e. not sensationalized) source of information. A woman cries out “Call on Jesus! He is all we have left (165)!” and a man in complete despair reflects, “We are nothing ... Look at this, [the rubble and body parts in the streets] we are nothing” (165)! Why did Danticat return to her ancestral homeland after the earthquake? She first explains that she wanted to see her country and visit her family members, but she has also come to find hope in the midst of the tragedy. She shares a moment of laughter with Haitian family members and explains, “Their laughter fills me with more hope than the moment deserves. But this is really all I have come for. I have come to embrace them, the living, and I have come to honor the dead” (168). Her family members do want her to help them. Danticat doubts if she can, “I have sometimes [in the past] succeed in helping, but mostly I have failed. Case in point: my elderly uncle died trying to enter the United States. I could not save him” (169). Here, Danticat refers to the situation where her uncle, a priest from Haiti, died in Miami while detained by US immigration. According to official reports, he died because was denied medication. Her memoir, *Brother I’m Dying* recounts the entire story of the gentle man who had raised her and her brother for a number of years in Haiti while her parents ‘made a new life’ as immigrants in New York. By highlighting her failure to protect her uncle, she seeks to enlist readers’ sympathies and activism toward the hardships that migrants face in the US. She is signaling the problems of US policies

regarding Haitians, Haitian refugees and immigrants. Danticat's writing in *Create Dangerously* is powerful and selfless. She ends the memoir by reminding the reader about her hopes and fears for her nation and the collaboration between the US and Haiti. Her description of the ongoing cultural interactions in the transatlantic space she views from the air as she departs Haiti brings this into clear focus:

As we take off, I look down at the harbor where a U.S military helicopter is flying between Toussaint L'Ouverture Airport and the USNS Comfort medical ship anchored just outside Port-au-Prince harbor. Further out to sea are U.S Coast Guard ships, whose primary purpose is to make sure that Haitians are intercepted if they try to get on boats and head to the United States. (173)

This space here is imbued with a high degree of cultural meaning, the welcome and the unwelcome. US interests are welcome to enter Haiti, but Haitians are not welcome to enter the US. The description of this space encompasses locations that convey the contradictory relations in the relations between US institutions and Haitians. Danticat does not need to explain why this is troubling. With the millions of dollars being donated to Haiti for earthquake relief, there is still a clear message from the US government that Haitians are unwelcome in the US. Much like Danticat's uncle, who fled Haiti looking for asylum because of death threats, victims of the earthquake were facing a death threat too- and this passage was written by Danticat before the cholera epidemic that ensued in the following months, taking thousands more lives and destroying much of the farm land by infesting it with bacteria laden-waters unsuitable for growing rice. In the postscript titled "A Year and a Day [After the Earthquake]" Danticat reflects on how cholera

disrupted the final rites as “People cannot touch a loved one who has died of cholera” (177). She asks why this suffering and human indignation must continue, “In the precarious dance for survival, in which we long to honor the dead while still harboring the fear of joining them, will our rivers and streams even be trusted to shelter and return souls” (177)? She answers her own question by explaining that there is, “the possibility of their [deceased Haitians] and our communal rebirth” (177). Beckoning to the Vodou belief that the dead are immersed in a body of water for a year and a day after their death and then are reborn, Danticat’s hope for Haiti is that it can, like the dead, be reborn. These are powerful words that evoke images of human suffering and hope in a seemingly hopeless situation. They come from a reliable, trusted source: the author who turned Haiti into a real place in the hearts and minds of her readers with fictional novels like *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and *Farming of Bones*. Her English-language readership has the opportunity to try and comprehend the horrible atrocities as a result of the Haitian earthquake in a way that transcend the US’s media reports- from the voice of an authentic source who indeed has the ability to position herself both in the US and Haiti and provide an honest and reflective testimonial account. This repositions the US-based readers as they realize that their country fosters a (possibly) contradictory policy toward Haiti: “the welcome-unwelcome.”

3.3 ALVAREZ’S JOURNEY ACROSS THE BORDER AS A MEDIA EVENT

In similar fashion, *A Wedding in Haiti* draws the reader into the author’s personal experiences with the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake and the emotional need to return to that space, not for catharsis, but instead to view the country with her own eyes and to

position herself to offer support and help. Like Danticat, Alvarez will later question her own ability to help or do any good, her motives to visit Port-au-Prince:

Something feels unsavory about visiting sites where people have suffered and are still suffering. You tell yourself you are here in solidarity. But at the end of the day, you add it up, and you feel ashamed- at least I do. You haven't improved a damn thing. Natural disaster tourism-that's what it feels like (274-275).

There is no doubting that Alvarez had good intentions on this trip to Haiti. In fact, her first stop is at a hospital called Hopital Sacré Coeur in Milot, a short distance from the city of Cap-Haitien. The hospital is overflowing with wounded earthquake refugees and their families. Alvarez and her husband are touring the site in order to “check out the facilities for a future trip” (182). They plan to return and help at the hospital in the near future. But the primary reason for this trip is to bring her adoptive Haitian family home to see their family. Alvarez has an initial feeling of solidarity with Haiti due to the fact that she and her husband had become close to a Haitian family living in the Dominican Republic at her coffee farm. She now considers this young family to be her “own kids” (179).

It is in part two of her memoir, “Going Home with Piti after the Earthquake” that Alvarez details the trip to Haiti post-earthquake. Upon hearing the news about the earthquake Alvarez reads passages from her journal that she had used to chronicle the first trip she took there in 2009, “I wanted to be close to Haiti [after the earthquake] in an intimate way, not the Haiti blaring all over the news, the Haiti of horrors, the failed

state, the death count rising. I wanted to hear the...laughing” (147). Like Danticat, Alvarez wants a moment of laughter and to find the hope in the tragedy.

Piti is the reason Alvarez has forged a close bond with Haiti. Piti is a Haitian migrant worker who becomes an adoptive son to Alvarez and her husband. They meet him as a boy, already a migrant-worker in the Dominican Republic. They mentor him, they help educate him and become close to him. Eventually (not directly through Alvarez) he is hired by the foreman to work at Alvarez’s coffee farm. It is then that she promises him that she will attend his wedding someday in Haiti. Piti is the groom of *A Wedding in Haiti*. When the earthquake happens five months after the wedding, the second half of the memoir then recounts how Alvarez takes Piti and his wife, Eseline, and their infant daughter, Ludy, back to Haiti in the summer of 2010 (154-157).

Piti and Eseline are from neighboring villages, Moustique and Haut Moustique, respectively. They are remote villages in the northwestern region of Haiti, a twelve hour drive from Alvarez’s coffee farm in the Dominican Republic⁴. The earthquake’s epicenter was Port-au-Prince but all of Haiti was effected. After the earthquake, Piti could not establish communications with his and Eseline’s families who live five hours north of the capital. It took a week for Piti to find out from a friend that his and Eseline’s immediate family members had survived. They did lose family members in other areas (147).

Alvarez discusses the resilience of Haitians in a similar fashion as Danticat does in *Create Dangerously*. Both authors testify to the fact that Haitians remain hopeful in the

⁴ See the map in *A Wedding in Haiti* (138-139) that traces the routes she took on her two separate driving trips from the Dominican Republic to Haiti in 2009 and 2010. In both 2009 and 2010 Alvarez crosses into Haiti in the north at Dájabon on the Massacre River. In 2010 she returns to the Dominican Republic in the south at Jimaní in order to visit the epicenter of the earthquake in Port-au-Prince.

face of tragedy because, what are their choices? Hope or death. Alvarez evokes this concept when she reminds the reader of a woman who was all but dead but days after the quake when she is pulled from the rubble. Her body is broken, bruised and maimed. She is weak and lying on a stretcher “seemingly a corpse” (154). But amazingly, this woman who is clinging to life is doing what Haitians do when their hearts are filled with hope, she is singing. This woman becomes Alvarez’s analogy for post-earthquake Haiti, “It’s as if Haiti *has* made a pact – with hope” (154). This analogy of hope does not overshadow the sorrow and suffering that Haitians endure. Both Danticat and Alvarez understand the dual sense of gratitude for what the earthquake had spared, but grief for the losses.

Alvarez explains:

Those two feelings [gratitude and mourning] were so tightly woven in every Haitian heart, tears of relief could easily double as tears of grief. A sister spared but a cousin killed. A friend maimed but a brother whole. How can the heart encompass it all? (147)

The quote expresses sentiments regarding the precariousness of Haitian lives. In writing about this devastating natural disaster, both Danticat and Alvarez refuse to turn a blind eye to the tragedy but instead try to find a way to understand it on their own terms by experiencing it concretely in Haiti. There, without the influence of the US media, they use their knowledge and understanding of the culture to help those who are suffering and in writing about it in their memoirs, they bring their US-based readers closer to comprehending it as well.

Alvarez embarks on this second journey to Haiti in 2010 for two reasons, to visit the devastated region of Port-au-Prince and to take Piti, Eseline, and their daughter home

for a visit their families. Eseline is suffering from *mal estar* a generalized uneasiness or malaise, which Alvarez translates into home sicknesses. Before the wedding, Eseline had never been apart for her family for an extended amount of time. As a new mother and a new wife living in a new country, she feels lonely being without/far away from her family members and community. The earthquake makes her long to return to her community and visit with her family more pronounced (154-158).

Alvarez takes the arduous journey back into the interior of Haiti first in August of 2009 for the wedding, and then again in 2010 after the earthquake. The post-earthquake trip takes place in July of 2010, five months after the earthquake. She and her husband begin planning the trip months in advance because they want it to go smoothly. On their first trip in 2009, trip they lacked proper legal documentation for their Haitian travelers who turned out to be undocumented. For this second trip in 2010, they also plan to bring provisions to support earthquake victims. The dual purpose of the trip makes it more difficult to plan and carry out (155-158).

A recurring theme in Alvarez's memoir is the difficulty of enacting change in both her native Dominican Republic and Haiti. At the governmental level, there is red tape everywhere, bureaucratic hurdles that must be prepared for in advance but cannot be completely anticipated. This is due to the influence of money and bribes that wield a great deal of power with border crossing officials. The greatest hurdle for Haitians is, of course, not just crossing the border, but arriving safely to their final destination. Alvarez details how roads in the Dominican Republic are lined with many military check points to ensure that Haitians have not entered illegally. She experiences first hand with her Haitians travelers, how Haitians can cross the Dominican border back into Haiti with

little effort, but unless they have all the proper paperwork, they risk being deported if stopped at a Dominican checkpoint. When Alvarez brought Piti and his wife and daughter back to the Dominican Republic after the wedding the summer before, both Eseline and Ludy were undocumented. They had to bribe a Dominican bus driver whose bus did not have to stop at the checkpoints because the majority of travelers were Dominicans, to take the trio by paying him a hefty amount (five times the normal fare for both Eseline and Lucy) back into the Dominican Republic (116-120).

Alvarez's second trip to Haiti in August of 2010 begins with the border crossing that is orchestrated as a media event. Due to the complications of traveling with undocumented Haitians that Alvarez experienced during the first trip, she decides to use her celebrity to make the second trip both completely legal. The trip becomes doubly "documented" since everyone has papers and since it is recorded by media and by Alvarez. She uses her Dominican connections to get support from a *ministro consejero* named Señor Ortiz. Alvarez learns that his job is to help "pesky people like me" (174) and by like me, she means people of influence who need help, not just any Dominican or Dominican-American. Ortiz arranges to have a welcome party escort her to the border (Alvarez, her husband Bill, the Haitian family Piti, Eseline, Ludy, and their Haitian friends, Wilson and Charlie and Mikaela, a student from Middlebury College where Alvarez is a professor and writer in residence). Alvarez is thankful that she had the escort arranged but the fact that the escorts are dressed in full military gear and carrying rifles concerns her, "it's as if we're to be escorted into a war zone, not just into Haiti" (175). The scene at the Dájabon border crossing into Haiti is nothing unusual for a Friday, it is a typical market day with "a river of traffic...handcarts, mule carts, *motores* [cars], people"

(175). Alvarez describes the space as congested, difficult to navigate and ripe with the threat of danger, a can be deduced from the military presence.

When Alvarez and her group meet the welcome party, arranged by the *ministro consejero* there is still a military presence, but also two consul dignitaries from each nation. A reporter from the Santo Domingo newspaper *Hoy*, who no doubt was informed that a famous Dominican-American novelist would be crossing the border into Haiti that morning, asks Alvarez what she has to say about Haiti. Alvarez responds to his question, misquoting José Martí, (1853-1895) a famous Cuban revolutionary and writer stating, “Haiti and the Dominican Republic are the two wings of a bird that can’t fly unless they work together” (177). The inaccuracy in the quote is the mention of the two nations, Martí had originally spoken of Cuba and Puerto Rico. In the moment, Alvarez is not aware of her mistake in quoting Martí but in her memoir she corrects her mistake explaining “I will discover that my memory on half-served me” (Alvarez 177). Yet her statement to the reporter sets the tone for the Haitian and Dominican dignitaries who then elaborate on this metaphor in their responses to the reporter “two wings, two brothers, two nations, one island” (177). Alvarez’s analysis of the rhetoric is simply that it is rhetoric. Alvarez will later learn that the journalist who interviewed her at the border changed her words in his published article in the newspaper *Hoy*, explaining that Alvarez was visiting Haiti to gather facts for a history book she plans to write. Alvarez had told the reporter the truth that she was going to Haiti “to visit the families of some Haitian friends whose wedding she attended last year” (178). This moment redirects Alvarez’s staging of the border crossing to produce a critique of state rhetoric and of the state’s use of media. At the same time, with their focus on unity, the speeches that make the media

moment contrast sharply with all the hardships the journey as a concrete experience of how the Dominican state really functions.

3.4 SPATIAL AND ETHNIC TENSIONS: UNGRIEVABLE LIVES

The social, economic and political problems between Haiti and the Dominican Republic cannot be summarized easily, but the ongoing tensions between Haitians and Dominicans are expressed in terms the prism of space and ethnicity. The space on one side of the island is devoid of economic resources and people by Haitians, who, as descendants of Africans, not a mixed ancestry like their neighbors in the Dominican Republic (who are a mixture of many ethnicities, including Africans). The other side of the island is peopled by less dark-skinned people and has more resources, but still poor economic conditions. To illuminate the discord between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and the United States' involvement in these ongoing issues, I first give an overview of the economic and political problems, then return to the question of ethnicity and belonging.

In the preface to *Why the Cocks Fight*, Wucker sums up the social and economic positions of Haitians as a continual spatial migration, a “Massive flow of poor hungry immigrants from one of the world’s most impoverished nations, Haiti, to a country that is not much better off [the Dominican Republic]” (xii). Though the issues confronting Haiti and the Dominican Republic are deeply ingrained in their shared histories, the present struggle continue to be waged regarding resources, jobs to earn money, to secure food, to survive. Wucker explains that the US has always been involved in the Haitian-Dominican situation:

Our [the United States'] relationship with the island [Hispaniola] has helped shape the conditions that have resulted in violence and underdevelopment there, and thus the stream of immigrants heading to our shores today. We have invaded each country twice during this [the 20th] century (Haiti in 1915 and 1994, Santo Domingo [The Dominican Republic] in 1916 and 1965). As struggles on Hispaniola continue, Dominicans and Haitians flee in search of political and economic security. (Wucker xii)

She uses spatial dynamics to outline her argument related to the invasions positioning them against the flight or act of migration to the United States. Wucker explains how the presence of the US in both countries negatively framed the United States as the nation that would solve their problems and did not, resulting in a false promise. And while the US did not solve any problems, it did let Haitians and Dominicans in on a little secret—that the northern country that has invaded ours is wealthier and would likely offer more economic opportunities. In the US there is wealth and prosperity, and therefore space for migrants.

The proximity of the United States to Haiti and the Dominican Republic as a wealthy neighboring country makes it a utopia in some regards, an imagined site for those seeking a better life in place where resources are plentiful. But migrants from both Haiti and the Dominican Republic are not welcome nor well received in the United States, for the same reasons that Haitians are not well received in the Dominican Republic: they are perceived to be taking economic opportunities or jobs away from citizens. As Wucker aptly notes, since the migrants are not qualified to fill the high-

paying or even blue collar positions that Dominicans and Americans want, they instead seek employment in jobs that are unsuitable for citizens, such as sugar cane cutting in the Dominican Republic and in the United States, hard manual labor such as farm work and behind-the-scenes service industry jobs (janitorial workers, restaurant dish-washers, etc.) (Wucker xii). Anti-immigrant sentiment in both countries can be understood more accurately in light of / as tensions stemming from uneasiness toward ethnic minorities.

In the US, refugees and migrant communities are categorized as racially different from white US citizens and often their presence is only brought into American homes through the media with reports and images of violence and death, “footage of immigrants selling drugs or rioting...boat people braving sharks and waves to cross” (Wucker xi). There are also instances of media interest in situations where families are torn apart, as was the case with Cuban child refugee Elián Gonzalez in 1999. His mother died on the journey to the United States and his US family, with support of the US government, initially kept him from returning to his father in Cuba.⁵ The media perpetuates the myth that Haitian and Dominican migrants are violent and therefore lesser human beings than white US citizens, for example in its portrayal of Haitians as ‘boat people’ refugees that the US Coast Guard must intercept in the Atlantic, not allowing them to set foot in US space.⁶ Likewise, Dominicans who have already arrived undocumented or documented are portrayed as trouble-makers, violent drug dealers and rioters.

⁵ For a summary of the Gonzalez case see Siegelbaum “Elián Gonzalez: 15 Years After His Rescue: A Quiet Life” Web. 25 Nov 2014.

⁶ See US Department of State: Cuba. It is of interest to note the Cold-War inflected US policy toward Cuban refugees differentiates between the mode of entry (and therefore, the economic means) in determining their legal status: if they set foot on land, they are legally allowed to enter the United States, but if they are intercepted in transit by the US Coast Guard, they are returned to Cuba. This policy is referred to as “The Wet-Foot Dry-Foot Policy.”

In terms of Judith Butler's conceptualization, these refugees and migrants are not grievable lives, people whose lives matter, who would be memorialized in some way by the community if they were to perish. This distinction that Butler forms of lives that are either grievable or ungrivable is based in the idea of nation, community and personal responsibility. Butler explains that the sentiment toward people as grievable develops due to a sense of responsibility toward those who are outwardly recognizable as belonging to their community. If an individual identifies with another person on the basis of sharing the same nation, territory or culture, they believe themselves responsible for that other person who they envision as belonging through the same identifying factors that are at the root of their concept of the nation (Butler 36).

With this frame of grievable and ungrivable lives in mind, I turn to the response of Dominicans and US citizens after 2010 earthquake in Haiti. In this scenario, I try to understand why, if Haitian lives are ungrivable, why did Dominicans and US citizens show an outpouring of financial support for Haitians? Was it because the scale of the disaster was so large that they felt inclined to act? What propelled them to do so? In the US, was this because of the media spectacle that showed contrasting images of destruction and suffering with special programming featuring Hollywood movie stars and other famous people coming out publicly and in droves to appeal to the American public to send their American dollars to Haiti? Was it because in both nations, Dominicans and US citizens felt that it was morally, 'the right thing to do'? How did the way US citizens treat ethnic migrants from the Caribbean, and how Dominicans treat Haitians under 'normal' circumstances transform these Haitian lives into grievable lives in the face of a natural disaster?

One reason could be that it is much more comfortable to delocalize suffering than to recognize it around you. This delocalization of suffering could be interpreted as an effect of the altruism toward Haiti. I beckon back to Danticat's observation of space from her plane departing Port-au-Prince after visiting her family in friends post-earthquake:

As we take off, I look down at the harbor where a U.S military helicopter is flying between Toussaint L'Ouverture Airport and the USNS Comfort medical ship anchored just outside Port-au-Prince harbor. Further out to sea are U.S Coast Guard ships, whose primary purpose is to make sure that Haitians are intercepted if they try to get on boats and head to the United States. (173)

The idea of grievability of lives is connected to community. Haitians were still unwelcome in the United States as evidenced by Danticat's visualization of the US Coast Guard ships ensuring that no Haitians would make landfall in the US. Yet Danticat also viewed the US ship docked at Port-au-Prince, a floating hospital full of provisions. The division is decidedly spatial, announcing loud and clear, "You, Haitians, are part of the human race. We recognize you with our donations and hopes for your speedy recover, but you are not welcome in our nations, in our space, because you do not belong here." Dominicans echoed the same sentiment to their neighbor, we will help you, but you are not welcome here.

3.5 DANTICAT'S SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES

Create Dangerously is about fearlessly "writing as though nothing can or will ever stop you" (149). It is about creating a space for words and action in the face of adversity. Danticat's commitment to this task as a writer is evident not only in *Create*

Dangerously but in the entire corpus of her writing. She is driven to do this because she believes in enacting the subtitle of her memoir “[I am] the immigrant artist at work.” The “I am” inserted into the subtitle is actually a “we are” because Danticat speaks out for others as part of a Haitian collective. Danticat reflects on the difficult task she is often given, to be the spokesperson for Haiti. For example, she expresses what she believed to be her role as a Haitian-American immigrant artist when she was asked to write and speak on behalf of the Haitian diaspora reacting to the January 12, 2010 earthquake. She recalls that her purpose as an immigrant writer in that moment was, “to be an echo chamber, gathering and then replaying voices from both the distant and the local devastation” (159). The concept of an echo chamber is an interesting modality to qualify this space- an echo chamber has multiple definitions, it is both a real space “a room designed with sound reflecting walls used for producing hollowing or echoing sound effect” (Merriam-Webster) and also a negative metaphor used in media and politics when people are not engaging with a concept or idea, but simply repeating each other’s ideas, thus distancing themselves from other viewpoints (Clark and Van Slyke 5-6). For Danticat the echo chamber is a neither of these definitions, but rather a transformative space as it allows her to position herself as the voice for the collective Haitian diaspora, taking into consideration a multiplicity of views, positioning herself as one who can hear, interpret and speak on behalf of others . The idea of being a spokesperson for the disenfranchised was also illuminated in her writing about the cane-cutters in *The Farming of Bones*. Danticat has always written as if she were a member of something bigger than herself, the collective character of Haiti and Haitian-Americans.

Because *Create Dangerously* is a collection of essays that Danticat wrote over the years for various lectures and conferences, it covers an immense amount of Haitian history and stories about Haitian artists and immigrants. Consisting of twelve chapters and a postscript, each chapter covers a distinct topic concerning Haiti, always linking the discussion back to the role of the artist fighting for Haiti in some form. Chapter one sets the tone for the book, by introducing what Danticat calls a “creation myth.” The myth is a real story of two Haitian men, Marcel Duma, age 21, and Louis Drounin age 31, who return to Haiti in 1964 after over a decade of migrancy (political exile in the United States). They return to Haiti in an attempt to topple the François “Papa Doc” Duvalier dictatorship but are caught and executed publically. Danticat remembers their execution as a creation myth because it haunts her. She does not remember when she heard the story, but feels she has always known about it “Like most creation myths, this one too exists beyond the scope of my own life, yet is still feels present, ever urgent” (7). This urgency rings throughout the first chapter and the entirety of the text, as Danticat reaffirms her stance that creating endures and is more urgent “when both the creation and the reception, the writing and the reading, are dangerous undertakings, disobedience to a directive” (11). Perhaps Marcel Duma and Louis Drounin were grievable to Haitians, who were told by Duvalier that they were not. He told Haitians that these men were *blan*⁷ or foreigners, not worthy of living, not grievable in death. Within Danticat’s echo chamber is this creation myth in the background, and it is a strong foundation of belief in

⁷ The literal meaning of *blan* in Kreyòl is white. However the culturally definition when a person is referred to as *blan*, means they are a foreigner. Black Haitian-Americans who return to Haiti are considered *blan*. See Smart-Bell’s (2013) piece in *The Nation* for further reading.

her ability to be a messenger, but moreover, the power of words and actions to enact change.

Danticat has created a space for herself as a writer and activist in print. Having created a space as a writer in print, it is fitting that Danticat's uses her author page on the social media website Facebook, to continue this practice in cyberspace. Her Facebook page has over forty thousand followers and that number is growing⁸. The timeline, or main page, shows her most recent activity. The archive of her activity from the time she created the page in 2008 is also available for viewing via the timeline. Danticat's Facebook timeline is regularly updated and contains three main categories of posts, announcements of public appearances, comments and announcements, and direct links to collaborative social justice initiatives.⁹

The first category of posts announces Danticat's public appearances, inviting her Facebook followers to attend events in person. Typically the speaking engagements consist of Danticat giving a talk on one of her books, or an issue related to social activism such as the situation of? Haitian refugees or the Haitian diaspora in the US. Danticat also continues to speak publicly about the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Facebook followers frequently have the option of viewing her appearances via live streaming technology online. These live streaming events often allow viewers to submit questions for Danticat in advance of, or even during the event via email or live messaging

⁸ See Danticat's Facebook page. It is officially maintained by her publisher, Vintage Books. However, I have asked Danticat questions via the Facebook messaging tool, to which she has responded to me personally, even offering me her personal email address. This evidences the fact that Danticat does access her page.

⁹ All three categories of posts are connected to Danticat's work as an immigrant artist supporting social justice initiatives, but the third category is unique in that it exposes Danticat's support of these groups and initiatives as activists. These posts are generally not related to her formal publishing career with Vintage Books.

features¹⁰. Other talks are recorded and available on websites for viewers to access at a later date, such as Danticat's TED Talk from January of 2010 (Danticat, Ted Talk 2010).

Because Danticat's followers can connect with her in both a physical space and in cyber space, the ability to connect on multiple platforms enhances the possibility that her writing and support of social justice initiatives will reach more global readers and enable a higher degree of exposure of her work and support of homeland, migrant and diasporic causes. In the first category of public appearances, she often shares the stage with other authors and activists. In April of 2015, Danticat spoke at a town hall meeting and fundraiser in Miami hosted by the US based Institute for Justice and Democracy for Haiti and their partner organization in Haiti, Bureau des Avocats Internationaux (International Advocates Bureau). They work together in conjunction with grassroots organizations to pursue legal action against human rights violations in Haiti and the US. For this particular event, Danticat shared the forum stage with Haitian priest, activist and former government official, minister of Haitians living abroad Edwin Paraison. He is the founder of the Zile foundation based in Santo Domingo which strives to improve Haitian-Dominican relationships in the Dominican Republic and in the US (Danticat's Facebook Page 3 Apr. 2015).

Danticat participates in public appearances which support Haitian-American heritage and the arts. She authored the libretto for Haitian-American oratorio and monodrama called *Anacaona: The Golden Flower Songs* which premiered in March of

¹⁰ I have attended several of these events virtually and have been able to ask Danticat questions about her work directly, for example, during Book Talk Nation's event on August 14 2013 I asked Danticat if she considered her novels to be feminist. Her response was "All my novels are feminist novels."

2015 at Emory University's Schwartz Center for Performing Arts in Atlanta¹¹. The project was funded by the university and various donors including a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's *Creation Stories Project*. Haitian vocalist Emeline Michel performed the piece which was composed by Haitian-American violinist and composer Daniel Bernard Roumain. After the performance, Danticat, Michel and Roumain spoke to attendees during a talk-back and reception (Emory Arts).

Danticat also collaborates with other migrant writers and activists at book related speaking events. In October of 2012 she and Salman Rushdie spoke to high school students about their latest work for the Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92 Street Y in New York (Danticat's Facebook Page 27 Oct. 2012). Danticat has collaborated publicly with Julia Alvarez on a number of occasions, including on National Public Radio's Tell Me More program. This nationally broadcast interview featured a conversation between Danticat and Alvarez about the seventy-fifth anniversary of The Parsley Massacre which occurred on the Dominican side of the border of the Massacre River. In this interview, Danticat connects themes from her writing such as *The Farming of the Bones*' concern for this historical and current situation of sugar cane workers, to the ongoing human rights issues of undocumented, stateless Haitians living in the Dominican Republic:

The fact that people [Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian ancestry] can be in the Dominican Republic for generations and not get a birth certificate and they can't go to school and all, these things that are sort of part of the current migration, so the history sort of overshadows the present... which

¹¹ See Danticat's children's book called *Anacaona: Golden Flower: Haiti: 1490* which tells the story of Anacaona, a Taino Queen famous for her songs and poetry who lived during the European conquest of the island of Hispaniola.

is why it's so important when people come together to talk about the past...to talk about how we can create a different future with what we know of the past. (Alvarez and Danticat)

The interview sought to bring awareness about the history of human rights violations and the continued contemporary struggles of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian ancestry living in the Dominican Republic. Little did Danticat (or Alvarez) know, that less than a year after this interview in September of 2013, the Dominican Republic's Constitutional Court would pass legislation ruling hundreds of thousands of Haitian-Dominicans stateless, stripping them of their citizenship if they could not provide evidence that their family had established roots in the country before 1929. After this ruling, Danticat and Alvarez continued their collaborative efforts to make the international community aware of this situation, speaking publicly and writing op-ed pieces in major US newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Miami Herald* and *The Los Angeles Times*.

Danticat's second category of posts on Facebook are comments and announcements which are also often related to her work as an activist. Her comments will often feature a quote from one of her writings or the writing of another author. In an April 30 2015 post, she types a comment and then the poem "Coping" by Audre Lorde: "Grateful for Audre Lorde today as I discuss both Baltimore and Nepal with some very young people via this beautiful poem [Coping]" (Danticat's Facebook Page 30 Apr. 2015). By evoking a message from another Caribbean-American immigrant artist and activist, Audre Lorde (1934-1992), Danticat connects her ancestral space with her space of migration, addressing issues facing people of color who protested against police

brutality in the April 19 2015 death of Freddie Gray, a twenty-five year old African American man who was arrested by Baltimore police and later suffered injuries while in police custody that would result in his death a week later. In the same statement, she expresses solidarity with the 2015 Nepali earthquake victims. Many Haitians, including Danticat, have expressed an outpouring of support for Nepal in the aftermath of the quake. Danticat has not distanced herself from Haiti's own natural disaster. Commenting on the five year anniversary of the 2010 Haitian earthquake, Danticat post resonates with the way she uses social media to impact her global followers: "So today both in Haiti and in the diaspora, our multidimensional heartbreak continues...But we all in our own way are trying to honor both the living and the dead" (Danticat's Facebook Page 10 Jan. 2015).

In her announcements, Danticat also updates her followers about her career by sharing information regarding her publications in other mediums, for example, forthcoming or recently published books, op-ed pieces, short stories and announcements regarding films in which she appears as subject expert or actor. These posts are often a hybrid of a comment and an announcement, such as this post from October 21, 2014:

I want to thank each and every one of you for your kind words of sympathy [for the death of her mother Rose Danticat on October 2 2014] here and elsewhere. My family and I are deeply grateful for them. Now, a bit of good news. Today, *Brother, I'm Dying*, became the first nonfiction book to join the National Endowment for the Arts' Big Read program, which supports organizations across the country in developing

community-wide programs to encourage reading and overall literacy for diverse audiences. (Danticat's Facebook Page 21 Oct. 2014)

This particular post shares a link to the National Endowment for the Art's Big Read program, featuring *Brother I'm Dying*. Posts like this one, regarding her publications, are often directly linked to other websites where the follower can learn more information or read what she has recently written or order her books online. One particular book post was of interest as it bridged both publicity and fundraising. Her page featured a post with no comment, simply the link to the article about her illustrated book for children age four to seven called *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti*.¹² The book chronicles the story of a seven-year old boy trapped beneath his house in Port-au-Prince after the 2010 earthquake. The focus of the post however, was the news that the book's publisher, Scholastic, planned to donate \$10,000 to earthquake victims to the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Danticat returned to Port-au-Prince in September of 2010 and had the opportunity to read her new book to orphaned child survivors of the earthquake. The reading took place at an IRC 'children's space' designed to be a safe zone where children participate in educational programs. Danticat authored a touching photo-essay about this trip to visit Haitian children affected by the earthquake that was published on the Huffington Post website. Scholastic, also plans to distribute free, Kreyòl versions of her book to children in Haiti (Danticat Huffington Post).

Danticat's struggle for change positions her both as author and Haitian-American citizen. Since many of Danticat's posts are directly related to the themes of *Create*

¹² The link to this particular article is broken, no longer available at the Macon.com website. The Facebook page still retains the original segment of the post which is where I gathered the information referenced.

Dangerously, they bear witness to/document those themes. Danticat spoke out in late 2014 in an editorial piece in the *New Yorker* about policy brutality in the United States called “Enough is Enough” (Danticat *New Yorker*) and in an op-ed piece written in 2012 called “Detention is No Holiday” she addressed an upcoming Congressional hearing on immigration detention policies in the US, critiquing proposed reforms and beckoning back to the story of immigrants who suffered serious physical ailments or died in detention, including her uncle who died in immigration detention in Miami in 2004. In this piece she also recounts her testimony at a Congressional hearing on immigration detention laws in 2007 where she spoke about her uncle’s death. In another post, Danticat spreads the word of a co-authored op-ed piece that first appeared in the *New York Times* and later in the *Los Angeles Times*. The piece warns about the dangers of ethnic and racial discrimination policies enacted at a governmental level, specifically critiquing the lack of international response to the Dominican Republic’s stripping their citizenship from Dominicans of Haitian ancestry. The law affects any immigrant of Haitian descent who arrived in Haiti after 1929. It is of interest to note that this law is another example of how the government of the Dominican Republic seeks to erase Haitians from their nation. The fact that the law is retroactive to 1929 seeks to further erase the atrocities of the Parsley Massacre which took in 1937 (Kurlansky et al.).

Danticat (and Díaz) have been writing on the topic of Haitian rights in the Dominican Republic since 1999 when they published an opinion piece in the *New York Times* called “Dominicans’ War on Haitian Workers” (*New York Times* 20 Nov. 1999). Danticat explores this theme in her novels, especially *The Farming of Bones*. The quantity, breadth and depth of this second category of posts illuminates how Danticat’s

work as an immigrant artist is extremely active and prolific, evidencing a pattern of activism on these issues and her collaboration with other migrant and American artists.

The third and final category of posts are what I call her ‘direct links to social justice initiatives.’ These posts are often links that she posts about content she has written (or appeared in) as an activist. The difference between this third category and the first and second categories of posts is that she links directly to content that she has authored on behalf of the organization, or simply in support of the organization. Unlike the first and second categories, these posts are generally not connected to her formal publishing career. These are ‘spread the word’ posts that enable her followers to stay connected to current social justice initiatives in Haiti and the US. Too numerous to document in their entirety, these posts focus on a range of social justice initiatives that Danticat supports in Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the US Haitian diaspora. For example, a post from September 29 2010 links to a fundraiser for an organization based in Brooklyn, NY called “Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees.”¹³ (Danticat’s Facebook Page 29 Sept. 2010) Another post links to buildon.org, a foundation that builds schools in Haiti and all over the world. Danticat wrote a blog post for this organization and supported fund raising (Danticat’s Facebook Page 9 Sept. 2012). Danticat also shares direct links that are messages promoting other social justice issues. She reposted a message expressing solidarity for Nepal from Haiti in light of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. This post was originally from a blog authored by Louino Robillard, a Haitian activist (Danticat’s Facebook Page 30 Apr. 2015). One more example, which I will return to in my

¹³ Danticat migrated from Port-au-Prince to the Haitian neighborhood called East Flatbush in Brooklyn, New York, when she was twelve years old. She currently resides in Miami but makes frequent visits to New York City.

discussion of Alvarez's social justice initiatives, is her sharing of the information about the organization *Border of Lights* which was established to memorialize the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Parsley Massacre in October 2012. Danticat voiced her support for this organization on Facebook and also shared a personal story of her ancestral connection to the massacre on the Border of Lights website (Border of Lights).

When examined in their entirety, these three different categories of social media posts show how Danticat uses cyber space to not only promote her career as a writer, but more importantly, to link the themes of her writing with the lived experiences of Haitians and the Haitian migrant community in the US. The ability to share information through social media enables Danticat to reach more followers and readers than traditional methods of print publication because cyberspace is also instrumental to social transformation on a global scale. For this reason I argue that social transformation is occurring in both cyberspace and in concrete (material) space. This spatial repositioning of social transformation is complementary to the type of social justice initiatives that Danticat explores in her writing and as an activist. Reaching an audience through print and cyberspace enables Danticat to reach more global readers.

During the initial phase of writing this dissertation my interest was sparked as much by cyberspace's capacity to transform concrete space, as by Danticat and Alvarez' use of social media to speak out on behalf of a number of social justice initiatives.¹⁴ This collaboration is evidenced primarily through posts on Facebook. Without Facebook, it is unlikely that activities outside of their formal publications would reach such a broad

¹⁴ Alvarez has both a Facebook page with over four thousand followers and an author website at: <http://www.juliaalvarez.com/>

audience. How could one research collaborative efforts without knowing that they had in fact, occurred? For this reason, social media is also transforming academic interests and research practices. It has facilitated my ability to track both author's participation in a variety of initiatives, bringing to light Danticat's and Alvarez's shared interests while enabling me to link them to the literary themes of this dissertation.

3.6 ALVAREZ'S SOCIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVES

A Wedding in Haiti tackles many issues related to social justice initiatives in the Dominican Republic which directly impact the lives of Haitians. In a similar fashion as Danticat, Alvarez has used her Facebook page to address issues related to legislation impacting the citizenship rights of Dominican-Americans, as well as non-profit organizations based in the US and the Dominican Republic. Working in a transnational space as a migrant writer who divides her time between her US residence in Vermont, her family's home in Santo Domingo and her coffee farm in the northern region of the Dominican Republic, Alvarez has added a new space to her ancestral and receiving cultures: Haiti. *A Wedding in Haiti* explores her encounters there, focusing on the travels and close bonds she has made with her new Haitian friends whom she considers family.

The framework around friendship that Alvarez builds in *Wedding in Haiti* echoes her sentiment toward Haitian-Dominican relationships, that these relationships are works in progress. In the author's note, Alvarez first asks the reader to take the story she is about to tell at its face value as a memoir/human interest story with the disclaimer "I am not claiming to be an authority on Haitian matters" and second, she explains her intention to tell a real story "about a friendship with a young Haitian, Piti, who happened into a farm and literacy project my husband and I set up in my native country, the Dominican

Republic” (Author’s Note, *A Wedding in Haiti*). These first two points make the book’s intention clear: Alvarez is writing as a Dominican-American sharing a personal tale of an unexpected bond with a young Haitian migrant worker. But the third and final point that the author’s note makes is the most powerful, the personification of Haiti as “the sister I hardly knew” (Author’s Note, *A Wedding in Haiti*). In the note, Alvarez admits that she still does not know her sister, Haiti, as well as she would like to, but she is getting to know her, demystifying her by stepping “outside the boundaries that separate us one from the other” (Author’s Note, *A Wedding in Haiti*).

To help her US-based English language readers come with her on this journey of getting to know her sister, Haiti, Alvarez must show them that her sister is everyone’s sister too, and that this sister has been misunderstood. She has been falsely misrepresented in the US media. Alvarez has to step outside of her comfort zones- the US and the Dominican Republic, and she must explain how and why she crossed the border and journeyed into a remote area of Haiti.

Inside the book jacket on the front flap, the prospective reader is given a piece of information about Haiti and the Dominican Republic that does not name the respective countries, but simply aims to help them understand the book’s general context, “Alvarez takes us on a journey into experiences that change our way of thinking about history and how it can be reimagined when people from two countries-traditional enemies and strangers-become friends” (*A Wedding in Haiti*, front interior flap of book jacket).

Because Alvarez’s readers may not necessarily be aware of the reason why the people from these two countries are considered “traditional enemies” (the centuries of troubled history between two nations sharing one Caribbean island), the memoir appeals to a

broad readership as a human interest story about hope, friendship and the interconnectedness of all human beings regardless of the differences that appear to separate people on the surface, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, gender and class.

On the front matter book jacket of *A Wedding in Haiti*, there is also a quote by Edwidge Danticat which summarizes the memoir as exploring, “An unlikely friendship between two people, two families, and two countries” and notes that we, the readers, are “privileged to witness it and become part of this journey” (Edwidge Danticat, front book cover of *A Wedding in Haiti*). A question arises in conjunction with the context of these descriptions of the memoir. Aside from Danticat’s and Alvarez’s observational pleasantries summarizing the content of the memoir, how does *A Wedding in Haiti*, a seemingly simple tale about friendship, help highlight the complexities of the Haitian and the Dominican communities in Hispaniola and the migrant communities in the US? *A Wedding in Haiti* adopts a completely different approach to educating a US based readership about Haitian issues when contrasted with Danticat’s *Create Dangerously*.

In *Create Dangerously*, Danticat tells stories about her fellow Haitian and Haitian migrant artists, many of these stories are tragic and end in death, but have a dyadic function of showing what can be learned about these histories and applied to current situations. Case in point: the immigrant artist must not be silenced. One story from the book that sparks hope is the near death experience of Alerte Bèlance who becomes the American “face of the junta’s atrocities in Haiti” (82) after appearing on the Phil Donahue television program (82). Bèlance survived an attack in 1991 during the military coup d’état (73). She then migrates to the US and becomes politically active in the migrant community. Bèlance was physically scarred and maimed by her experience,

having lost her right arm and her left fingers. *Create Dangerously* also details the not so happy endings, the public executions of Marcel Numa and Louis Dounin for collaborating to take down the Papa Doc Duavlier regime in 1964 (1) and the gunning down of Danticat's friend Jean Dominique, a well-known radio personality and prominent Haitian journalist who was killed outside of his radio station in 2000 (41-42). Alvarez's memoir does not focus on the same types of atrocities but rather on her maternal bond and friendship with a Haitian family. The rationale for her memoir? Beyond the fact that it is a true story that warrants being told, *A Wedding in Haiti* also aims to erase erroneous beliefs and notions about Haiti for the American public. Alvarez positions herself more as an American than as a migrant as Danticat does. She does not negate her ancestral home in this move, she employs it to become a reliable narrator for her US-based readership. Alvarez does this by repositioning Haiti as a family member as opposed to a stranger or strange land.

Gendering Haiti as a female relative or sister is intended simply to make Haiti more inviting, to tell a story about Haiti that has not been told before. Alvarez offers up a literary representation of Haiti that attempts to overcome some of the preconceived stereotypes about the country such as its complete failure to protect its citizens after the earthquake of 2010, ongoing governmental dysfunction and corruption, widespread poverty and illness. By invoking Haiti as feminine, Alvarez sends a symbolic message that Haiti is "just like you and me" Haiti is one of us, she's a sister, somebody's daughter, perhaps somebody's mother and wife- and invites the reader to become better acquainted with her through non-threatening yet non-fiction terms.

Before *A Wedding in Haiti*, Julia Alvarez had never crossed over the Massacre River into Haiti. This particular border is known as a busy market crossing where Haitians travel back and forth to the Dominican Republic as migrant workers; this is not a place for tourists. Why does Alvarez now find herself in this remote, impoverished part of the Dominican Republic rather than the capital, Santiago, where she grew up? She crosses the border in order to reach a remote part of Haiti, to attend the wedding of a young Haitian migrant worker whom she befriended at her organic coffee farm *Alta Gracia* (High Grace) in the Dominican Republic¹⁵. The memoir's title *A Wedding in Haiti* does not accurately describe its focus on the crossing of borders, both physical and cultural, real and imagined. *A Wedding in Haiti* is a memoir about human relationships and about journeying into (un)comfortable zones through the bond of an unlikely transcultural friendship, the friendship between Alvarez and Piti.

When Alvarez agrees to attend the wedding in 2009, she naively assumes that Piti can simply give her his address and she could find his house on her own. Instead, Alvarez has to pay two Haitian guides to travel with her since there is no reliable map or GPS that would lead her and the group of Dominican and American travelers safely to their destination. The difficulty of traveling in Haiti is not in navigating an unknown space, it is the fact that space is uncharted and unknowable to foreigners. Alvarez tries to focus on the positive cultural aspects of her journey, but those aspects are somewhat overshadowed by the difficulties she experiences while traveling in this “remote corner of Haiti” (48). The impact that poverty has on Haiti's ability to provide for its people echoes

¹⁵ See *A Cafecito Story* (Alvarez 2002) for the complete story of the Alta Gracia organic coffee farm.

throughout the memoir as Alvarez struggles to find food and shelter for herself and her fellow travelers. She encounters groups of hungry children who beg for food and personal items such as the jewelry she wears. She finds out that there is no electricity and no indoor plumbing in the region where she will be staying, only outhouses, outdoor showers taken with river water, and abandoned buildings that used to be businesses like restaurants and gas stations (Alvarez 45-49).

The Haitian landscape in itself is problematic as it is a direct reflection of the lack of both infrastructure and resources. The roads are in poor condition because there isn't any money to fix them, the landscape is barren because the trees are used for fuel.

Without reliable roads and infrastructure, Haiti is unknowable to outsiders unless they have a Haitian willing to guide them (Alvarez 64). So why has Alvarez documented this journey in book form when it seems that a blog could have reached more readers?

Alvarez maintains a more traditional approach to her use of the Internet and social media. This could be because she is more comfortable with the material (print) format, or simply because of contractual writing agreements with her publisher.¹⁶ She emphasizes that while the country may have been impoverished even before it was devastated by an earthquake in 2010, the human capital of Haiti is a wealth of hope and promise (Alvarez 276-279).

Alvarez takes her first journey in late August of 2009, crammed into a pick-up truck with four men, her husband Bill, Eli, a student from Middlebury College spending a year as a teacher at their Dominican coffee farm, Homero, a Dominican researcher for the

¹⁶ Alvarez's publisher is Algonquin Books, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. They have published the majority of her non-fiction work including the two novels explored in chapters one and two of this dissertation, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994).

government's agroforestry institute, and Leonardo, an undocumented Haitian worker who is a friend of Piti's and one of the paid guides. This unlikely group of travelers, consisting of two Americans, one Dominican-American, one Dominican and one Haitian crossing the border into Haiti together is probably an uncommon sight. They cross at Dajabón, over the Massacre River, where the Parsley Massacre took place in 1937. This detail is not lost on Alvarez who takes time in her book to reflect on the violence visited upon Haitians by Dominicans under Trujillo's command (30-31).

Before they can cross the border they must bribe the guards by paying them six hundred Dominican pesos, the equivalent of seventeen US dollars, because they do not have the correct paperwork to enter the country with the pick-up truck. The guards do not ask to see Homero's Dominican passport or visa to enter Haiti, nor do they ask Leonardo for his Haitian identity documents, which is a good thing because Leonardo has no documents, "technically, he doesn't even exist" (30). This border crossing is a physical activity but also a cultural rite of passage. Alvarez and her fellow American travelers have learned two important lessons from this experience: 1.) That by asking, "isn't there a way we can resolve this little problem here now?" (33) a monetary bribe can solve bureaucratic problems and 2.) That Haitians on the Dominican side of the border can get back into Haiti without issue but reentering undocumented will be a challenge. In Leonardo's case "he's undocumented so he will have to pay a *buscón* to smuggle him back across the border" (14).

Bearing witness to the difficulties faced by Haitian migrant workers on the shared border between the two nations may have been the impetus that impacted Alvarez in a

way to make her take another trip to the Dominican/Haiti border in 2012.¹⁷ Alvarez spent several days there at the border in October of 2012 at Dajabón and Ouanaminthe. For this trip, instead of writing a memoir, she used her social media platform on Facebook to announce her participation in a new social justice initiative, her collaboration with The Border of Lights organization. The description of the organization on their webpage states, “Border of Lights is a collective coming together to commemorate, collaborate and continue the legacy of hope and justice” (Border of Lights). In 2012, Border of Lights held its first annual gathering on the 75th anniversary memorializing the Parsley Massacre and hoping to serve as a catalyst to improve current relationships between Haitians and Dominicans. Events intended to commemorate the massacre and restore unity took place on both sides of the Massacre River in the border towns of Dajabón, Dominican Republic and Ouanaminthe, Haiti. Alvarez was present at this inaugural event, as evidenced by photos of the event available on the organization’s website, Facebook page and Alvarez’s Facebook page and author’s website.¹⁸ The organization is diaspora inclusive, although the gathering is held in both the border towns (Dajabón and Ouanaminthe) there are diaspora themed activities, lectures, and projects such a murals and storytelling that occur in New York City leading up to the event each year. These events are created and hosted by Dominican and Haitian migrants or people of Dominican and Haitian ancestry (Border of Lights).

¹⁷ I attempted to contact Alvarez for questions but was told by her agent that she could not respond to my request.

¹⁸ Although I could not confirm whether or not Alvarez attended the event in 2013 or 2014, she did actively post information about the organization and the events on her Facebook page. Plans for future events have not been released.

In 2014 the organizers instituted a virtual portion to the Border of Lights to the program which added the integration of social media to the event with live commentary sharing or ‘tweeting’ via the social media site Twitter, during the event. The program encouraged participants to post and send pictures of how they were making “a border of light.” Although Alvarez has actively promoted the event during the first three years, there is no evidence that Danticat has ever participated on the ground activities at the border, she did however, lend her authorial celebrity and voice to the organization by writing personal essays and reflections about Haitian and Dominican history and relationships on the Border of Lights website (Border of Lights).

The Border of Lights website features a list of organizations that are “committed to change and supporting a mission of justice and peace in the Dominican Republic and Haiti” (Border of Lights). One of those organization is the Mariposas DR Foundation, which Alvarez belongs to as a co-chairperson. In the spring of 2015, Julia Alvarez publicized a volunteer trip to the foundation on her Facebook page , “I went down [to the Dominican Republic] to volunteer at the Mariposa DR Foundation, an organization that works to end the cycle of generational poverty by educating and empowering young girls” (Alvarez’s Facebook Page 29 Apr. 2015). Before Alvarez’s visit, the foundation had just wrapped up a fundraising event bringing in \$13,000 US dollars in a matter of days by using social media outlets to promote their cause (Mariposas Foundation DR Facebook Page 29 Apr. 2015). This money earned through the web based fundraiser will enact real change for the girls who take part in the programing at the Mariposas DR Foundation. This evidences how cyberspace and concrete space do complement one another.

The Mariposas DR Foundation is an example of an increasingly popular type of transnational organization, a non-profit registered in the United States but physically located in another country, in this case, the Dominican Republic. This is not surprising as John Casey, professor of non-profits at the Bausch College School of Public Affairs in New York City explains that in the developing world, approximately “ninety percent of the funds that local charities receive come from outside the country” (Casey). Casey explains that large donor bases in the US justify this trend of US based non-profits who have locations or branches in other countries. The Mariposas DR Foundation is a prime example: in a short amount of time since its inaugural year in 2009, it has provided a variety of services to Haitian and Dominican girls from the community who live in impoverished conditions. Part of the foundation’s success is that it welcomes international groups for service learning projects, thus opening the door for wealthier donors to get a first-hand experience in affecting real life change (Mariposas Foundation DR Facebook Page 29 Apr. 2015).

The foundation’s mission is summarized on their Facebook page as “empowering and educating girls to create community based solutions to end poverty.” (Mariposas DR Facebook Page 29 Apr. 2015). In 2012, the organization purchased a former private school building in Cabarete to serve as their center but the building was in need of large-scale renovations. According to the Mariposas DR Foundation website, once the building is completely renovated, it will become a “facility where poor Haitian and Dominican girls will come to engage in sports, academic tutoring, library and computer access, job and life skills training, health and wellness care” (Mariposas DR Foundation). The center is a shared space where the girls and volunteers can learn and from one another, enacting

change in their lives. The center gives girls an opportunity to develop skills which will enable them to escape generational poverty through further education and employment.

The notion of a shared space mentioned in the description of the center focuses on building relationships and making connections with communities worldwide in order for the girls who participate at the foundation to become agents of their own lives. The experience of being mentored by volunteers like Alvarez provide significant opportunities for cultural interactions and foster positive goals for escaping poverty through education and well-being. The center is a transcultural site as it:

Attract[s] visitors from all over the globe [becoming a] place where volunteers, educators and girl champions can share knowledge on how empowering girls will lift entire families out of generational poverty. The Mariposa Center for Girls will be a model for the world. (Mariposas DR Foundation)

Alvarez's support of the Mariposas DR organization stems from her long-term commitment to social justice issues in the Dominican Republic which formally began in 1997 when she and her husband purchased deforested farm land in the impoverished area of Los Maranitos in the mountains above Jaracoba. It was an unplanned endeavor, as Alvarez had initially visited the region to write a piece about the area for an anthology collection for The Nature Conservancy. Little did Alvarez know that her visit to Los Maranitos would have a lasting impact, as she and her husband helped to transform the farm area into a thriving community complete with a literacy center and housing for the farm workers. The impetus for Alvarez's altruism stems from her desire to see her homeland thrive. She has recently broadened that scope to include the neighboring

country of Haiti, and the results of her activism and philanthropy are numerous as evidenced in the success of her coffee farm and the Border of Lights events, and the Mariposa DR Foundation, all three initiatives brings awareness of Haitian and Dominican issues to a broad audience (Alvarez *A Wedding in Haiti* 1-10).¹⁹

One of the first human rights atrocities that Alvarez wrote about, before her interest was sparked in the Parsley Massacre, was the murder of the Mirabal sisters chronicled in her novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*. She befriended the surviving Mirabal sister Dedé, while writing the novel, and has since become a close friend to other Mirabal family members. It is no coincidence then, that the Mariposa DR Foundation is named after the Mirabal sisters, the Butterflies (las Mariposas), national heroines in the Dominican Republic. When Alvarez volunteered at the foundation in April of 2015, she was a guest of honor along with the daughters of the two of the Butterflies, María Teresa (Mate) Mirabal's daughter Jacqueline Guzman Mirabal, the honorary co-chairwoman of the Mariposa DR Fundation, and Minerva Mirabal's daughter, Minou Tavaréz Mirabal, now a congressperson in the Dominican Republic.²⁰ A post on the foundation's Facebook page explained:

Last Friday evening we celebrated acclaimed author Julia Alvarez and her support of the Mariposa Foundation. We celebrated the Mirabal family for

¹⁹ As noted in the section on Danticat, Alvarez also spoke out against and collaborated with other migrant authors in the US to disavow the Dominican law which rendered the statelessness of Haitian-Dominicans who entered the Dominican Republic after 1929. For further reading see Rojas, "Dominican Court Ruling Renders Hundreds of Thousands Stateless."

²⁰ In addition to Alvarez and the Mirabals, representatives of the US Embassy in the Dominican Republic, as well as musicians from the Dominican Republic, Edgar Molina and Tadeu De Marco, were present at this celebration (Mariposas Foundation DR Facebook Page 29 Apr. 2015).

serving as an inspiration to us, the country, and the world ... But most of all, we celebrated the amazing Mariposa girls, how far they have come, and the amazing places they are going. (Mariposas DR Facebook Page 29 Apr. 2015)

It is worth recognizing the connection between Alvarez and the Mirabal family, first, because of their fame, as both Alvarez and the Mirabals continue to have a powerful impact as representatives of the Dominican Republic both on the island and in the United States migratory diaspora. Second, because of the philosophical relationship they have in their shared beliefs in social justice initiatives to bring girls the opportunity to find a way out of generational poverty through mentoring and education. This legacy of humanitarian feminism was left to the surviving Mirabals and to Alvarez as well. The figure who kept the memory of the Butterflies alive for many decades after their murders was Bélgica Adela Mirabal, known to everyone by her nickname, Dedé. She passed away on February 1, 2014. Dedé dedicated her life to memorializing her sisters by running a museum in the family home. She was often asked by school children why she did not die like her sisters. In a piece posted to Alvarez's personal author's website memorializing Dedé, Alvarez suggests:

Every day we can ask ourselves a version of the question the schoolchildren would ask her [Dedé]: Why am I alive today in this world? How can I serve? What can I contribute to see that justice is served? To ensure that every girl and boy in the world gets the opportunity to live a decent life? Each day that we provide our answer to these questions, the

Mariposas *are* alive. (Alvarez “How to Keep the Butterfiles Alive”
Official Author Website)

Through her collaborative efforts with Mariposas DR Foundation and the continuing operation of her coffee farm and literacy center, along with her support of the Border of Lights organization, Alvarez continues “Spreading Grace” as the title of her coffee farm webpage declares (Altagraciacafe.com). Alvarez’s dream of “enriching the human community... [dreaming that] high grace will spread to our neighbors beyond our small farm and beyond our small country” (Café Alta Gracia). There is little doubt that Alvarez has made a great impact and will continue spreading grace.

3.7 CONCLUSION: WRITING IN CONCRETE AND CYBER SPACES: CRITIQUES AND SIGNS OF HOPE

In this chapter I have developed a new type of third space theory that conceptualizes a network that Danticat and Alvarez create from their position as transnational/migrant writers, using non-fiction to connect English-language readers to other experiences and cultures situated both outside and inside their ancestral homelands. I have illustrated how two nonfiction works, *Create Dangerously* (Danticat) and *A Wedding in Haiti* (Alvarez), set the stage for these authors’ participation in social activism in concrete (material) spaces as well as in cyber space (social media/internet). The authors’ writing is complementary to their participation in social justice initiatives in these two spaces as it addresses and frames issues concerning the peoples of Haitian and Dominican diaspora in the US and homelands.

I draw attention to the ways in which Danticat and Alvarez write about the 2010 Haitian earthquake to illuminate that their nonfiction writing as an extension of their

work in historical novels which reinserts women into the Caribbean space in ways that open up a critical access on gendered and ethnic perspectives. I explore how Danticat and Alvarez are cautiously hopeful in their response to the aftermath of the 2010 Haitian earthquake while highlighting their critiques of the US government and media outlets. Haitians and Dominicans as unwelcome in the US while Haitians are unwelcome in the Dominican Republic. I question why Dominicans and Americans offered monetary donations as support to Haitians after the earthquake and surmise that donations were offered because it was much more comfortable for Dominicans and Americans to delocalize suffering than to recognize it around themselves. The delocalization of suffering is an effect of these Dominican and US citizens' altruism toward Haiti. I connect Dominican and US governments and citizens' desire to aid victims immediately following the 2010 earthquake as a response of offering food and medical supplies, but note that neither country has any plans to help the people of these nations in the long term since no policy initiative has been taken to allow refugees from the disaster across their borders. They can help from afar, but they do not want Haitians to enter their nations.

In the US, migrants from both Haiti and the Dominican Republic are unwelcome. I give evidence through examples of Danticat's writing that show how this applies to Judith Butler's theorization of grievable and ungrivable lives, exploring how one's identity and connection to their nation is defined by a sense of responsibility to one's imagined citizenry. Only those who are part of that citizenry are grievable. Neither Haitians nor Dominicans fit the definition of grievable lives in the United States since, as migrants, they are racially and ethnically different from the majority white population which still wields a great deal of influence in governmental policies and media

programming and messaging. There is hope that this may shift in the future as the ethnicities of US populations shift, there will be hopefully more political representation of these populations who are willing to legislate for changes to immigration policies.

The work that Danticat and Alvarez carry out as writers and activists attempts to debunk myths about Haiti, Haitians, Dominicans and the Dominican Republic and their existence as members of the US society in the diaspora. By telling stories about their ancestors, friends and family members, Danticat and Alvarez convey a more humanized version of migrant lives. As Alvarez has written and said during interviews, “Haiti is the sister I hardly knew.” If US-based readers adopt that a form of affect, there is hope for change in the ways that migrants from Hispaniola are perceived in the US. Danticat’s and Alvarez’s writing also sheds light on discriminatory practices towards migrants that are enacted by the US and Dominican governments. Danticat and Alvarez provide an alternative approach to traditional media outlets in their work by focusing on positive frames of their ancestral lands and citizens without obscuring the difficult realities that their ancestral nations face.

After establishing these primary points of analysis, in the second half of the chapter, I examine the social justice initiatives that the authors participate in either in traditional print form and in cyberspace. Through these examples of their multiple textual and cyber based projects, I arrive at my conclusion that the bridging of these two categories of space, concrete and cyber space, is complementary, especially in its capacity to enact change in the lives of Haitians and Dominicans through fundraising efforts carried out via the internet. The donated funds that Alvarez and Danticat have helped raise for their Haitian and Dominican nonprofit organizations via the internet

directly impact change by supporting the continuation of these nonprofit groups and their programming. The funds enable social justice initiatives to be carried out in the concrete space.

Danticat and Alvarez are two writers who, by virtue of their experience having grown up in both their ancestral lands and the US, have experienced multiple spatial configurations as transnational migrants, and are able to offer perspectives based on their unique understanding of the social, ethnic cultural and political categories in their homelands and in the US. They carry out their important work of writing and communicating messages in cyber space, using their fame and credibility with a US based English readership to lend their voices to causes that have an impact in the concrete space, enlisting their readers to do the same.

CONCLUSION

DEFINING AND CONTRASTING FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD SPACES WITHIN THE TRIALECTICS OF TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT WOMEN'S WRITING

This dissertation aimed to explore the tensions and interconnections between three types of transnational women's writing which formed a trialectic: the migrant woman's revision of the *Bildungsroman*, the historical fiction novel set in the ancestral homeland and nonfiction books and social media writing which promote social justice initiatives in the ancestral and receiving cultures. By linking the work of writers who are typically isolated into fields that focus on the ancestral designations: Edwidge Danticat (Haitian-American) and Julia Alvarez (Dominican-American), I have opened up the category of "migrant writing" to a more fluid interpretation, still grounded in specific spatial and thematic frames. Applying a conceptual frame that takes into consideration these writers' shared ancestral space, the island of Hispaniola, has enabled me to compare and contrast their work as Caribbean-American.

Choosing to focus on the category of migrant writing was intentional and meant to disrupt the notion that literatures of diverse authorship cannot establish connections. This is evidenced by the fact that, while a critical field of US Latino and African-American writing has been well-developed in the US, the historical, cultural and sociolinguistic barriers between the two nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic have had a determining influence on how critical investigations of these migrant

literatures are isolated into respective designations, in the case of Danticat (Haitian-American or African American) and Alvarez (Dominican American or US Latino). One of my guiding questions in formulating this study is, what bridges these authors' work in ways that highlight the migrant case specifically? How is the case of migrant writing distinct from these other critical fields? What makes Danticat and Alvarez's writing or perspective different is that they never lose sight of the homeland, and never outright reject the idea that they must live in-between these spaces as writers. This is critical to understanding why third space is a framing that does not ignore the complexities of their cultural and ethnic identifications. I found evidence of my own theorization about these authors in their writing and I was able to articulate a more nuanced critical framework that moved beyond existing critical fields in its exploration of the interactions between gender, culture and diverse spatial coordinates from the island of Hispaniola, the Atlantic and the United States.

In each chapter, I defined and linked a category of migrant women's writing creating a triad. These chapters unite together to form the bigger picture of the trialectic as described above, that evidences the tensions between these categories, and shows how I have bridged them in my analysis. While this allowed me to separate my objects of study in three chapters it also positioned the culmination of a broader trialectics, illustrating how space operates on different scales, national, local, transnational and historically.

In the first chapter, I begin the framework of my dissertation's triad by examining subjectivity in the migrant's revision of the *Bildungsroman*. The triad is constituted by three types of space, first space, the ancestral homeland, second space, the receiving

culture and third space, the space that manifests in their *home away from home* or in the domestic private sphere. But none of these spaces are exclusively a material idea or an abstract construct, instead they are open to a sociality that encompasses the subject that cannot be entirely separate or displaced when the social actor moves from one location to another. In this chapter I critique these three different spatialities, culminating in the novels when the protagonists return temporarily to the ancestral homeland and come face to face with their subjectivity in life-altering experience that challenges but solidifies the protagonists' sense of self. These experiences enable the release of negative emotions about the self and consequently lead to acceptance and a newly opened space of opportunity for change and agency. The migrant experience is always doubled. The double consciousness of sending and receiving cultures merges into a third self which manifests in the third space. In the migrant woman's *Bildungsroman* there is a cautious optimism for the future that is not divisive but rather fully inclusive of the multiple dimensions of the protagonist's subjectivity.

The second chapter is centered on the second term in the trialectic or triad, the ancestral home. Focused on the island of Hispaniola and written from the point of view of adults who came of age and have lived the majority of their lives in the United States, the historical novels examined stake a claim to the writer's ancestral memory, culture and history by writing from a space of migrancy in the US. The chapter details the unique space occupied by Caribbean migrant women's writing, illuminating topics and questions left outside of a predominantly masculinist analysis: "feminist contestations of patriarchy, political and social disenfranchisement, citizenship, exile and cultural dystopia" (Mehta 1). The novels are about women's lives in the midst of social injustices and upheavals,

conflict and physical violence resulting from persecution from alignment or commitment to one's imagined community. The novels detail women's ways of both coping with and intervening in the tragic events in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. By writing as migrants from their third space location in the United States and beckoning back to their ancestral homelands, the novels illustrate the negativity of the state and of national identity and in doing so, also highlight the negative constructions of identity for women and ethnic minorities such as the migrants who become sugar cane cutters in the Dominican Republic.

If the first two chapters examine space through novels, the third chapter examines space through nonfiction reflecting how the authors engage in social justice initiatives and activism that aim to influence both the ancestral (first) and receiving culture (second) spaces. Here, the production of a third space is examined both through nonfiction and also in cyber space as a transnational supra network, connecting Danticat's and Alvarez's writing to a global audience of readers and fellow activists. Print texts and internet based writing complement one another to form a new third space making the writers' works more accessible. Third space repositions spatial dualities (first and second spaces) as the author's writing is made material through their nonfiction work social justice initiatives, fundraising and on the ground activism addressing and framing issues concerning the peoples of the Haitian and Dominican diaspora in the US and homelands. By giving examples of the authors' focus on nonfiction and cyber space-based writing about the Haitian earthquake of 2010, I also show how third space writing is transformative for the US-based English readers who are given an alternative approach to traditional media outlets when reading Danticat and Alvarez. These authors provide a balanced perspective

that shines with a glimmer of hope, positively framing their ancestral lands and citizens without obscuring the difficult realities that their ancestral nations face.

By examining space as a trialectic, I was able to bridge a theoretical and practical approach in each of the three separate yet connected chapters in their progression of my argument fleshing out a triadic spatiality. Edwidge Danticat and Julia Alvarez began their careers as novelists in the early 1990s and their writing has become more prolific as evidenced by their publishing record, and by their openness to a dialogue with spaces (first, second and third) through their connections to their ancestral homelands and receiving culture in the US. During the first decade of the twenty first century, both Danticat and Alvarez became increasingly concerned with writing on topics related to social justice initiatives. If the focus of their first novels was the self as subject, the focus of the second became the ancestral homeland, and the third, the lived experienced of both authors and their extended networks of authors and activists as part of the diaspora in the US and their connection to the ancestral homelands.

Danticat and Alvarez are from two separate countries, were born into different generations and are also distinct ethnically, but a commonality is that they began their publishing careers only years apart from one another, and both have followed a similar career trajectory as migrant writers.²¹ Their novels intersect points of Haitian and Dominican history, especially the violence visited upon Haitians by Dominicans. The categories of space that I have examined in their work addresses their similar themes which are fleshed out in contrasting ways. For example, while Danticat covers a variety

²¹ Alvarez was born in 1950 and published her first novel, *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* in 1991, Danticat was born in 1969 and published her first novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in 1994.

of topics in *Create Dangerously*, each chapter an adaptation of a lecture or piece she had written for a specific occasion, Alvarez's memoir is a story of friendship from beginning to end, chronicling how she has remained hopeful despite many obstacles. These nonfiction works both have a similar didactic function in their attempts to clarify and demystify Haitian and Dominican history, people and culture. Both are also cautiously optimistic about the future of their homelands as well as regarding conditions for migrants in the US diaspora.

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