

Wiebke Beushausen

Dirty Skirts

Body Politics and Coming of Age
in Feminist Fiction
of the Caribbean Diaspora



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About the Author

Wiebke Beushausen studied English, Spanish, and Business Studies at the University of Gießen. In 2018, she graduated in the Humanities at the University of Heidelberg. She was research associate in the Transcultural Studies junior research group at Heidelberg University, consultant for gender equality at the University of Göttingen, and lecturer in cultural studies at the Universities of Mannheim and Heidelberg. Since 2018, she works at the Center for International Dialogue at the Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation in Berlin. Wiebke Beushausen is co-editor of the collections *Caribbean Food Cultures* (transcript, 2014) and *Practices of Resistance in the Caribbean* (Routledge, 2018).

This publication is the result of a PhD completed at the Faculty of Modern Languages at the Ruprecht-Karls-University of Heidelberg. The dissertation "Narratives of the Body: Gender and Body Politics in Coming-of-Age Novels of the Caribbean Diaspora" was handed in at the English Studies Department and defended on 26th June, 2018.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.



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Published at heiBOOKS,
Heidelberg University Library 2019.

The online version of this publication is freely available on the ebook-platform of the Heidelberg University Library heiBOOKS <https://books.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/heibooks> (open access).

urn: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-heibooks-book-452-6

doi: <https://doi.org/10.11588/heibooks.452>

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Cover illustration: Dominique Hunter, *Fatale!*, 2016, <https://www.dominiquehunter.org/>

ISBN 978-3-948083-06-9 (Softcover)

ISBN 978-3-946531-98-2 (PDF)

Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without the support of my wonderful colleagues, friends, and family. Most of all I want to thank my supervisor and mentor Anne Brüske for her expertise, advice, patience, and trust. I also want to thank my second supervisor Günter Leypoldt for his kindness, support, and offering new perspectives during inspiring colloquia.

I would like to express my gratitude to the University of Heidelberg and the *Transcultural Studies* group for providing an extraordinary research environment and the funding of my project. The junior research group “From the Caribbean to North America and Back: Processes of Transculturation in Literature, Popular Culture, and New Media” with Ana-Sofia Uhl, Sinah Kloß, and Patrick Helber was a space to think, discuss, and grow – a million thanks to my colleagues for having shared my passion for research and their invaluable contribution to this book. Also, I was fortunate enough to receive a grant from the *Stiftung für Kanada-Studien* to do research at the *Center for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean* at the York University, Toronto.

I am particularly grateful to Michael R. Drescher for proofreading and commenting repeatedly on all chapters and in their various conditions. I like to thank Sandra van Lente for her valuable feedback on the analytical parts, and Daniela Jakob and Frank Krabbes at heiBOOKS for the cover design and final text formatting.

I am indebted to Makeda Silvera, Ramabai Espinet, and Ruel Johnson: Thanks for some unforgettable moments, great conversations, and sharing your work with me. I am enormously thankful to Dominique Hunter, who spontaneously agreed to have her art work displayed on the cover. The image playfully reveals the colonizing gaze while staging a powerful moment of resistance.

Science and discourse took place not only within the walls of the Alma Mater but also, though quite in different ways, during the many “Karlchenabende” with Marlène, Ayse, Benjamin, Max, and Michael. To them as well as to Nicole, Simone, and Klaus, I am forever grateful for listening and consoling. Thanks to Lea for the decades of friendship and asking tirelessly about “Malu”. My thanks to David for all the tiring work of text editing – and for so much more. To my parents Heide and Reiner, my brother Christian, to Ulrike, Sabine, Andreas, and Volker, to whom I dedicate this book: I am grateful for your unconditional love and support.

Fuckin’ Fyah, Baby!

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1. Introduction

- Don't you know that what I fear most is my words floating separate from my body? You there with that tape recorder is the scariest thing!
(Sheila Heti 2014: 59)

There are some good reasons to begin this book on Caribbean diaspora writing with a quote cited from the autobiographical novel by Jewish Canadian author Sheila Heti. For one, and this refers to the author's biography, Heti was born to Hungarian parents in North America, thus her family's history is one of migration as is also the case for the four Caribbean writers I engage with here – two of whom are also citizens of Canada. Likewise, they share a history of displacement and diasporic dispersal as well as of being attributed a constructed ethnic identity that is used as marketing tool for their literary output. Lastly, the quote from the novel itself is telling for bringing the body into focus. This sentence is uttered by Sheila's friend Margaux during a conversation that Sheila wants to record to help her write a theater play she is struggling with, which Margaux, however, feels is scary, because she risks losing control over her own words and body. The idea that one can separate an utterance from its source – the mouth and body – by recording it is interesting, but it makes one think about the actual inseparability of the body and the text: Through recording and writing down Margaux's words they might be materially detached from the body, but they indeed become durable, fixed; they are "floating" no longer, as the character fears. To record words (whether on tape or as text) in fact means to document this body's history and make it accessible for others. It is not owned by the individual alone any longer, which might be the source of Margaux's fear and which brings me to ask whose histories and whose bodies are we actually talking about? In the context of the literature investigated here, there is nothing to be feared. The literary record creates durability in the unity of word, body, and existence. Those words being recorded in the novels in fact may be thought of as a process of becoming, of writing Caribbean bodies back into being.

1.1 Women's Fiction of the Caribbean Diaspora

Caribbean diasporic women's writing in North America, usually conceived of as part of immigrant fiction and ethnic literature, has gained increasing importance since the post-1960 social movements in the context of identity politics and the emergence of post- and decolonial theory since the 1980s. The 1990s in particular mark the beginning of a new period in Caribbean women's writing, especially in the emerging field of Afro-Caribbean women's fiction and poetry.¹ This period manifests itself on the basis of a wide range of topics and genres, diverse lived experiences that the writers cover, new contexts, facilitated access to publishing opportunities and distribution channels – the latter being a development in the metropolitan centers of the global North in particular. The founding of alternative publishing houses like Peepal Tree Press in Leeds or Sister Vision Press in Toronto, publications of influential anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back* by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (1981), Selwyn Cudjoe's *Caribbean Women Writers* (1990), and Carol B. Davies and Elaine S. Fido's *Out of the Kumbla* (1990), or the institutionalization of Caribbean studies at North American and British universities² have created new spaces for literary voices which have been or continue to be marginalized. This development, paired with the huge success of some authors, has often been related to affirmative action and multicultural policies particularly in the U.S. and Canada. Additionally, the increasing global reception of the mostly diasporic Caribbean literature is attributed to an educated, mostly white, middle-class reading public's demand for a 'true' ethnic story, preferably disguised as a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story, 'authentic' for sure. The authors of ethnic, migrant fiction are put in the position of 'ethnic advocacy to adopt Arjun Appadurai's term (cf. 2008: 300). Zadie Smith, as well, feels bur-

1 The 1960s mark the beginning of the early Women's Movement in the Anglophone Caribbean (cf. Narain 2001; 2007). Since the 1970s, according to Jana Gohrisch (2007), a critical woman's perspective increasingly enters the Caribbean literary scene. But, it is only since the late 1980s that the field has started to pay attention to Caribbean women writers and their literary output. Caribbean women's writing as a serious field of study has emerged since the 1990s in literary and postcolonial studies (cf. Narain 2007: 224; Torres-Saillant 2013a: 89), thanks as well to international conferences on Caribbean women's fiction, the publication of anthologies (such as the seminal *Out of the Kumbla* by Boyce Davies and Savory Fido in 1990), and a variety of published critical articles (cf. Anim-Addo 1996; Cudjoe 1990).

2 For example, the CUNY Dominican Studies Institute, the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean at the York University, Toronto, or the Caribbean Studies Program at the University of Toronto.

dened by the “responsibilities of representation” along with the market pressure for authenticity, as she puts it:

The thing that can be challenging in fiction is allowing people to exist imperfectly. There is perhaps an added pressure if the author belongs to a group that feels itself burdened by what I want to call the responsibilities of representation. [...] I want to write without shame or pride or over-compensation in one direction or another. To write freely. (Smith 2013: n.p.)

The burden of representing the “single story,” as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie says (cf. Adichie 2009), the grand narrative of a whole community, region, or even continent, often determines the topics writers of Color must engage with to get published and achieve global recognition.

Now, “Caribbean literature written by women authors is embracing the global community,” Florence R. Journey writes in her monograph on women-authored fiction from the Anglo-, Hispano-, and Francophone Caribbean (2009: 1). The 1990s, indeed, as scholars on Caribbean literature like Alison Donnell note, mark “a critical moment [...] through the articulation of sexuality within Caribbean writings” (Donnell 2006: 9). Former taboo topics related in particular to the female body, active sexuality, homoerotic desire and love, but also physical violence are increasingly engaged with in creative ways. A new generation of writers explores ethnic and diasporic identities in transition along with queer subject positions or fluid gender constructions. Underlying their creative work is almost always an understanding of embodied subjectivity as entangled with other social factors of gender, sex, race, and class and the resulting hierarchies and effects on citizenship. The strong presence of women’s voices both in the literary field as well as in the literature itself goes hand in hand with a recovery of marginalized identities and silenced histories, and this without being essentialist. Rather, I take this as a strategic move of a politically engaged writing to give privilege to formerly and still excluded subjects as part of a larger emancipatory agenda against colonial dominance, the literary legacy of the European canon, as well as a Caribbean literary scene that for a long time has been dominated by male writers. At the same time, women writers in the field make a legitimate claim for inclusion within the mostly patriarchal anti- or decolonial nationalist movements of the twentieth century and cultural diaspora discourses of the twenty-first century.

Far from being a uniform phenomenon, Caribbean literature is a multifaceted, heterogeneous formation reflecting on the ethnic, social, and cultural diversity in the region. It is further diversified through (transnational) global connections and diasporic processes, which makes it an excellent object for

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comparative study. What needs to be mentioned at this point is that a rather recent addition to the field of Caribbean literature is the fiction authored by Caribbean women of Indian descent (cf. Mahabir/Pirbhai 2013).³ While the literatures produced by African and Indian-descended Caribbean writers share many thematic concerns, they are still investigated separately by literary scholars who adopt usually an either-or-perspective. This separation in Caribbean research reflects their separate ethnic identities or group consciousness not only on a national level, enforced by colonial authorities and upheld ever since by post-colonial processes of ‘ethnopoliticization,’ but also with regard to community building in the diaspora (be it in the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, or France). This study seeks to overcome this artificial separation by its selection of a heterogeneous corpus reading Indian- and African-Caribbean diasporic novels next to each other. Moreover, a mono-linguistic focus on Caribbean literature is still discernable in literary scholarship, meaning a focus on only one linguistic area, either on the Dutch, Hispano-, Franco-, or Anglophone Caribbean, owing this both to traditional area studies as well as to the outdated notion of a national literature (and surely also to the literary scholar’s own language competence). While it is crucial to take note of the particularity of each nation state and the cultural plurality within the region, similarities do exist in the historical, political, and economic development, the fact of colonial occupation, and neo-imperial dependency capitalism. A fruitful discussion of Caribbean literary and cultural production in the Americas that potentially crosses borders will take into consideration their sameness in difference, not as artificially separated but on the grounds of what they share being as they are embedded within intra-regional and transnational circulations of people, capital, culture, and knowledge – an approach undertaken particularly in Inter-American Studies and one that moves beyond a restrictive focus on a national literature.⁴

In the second, revised edition of *Caribbean Poetics: Towards an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature* (2013a [1997]), Silvio Torres-Saillant includes *en passant* the idea of a diaspora poetics as a necessary addition to a regional Caribbean poetics that he defines in the first edition, but does not offer a comparably

3 See especially Ramabai Espinet’s criticism of the absence of Indian women characters and female agency in Caribbean literature (cf. 1996).

4 The ‘New World approach’ as promoted by Michael Dash, “is also being proposed against the background of a still prevalent tendency to fragment the Caribbean into zones of linguistic influence or ideologically determined categories. [...] To force a national model onto a literature that often identifies itself with larger regional and ideological entities would be a misleading simplification” (Dash 1998: 3). See also the recent publication by Elena Machado Sáez (2015).

systematic approach to the texts and themes. I propose a *Caribbean diaspora poetics* in tandem with the generic mode of the coming of age as structuring principle, and thus extend Torres-Saillant's concept of a Caribbean poetics that, according to him, is defined amongst other things by the condition of marginality. In terms of marginality, some shifts are observable: Indeed the literature has moved from the geographic and economic periphery of the Antilles to the so-called literary metropolitan centers in the North. Caribbean-descended authors receive international acclaim, like Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz, or Marlon James; diaspora literature, similarly, has found a niche in academia and in the literary scene. The problematic issue is that what has come to be defined as Caribbean literature in general is mostly the product of Caribbean writers residing in the diaspora at the expense of the regional literary scene in the Caribbean. Without being too strict on artificially separating 'island' from 'diaspora writings,' we should nevertheless acknowledge local authors, their different national belongings, as well as publication barriers and the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital.⁵ But still, the increased engagement with Caribbean diaspora writers may contribute eventually to the visibility of the literature also from the region.

The coming-of-age novel is one of the most prevailing generic formations in Caribbean fiction having emerged from the *Bildungsroman* tradition to depict individual and community development. The purpose of this study is to interrogate the contribution of four authors, namely Makeda Silvera, Ramabai Espinet, Edwidge Danticat, and Angie Cruz, hailing from various parts of the Caribbean and different diaspora locations, to the formation of the coming-of-age genre and a women-centered (literary) history as well as an emancipatory body politics in the Caribbean and diaspora. The study discusses the multiple ways these writers negotiate the complexities of Caribbean life and individual migrant experiences, thereby disclosing the discriminatory practices of racism, sexism, and classism challenging the normative functioning of the underlying social categories. I illustrate how corporeality and multiple forms of embodiment are dealt with through the mode of the coming-of-age narrative. An underlying thesis is that the novels' focus on the adolescent and adult female body and the processes of 'becoming woman' can be read as a subversion of Eurocentric models of the *Bildungsroman* and, on a larger level, as criticism of

5 I will return to this aspect in the conclusion reading Ifeona Fulani's concept of "literary anancyism" (2005) along with Marc McGurl's criticism of "high cultural pluralism" (2009) and Elena Machado Sáez' "market aesthetics" (2015).

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hegemonic formations.⁶ The four writers selected here make strategic use of a dominant literary tradition from a minority perspective in an attempt to decolonize the genre and the ways of reading it. Nevertheless, one should be cautious not to apply a one-sided reading that, on the one hand, neglects the market mechanisms of the literary field, and, on the other, presupposes that all texts claim to be politically subversive or depict resisting subjects.

This study's concern is two-fold: It deals with the omnipresence of the body in and its construction through the text, while also being concerned with the "enduring power" (Bolaki 2011:10) of the *Bildungsroman* or the coming-of-age novel, a category that some deemed a long lost "phantom" (Redfield 1996: xi). The *Bildungsroman* is traditionally regarded as the novelistic genre that most fully reflects, according to Joseph Slaughter, on the "normative process of human personality development" (2007: 43) and is "most intensely concerned with the problematics of socialization" (92). The majority of literary scholars will certainly agree on this broad definition. However, there is – and I shall return to this point later on – no consent on terminological choice, the least when it comes to those literatures that accommodate minority voices and are political in intention. Moreover, whereas some literary critics and scholars claim that the *Bildungsroman* is dead or at least unpopular and outdated, this does not hold true for coming-of-age narratives – especially when these narratives recount marginalized histories, non-normative embodiments, or queer desire. This shows not only in literary fiction but also in contemporary cinema. Barry Jenkins' award-winning coming-of-age film, *Moonlight* (2016), for example, which is based on the semi-autobiographical piece *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue* by Tarell Alvin McCraney, offers a story about, amongst other things, the (forbidden) homosexuality of the African American protagonist. It deals with integration and social exclusion on the one hand, and, on the other, with sexual development, the negotiation of gender roles, as well as hegemonic masculinity and Blackness. Similarly to the novels that will be discussed in the following chapters, the film clearly shows the fictional, medial representation and construction of the body via the text, or the coming-of-age narrative.

Moreover, the approach to the literary diaspora of the Caribbean in North America undertaken here, what I refer to as a *pan-Caribbean diasporan perspective*, aims to be more inclusive in covering multiple experiences of displacement

6 Such a reading is certainly influenced by postcolonial studies, its 'empire criticism,' and the paradigmatic 'writing back'; see also the approach by Dodgson-Katiyo and Wisker in *Rites of Passage in Postcolonial Women's Writing*, (2010) and the chapter "Talking Back to the Bildungsroman" in MacDonald-Smythe's monograph *Making Homes in the West/Indies* (2001).

and several linguistic areas.⁷ It allows including authors of multiple positionalities, coming from different parts of the Caribbean region and residing in the diaspora location of Canada and the United States. Acknowledging a shared history of traumatic experiences of uprooting, it accounts for a cultural, geographical reality of dispersal and fragmentation as a result of global movements in tandem with the emergence of transnational networks. Although the novels can be counted among North American immigrant fiction and although the migrant experience is central in these novels, the denomination of diaspora literature is preferred here over immigrant fiction to indicate their connection to a Caribbean literary tradition and compare them on basis of their diasporic connection and idea of a transnational yet diverse *Caribbeanness*. I agree with Brinda Mehta on the productive use of “Caribbeanness as a site for interracial collaborations, gender negotiations and the affirmation of negated identities” (Mehta 2004: 65).⁸

1.2 “In Search of Itself”: Caribbean History and Migration

A thorough reading of the novels selected for this study necessitates a likewise thorough contextualization of the history and geopolitics they emerge from. At this point a brief overview of a few cornerstones of Caribbean history as well as migratory movements shall suffice to better frame the different theoretical approaches combined here, and, on the other hand, point out the books’ common grounds.

The Caribbean archipelago is usually singled out for its exceptional cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. The widely discussed idea of creolization is linked directly to the region’s colonial history, the encounter of indigenous, African, Asian, and European cultures, as well as to constant migratory

7 I should note, however, that all four writers discussed here write and publish in English due to their situatedness in Canada and the United States which slightly weakens the argument of the linguistic diversity of the text corpus but not of the authors’ backgrounds. Supporting my argument of linguistic richness, however, is the inclusion of Afro-Caribbean proverbs, Hindi terms, Dominican-Spanish sentences, Jamaican patwa, or Haitian kreyòl in the narratives.

8 See also the publication by Rebecca Fuchs (2014) in which she contours *Caribbeanness* as a global phenomenon investigating the literary production of three Caribbean writers, namely Junot Díaz, Edwidge Danticat, and Cristina García, residing in the diaspora.

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movements within and out of the region.⁹ The Caribbean has never been a geographical space only “but a cultural construction based on a series of mixtures, languages, communities of people” (Boyce Davies 1994: 13). Creolization, migration, and subsequent diaspora formations have further extended the Caribbean to a transnational “contact zone” (Pratt 1991: 34). Ever since its ‘discovery’ it has also been a site of imagination and consumption for the Western world on which erotic fantasies and the desire for possession continue to be projected (cf. Sheller 2003). The imaginary of the exotic, paradisiac Caribbean promoted by multinational tour operators but also by local tourist boards is to be seen within an exploitative regime of the global economy with often disastrous effects on individual lives.

Carine Mardorossian describes the encounter of different people, cultures, religions, and languages in the Caribbean as “transnational and cross-cultural processes of intermixing and transformation” (Mardorossian 2005: 4), a creative, enriching process that is most prominently theorized by Kamau Brathwaite’s notion of creolization. This celebratory ethos of a ‘happy hybridity’ should by no means extenuate the fact that the “history of the Caribbean has been a violent one,” as Selwyn Cudjoe puts it (1980: 1). Cross-cultural mixing and miscegenation have been enforced in the cruelest ways possible by European colonialism, starting with the conquest of the so-called ‘New World’ in 1492 and the subsequent quasi-annihilation of the indigenous population through the hands of Spanish and Portuguese conquerors. The seventeenth century, then, marks the beginning of the era of colonialism and slavery in the whole area of the Greater Caribbean. The British, French, Dutch, and Danish crown joined the two other European powers on Caribbean soil to compete for hegemony. Accompanying European mercantilism, a highly profitable plantation system, and a triangular transatlantic trade of humans and goods were introduced, during which approximately ten million people were taken forcefully from Africa across the Atlantic and enslaved in the Americas – a devel-

9 Geographically, the Caribbean archipelago consists of the islands of the Greater and Lesser Antilles. The Greater Caribbean additionally includes Guyana, Guiana, and Surinam, and the Caribbean coast of Venezuela, Columbia, Central America, and Mexico on the grounds of shared historical, cultural, social, economic, and geopolitical characteristics. These characteristics pertain, for instance, to insularity, proximity to (other) Caribbean islands, their sharing a Caribbean coastline, the colonial history and role of the former colonizing powers, i.e. “the distribution of the plantation economy, [...] replacement of native peoples with African slaves, development of an export-based monoculture of sugar, cotton, cacao, or other cash crops, absentee ownership, [etc.]” (Elbow 1997: 14). They also share a history of anti- and decolonial struggle for independence as well as the persistence of asymmetrical power relations and a racially stratified society.

opment which also paved the way for global capitalism and is inextricably linked to modernity and industrialization in the colonial motherlands.¹⁰

The systematic exploitation of human life and labor continued along with constant resistance on part of the colonized – most notably the successful Haitian Revolution and independence in 1804 – until the 19th century. When revolts in the colonies occurred more frequently and effectively, and the support of anti-slavery movements and abolitionism rose on the continent, slavery was officially abolished.¹¹ Nevertheless, despite abolition, the economic situation of the formerly enslaved persons did not improve significantly; citizenship rights were only granted on the grounds of land ownership that the majority did not have. To meet the labor shortage on the plantations, the colonial administration, especially the British, installed a system of indentureship, ‘importing’ labor force mainly from India, but also China, Syria, or Portugal. The disenfranchised Black population at the bottom of the social hierarchy found themselves competing with the newly contracted workers from the Asian continent. White and creole elite rule on the one side and precarious conditions for the masses on the other continued; despotic leaderships were firmly in place as was social and racial stratification.

The 20th century, a time of political upheaval, nationalism, and socio-cultural transformation, witnessed not only the emergence of the middle-class, which cemented its power in the moral code of respectability. More significantly, the formation of distinct national identities and rising political consciousness eventually led to formal independence of most of the island states.¹² Curdella Forbes pointedly summarizes this period:

10 On the interdependence of global capitalism, colonialism, and modernity see, for instance, the works by Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano; on the strategic, geopolitical role of the Caribbean, see Ana Esther Ceceña’s *El Gran Caribe: Umbral de la geopolítica mundial* (2010).

11 The transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans was banned first by Denmark in 1802; by the British in 1807; the U.S. followed in 1808; the Netherlands in 1814; France in 1831; Spain in 1845 (cf. Blouet 2007: 38). The British government passed the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, followed by France in 1836 and Spain in 1864 (cf. Knight 1997: 326).

12 Here, I am thinking about Garveyism in Jamaica and his early promotion of Black pride, for instance, or Haiti’s strong emphasis of its status as first free Black Republic. The Dominican Republic, on the contrary, has always emphasized its European heritage and the Spanish origin and pride in light skin color. Trinidad and Tobago is an interesting case, first because the ethnic composition heavily changed with indentureship, and second the island possession changed colonial hands quite frequently before Britain secured the rule (see in particular chapter 5).

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The era of West Indian nationalism may be traced in two phases: first, the drive towards self-government in the first half of the century, and second, over at least the next three decades, the independence and post-independence struggles against the colonialism which after independence still dominated the territories in all but political name. The West Indies in this period may be described as a region in search of itself, so that the crucial issues as seen by intellectuals were freedom, identity, race, class, colour, society. (Forbes 2005: 4)

Forbes addresses important issues in this brief summary of the 'long century.' The Caribbean as a region is shaped by the persistence of colonial structures, economic dependency, social inequality, and racial hierarchies.¹³ By means of omission, Forbes also points out the apparent insignificance of the issues of gender and sexuality for anti-colonial and independence movements, which were patriarchal in nature, and which especially local feminist movements have been addressing at least since the 1970s.

Moreover, throughout this period especially in the Anglophone Caribbean, in Trinidad and Guyana in particular, East Indian ethnicity needed to be accommodated within a nationalist body politics that has officially been promoted as pluralist but has been internally divided along the European and African descendants and excluded the Indian and indigenous population. This division, enforced by British rule and postcolonial governments, has paved the way for ethno-political struggles that have not ceased to exist in the twenty-first century, as Patricia Mohammed makes clear with respect to the citizenship status of the Indian population: "In particular, Indians in Trinidad, collectively if not individually, and perhaps especially those belonging now to an age group over fifty, view themselves as an ethnicity under siege, occupying a second-class status in the society and having less claim to the state's resources" (Mohammed 2009: 59).

Throughout the century, enthusiasm for independence was always weighed against severe living and political conditions. Neo-imperial intervention by the U.S. (in Haiti or Grenada), dictatorships (in the Dominican Republic or Haiti), gang violence and garrison politics (in Jamaica), dependency on the IMF and World Bank along with the disastrous outcomes of structural adjustment measures, dominance of multinational corporations, and finally natural catastrophe and chaos boosted by foreign aid have all contributed to economic and political instability in the region. Asymmetrical power relations continue to

13 These conditions and societal structures and restrictions are most pointedly summarized under what Anibal Quijano describes as the "coloniality of power" which is a global phenomenon and not limited to the Caribbean or the Americas (cf. Quijano 2000, 2007).

shape Caribbean societies until today. The circumstances of poverty, unemployment, economic hardship, political unrest, and lack of opportunities have forced many citizens of Caribbean nation states to leave their countries.

As a result, migration, according to Laurence Brown, “has been one of the most significant forces defining and shaping [Caribbean] island societies” (Brown 2004: 118; cf. Bonnett 2009: 7).¹⁴ North America, especially the United States, has always been attractive as a destination because of its geographical proximity, linguistic similarity (at least for those from the English-speaking Caribbean), the perceived wealth, and the prospects for upward mobility. In the second half of the 20th century, large scale emigration took place from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Jamaica, Guyana, and Trinidad to the main hubs Toronto, Montreal, New York, and Miami.¹⁵ Looking at the profile of the immigrant population throughout the decades, there is a discernible shift in class, education level, and gender. For instance, while the aforementioned reasons are predominantly economic, work-related that have motivated ‘labor migration’ increasingly since the 1970s, the earlier ‘political migration’ movements were often caused by persecution under dictatorial regimes that forced many intellectuals and middle-class members of the opposition into exile.

14 The movement of people within the Caribbean region long precedes large-scale outward migration to the European continent and North America. Between the 1880s and the first decades of the 20th century, the first migratory movements were directed from the Caribbean core to the fringe and periphery areas. The main causes were the introduction of indentureship and economic crises in the sugar industry of the British West Indies. Sugar estate owners laid off a high amount of workforce, cut wages, and reduced production not only due to the cheaper beet sugar from the European continent, but also because the United States closed its market to West Indian sugar in order to protect the sugar imports from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic (cf. Moya Pons 2007: 299-303). The construction phase of the Panama Canal (first phase from 1881 to 1891 by France, second phase 1904 to 1914 by the United States) offered new employment opportunities and attracted many workers especially from the British Caribbean (Jamaica, Barbados). From there, many moved on to Honduras and Costa Rica to work on banana plantations. In the second and third decade of the twentieth century, immigrants from Barbados, Jamaica, and Haiti went primarily to Cuba, whereas a considerable number of Puerto Ricans moved to the United States after having been granted citizenship in 1917.

15 Circular movements between these localities have led to the formation of new “contact zones” (Pratt 1991: 34) which unsettle national borders and engender new definitions of Caribbeaness. Questions concerning citizenship, (un-)belonging, race, or cultural and ethnic identities were and still are reformulated and complicated in the wake of transnationalism and the emergence of diasporas in North America and Europe.

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The first notable move from the Caribbean to the U.S. occurred throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The majority –among them migrants mostly from the nearby islands of the Bahamas and Cuba – took up residence in New York City, others settled in Florida (cf. Brown 2004: 130; du Bois 2011: 584). The first attempt by the government to slow down immigration, which also affected Caribbean migrants, was the Immigration Act of 1924. The rise of anti-immigration movements after the First World War triggered this development, fueled by “suspicion of anything foreign” within a highly segregated society and white American’s anxiety for “Anglo-Saxon superiority” (Castles/Davidson 2000: 161-162). To keep the “undesirable aliens” (ibid.) out, immigration quotas according to national origin were imposed and the possession of a visa became mandatory. In 1952, immigration from the West Indies to the States was radically reduced with the introduction of the Immigration and Nationality Act (McCarran-Walter Act), motivated also by isolationist and xenophobic sentiments (cf. du Bois 2011).¹⁷ A new quota was laid down which only tolerated as few as 800 entries from the West Indies. The 1960s and the rise of the Civil Rights movement eventually brought about more liberal and

16 A census report dating back to 1880 “cited 14,017 foreign-born black” (Thorington Springer 2011: 8) mostly from the West Indies. Immigration during the time from 1900 until the Great Depression brought more than 150,000 Afro-Caribbeans to the country, which led to the creation of the first “island diasporas” (Brown 2004: 130; cf. Bonnett 2009: 11).

17 The field of transnational American studies (irrespective of its seriousness and potency), as outlined, for instance, by Donald E. Pease (2011) or Winfried Fluck (2011), engages with the periphery of minority and migrant cultures ‘produced’ by U.S. imperialism, migration policy, and border control, and critically investigates U.S. hegemony and its “state of exception” (cf. Pease 2011: 20-23). It also takes issue with identity categories, cultural identification, the significance of national belonging, borders, and citizenship (cf. Pease 4-5). I would argue that much of transnational American studies’ ethical, political, and theoretical impetus is, and arguably so, a reproduction (not to say mimicry) of the concerns of post- and decolonial studies. Pease describes how a transnational focus may successfully ‘recover’ what he calls the “disavowed underside of exceptionalism” (2011: 27). This “underside” are the “excepted peoples” (29) or ‘abjected bodies’ who inhabit the territories once under imperial rule of the U.S. The margin thus becomes the center of enquiry disrupting this binary logic. He argues thusly: “When transnational Americanist scholars recovered the memories of the peoples who were the victims of Euro-American colonialism on these sites, they retrieved an imperial legacy that American exceptionalism had disowned. [...] Transnational Americanists’ newly imagined territorializations of these excepted regions from the disavowed underside of exceptionalism brought into stark visibility the national shame – slavery, white settler violence, the forcible depopulation and genocidal extermination of native populations, internment camps, transfer stations – that U.S. exceptionalism had disavowed” (Pease 2011: 28).

open migration policies. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Cellar Act), Basil Wilson suggests, “completely changed the complexion of American immigration and allowed an influx of Caribbean workers to seek occupational upliftment in a highly industrialized America” (Wilson 2009: 33). Since then, the major part of out-migration from the Caribbean has been directed to the United States.¹⁸

One of the earliest migratory movements between the West Indies and Canada was initiated by Presbyterians in the 19th century. While some Canadian missionaries went to Barbados and Trinidad, a few West Indian churchmen came to Canada (cf. Page 2011: 37). Joseph Mensah emphasizes the long-standing history of Jamaican migration to Canada: “[O]ne of the first large groups of Blacks to enter Canada was the Maroons of Jamaica, who landed in Halifax in 1796. Also, during the First World War, Jamaican Blacks were among those recruited to work in the coal mines [...] and the shipyards” (Mensah 2002: 98). However, unlike the United States, where immigration from all over the world has been flowing persistently in great numbers since the 19th century, Canada had trouble attracting prospective citizens due to domestic conflicts and imperial dependence. Internally, the country was split in a French dominated Quebec (formerly New France) proud of its French distinctiveness and a larger English Canada keen on retaining its white British national character. Additionally, employment and economic perspectives were not perceived as attractive by newcomers, which was partly due to unfavorable conditions for agriculture and construction.

As Reg Whitaker explains, migration policy in Canada was dominated less by the government, which “was very reluctant to assume a strong role in shaping and directing policy” (Whitaker 1991: 5). Rather, private economic interests, especially railway companies that profited from national development, were

18 Another crucial factor that contributed to the increase in the flow of migrants northwards was the changing immigration policy of the UK. After the Second World War and with the introduction of the British Nationality Act in 1948, an “open door policy” was established; this policy declared citizens of the Commonwealth as British citizens by law. As such, they were permitted to enter the country without major difficulties. The majority of those who arrived from the West Indies served in the British army during the war, and they were now hoping for a better social and economic future. Whereas annual migration from the Caribbean numbered approximately 25,000 during the 1950s, this figure quadrupled by 1961 and 1962 (cf. Brown 2004: 128). This development was understood as a threat to the social, ethnic composition of the country and to political, cultural, and economic advances. As a consequence, the ‘mother country’ effectively shut its doors with the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1962. Under this law, immigration was controlled and dramatically reduced.

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“the main instrument of immigration and settlement. [...] The state, having set the framework for development, was then content to leave much of the actual process of immigration to private companies and market forces” (ibid.). This changed in the first decade of the 20th century: Canada’s new liberal government adopted a more open policy and curtailed the political power of the private industrial sector. In 1910 and 1919, conversely, an “exclusionary authority” was re-enacted and “draconian measures”, such as “medical and character checks” (Whitaker 1991: 11), were adopted in amending Immigration Laws enforcing racial and ethnic discrimination.¹⁹ World War I and II as well as the recession period added to xenophobic sentiments and stiff regulation in Canada’s migration policies. It was not until the late 1950s that the government implemented schemes to pull in foreign workforce to stimulate economic growth. Amongst others, the 1955 Household Service workers scheme was introduced, which brought mostly young women from the Caribbean to Canada and was also an important factor in the emancipation of Canadian middle-class women.²⁰ Further, the newly implemented point system attracted a larger number of skilled labor introduced in the late 1960s. The government’s implementation of the federal multiculturalism policy under then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1971 was probably the most progressive move at the time. This political ideology was seen as an attempt to recognize Canada’s social reality and the many different cultures that exist next to each other (in contrast to that, Quebec is supportive of interculturalism).

The communities in the metropolitan centers both in the U.S. and Canada continue to grow, while there is also a notable number of those who return to the Caribbean. The newcomers have always made use of and expanded the existing networks within the minority communities, which are often perceived as an important source of social cohesion, self-preservation, and identification. They also continuously transform the composition and make-up of and in interrelation with their social environments. Both countries’ governments have adapted their immigrant policies and legislations in their attempts to deal with and integrate the increasing number of people of diverse backgrounds. The different approaches range from assimilation, acculturation, or Anglo-

19 “The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, created as a national police force in 1920, immediately commenced surveillance of ethnic organizations. Immigrants of certain origins [especially Ukrainians, Russians, Finns, and Jews] and those holding certain political opinions (mostly left-wing) were marked as potential enemies by the Canadian state” (Whitaker 1991: 11).

20 Earlier in the century, French Canada put a similar plan to action. “1910-11 saw the first Caribbean Domestic Scheme, when 100 Guadeloupean women migrated to Quebec” (Burman 2010: 86).

conformity, to multi-, inter-, and transculturalism, ethnic pluralism paired with affirmative action policies, and so forth. However, the harmony indicated by terms such as the ethno-cultural mosaic, salad bowl, or melting pot that have come to symbolize the respective policies should not belie discriminatory practices that are often contained therein. As a matter of fact, “[p]opulations have become more heterogenous and culturally diverse. Cultural difference and social marginalization are often closely linked, creating ethnic minorities with disadvantaged and relatively isolated positions in society” (Castles/Davidson 2000: 8). A major point of concern with regard to Canada’s diversity policy is put forward by Mensah who indicates that “multiculturalism simplifies, commodifies, and devalues ethnic cultures and ultimately reinforces cultural stereotypes” (2002: 227). Inherent in constructions of ethnicity, e.g. through census data and in part through affirmative action policy, are processes of racialization that determine a (visible) minority in a binary relation to a racially unmarked, dominant white mainstream society. Racialization is understood as a “social process whereby groups are singled out for unequal treatments on the basis of real or imagined phenotypical characteristics” (Li 1990: 8).²¹ According to Leo Driedger, based on such “social construction[s] of race [which are enforced] by those who have power and authority” (Driedger 2003: 4), members of minority groups are often systematically disadvantaged and/or individually discriminated.²² In this context, minority cultures and ethnicity come to be seen as commodities “that can be displayed, performed, admired, bought, sold or forgotten” (qt. Neil Bissoondath in Mensah 2002: 227). If we talk about ethnic literature, it is this power dynamic of racialization that needs to be taken into consideration and renders the literary works under this label always already a political issue.

21 Cf. also Cornell/Hartmann 2007: 34.

22 Systematic and individual discrimination is subject of Critical Race Theory, which in Germany is commonly known as the quite controversial Critical Whiteness Studies. “Critical race theory calls attention to the relevance of, and the circumstances and cultural contexts, by which race is made consequential in individuals’ interactions and experiences” (James 2009: 93). Processes of racialization and the production of ethnic categories (which is the case with multiculturalism) are inextricably linked to hegemonic formations meaning one group’s “power to define one culture against the other” (Cornell/Hartmann 2007: 28/29).

1.3 Theorizing Diaspora

Numerous publications, ongoing discussion in academia, and the launch of various diaspora studies programs at university level are proof of the popularity of the terminology and prominence of diaspora theories in recent years. Increasingly, issues of post-/colonialism, transnationalism and transculturation, globalization, as well as discussions on migration, race, and ethnicity are being incorporated in this field. In the context of geographic dispersal and postmodern understandings of subject fragmentation, the term diaspora has been redefined and applied as an analytical tool to describe “new cultural geographies and flexible identities” (Ha 2011: 584; my translation).²³ It encompasses the creation and development of transnational communities and networks beyond the political influence of the nation-state, which, in theory, share a common sense of belonging based on origin, imagined homelands, and/or a shared history of displacement or ethnic and racial exclusion. In the case of the contemporary Caribbean, Brian Meeks elaborates that

populations are increasingly mobile and transnational. The physical and virtual movement between Kingston and Miami, Santo Domingo and New York, Bridgetown and Toronto are rapidly changing the rules of engagement of Caribbean political economy. Nation, if it was ever the case, can no longer be confined to territorial space. (Meeks 2001: xiii)

Meeks’ vision of a complete territorially unbound nation state may be debatable especially when considering the factual existence of legal citizenship, but transnational mobility certainly exposes the limits of territorial sovereignty and borders. Also, the composition of the island territories themselves is transformed through the cultural, political, and economic influence enacted by the Caribbean population of the diaspora, especially through the high amount of remittances sent; in turn, the Caribbean communities have a significant impact on the host countries in North America or Europe.

Theorizing diaspora provides the space for the consideration of movements to and from the Caribbean, the manifold interactions and interconnections between the region and the global North, as well as accompanying societal and economic changes. Tracing those migratory movements through which diaspo-

23 The term diaspora derives from Greek *diaspeirein* – meaning to scatter about, to disperse – and originally denoted the banishment of Jews in religious history and later also the forced eviction of Armenians from their home lands (cf. Brazier 2008a; Cohen 2008; Safran 1991).

ra formation has been made possible in the first place brings into focus colonial histories of transoceanic passages, the mostly forceful ‘deterritorialization’ of bodies, and subsequent ‘reterritorialization.’²⁴ For Stuart Hall, the Caribbean, a diaspora in and of itself where “everybody there comes from somewhere else” (Hall 1995: 6), is the prime example of a modern diaspora, “the first, the original and the purest” (ibid.). He argues, that the indigenous population, such as the *Arawaks*, *Caribs*, and *Taino*, were after all displaced peoples, as were those from the African and Asian continent; and neither did the Europeans originally ‘belong’ there. Importantly, Hall connects a sense of loss, rupture, and emotional fragmentation to diasporic dispersal (cf. Hall 1990, 1995). The often traumatic experiences of such violent displacement in connection with a sentiment of loss, the fear of forgetting, or sometimes the wish to erase the past or its idealization are common features of diaspora and frequently evoked in fictional writing. The trauma of forgetting is substantially explored, for instance, by Trinidadian Canadian writer Dionne Brand in *The Map to the Door of No Return* (2001), a non-fictional, personal account in which she muses on routed belonging and the impossibility of return in the case of the African history of enforced displacement. The Black diaspora is thus build on a shared sense of loss and the idea of a place of origin which for Brand is “the place which holds the before of history. [...] I cannot go back to where I came from. It no longer exists. It should not exist” (Brand 2001: 89-90). Diaspora identity may thus be formed on the premises of memory and forgetting, imagination and the myth of origin and return.

Literary scholars frequently turn to the numerous theoretical approaches to diaspora, identity and subject formation in order to link the large, equally dispersed body of Caribbean literatures. These approaches reach from a more categorical, systematic theorization, as put forward by William Safran (1991) or Robin Cohen (2008), to those that are based on cultural consciousness and transnational connections, suggested, amongst others, by Paul Gilroy (1993) or James Clifford (1994) who emphasize routes and travelling cultures to counter ethnic absolutism and essentializing identity categories. Cohen, in drawing from Safran, proposes a checklist of several features that define the specificities of diaspora, the usefulness of which is certainly debatable (cf. Cohen 2008: 6-

24 In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987[1980]) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari elaborate on these concepts that especially anthropologists refer to in order to describe the relation of and weakening ties between culture, people, and place in the context of globalization and (forced) displacement. Here, it means the transplantation of the subject from one geography to another and her re-rooting in the new location.

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8).²⁵ While he terms the African diaspora as “victim diasporas” (39)²⁶ and the Indian as “labour diaspora” (125), with reference in particular to the history of enslavement and indentureship respectively, he describes the dispersal of the people from the Caribbean territory to North America and Europe as a “deterritorialized diaspora” where cultural elements are retained to a certain degree (cf. 130). In fact, Cohen’s notions are reminiscent of Gilroy’s conceptualization of the Black Atlantic. This indicates that another diaspora can emerge out of a preceding one, as is the case for Indo-Trinidadians and Indo-Guyanese in Canada and the U.S. who become doubly diasporized (hyphenated) subjects, which is first and foremost a theoretical possibility of constructing and defining an ethnic identity and may not match to the same degree the lived experience and self-designation of those it seeks to define.

For Cohen, as for Hall, the dispersal from the original homeland is not necessarily a forced one but may also happen voluntarily based on work-related or other personal motives. He also amends “the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism” (Cohen 2008: 17).²⁷ These last points add a positive connotation, moving away from defining diasporic consciousness solely in terms of loss and mourning but rather in terms of transformation, possibility, and difference. Living in multiethnic societies, such as Toronto and New York, the diaspora experience is by necessity heterogeneous, diverse, and hybrid, as Hall claims (cf. 1990: 235).

25 In short, Safran identifies the following commonalities: being dispersed from the homeland; sharing a collective memory; being foreign and not accepted; experiencing alienation in the host country; idealizing home and a desire to return; retaining close relations to the homeland (cf. Safran 1991: 83-84). Cohen adjust these features, adding a conflicting relation with the host society, a strong group consciousness, and a sense of solidarity for co-ethnic members, and the likelihood of an enriching, creative life in the host country. Importantly, he adds, the “term ‘diaspora’ can be used to describe transnational bonds of co-responsibility even where historically exclusive territorial claims are not strongly articulated” (Cohen 2008: 7-8; italics omitted).

26 Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin understand diaspora as a “historical fact of colonization” (1998: 68/9) and state that due to diasporic movements cultures or cultural practices become creolized forming part of a celebratory ethos of diasporic identity. They continue that the “development of diasporic cultures necessarily questions **essentialist** models, interrogating the ideology of a unified, ‘natural’ cultural norm, one that underpins the **centre/margin** model of colonialist discourse” (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 70; emphasis in original). It is remarkable, however, that the authors do not use the term Black diaspora, and neither do they refer in particular to the dispersal of people from the African continent to the Americas (the African diaspora) in the course of colonialism.

27 The openness to cultural pluralism is the vantage point for pluralist and multicultural approaches in, e.g., Canadian immigration policy.

Caribbean diaspora poetics, the term I have chosen for this study to describe the textual aesthetics and performance of identity formation and subject development, may give the misleading impression of what is adopted here is a homogenous monolithic construction of a collective Caribbean diaspora identity, which obviously does not exist. This, too, is a major point of critique made by Jana Evans Braziel with regards to Silvio Torres-Saillant's approach to the concept of diaspora:

I find particularly troubling and problematic Professor Torres-Saillant's overly optimistic valorization of the Caribbean diaspora to inculcate, reform, and correct corrupt homeland Calibans. Caribbean diaspora, as an organizing rubric, not only obscures nationality, class, race, gender, sexuality, and political economy as striating diasporas and diasporic communities, but it also smacks of naïveté given several undeniable facts: there is not *one* Caribbean diaspora but many; one cannot properly speak of *the* Caribbean diaspora but must necessarily talk about the Haitian, the Dominican, the Cuban (experienced less as diasporic arrival and more as exilic displacement), the Trinidadian, the Bajan, the Antiguan, the Jamaican, the Curaçaoan, and so forth. (Braziel 2008b: 154; italics in original)

Braziel's criticism is certainly valid and I agree with the shortcomings she identifies in many theoretical approaches to diaspora in particular with regard to its homogenizing tendency as well as the often neglect of gender and sexualities.²⁸ Nevertheless, I see the productivity of the term in the analytical framework thus established; this framework renders possible a comparison of similar yet diverse literary and cultural productions across the many diasporas of the Caribbean. Instead of a meticulous search for the many fractures and differences, it seems indeed more productive to point out the commonalities that bring writers and intellectuals together; this approach makes possible the use of the cultural and academic capital associated with the concept of diaspora and can therefore produce a notion of pan-Caribbean solidarity on the literary level, without, of course, losing sight of existing historical particularities and cultural specificities. Here, I add to recent scholarship on Caribbean women's writing such as Odile Ferly's *A Poetics of Relation* (2012), in which she applies the rhi-

28 See Virinder S. Kalra et al. on the limits in diaspora studies with regard to gender and sexuality. Their points of criticism relate to the common omission of these categories from diaspora theorization or the ways women's bodies often figure as the bearers of 'home' culture. They furthermore highlight the connection of diaspora studies to queer theory as both "fundamentally question [...] the idea of settled and normative notions of home. For the diasporic individual, home is an unsettled category due to migration; for the queer, home is unsettled because of normative heterosexual expectations" (Kalra/Kaur/Hutnyk 2005: 63-64).

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zomatic root system of the mangrove as analytical framework to connect Caribbean (diaspora) literary production by women writers across geographical distance and linguistic variety. To Ferly, the mangrove, “an area with no clearly defined boundaries, [...] like the Caribbean, is an open, dynamic space that can expand or contract, a space that reinvents itself” (152). In a Glissantian fashion, she places the “archipelago and diaspora in dialogue” (130), highlighting “Relation” and connection over origins; thus the mangrove, like a diaspora poetics, “may help solidify a pan-Caribbean consciousness” (136).

In focusing on the multiple migratory routes while also acknowledging a certain degree of rootedness, theorizing diaspora attempts to overcome postcolonial paradigms that reinforce the binary of the center and periphery along with its debilitating discourse of victimization that keeps the former colonies in an ever subordinated relational position to the colonizing West. Brazier and Anita Mannur argue that similar to concepts of cultural and ethnic identities in the Caribbean, such as “the critical terms *rhizome*, *créole*, *creolization*, *hybridity*, *heterogeneity*, *métis* and *métissage*, then, diaspora has emerged as an internal critique of the binarisms [...] that circulated and found currency within colonial discourse and that persist even within some spheres of postcolonial studies” (2003: 4). Nevertheless, Caribbean diaspora studies, emphasizing more the transnational entanglements in the Americas, frequently refer back to other ideological binaries, namely those of home/foreign, local/global, regional/transnational, or of Caribbean backwardness and diasporan modernness, as for instance in Hall’s “postmodern New World nomad” (1990: 234), a notion from which this study seeks to depart.

Where Caribbean literature and culture are investigated with the focus on the Caribbean region’s transnational entanglements and embeddedness in the Americas, Rosamund S. King wishes to coin the term “Caribglobal” (2014) to account for global and intra-regional mobility that also encompasses experiences within the Caribbean and diasporas. The strong emphasis on the global seems an unnecessary amendment. For one it makes Caribbeanness appear as a uniform, corporate brand; on the other hand, diaspora includes already by definition a global dimension especially if we understand the Caribbean as “umbral de la geopolítica mundial,” as the threshold of global geopolitics (cf. Ceceña 2010). In this regard, Kezia Page offers a productive multidirectional investigation of the literatures of the Caribbean diaspora through a “two placed gaze” thus “avoid[ing] the imbalance by which the diasporan swallows up the ‘local’ or the local and the diasporan are seen as exclusive categories with the former as a disreputable [...] or obsolete voice on the margins” (Page 2011: 1). The novel by Makeda Silvera, for instance, shows that the Caribbean ‘local’ space

remains the main reference point and entangled with the diaspora setting. Toronto as the present setting where a Jamaican family migrated to is hardly mentioned as a physical space. The dominant perspective of Maria, the matriarch who looms over all characters and embodies the Jamaican home, constantly shifts the “gaze” to the Caribbean local, not “swallow[ing]” it, thus unsettling the binary of center and margin through a transnational back-and-forth.

Paul Gilroy’s concept of the “Black Atlantic” (1993), which he originally proposed as an alternative to nationalist and ethno-centric models of identity, offers a still useful conceptual background to see how cultural artefacts, music, literature circulate transnationally and transmit Black diaspora identity. He points out the common history of colonialism and modernity shared by the colonizing West and the colonized world in the course of which new contact zones have emerged.²⁹ Rather than being bound to a concrete territorial rootedness or an essential core, he identifies diaspora as a relational network that engenders cultural exchange to define identity and belonging. In *Against Race* (2000), Gilroy adds that diaspora is “radically gender-specific” (126). He specifies diaspora as relational network “which contributes to the analysis of intercultural and transcultural processes” (123). Importantly here, Gilroy differentiates the locations of residence from the locations of belonging (cf. 124): The latter in particular is detached from a geographically fixed territory thus complicating both the idea of rooted origin as well as the strict binary of the regional and the transnational. In addition, drawing attention to the ways diaspora consciousness troubles and is being troubled by the concept of the nation state and national citizenship, it opens up alternative spaces for subject formation and/or alliances. This idea makes Gilroy’s a productive concept to frame and unify Caribbean literature emerging from multiple diaspora locations, forging local and transnational connections.

Where Gilroy’s diaspora concept falls short – especially with regards to aspects of gender like Torres-Saillant –, Carole Boyce Davies offers a more nuanced perspective on the role of gender in the negotiation of identity in relation to place and the dissemination of Black diaspora culture in and through fictional literature.³⁰ She proposes the term “migratory subjectivity” (Boyce Davies 1994: 4), a terminology both resisting and diasporic, that emphasizes movement

29 The shortcomings of Gilroy’s idea have been frequently addressed pertaining to his one sided-focus on British cultural studies, the too narrow geographic focus excluding, for instance, Canada, and most prominently his neglect of gender difference, sexuality and queer subjectivity (cf. Walcott 2011: 499).

30 Boyce Davies’ book, too, does not fall short of a criticism of imperialism and related forms of domination (cf. 25).

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so as to refer to, bring together, and compare Black women's writing in multiple places throughout the Americas and the African diaspora:

In other words, there are Black women writers everywhere. [...] If we see Black women's subjectivity as a migratory subjectivity existing in multiple locations, then we can see how their work, their presences traverse all of the geographical/national boundaries instituted to keep our dislocations in place. This ability to locate in a variety of geographical and literary constituencies is peculiar to the migration that is fundamental to African experience as it is specific to the human experience as a whole. It is with this consciousness of expansiveness and the dialogics of movement and community that I pursue Black women's writing. (ibid.)

Declaring exile and migration as fundamental aspects of being, rather than national affiliation, Boyce Davies understands Black women's writing "as a series of boundary crossings and not as fixed, geographically, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing" (4) that enables a "more trans-cultural/trans-local awareness of Black women's writing communities" (128). In the chapter "Writing Home," she elaborates on gender, sexuality, class, race, and ethnicity as co-constitutive of Caribbean migrant identities in the U.S. – which can easily be extended to the Canadian context. What I find particularly relevant is her observation that the *Bildungsroman* of writers like Jamaica Kincaid are best described as narratives of a "coming of age to sexuality and place" (125), thereby interrelating a notion of home with sexual identity and gender. Although her approach engenders "cross-examination" (128), unfortunately, in her study, Boyce Davies neither includes writers of the Hispano- or Franco-phone-Caribbean nor does she critically engage in a reading of texts by those who reside in Canada, although she acknowledges the emerging body of work by Black women writers like Dionne Brand or Claire Harris.³¹ Nor does she open up the possibility of connection to Caribbean women authors of Indian descent, partly due to her decidedly Black feminist stance, thus risking an ethnic absolutism which Gilroy, for example, is critical of.³²

Caribbean diaspora poetics, in order to be more inclusive as framework and make visible ethnic identities that have been marginalized (as the Indo-Caribbean has been) in theoretical discourse, needs to be extended by what I call the '*kala pani* continuum' (see chapter 5). Here, this study builds on Brinda

31 Marlene Nourbese Philip's work on language may be the exception. Also, one of Makeda Silvera's anthologies is mentioned but relegated to a footnote.

32 The same can be said about the racial-cultural identity concept of *négritude* put forward by Léopold Senghor or Aimé Césaire and its counterpart of *coolitude* for the Indian diaspora identity coined by Khal Torabully in 1992.

Mehta's work. Mehta, in contrast to Boyce Davies, although primarily concerned with "Indo-Caribbean diasporic dislocations," as suggested in her monograph's title, recognizes the commonalities of experience shared by women of African and Indian Caribbean descent. Mehta takes up Boyce Davies' idea of migratory subjectivity: "The *kala pani* is a discourse of rupture that initiates transgressive boundary crossings through creative (self-)assertion in literary production" (2004: 4) and "promote[s] a sense of multiple consciousness" to create "diasporic solidarity" (11). Her approach attempts to disrupt both racial categorizations as well as the separation of feminist movements and the literary production of Indo- and Afro-Caribbean women. She suggests the *kala pani* discourse as

a model of hybridized feminist awareness that includes a sense of participatory ownership among all communities of women in the Caribbean, most of whom share a common heritage, of *kala pani* crossings on the 'black' Atlantic, in the form of Asian indenture, African slavery and Middle Eastern commercial enterprise. In this way, *kala pani* hybridity could offer a solution to the problematics of naming and to the privileging of particular ethnic experiences. (15)

What seems paradox is that although Mehta rightly notes the politics and exclusionary potential of naming, she nevertheless chooses an ethnically defined term as *kala pani*, which originally denotes the culturally contaminating crossing of the ocean by Hindus (see chapter 5), to be all encompassing of Caribbean diaspora experience. Actually Boyce Davies' rather 'untainted' migratory subjectivity is much better suited to accomplish this task if opened up.

A pan-Caribbean, diaspora approach neither considers groups of people as 'ethno-racially' separated units nor defines subject-hood on a clearly marked cultural essence but rather recognizes plurality and difference (cf. Khan 2015).³³ As an analytical category it brings together literary production over large distances into a metanarrative on racial and body politics, ethnic identities, economic instability, and a historical continuity of both exploitation and resilience. By necessity it must be gender-sensitive and pay attention to sexualities as well as multiple embodiments to make visible newly emerging subject positions from which to speak. A gendered reading of diaspora is a way of interpreting literature that deals with women's lived experience in multiple locations and conditions, transgresses real and imagined boundaries, and unsettles asymmet-

33 This perspective, furthermore, is open to the possibility of transcultural processes of exchange both on the intra- and extra-textual level, which in the Caribbean context are known under such diverse concepts as *creolité*, *métissage*, or *douglarization* or *douglar poetics*.

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ric hegemonic structures that are organized along intersecting lines of gender, race, sexuality, class, nation, and heteronormative social codes.

1.4 Bodies Matter

This study is located in the fields of Caribbean diaspora and literary studies and the area of body studies, hence the focus on body politics and on how subject development is narrated. Recent research, such as the publications by Nadia Celis (2015), Tanya Shields (2014), Donette Francis (2010), or Brinda Mehta (2009), proves the significance of the body and sexuality for feminist scholarly work on Caribbean literature.³⁴ Herein, the body is conceived of as a multidimensional research object being approached as such in its materiality, discursivity, productivity, and symbolism. The authors convincingly demonstrate that historical transformations are inscribed on and retraceable through the body.

Since the emergence of the field of body studies in the 1980s – the assumed “body turn” in the humanities, social sciences, and cultural studies (cf. Gugutzer 2006: 9) – the body has received a high amount of scholarly attention.³⁵ Sociologist Chris Shilling attributes the prominence of the body in various

34 Further publications that deal with women bodies in Caribbean literature are, for instance, Anatol (2015), Borst (2015), King (2014), and De Ferrari (2007). The book-length study *La rebelión de las niñas* (2015) by Celis offers a focus on the female body, embodied subjectivity, and girlhood in Hispano-Caribbean coming-of-age novels. She investigates the symbolic signification of the body and the formation of the characters as a corporeal process which is usually “problematic and unfinished” (30).

35 This pertains to the rise of the field especially in European and North-American scholarship. While Bryan Turner observes that a general theory of the body has been missing in the early 1980s (cf. Turner 1984), there is now a large body of literature on corporeality and multiple forms of embodiment, even an over-theorisation of the subject, thus a risk to lose sight of what academics actually mean when engaging in a discussion on the body (cf. Bynum 1995; Shilling 2005, 2007). Aleida Assmann, too, confirms an inflationary boom when it comes to the use of concepts related to the body (cf. 2011: 89). A MLA-search on books and articles that contain the subject ‘body’ in the main title for the years 2014 and 2015 reveals body studies as a multi-dimensional field, exploring the body in its various dimensions, for example, as in “Gendered Bodies,” “Monstrous Bodies,” “Leaky Bodies,” “Uncanny Bodies,” “Melting Bodies,” “Bodies in Pain,” “The Female Suffering Body,” “Bodies on the Line,” “Desired Bodies,” “Bridges, Border and Bodies,” “The Displacement of the Body,” “Conflict Bodies,” “Conspicuous Bodies,” “Body Technologies,” and so forth.

disciplines to the rise of consumer culture, second wave feminism, an interest in governmentality and bio-politics, as well as to technological and medical advances (cf. 2005: 2-5).³⁶ Also, the linguistic constitution of the body that post-structuralists in particular have detected urges body theorists to investigate the production of the body through language and enunciation. Most of the studies share two things: the body is multi-dimensional and over-whelming in its complexity. Judith Butler, too, in the preface to *Bodies that Matter* (1993), admits the challenge to unveil the numerous layers of the body and that she “kept losing track of the subject” (ix). As source and effect of socio-cultural practices and performances relating to multiple interdependent societal factors, the body is regarded as a medium for subject formation and constitution of lived experience. The body matters as site of political conflict manifested on which are mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that interrelate, for instance, with the status and practice of citizenship.

The study’s focus on bodies in a migratory context is political and of high contemporary relevance. Although travelling bodies are certainly not a new phenomenon of our immediate present, the ways these bodies come to matter within a transnational context have been shifting, taking into consideration the contemporary paradox of seemingly borderless global markets and free-floating capital but increasing control of certain bodies at quite real national borders. In addition, the ways some bodies are positioned outside of a national imaginary as well as the degree to which racially marked bodies (meaning *non-white* bodies) are subjected to state-enforced violence, public scrutiny, and discrimination have reached an alarming level.³⁷ In the context of the #Blacklivesmatter activist movement, for instance, Butler explains in an interview with George Yancy how the public mourning over certain dead bodies reveals the extent to which some bodies are trusted while others, black bodies, bodies of color, are suspect:

36 The quantity of published readers and monographs that discuss the body from various perspectives in recent years is certainly proof of the subject’s prominence in contemporary scholarship (e.g., Howson 2013; Fox 2012; Moore/Kosut 2010; Blackman 2008; Fraser/Greco 2007; Atkinson 2005; Brook 1999; Price/Shildrick 1999; Conboy/Medina/Stannbury 1997). On the body in literature, see also the recent *Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature* (2015) edited by David Hillman and Ulrike Maude.

37 Here I refer to the killings of Black persons like Trayvon Martin or Tamir Rice in the U.S., the so-called refugee crises in Europe in 2015/2016, or the withdrawal of legal citizen status of Dominicans of Haitian descent as just a few, very diverse examples to illustrate how individual subjects and collectives become marginalized, even murdered, based on the misperception and racial ‘phobia’ related to their ‘Other’ bodies.

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If black lives do not matter, then they are not really regarded as lives, since a life is supposed to matter. So what we see is that some lives matter more than others, that some lives matter so much that they need to be protected at all costs, and that other lives matter less, or not at all. And when that becomes the situation, then the lives that do not matter so much, or do not matter at all, can be killed or lost, can be exposed to conditions of destitution, and there is no concern, or even worse, that is regarded as the way it is supposed to be. (Yancy/Butler 2015)

What Butler describes here is a racialized body politics revealing how mechanisms of exclusion function via the body and corporeal inscriptions and ascriptions. Here the thusly embodied subjects by way of their intersectionally defined positionality are perceived as more worthy or come to matter less.

It is crucial for investigations of the body from a feminist literary studies perspective to include intersectional thought not solely as a methodology to point out moments of discrimination and thus risking to reduce it to an empty signifier. Rather, it shall function as framework of knowledge to grasp the interdependence of simultaneously operating inequalities and their complexity, to reflect one's own positionality (and privilege) in relation to the subject of investigation (cf. Roth 2013). The transversal axes, or overlapping social categories such as gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and ability determine the lived reality of each and every individual in different ways. However, the possibility of overcoming them should not be foreclosed and be realized through acts of solidarity and coalition building. Here, I draw from relevant approaches of Black and Caribbean feminism. For instance, Consuelo Lopez Springfield's *Daughters of Caliban* (1997), a collection seminal for Caribbean feminist thought, analyses the intersecting patterns of discrimination, along with multiple overlapping forms of resistance. In the title, she furthermore hints at a colonial legacy of inequality and difference (evoked is Caliban and Prospero, prosperous culture and the cannibalized other as well as indigenous identity); she points out how slavery as a corporeal history shapes women's lived experience until today – a point made, too, by transnational and Third World feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty or María Lugones. Based on this, the collection then suggests the female body as a material and discursive site of resistance. Other Caribbean feminists, like Eudine Barriteau, expressly draw from U.S. Black feminism and intersectional approaches as defined and put forward by the Combahee River Collective, Barbara Smith, Kimberly Crenshaw, Angela Davis, or Patricia Hill Collins.³⁸

38 “A foundational contribution of black feminist scholarship is its exposure and problematising of race/racism as a social relation, which simultaneously complicates

In the same vein, this study here is concerned with the modalities of social inequalities and multi-axial forms of oppression, struggle, and resistance (cf. Stam/Shohat 2014: 82). These are made explicit by four different writers of the Caribbean diasporas, as the following chapters will show, who critically examine inscriptions and ascriptions in, on, and to the body in migrant or minority contexts to unveil hierarchies of power that produce and normalize bodies as white, black, *mulata* or latina, or as hyphenated 'Afro-' and 'Indo-' while these bodies shape and appropriate these categories on their own terms. Authors of fiction from the Caribbean and its diasporas as well as literary scholars turn away from negative, stereotypical representations of Caribbean women's bodies. Ferly confirms that "[w]ith the irruption of new female narratives from the 1970s across the region, positive self-images became more frequent, and the long-lasting depiction of Caribbean women as exotic, erotic, and alienated was challenged more systematically" (Ferly 2012: 23). While women's bodies, sexualities, and agency are celebrated in its myriad dimensions, both fictional and critical works do not conceal the discrimination and oppression enacted on, with, and through these bodies. J. Michael Dash, for example, is concerned with Caribbean bodies being "filtered into America's consciousness" (Dash 1997: 137). He traces the ontological roots of the conflicting relationship between Haiti and the United States through the perceived deviance of the Haitian body prevailing the literary imagination of the 19th and 20th century. "Images of the rebellious body, the repulsive body, the seductive body and the sick body," according to Dash, "constitute a consistent discourse that has fixed Haiti in the Western imagination" (ibid.), which writers like Edwidge Danticat seek to unsettle (see chapter 6).

1.5 Outline

This study offers a comparative perspective on the coming-of-age novel in Caribbean women's writing of the diaspora. The following chapters investigate a pan-Caribbean selection of texts and distinct diasporic locations and define

and is complicated by other social relations of domination. The intellectual and activist work of black feminists reveals hierarchies of power within categories of race, class, gender, patriarchal relations, sexuality and sexual orientation" (Barriteau 2006: 15). As early as 1851, in her famous speech "Ain't I a woman?" Sojourner Truth comments on gender equality and how race and class status, i.e. enslavement, affects being a woman.

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the *Caribbean-diasporic coming-of-age novel*, opting for this terminology to decolonize the narrative convention of the *Bildungsroman*. This approach takes into account the writers' attempts to "negotiate the double-bind of responding to or critiquing European norms while also working in a genre defined traditionally by its Eurocentricity" (Chancy 2011: 24). Myriam Chancy, in this quote, points to the ideological baggage the genre comes with, implying that an alternative genre may be more suitable to capture the non-hegemonic identity formation envisioned in these novels. It is not my intention to squeeze the selected texts into an already existing, narrow definition of the genre. The novels resist easy categorization as they cannot be easily subsumed under the label *Bildungsroman*. Instead, in narrating singular coming-of-age stories, they suggest alternative visions of womanhood and conviviality.

The text corpus consists of four post-1990 novels to stress the period that Alison Donnell marks as the turning point in Caribbean women's writing in terms of a more open discussion of sexuality and body matters. These texts are the literary debuts of Makeda Silvera (*1955), *The Heart Does Not Bend* (2002), Ramabai Espinet (*1948), *The Swinging Bridge* (2003), Angie Cruz (*1979), *Soleidad* (2001), and Edwidge Danticat (*1969), *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). All novels are set in the second half of the twentieth century and provide a two-placed gaze between the Caribbean and its diaspora in the North. This selection covers not only three linguistic areas of the Caribbean, with Espinet and Silvera from Trinidad and Jamaica respectively, Danticat from Haiti, and Cruz being of Dominican descent, but also the two major diaspora locations of Toronto and New York, proving that there is not only one but many stories to be told about the Caribbean and its many diaspora communities.

Chapters two and three provide the theoretical and methodological groundings for the four subsequent analytical chapters. The next chapter "Routes of Development: Coming of Age and Caribbean Diaspora Poetics" discusses the genre development from *Bildungsroman* to *coming-of-age novel* to emphasize the necessity of a certain terminology with regard to the literary output of Caribbean women writers resident in the diaspora. Among the features I detect that define the diasporic coming-of-age novel are the hybridity of the genre, the privileging of women's voices, retrospective narration, transgenerational conflicts and interrelated life stories, the importance of the women-centered community, journeys and healing, a concern with the sociohistorical circumstances of being, and, most importantly, a commitment to the female body, embodiment, and sexuality. I build on various studies for example by Geta LeSeur (1995), Julia Kushigian (2003), Christy Rishoi (2003), Mark Stein (2004), Joseph Slaughter (2007), Lucy Wilson (2008), Yolanda Doub (2010), Stella Bolaki

(2011), or Birte Künstler (2012). What these studies show is that the genre has changed considerably and is productively adapted to discuss individual lived experience in migrant contexts as well as mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion that either support or inhibit personal development within seemingly predetermined power structures. Moreover, they all juxtapose specific types of and alternative terms to the *Bildungsroman* with an analysis of intersecting social factors such as gender, sex, race, ethnicity, class, age, colonial status, and cultural ‘difference’ in a *white*, Western mainstream culture. The chapter then summarizes major points of criticism of the term *Bildungsroman* as voiced amongst others by feminist and postcolonial literary scholars arguing for the appropriation of the genre by marginalized subjects to “demonstrate[...] the gender, racial, ethnic, religious, class, and other ‘minority’ biases and exclusions that are institutionalized in the historical world of convention and [...] constitutive of [...] the liberal public sphere’s hegemonic functioning” (Slaughter 2007: 182). This hegemonic functioning, I argue, is a continuation of colonizing processes which manifest themselves in particular on and through women’s bodies.

Chapter three, “The Making and Remaking of the Body,” takes issue with the body, embodied subjectivity, and lived experience first from a theoretical and second from a literary studies perspective. The reading of the body as suggested throughout this thesis is based on a variety of feminist, sociological, and philosophical investigations. Agreeing that the body has a materiality, I also argue that bodies are socially constructed and simultaneously productive of socio-cultural, political conditions. Insisting on the agency of the body, its performative, discursive power, as a kind of textual script testifying lived experience, I argue that the characters in the novels challenge normative views on the gendered, sexualized, and racialized body at the same time as they imply a critique of colonial constructions of the body, its objectification and fetishization, and the often stereotypical representation of the ‘Other body’ within hegemonic Western knowledge production. In addition, I borrow the term corporeal narratology from Daniel Punday (2000) to emphasize the bodies’ relevance for the narrative, opting for a systematic analysis of the body and embodiment in fiction in general and in coming-of-age novels in particular. There is an analogy of the body written in fiction and the understanding of the body as text: I regard the body as a palimpsestic entity that can be inscribed, rewritten, and overwritten, thereby storing memory, or recording it.

The four analytical chapters will show that due to migration – meaning shifting cultural and socio-political value systems – the self- and social perceptions of the body are subject to change. Chapter four “Erotic Power and Moth-

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erly Bodies” offers a close reading of Makeda Silvera’s *The Heart Does Not Bend* read alongside her non-fictional contribution to Black feminism in Canada. The novel not only portrays immigrant women’s lives in Canada, but also discloses limitations of existing gender and national discourses in Jamaica. In its depiction of non-normative subject formations (as a queering of the genre), the novel challenges the heterosexual imperative for woman- and manhood and citizenship built on ‘respectability’ as pillar of the postcolonial, creole multi-racial state. Importantly, Silvera breaks the silence surrounding homosexuality in a Jamaican community, ascribes sexual agency to the maternal body, and rewrites Black lesbian bodies as erotic, sensuous, and desirable placing it in opposition to a destructive masculinity.

In chapter five, “Dirty Skirts and the Other Body,” I discuss Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge*. The novel retraces the ancestral lines of women who have come from India to Trinidad, and later moved to Canada, thereby recovering the marginalized history of indentureship in the Caribbean and of those bodies that for a long time have not been accommodated within the dominant national, cultural ideologies of creolization. Investigating colonial structures and horizontal racism among the Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian population, Espinet discloses how ‘ethno-racial purity’ is preserved through the female adolescent body. This very same body is disciplined through patriarchal violence and Presbyterian respectability, both of which are challenged by the ‘Other’ body of the emancipated woman and homosexual man. The analysis, furthermore, reveals a nomadic diaspora identity, ‘unhomed’ bodies, and racialized subject positions which are, however, swallowed up by multicultural identity labels in Canada.

The much acclaimed novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by Edwidge Danticat, subject of the sixth chapter entitled “Bodies in Pain,” is most explicit in its representation of female corporeality and embodiment. The novel depicts not only virginal, shamed and violated, terrorized and terrorizing bodies, but also the painful and racist stigmata associated with the Black Haitian body in the West. Set against the Duvalier dictatorship and forced migration to North America – which are defining moments for Haiti’s society – it chronicles the personal and political implications of colonial and postcolonial state violence as well as the U.S.-invasion. Danticat complicates too easy separations of the local and diaspora as she makes clear that history and memory are stored within the body and travel with the migrating or exiled subject. Further issues that foreground the body’s centrality in the narrative are Danticat’s depictions of a society’s obsession with class and sexual purity, the inheritance of individual trauma,

along with strategies of survival and resistance found in the healing power of Vodou and storytelling.

The final reading, “The Incarcerated Body,” focuses on Angie Cruz’ *Soledad* and the intertwined coming-of-age story of a mother and her daughter in New York and the Dominican Republic. The precarious economic conditions on the island and desire for upward mobility as hoped for in the U.S. are focused on in this text. I highlight the novel’s criticism of the neo-colonial consumption of Caribbean bodies through prostitution of under-age women, while also commenting on the psychological effects that both sexual labor and the patriarchal violation of women’s intimacy may have on the individual. Moreover, while loneliness is a central motive that interrelates with migration and assimilation, Cruz, I argue, like the three other authors, makes clear that family, the community, and belonging are crucial for a wholesome subject formation and ethnic identity. This process of becoming subject however is bound to gendered socialization practices – in particular the performances of *machismo* as hegemonic Latino masculinity that needs to be negotiated between the legacy of the virility cult of the Trujillo dictatorship and survival in the streets in the Dominican *barrio* in New York City.

The close reading of the four selected novels is context-oriented. Correspondingly, each chapter starts with the historical and socio-cultural background of the respective Caribbean island nation, namely Jamaica, Trinidad, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, including the migratory movements to Canada and the United States. In order to situate the novels and their authors, a brief overview of the respective literary history follows. On a context-oriented close reading, Myriam Chancy comments that “[by] necessity, the cultural or literary critic must engage such texts not as empty artistic vessels standing outside of time, but as political manifestoes emerging from distinct spatial and geographical locations” (1997: 9). Thus, I wish to propose a reading of the four novels within the frameworks of their and their authors’ activist practices and political engagement with the minority community they explicitly identify with.

The texts depict “[s]ubjects dwelling on multiple margins” (Stam/Shohat 2014: 81) who nevertheless unsettle gendered and racialized body politics of ‘respectability’ and hyper-eroticism. In different ways, they criticize patriarchal social structures as well as the negative effects of global capitalism on Caribbean subjects. Questions underlying the analysis are: How is the genre of the coming-of-age novel considered to be a medium that offers emancipatory potential? How do sexism, racism, and heterophobia come to determine women’s subject positions? How do they potentially reproduce the same (patriarchal)

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mechanisms of power and exclusion? How is agency exercised with or through the body? Although the novels are quite explicit in disclosing the hegemonic normative structures that privilege certain subject positions while they at the same time discriminate against individuals and collectives who do not fit these normative conceptions, one should be cautious and avoid a too deterministic reading or regard the protagonists only as victims of violence.

2. Roots and Routes of Development: Coming of Age in the Caribbean and Diaspora

By breaking into the old genre, the female heroine has brought new meaning to Bildung and the Bildungsroman.
(Labovitz 1989: 258)

West Indian women have reinvented the traditional male-centred form in order to portray the emerging female voice and consciousness.
(Wilson 2008: ix)

What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable. [...] For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.
(Lorde 2007:112)

2.1 A Contested Genre

Among the most-often repeated mantras of postmodernism are most likely the ones about the death of the author and the fragmentation of the subject. While the first is seen as antithetical to identity politics, the latter in particular poses a serious threat to a novelistic genre like the *Bildungsroman*, which concerned itself originally with coherent subject and stable identity formation. Indeed, postmodernism, as Daniel Lea puts it, “constitutes a serious ideological blow to the relevance of the *bildungsroman*” (2005: 20). As a consequence, by the 1980s, the *Bildungsroman* is pronounced dead by some of its critics (cf. Miles 1974; Moretti 2000), while others argue it has only ceased to be a form valid for tracing the development and self-actualization of certain privileged or bourgeois social subjects, meaning white, male, educated, mostly middle-class individuals; at the same time, for the depiction of female development it “still offers a vital

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form” (Abel/Hirsch/Langland 1983: 13). Likewise, in analyzing contemporary U.S.-American literature, Bonnie Hoover Braendlin’s much cited article seeks to show that

the *Bildungsroman* is being resuscitated, revived not by males of the dominant culture but by societal outsiders, men and women of marginality groups. The *Bildungsroman* of these disenfranchised Americans – women, Blacks, Mexican-Americans, native Americans, homosexuals – portrays the particular identity and adjustment problems of people whose sex or color renders them unacceptable to the dominant society. (1983: 75)³⁹

Apparently, the *Bildungsroman* continues to be an important genre to describe and investigate the formation of the individual subject in interrelation with her environment, in particular in contexts of political upheaval, emancipation, migration, exile, or other minority contexts.⁴⁰ The revival of the genre through “marginality groups,” as Braendlin writes, however, appears to remain locked within a binary of being ‘other’ of the “dominant” cultural form, never quite achieving a status of its own. Is the artificial resuscitation of a genre really desirable? Do we really need to expand generic features beyond recognition, to force a ‘one-size-fits-all’ formula on the texts?

The term of preference here is the *diasporic coming-of-age novel*, which seems a more appropriate terminology for what the novels considered here actually achieve. Since the 1980s, mainly Caribbean women writers, and increasingly those of Indian descent, mostly residing outside of the region, have taken to that specific literary model and re-shaped it to fit their lived experiences in ethnic minority contexts.⁴¹ Feminist and postcolonial literary studies

39 Braendlin considers the *Bildungsroman* as an important “ethnic genre” in contemporary U.S.-American literature, adapted by writers like Chicana Isabella Ríos in *Victuum* (1976) or Sandra Cisneros in *The House on Mango Street* (1984), which “asserts an identity defined by the outsiders themselves or by their own cultures [...]; it evinces a revaluation, a transvaluation, of traditional Bildung by new standards and perspectives” (1983: 75).

40 The popularity may further be explained by the realist depictions of the socio-historical and cultural particularities of the contexts of origin in which the novels of this generic rubric emerged, rendering the *Bildungsroman* valuable for cultural materialists or new historicists; cultural and literary studies preoccupied with research on migration and ethnicity found in it a valuable form to retrace individual journeys and community building in relation to or exchange with a mainstream culture. The claim for ‘authenticity’ often related to these texts is what I find problematic.

41 The 1980s saw an increase in the literary output of the form, see, for instance, Merle Hodge (Trinidad) *Crick Cack, Monkey*; Erna Brodber (Jamaica) *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*; Zee Edgell (Belize) *Beka Lamb*; Michelle Cliff (Jamaica) *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*; Grace Nichols (Guyana) *Whole of a Morning*

frequently return to a discussion of this specific fictional form in their analysis of social constructions of identities and formation of those subjects that are marginalized by dominant discourses. The by now numerous theoretical publications on the *Bildungsroman* and related generic forms (such as the novel of development or coming-of-age novel) usually include an explanation for the respective terminological preference while highlighting either its liberationist or exclusionary potential. Yet, notwithstanding their argumentations for the retention of the term *Bildungsroman*,⁴² I question its validity for the moral, political, and social purposes of the novels included here. The interrelations of social inequalities, the emancipatory claims of women of color, and the anti-racism expressed in these books cannot sufficiently be captured by a genre that remains connected to its European heritage and “that embodies [white] male norms” (Abel/Hirsch/Langland 1983: 11). The coming-of-age novel is not limited to such conventions. It accounts for the experiences and processes related to childhood, adolescence, aging, and becoming adult without being tight to a certain age range or strictly defined stages of *Bildung* (cf. Künstler 2012).

The two publications by Esther Labovitz (1989) and Lucy Wilson (2008) are exemplary for the discussion of this likewise prominent and contested genre in literary history. With almost twenty years in-between the publication of their respective books, they prove that the *Bildungsroman* model is developing and being adapted at different times in different contexts by different writers who have added new meaning to it. Labovitz notes the absence of the female heroine from the genre during its flourishing period in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁴³

Sky; Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua) *Annie John* and Lucy; Merle Collins (Grenada) *Angel*, Marlene NourbeSe Philip (Trinidad) *Harriet's Daughter*. These are just a few of the earlier examples of writers from the Anglophone Caribbean. In addition, for Latin American literature, Yolanda Doub attests a similar “veritable boom of novels of female formation since the 1980s” (Doub 2010: 5).

- 42 See, for instance, the *Proceedings of the Anglistentag 2014*, edited by Jana Gohrisch and Rainer Emig (2015), here in particular the contributions to section four on “Narrative, Identity Formation, and the Bildungsroman.” Also Stella Bolaki’s *Unsettling the Bildungsroman* (2011) and Martin Japtok’s *Growing Up Ethnic* (2005) continue to use the term. Japtok uses it heuristically and to retrace a protagonist’s development, but is cautious to not apply it “as a historically specific term denoting a number of novels written in eighteenth-century Germany” (2005: 22).
- 43 German literary scholar Karl Morgenstern considers Wieland’s *Agathon* as exemplary for the genre and even more so Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in its illustration of the natural development of a male protagonist who by the interaction of his personal disposition with external conditions obtains balance, harmony, and liberty (cf. Morgenstern 1820: 17/18); see also Jacobs (2005: 24). Henry Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749) or Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1861) are often referred to as exemplary for the genre in Anglophone literature.

The formative phase of young adults typically depicted in the *Bildungsroman* used to be focused primarily on “male education and experience” (3).⁴⁴ This process and option of *Bildung*, building on Enlightenment ideals of social relations, cultural refinement, education, progress and individual achievement, integration and conformity,⁴⁵ did not pertain to the same degree to women, who remained locked within (middle-class) feminine ideologies of marriage and domesticity. Labovitz attributes the growing importance of the genre for women writers in the 20th century to women’s emancipation movements in the West when political participation became an option for the majority of women, leading to a re-definition of *Bildung* in general and later of the genre as well.⁴⁶

Lucy Wilson, on the other hand, stresses the *Bildungsroman*’s incompatibility with the experiences of (national) independence and social mobility, but also with the experiences of poverty, violence, racism, and sexism or *machismo* made by “contemporary female characters from developing nations” (2008: ix). She further emphasizes the genre’s “radical transformation in the hands of

Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) is commonly referred to as a first revisionist female bildungsroman that traces the path of a heroine’s development.

- 44 Morgenstern, one of the first to use the term in his lecture “Über das Wesen des Bildungsromans,” delivered in 1819, defines the *Bildungsroman* as a subgenre of the novel which depicts the *Bildung* of the hero from its very beginning in its progress to a certain level of completion. *Bildung*, according to Morgenstern, can be understood as the intellectual, ethical, or aesthetic formation of a (male-gendered) human being in harmonious relation with society. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, like Morgenstern, in his exclusively male-centered definition of the bildungsroman, dates the origin of this type back to late eighteenth century Germany and the publication of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. In the essay “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism” he applies the term “novel of emergence” thereby emphasizing the dynamic formation and mobility of the *bildungsheld* as well as “the image of *man in the process of becoming* in the novel” (Bakhtin 2010: 19; italics in original).
- 45 Concepts like harmony and universality, education and the relation between the self and the world are central to the definition of the genre and the term *Bildung* in this period. Schöneich describes the different meanings of these terms in the literature on the Bildungsroman (Dilthey, Morgenstern, and Lukács), referring either to an inner condition of the individual or the individual’s relation to the world (cf. Schöneich 1999: 28).
- 46 Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland contextualize the emergence of “fictions of female development” within increasingly politicized women’s movements, favorable economic conditions, easier access to education and the book market. “While the Bildungsroman has played out its possibilities for males, female versions of the genre still offer a vital form. [...] Although the primary assumption underlying the Bildungsroman – the evolution of a coherent self – has come under attack in modernist and avant-garde fiction, this assumption remains cogent for women writers who now for the first time find themselves in a world increasingly responsive to their needs” (1983: 13).

West Indian women writers” (15). This she sees realized especially in the relational character of the re-invented genre as well as the extent to which it establishes a “dialogue across generational, gender and political lines” (28). Evoked in the quotes is an argument made also by Slaughter, stating that the genre needs to be regarded as “function (or practice) that articulates certain social relations” (2007: 7) and constitutes a veritable “instrument for historically marginalized people to assert their right to be included [...] and to participate [...] to make the socially unrepresentative figure representative” (157). Slaughter here confirms this study’s thesis that the genre is an ideological tool and political in its claim for the right of participation, that in its redefinition as coming-of-age novel is potentially emancipatory for marginalized or minority voices – I will return to this argument later in this chapter. While Labovitz, in referring to an explicit feminist intervention into the “old genre,” retains the terminology of *Bildungsroman* in order to write the heroine into the genre and thereby emphasizes women’s newly gained access to *Bildung* and the public sphere, Wilson argues for the necessity of another terminology to denote the revisionist attempts by women writers from the Caribbean who write against a background of colonial history and experiences of oppression. Wilson’s term the “novel of relational autonomy” (16) breaks with preceding terms in its emphasis on the communal aspect of these novels and the development of an autonomous self in (intimate) relation to others, always “in dialogue between the past and present” (21).

Another important step in the development of the genre theory along with a contestation of the assumption of a coherent self is the genre’s move towards the *negative* or *anti-Bildungsroman* and the emergence of disintegrated subjectivity. In the 20th century, there is the tendency to analyse and interpret the genre not solely regarding the harmonious balance between the protagonist and society but rather with respect to ruptures and contradictions in the formation of identity (cf. Schöneich 1999: 29). Christoph Schöneich’s analysis of the English (male) *Bildungsroman* after 1945 stresses the importance of the modern concept of identity for the analysis of the genre since the 1970s and how the *Bildungsroman* performs the relationship between the self and the world (cf. 37). He argues that the social and psychological dimensions of identity correspond to the genre’s “central dialectics of individuality and norm, liberty and conformity” (12; my translation). It becomes clear that individuality does not always conform to social norms; that the ‘negative emergence’ of identity leads to a dialectical conflict between social and psychological forces. What turns out is the failed rather than successful integration of the protagonist into the community, termed then as an *anti-Bildungsroman* that foregrounds social

criticism and problematic aspects in subject formation, which have already come to the fore in the modernist *Bildungsroman* of the 1890s (cf. Castle 2006: 23).⁴⁷ The denomination remains, however, problematic, when, for instance, protagonists who are ‘marked’ as ethnic or queer do not fit presupposed normative categories promoted by the ideology of the genre. Their development and coming of age is then already pre-determined as ‘anti’ or ‘negative’ because of its perceived non-conformity. The move of the genre toward a focus on the protagonists’ alienation or disintegration is observed by Christy Rishoi, who speaks of “the quintessential outsider’s genre” (2003: 64) or by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, who, with reference to Caren Kaplan, label it as “out-law genre” (Smith/Watson 2010: 59).⁴⁸ This outsider or outlaw is a character who ultimately fails to accomplish what society expects of her or is not rewarded with complete integration for her attempts.

Admitting that the genre tradition in Caribbean writing, the coming-of-age novel in particular, has not developed in isolation from the more conventional though ideologically tainted *Bildungsroman*, a deviation from the European precursor is indeed also discernible.⁴⁹ If we accept the genre’s ability (and the ability of literature in general) to participate in social discourses and intervene in hegemonic forms of knowledge production, the coming-of-age novel can act as counter-narrative that neither seeks to depict only harmonious processes of socialization nor labels non-conforming emergence of individuals as negative or ‘anti.’

A possible way out of the terminological labyrinth is the distinction of the *novel of development* as the umbrella term under which several sub-categories can be subsumed (cf. Gutjahr 2007: 11-14).⁵⁰ It is broad and ‘neutral’ enough to

47 In short, as compared to its classic model, the plot structure of the 20th-century form is less teleological, it is more flexible in crossing genre boundaries, and the ending is usually more open (cf. Schöneich 1999: 12).

48 Two canonical examples are Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) or J. D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* (1951).

49 The on-going discussion on terminological choice has produced a variety of synonymous terms or sub-forms of the type, the most common being the novel of development, of emergence, of growth, of education, of formation, of apprenticeship, of self-realization, of adolescence, of awakening, the coming-of-age novel, the *Künstlerroman*, and so forth. For plot-related genre conventions of the *Bildungsroman* and other sub-forms, see, for instance, Buckley (1974), Redfield (1996), Schöneich (1999), Moretti (2000), or Jacobs (2005).

50 For example, Gutjahr differentiates the *Bildungsroman* from the educational novel as the latter primarily narrates the formation and guidance of the young protagonist through a mentor figure and pedagogical instances (cf. Gutjahr 2007: 13). The protagonist’s adaptation to contemporary didactic and pedagogical concepts – usu-

accommodate both the *Bildungsroman*, as the most prominent and traditional form, as well as the *coming-of-age novel*, making clear, too, that they are not to be treated as synonyms.⁵¹ For the more general features of the novel of development one may consult Rita Felski's and Mikhail Bakhtin's definitions of the genre.⁵² The novels of the genre are indeed biographical in the sense that they narrate personal live stories, yet seldom those of a "coherent" subject as Felski suggests (cf. 1986: 138). In his study on the typology of the realist novel, Bakhtin distinguishes the *novel of emergence* as collective term along with five sub-categories.⁵³ Although the definitions are all based on the male hero only and a man's process of becoming (cf. Bakhtin 2010: 19), especially his fifth variant is interesting for its dialectic-relational and historical characteristics. In this type, "man's individual emergence is inseparably linked to historical emergence" (23). Thus the novels are more context-oriented and reflect on the changing nature of the world that has ceased to be a static and "immobile orientation point" (ibid.). The protagonist comes of age or "emerges *along with the world* and he reflects the historical emergence of the world itself" (ibid.; italics in original). Bakhtin's explanation that the development of the self is no longer solely biographical and a "private affair" (ibid.) implies that this process and actions have an effect on the subject's surroundings and alter social and cultural conditions. He adds that the hero finds himself at the "transition point from one [epoch] to the other. This transition is accomplished in him and through him" (ibid.). This means that those who inhabit the fictional worlds constantly change and adapt to but also actively participate in and contribute to this transitional process. Naturally, in order to create historical time or emergence, this novelistic type juxtaposes individual, multi-generational, and communal emergence thus expanding the temporal horizon. If we understand the epochal not only in its temporal but also ideological or conceptual meaning or as relating to worldview, this model fits current conceptions of the world and identities, of

ally unreflected and unquestioned by her- or himself – are of particular importance in this form.

51 Here, this approach departs from studies such as Jerome Buckley's who uses the different terms interchangeably "for the sake of convenience and variations" (Buckley 1974: vii), which is hardly a satisfying explanation.

52 Felski suggests four defining elements of what she terms the "novel of self-discovery" that equally apply to the novel of development for this study's purpose: *biographical*, assuming the existence of a coherent self; *dialectical*, understanding identity to be conditioned by a process of interaction between psychological and social forces; *historical*, describing identity changing over time; and *optimistic*, in the belief in a possibility of meaningful development" (1986: 138; emphasis added).

53 Among these sub-categories we also find the *Bildungsroman* in a narrow sense being based on humanistic ideals of education (cf. Bakhtin 2010: 22, 24).

societies and cultures that, indeed, are increasingly characterized by transformative moments and transnational and transcultural processes.

Recalling briefly the lines from Braendlin's article quoted above, there resonates an early postcolonial reading of U.S.-ethnic women's novels, one that highlights the writers' successful attempts at rewriting the genre of the *Bildungsroman* (she uses the verbs to resuscitate, to revive) while disclosing structures of inequality that can be linked to the persistence of colonial and neo-imperial power relations. One focus of postcolonial literary studies has been on the adaptation of the genre in 20th-century Caribbean literature, most paradigmatically phrased by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (1998) as a writing back to a Eurocentric canon. On an ideological and political level, the strategic writing back, or the "appropriation and revision of Western form" is directed against existing forms of domination and seeks to destabilize "colonial mastery and the mastery of European culture" (Marx 2004: 88-89).

An extensive work on the genre by Black writers of Caribbean descent is conducted by Geta LeSeur in *Ten is the Age of Darkness* (1995). The author draws a genealogy of what she terms the "Black *bildungsroman*" by comparing an extensive body of texts written by African Caribbean and African American authors in the time period from the 1930s to the late 1980s. With her terminological choice she not only highlights the genre's concern with race and identity politics, but also seeks to differentiate the Black *Bildungsroman* from those by white American and European writers (cf. 19). She furthermore makes a clear-cut distinction between the African Caribbean tradition (memory, nostalgia) on the one side and the African American (politics, protest) on the other, which can be contested. Accordingly, "the West Indian novelist writes a *bildungsroman* to recall childhood roots and to discover the truth about self and home, while the African American novelist tends to use personal experience in order to make a viable protest that is almost always about race, slave history, and the White establishment" (1).⁵⁴ This might be true for some of the earlier examples in Caribbean writing that are less political in scope or for those authors who write from exile.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, writers from the West Indies also

54 Writers like Claude McKay or Paule Marshall, whose work forms part of both the African-American as well as the African-Caribbean literary tradition, already blur this distinction though.

55 Since many of the Caribbean authors live, write, and publish abroad, similar to a self-imposed exile, they often depict a nostalgic memory of an idyllic childhood that "retains the freshest images and the most deeply imprinted experiences" (LeSeur 1995: 26) of the Caribbean home space. Also, this is connected to the "wish to establish an authentic basis of experience [and...] to repossess or reinterpret a past that to the adult seems broken and fragmentary" (ibid.).

do use the genre for their protest both against an imposed canon – even before postcolonial theorists’ invented the concept of writing back – and against the colonial establishment, postcolonial dictatorships, or gender inequality. For example, Paule Marshall’s novels *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) and *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969) highlight “age, continual process, and female mentoring and its relationship to empowerment and subsequent articulation as significant elements of [...] women’s quests” (Dehn Kubitschek 1987: 44). The process of *Bildung* therein is more suitably described as a coming-of-age process during which the protagonists try “[t]o recover [their] wholeness [...] in a racially or culturally specific myth rather than a universalist structure” (47). In this regard the applicability of a universalist narrative form such as the *Bildungsroman* as LeSeur uses it, too, can further be questioned; debatable too is the adequacy of *Bildung* which in the novels usually goes along with deprivation and alienation.

Noteworthy in LeSeur’s analysis is her focus on gender-differential socialization processes as well as conflicting relationships among generations and genders. “The girls in the West Indies novels, and that number has increased since the late 1940s and 1950s [...] learn early about the problems of gender, color, men, and motherhood and community. [...] There is a code of conduct prescribed for a girl by the family and the ‘village,’ so she must at all times remain ‘feminine’” (5). The plots of these novels circle around the protagonists’ attempts to come to terms with their bodily selves in the context of gender and racial discrimination and non-conformity, showing also their ambition for education and wish for upward mobility in highly stratified societies. Further recurring motives and themes are, amongst others, informal education through the older generation and community, the move from the countryside to the city, or migratory journeys from the Caribbean to North America along with alienation from the Caribbean home, all of which are influential, sometimes disturbingly, on their individual emergence from girl to woman. Here, LeSeur asks an important question, “what can happen to a young girl when the natural initiation process is complicated by an imported metropolitan culture” (191)? Indeed many of the features LeSeur mentions are relevant also for the text corpus selected here; her terminology nevertheless needs to be reconsidered and broadened for this study, as she does not consider novels by Indo-Caribbean writers, who admittedly have been gaining recognition only around the time of her publication. And, she does not pay explicit attention to the aspect of diaspora.

Coming of Age in the Caribbean and Diaspora

In their working definition of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson clearly shift focus towards the ideology inherent in the form of the *Bildungsroman*:

Contemporary postcolonial writers in particular are employing the bildungsroman form to cast their coming-of-age stories as encounters with powerful mentors at the cultural crossroads of metropole and (post)colony, where conflicting concepts of education and social value collide. [...] [E]mploying the form [they] typically reshape the story of education as one of becoming *alienated subjects* of double legacies in ways that interrogate the *form's ideology* of development, self-determination, and *incorporation of citizens* into the new world. (Smith/Watson 2010: 128; emphasis added)

They identify the coming-of-age narrative as plot driving element in the postcolonial *Bildungsroman*. In their definition the educational aspect pertains to an alienating process of becoming within colliding value systems of the old and new world. The historical emergence, in Bakhtin's sense, depicted in these novels is one of social transformation, political upheaval, racism, ethnic conflicts, as well as class and gender struggle at epochal turning points of colonial rule, anti- and post-colonialism. These coming-of-age narratives reveal the ideological underpinnings of the novel form and problematize both the incorporative function as well as the exclusionary mechanism associated with the status and practices of citizenship, which is an important addition. Another recurring thesis in postcolonial readings of Caribbean coming-of-age stories, especially those narrated from a woman's point of view, suggests that the development of the young women mirrors the emergence of larger community structures and national self-definition while being set against the historical background of independence. Her rebellion is one against an oppressive patriarchy, disclosing parallels to Caribbean societies' resistance to colonial domination of Europe or the invasion of North America, as in Merle Collins' *Angel* (1987).

2.2 Coming of Age as Literary Option of Decoloniality

Continuing with the issue of terminology, what so far remains under-investigated in literary theory is the extent to which fiction, genre, or aesthetic form constitute a decolonial option. This pertains not only to their representa-

tion and analysis of social constructions of identities and marginalized subjectivity, as offered for instance in coming-of-age narratives, but also to the terminological choices made by literary scholars themselves.⁵⁶ Audre Lorde's argument "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" (Lorde 2007: 112; italics in original) has been evoked in numerous contexts mostly in connection with feminist, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-patriarchal discourses and ties in well with the argument I wish to make. Despite "its adaptability to different cultural contexts" (Doub 2010: 1), the *Bildungsroman* is "burdened with the cultural baggage" of its history (Bolaki 2011: 20). The genre has a particular role in Caribbean literature. Caribbean adaptations used to be modelled specifically on the European form for its aesthetic value; on the global publishing market, the ethnic Caribbean version provides cultural capital and access to publishing opportunities;⁵⁷ the European form itself, and European literature in general, were major didactic "tools" in the colonial and postcolonial education system used for the propagation of gender and racial ideologies or moral conduct. But does it make sense to retain a certain literary form and terminology when its mechanisms cultivate normative being and therefore reproduce the same "master" or grand narratives we wish to overcome? Are there not certain conventions evoked that when squeezing minority writers of color into the genre it would mean bending them to the rules of the "master's house" to use Lorde's phrasing? Literature participates in the dissemination and preservation of culture, norms, and values. Genres, like children's books, fables, or the *Bildungsroman*, too, are embedded within certain discourses and articulate "certain social relations" (Slaughter 2007: 7). They can be turned into an ideological tool as they, too, produce and circulate certain kinds of knowledge, or illustrate a certain lived reality or normality.⁵⁸

Stella Bolaki sets herself the task to unsettle the *Bildungsroman* genre, as her monograph's title promises, but, unfortunately, holds on to the term. The book, it is argued, in "exploring the category [of the *Bildungsroman*] in new settings and through new perspectives reveals its usefulness for the representa-

56 See, for example, Roth (2014).

57 According to Slaughter, the realist bildungsroman is a key that grants ethnic authors entrance to publishing houses: "But the *Clef à Roman* is a *Bildungsroman* that, at least implicitly, recognizes itself as a commodity in a socioliterary economy – as a vehicle for the commercial publication of the author" (309).

58 Here, one might want to recall the correlation of knowledge and power Foucault, for instance, addresses in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) and *History of Sexuality* (1976).

tion of ethnic American and postcolonial subjectivities” (2011: 9).⁵⁹ Bolaki’s reading of the subversive ‘disfigured’ body in Lorde’s *Zami* (1982) and *The Cancer Journals* (1980) is particularly intriguing, but especially the latter can hardly be described as *Bildungsroman*. Bolaki admits that the term has become “notoriously slippery” (10) to which she contributes by “bending and stretching” (11) it beyond recognition so as to incorporate autobiography and life writing, short story and poetic forms, which seems arbitrary and problematic. She justifies the decision against the usage of terms like coming-of-age narrative or novel of development with a nod to the productivity of the term *Bildung*.⁶⁰ Finally, the subject formations depicted in the narratives Bolaki investigates are meant to “challenge the boundaries of categories such as ‘ethnic’ and ‘American’” (24) – and the *Bildungsroman* – which then is not reflected in the terminological choice she makes. On the contrary, the category or label of the ‘ethnic American’ is re-inscribed on the body (of works) and fixes it within the very paradigms it wishes to unsettle. The *Bildungsroman*, to contradict Bolaki’s claim, does not offer these authors the stage to perform their “acts of disobedience” (26), unlike the coming-of-age novel which allows hybrid identities and *mestiza* consciousness to emerge without overly emphasizing the controversial concept of *Bildung* that it then needs to either contradict or confirm. Interestingly, she explicitly uses the term coming-of-age stories:

The texts discussed here allow [...] an examination of the place of feminist discourses within debates on assimilation and cultural nationalism and of the ways through which ethnic women writers query this binary in their *coming-of-age stories*. The texts confront false dilemmas and divided loyalties, such as those between gender and ethnicity, by attempting, with different degrees of success, to *construct hybrid spaces and borderland subjectivities*. (14-15; emphasis added)

59 She closely examines the four ‘ethnic’ American women writers Jamaica Kincaid, Maxine Hong Kingston, Audre Lorde, and Sandra Cisneros. In the “Postscript” she furthermore mentions a couple of women writers of the Caribbean diaspora who in her definition add to the *Bildungsroman* canon, such as Esmeralda Santiago, Julia Álvarez, Cristina García, and Edwidge Danticat, and who “question patterns of development central to the Anglo-American canon of the *Bildungsroman* and specific notions of American self-hood” (28). Her use of the label of the ethnic homogenizes the in fact very diverse group of writers based on their being essentially non-American.

60 The productivity she sees in the word’s phonetic proximity with building as well as in the sense of *Bildnis* (as in portrayal of identity or human kind). She also addresses the simultaneous meaning of *Bildung* as product, as in culture, education, or civilization, and process, as in cultivating, educating, or civilizing – now adding colony and colonizing and we have a violent imperial twist.

The label obviously works well to contour the literary and political work her selection of writers in fact accomplish – in a sense decolonial but definitely feminist and intersectional.

Maria H. Lima, on the other hand, argues that for Caribbean diaspora writer Jamaica Kincaid, whose work *Bolaki* also analyses, the model of the conventional *Bildungsroman* “does not fit her [Kincaid’s] protagonist’s reality and needs, for not only does her character have to reject the social order and carve a space for herself, but she still has all that justified anger to overcome/express” (2002: 864). Kincaid, just like the four writers whose fictional work I examine, charts “counternarrative[s] to ‘progressive development’ and ‘coherent identity’” (859). While this observation relates to the narrative level and content, Lima – in an earlier article – also notes the decolonial potential of what she names the Caribbean novel of development as resistance in its “destruction of boundaries” (Lima 1993: 53) and deconstruction of the former imperial literature’s dominance. Of interest is her criticism of the model: “While genre does not in itself determine that a text must be read in a certain way, it brings with it a history of reading, a set of conventions and of specific aesthetic ideologies” (36). This statement is absolutely crucial but unfortunately does not lead her to a more radical re-definition of the genre that would also affect and possibly decolonize a certain reading practice. It remains within the postcolonial paradigm of writing back which surely makes sense in the scholarly context of the 1990s in which her essay “Revolutionary Developments” was written: “While contemporary postcolonial *Bildungsromane* do not break the conventions outright [...] they explore its possibilities, thereby expanding the genre” (36), remaining nevertheless within the Western discourse of *Bildung* “that constitutes identity in terms of a relation to origin” (36), which in the Caribbean context is a complex issue.

With regard to the bourgeois connotation of the word *Bildung*, Wilson, too, wishes for “a new term, one that is free from the cultural and historical implications of the German word, a term that acknowledges the attempt of these writers” at subversion (Wilson 2008: 15).⁶¹ In addition, glancing quickly at the texts of Silvera, Espinet, Danticat, and Cruz in terms of their conceptualization of *Bildung* as schooling, it can be seen that for the adolescent girls it is compulsive and often hurtful in its propagation of racist ideology. Within the institutional realm of education, Espinet’s protagonist learns about an Indian woman’s proper place in Trinidadian society from her teacher who keeps reminding her that she was one of those “hot coolie [sic.] girls who had to be brought in

61 A criticism of the term *Bildung* itself is provided, amongst others, by Nussbaum (1997) and Slaughter (2007).

line” (143). Similarly, Silvera’s and Danticat’s main characters are racially discriminated against by classmates and made aware of their outsider status.

Rishoi, likewise, discards of the *Bildungsroman* form. She holds that the move to transfer this “grand narrative” of identity formation to any other context is nothing more than “recycling an already-established literary form that restricts the norms of male development in the first place, and has in any case proved entirely unsuitable to female narratives” (2003: 61). A break with the conventional form, she explains, is envisaged by the coming-of-age narrative as a literary practice that liberates the subject from “cultural interpellation” (61).⁶² The coming-of-age novel by Caribbean women writers of the diaspora is significant in this respect because, as the following analytical chapters will highlight, it grapples with the formation of the subject, the interrelation of body and psyche with culture and citizenship to confront the ideological underpinnings of a normative order of society.

The two concepts of *Bildung* and the *Bildungsroman* undeniably have undergone transformation since their emergence, but they still carry a negative undertone considering the Caribbean past of epistemic and literary colonization through imperial power. Caribbean literature, the four novels here are no exception, frequently addresses those inequalities that are deeply rooted in the period of conquest and colonialization.⁶³ Above I have touched upon the post-colonial criticism of the *Bildungsroman* along with the strategy of *writing back*. Now, criticism of the postcolonial both as a theoretical concept itself and in its temporal dimension, suggesting that we have gotten past colonial dominance, comes from the corner of decolonial thinkers.⁶⁴ Walter Mignolo’s fundamental issue with postcoloniality is that in contrast to decoloniality it

62 In a very broad sense, ‘interpellation,’ in the sense of Louis Althusser, means the interrelation of the individual and ideology and the ways the subject is defined externally and positioned through it. According to Althusser, “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (1971: 173). They “are always-already interpellated as subjects with a personal identity” (178).

63 To mention just two examples, there are St. Lucian Vladimir Lucien’s poetry collection *Sounding Ground* (2014) or Guyanese Oonya Kempadoo’s novel *Tide Running* (2001).

64 On the origin of the decolonial option, Mignolo states, “decolonial thinking emerged at the very foundation of modernity/coloniality, as its counterpoint. And this occurred in the Americas, in Indigenous and Afro-Caribbean thinking. It later continued in Asia and Africa, unrelated to the decolonial thinking of the Americas, but rather as a counterpoint to the re-organization of colonial modernity with the British Empire and French colonialism” (Mignolo 2011: 46). Quijano further argues that race, as a social construct, is a primary factor for the classification and stratification of the world’s population. He adds, “[t]he racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism

suggests an 'after' of coloniality. The prefix 'de' assumes, instead, many temporalities and it is aware of the imperial dimension of a unilinear concept of time and assumes the pluriversality of local time, including European imperial time, for instance [...]. Coloniality is still with us: there is no 'post' from decolonial perspectives. (Mignolo 2014a: 21)

The "coloniality of power," meaning the continuity of hegemonic relations and imbalances which are a direct legacy of European colonialism in the Americas, pertains to the same degree to economic and political control as it does to social relations and knowledge production.⁶⁵ In an interview, Mignolo furthermore stresses that decolonial thinking "no es un método a aplicar sino una manera de estar y pensar en el mundo" (2014b: 62). Agreeing that decoloniality is primarily a way of *being* and *thinking*, it should also underlie our ways of *seeing* and *describing* the world. In this respect a decolonial option applies to the same degree to methodology and terminology, and may start with a serious engagement with the literary genre especially when considering the literature's potential of world-making and imag(in)ing and how literary theory and narrative analysis conceive of it. Here Audre Lorde's contention makes sense: A continuous use of certain tools will not dismantle persisting power structures that shape plural forms of marginalization and discrimination. A decolonial world envisioned by Caribbean literature will not reveal itself if looked at through colonial lenses. So as to unsettle the *Bildungsroman* along with its ideological baggage, a more profound break with the genre is needed. This decolonial option furthermore engenders a critical discussion on labelling and the mechanisms of the literary field in which the participating entities are in a hegemonic constellation. Moreover, decolonial thinking not only necessitates the contextualization of history, politics, and economics but also a methodological approach that takes the ideologies behind terminologies seriously.

in whose matrix it was established. Therefore, the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of coloniality" (Quijano 2000: 533).

65 What Mignolo terms the coloniality of power or "colonial matrix of power" continues to shape contemporary societies and politics in particular in "four inter-related domains [...]: the control of economy (labor, land, natural resources); the control of authority (government, army); the control of gender and sexuality (control of family life and reproduction of the species based on the Christian/bourgeois family) and the control of knowledge and subjectivity (epistemology, aesthetics)" (2008: n.p.). On "The Coloniality of Gender," see especially Lugones (2010).

2.3 A Fraught Period: Socialization and the Subject

In her novel *The Scorpion's Claw* (2004), Haitian-Canadian author Myriam Chancy describes an up-rooted self in search of her place in the world. The protagonist reflects on her own becoming and unbelonging:

I haven't realized yet that one can't rush into the future without having looked the past in the face. I know that facing the past would be like holding up a mirror to myself and seeing the pain hidden there, behind the skin still recovering from the scars of adolescence, in the eyes round with anticipation [...]: a life half-lived, cut-off at the roots. (31)

The mirror evokes a dramatic Lacanian moment of confrontation and self-identification – a moment that reveals the necessity of reconciliation of past and present. Interestingly, all of the four novels selected for this study stage such a mirror scene; they do so either in the sense of self-alienation, thus reversing Lacan's hypothesis, or as an instance of self-recognition. Chancy's narrator furthermore hints at the painful and turbulent phase of adolescence, the memories of which are imprinted on her body like scars. The memories in this case not only stem from the transition from youth to maturity, but are also caused by the haunting recollections of the Duvalier dictatorship and its legacy as well as the loss of her home, having moved from Haiti to Canada.

The transformation from child to adult is a particularly contradictory period; Chancy's narrator elaborates not only on pain but also on anticipation and curiosity for what lies ahead. In a similar way, Makeda Silvera describes the coming of age as a "frustrating period for young adults, fraught with insecurities, pain, confusion, excitement, joy and discovery" (Silvera 1995a: ix). A close reading of the novels of the diasporic coming-of-age genre makes clear that the source of this pain and insecurity is not only all the 'weird stuff' the changing body does, but also the often stereotypical ascriptions by the society or peer group. Joy, on the other hand, may be derived from a nurturing community or sexual pleasure. Thus, coming of age can be specified as a fraught period of bodily and emotional turbulences that renders the adolescent subject vulnerable to exterior influences or intrusions.

Broadly defined, the novels "narrate[...] the formation of a young life as gendered, classed, and raced within a social network larger than the family or the religious community" (Smith/Watson 2010: 120). In a diaspora context, such as Chancy's novel envisions, the coming-of-age novel is particularly well suited to investigate how migration, cultural entanglements, and growing up in (at

least) two locations perceived as different (namely the Caribbean and North America) impact on the individual and alter subject formation. The formative process is not a coherent one but disrupted and unsettled by the experience of migration. Socialization takes place in a transnational social network and is further problematized by displacement, clashing codes of conduct, or stereotypes that may be damaging to the individual. The central aspects of the genre type are hence the conflicting socialization of individuals as sexualized, racialized beings into socially sanctioned, but often compulsive roles and the negotiation of the own identity, needs, and obligations within family and community structures and the wider society which is often in conflict with a positive self-definition and personal liberation.

Relocated in a new environment, the novels' protagonists suddenly find themselves in a reference frame different to the one they have been accustomed to. Gloria Anzaldúa puts this comprehensibly in her theory of the borderlands, stating that "having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes *un choque*, a cultural collision" (1987: 78). The collision of different sociocultural sets reinforces the confusion felt by the adolescent individual. It may thus be an alienating experience. Anzaldúa's observation recalls Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* and structural conflict (cf. 1984) to describe the discrepancy of internalized dispositions in relation to cultural patterns and expectations of the social location (considered as gender- and ethnicity-specific or milieu-specific). Nevertheless, the emergence of an in-between-state of what Anzaldúa terms a *mestiza consciousness*, a borderland of identity/identities, may also be enriching and not necessarily alienating and damaging to the subject.⁶⁶

Insights from sociology, in particular socialization theory, provide an understanding of subject formation envisioned in the novels of development. Socialization names the process of becoming a subject, encompassing the social conditions that enable the individual to develop and secure her own personality and identity. It denotes

the formation process of the personality in a productive engagement with the natural dispositions, particularly bodily and psychological characteristics ('inner/interior reality'), and the social, physical environment ('exterior reality'). This definition is based on the assumption that the individual is strongly influ-

66 Homi Bhabha reaches a similar conclusion in his more abstract conceptualization of the *Third Space*, a space of hybridity from which new subject positions can emerge provided with the power to act (cf. 1994).

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enced by her environment, while at the same time actively participating in the construction of social structures. (Hurrelmann 2002: 7; my translation)

From the beginning, children enter in continuous contact and exchange with their surrounding and into relation with contact persons they need to confront and engage with (sometimes involuntarily) (cf. Unfried 2013: 32). While it is assumed that individual development in itself is a universal experience, every child is born into a very specific sociocultural framework. In addition, the parameters which condition, structure, or (partially) determine personality formations are individually specific, best explained by taking into consideration intersectional theory.⁶⁷ It is clear that migration leads to a profound change of this framework. The assumption, however, that the emergence of the subject happens quite passively under certain circumstances without her intervening, would be a denial of individual capacity to transform these structures. Also, assuming that embodied subjectivity is constructed, one may ask with Butler “who is doing the constructing?” (1993: 6). Following from the premise of agency, the subject is doing it herself, co-producing and complicit in containing certain hegemonic relations. This brings to mind Anthony Giddens’ idea of the interdependency of agency and society (cf. 1984), i.e. the existence of intentionally acting agents who create social structures under certain conditions determined in turn by these structures.⁶⁸ Sociologist Andreas Reckwitz concretizes the location of the embodied subject as she finds herself in an ambiguous constellation as an autonomous, acting, self-determined entity, on the one hand, but, on the other, is limited by or subjected to culture-specific rules, codes, and expectations (cf. Reckwitz 2008: 14).

It is, furthermore, through the “process of reiteration” (Butler 1993: 9) by which the subject comes into existence and incorporates certain norms and

67 “An intersectional perspective always takes the multidimensional character, the entanglements, the analogies and simultaneities of various axis of stratification into account. Accordingly, research carried out in that field considers every constellation as ‘always already’ marked by various factors, for example, race and racial hierarchization/racist exclusion as ‘always also’ and ‘always already’ defined by other dimensions of inequality such as gender, sexuality, social class, citizenship, religion and furthermore differing from locality to locality and from context to context” (Roth 2013: 2).

68 In her book, *Nomadic Subjectivity* (1994), Rosi Braidotti, too, discloses the ambiguity of the acting subject: “The concept of the body in the specific inception given to it by the philosophy of modernity and the theories of sexual difference refers to the multifunctional and complex structure of subjectivity, the specifically human capacity for transcending any given variable [...] while remaining situated within them” (Braidotti 1994: 198).

standards perceived as normality (as for instance in what Butler calls the heterosexual matrix). This pertains to the linguistic level, group-specific performances, as well as to a certain habitus. Butler and Michel Foucault have made explicit the central role the body plays (or performs) in the formation of the subject and the construction of identity, as the following chapter highlights. In addition, Foucault brings in the dimensions of discipline, control, and punishment that impact the production of an embodied subjectivity or docile body. In this context, the literary form of the novel of development, Slaughter rightly points out, recognizes both “the individual as a social creature and the process of individuation as an incorporative process of socialization” (Slaughter 2007: 19), accomplished in relation to the social surrounding. Assuming a polarity of individual and society, agency and structure (cf. Reckwitz 2008: 15), I analyze in how far the novels reflect on those disciplining measures within society that are played out on the body and how these affect individual and communal development.

2.4 The Coming-of-Age Novel: Form and Features

Accounts or narratives of coming of age and individual development can be found in different fictional and non-fictional genres, such as the memoir, the biographical novel, the neo-/slave narrative, and so forth.⁶⁹ “The challenge remains to conceive of a genre flexible enough to encompass various paths of development” (Rishoi 2003: 61). How does the coming-of-age novel achieve this goal? How to avoid “a one-size-fits-all journey of development [...] that ends up sounding as much like a grand narrative as the earlier model” (61), as Rishoi asks with respect to endless adaptations of the *Bildungsroman*. Moving on from here, the coming-of-age novels selected here introduce subjects who seek to obtain a more nuanced picture of their own selves and a better understanding of the world. The four authors this study engages with carefully depict the formation of the Caribbean subject set against the backdrop of social transformation (e.g. nation and community building) and large-scale migration. The writers juxtapose their representations of these formative processes with a close examination of the human body and body politics, which, as I argue, are informed by colonial continuities of inequality. In the remainder of this chap-

69 Several studies attest the influence of the slave narrative on the coming-of-age genre, e.g. Rishoi (2003), Smith/Watson (2010), or LeSeur (1995).

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ter, I wish to highlight some prominent formal and thematic features and recurring motives of these coming-of-age novels. As a study is always limited in scope, the four novels selected here are considered not as representative of Caribbean literature in general but certainly as exemplary for the genre as it has developed since the 1990s in Caribbean women's writing and as part of a Caribbean diaspora poetics.

2.4.1 Genre Bending and Remembrance

If the Greater Caribbean and its diasporas constitute a space characterized by hybridity, transculturality, movement, and the creolization of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and artistic elements and artefacts, its diverse literature certainly reflects this character. The coming-of-age genre in Caribbean literature is likewise a hybrid genre and defies too narrow definitions. The genre boundaries are fluid and, like the coming-of-age narratives Rishoi looks at, "not constrained by a generic formula" (Rishoi 2003: 62). Thus, it intermixes with other genres like the family saga (such is the case with Espinet's book or Lakshmi Persaud's *Daughters of Empire* [2012]); it interweaves a coming-out narrative (e.g. Silvera's novel or Achy Obeja's *Memory Mambo* [1996]); or may integrate the plot of the *Künstlerroman* (cf. LeSeur 1995: 25-26) as Cruz' and Espinet's novel demonstrate with their protagonists who are pursuing a creative career as painter (*Soledad*) or filmmaker (*The Swinging Bridge*).

What further 'unsettles' the novels of the genre – to use Bolaki's phrasing – on the aesthetic and textual level is the texts' frequent usage of oral history, folk tales, anecdotes, references to Hinduism (as one of the major religions especially in Trinidad, Surinam, and Guyana) or Afro-creole religions like Vodou or Santería. This may be for educative purposes, as cautionary advice, or as means of self-empowerment and identification. Likewise, creole proverbs, ancestral wisdom, spiritual and religious practices are included. That way the writers ground their works in local knowledge combining it with their respective African, Indian, or European heritage to construct a multi-layered diasporic space.⁷⁰

To come to terms with the past seems crucial for individual and communal development. For this reason, the authors integrate several different sources of

70 For instance, the phrases that introduce each chapter of Silvera's novel are mostly Yoruba proverbs and thus establish an African diaspora connection on the aesthetic level (see chapter 4).

remembering, such as diary entries, excerpts taken from notebooks or sometimes history books, souvenirs, photographs, and letters. In the attempt to recover that which seems lost, the narrative process often splits into fragments thereby interrupting the linear script of subject development proposed originally by the *Bildungsroman* form that imagines coherence. These fragments of identity that both the characters and the reader need to put together then create a collage showing that collective memory is intertwined with the personal story and individual lived experience.

Noteworthy, since the novels usually cover a relatively large time span in their accounts of the live stories of multiple generations, they draw a complex and detailed picture of Caribbean history and the postcolonial as well as the diaspora society. These stories are located within a clearly defined temporal and spatial context; they mention specific locations, historical and political facts, dates, and data. Through the novels, the authors often re-visit and re-imagine colonialism, indentureship (see chapter 5), decolonial movements, or the political turmoil after independence and nation building. Merle Collins, in her coming-of-age and neo-historical novel *Angel* (1987), for example, depicts the U.S. intervention in Grenada's regional politics from the perspective of her protagonist; Julia Alvarez' *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) documents the terror and violence of the Trujillo dictatorship by narrating the destinies of the Mirabal sisters. Oonya Kempadoo's coming-of-age novel *Buxton Spice* (1998) implicitly criticizes a seemingly harmonious ethno-cultural creolization in Guyana of the 1970s.

The juxtaposition of the coming-of-age novel with the neo-historical novel thus creates a hybrid genre to document parts of an often silenced or forgotten history, building an archive of knowledge in which the body is significant for storing memories and lived experience, according to Francis (cf. 2010: 133). In addition, the four novels that I read more closely in this study may offer a less extensive 'historical panorama' through the coming-of-age narratives – with the exception of Espinet's book – but they do engage in a critical analysis of migration and the social conditions in the diaspora locations. What emerges is a social realism with a didactic purpose (cf. Machado Sàez 2015).

2.4.2 Language Use and Subversion

The use of idiomatic language, creole, and vernacular is not a specific feature of the coming-of-age novel itself, but of Caribbean literature in general and of a

diaspora poetics in particular. Language is used as stylistic device and/or to highlight the ethnic, Caribbean background. The writers considered here engage in a ‘creolization of the text’ through mixing local ‘dialects’ and idioms with the English ‘standard’ form. There are different degrees how this is accomplished, for instance through the inclusion of single idioms without translating them, most frequently these are food items, descriptions of characters, or emotional conditions. For these words a glossary may be included as appendix, either on the author’s own or the publisher’s accord. Another option is to write the dialogues between or the thoughts of characters in creole, followed by direct translation; single longer passages or even the complete text may be written in creole, though the latter is rarely the case.⁷¹ Of the four writers included here, Silvera makes the most extensive use of Jamaican patwa (what effect this has in the narrative is discussed in chapter 4). Language use in this context becomes an affirmative act of identity and a means of demarcation from imposed standards. But, one may ask, what happens to its decolonizing agenda in the context of diaspora literature in the 21st century? Does it forfeit its emancipatory function to the marketing strategies of ethnic or migrant writing?

Especially throughout the first half of the twentieth century, with the aim to dismantle the prestige associated with standard English, French, or Dutch (to a lesser degree Spanish), many writers have begun to include creole languages, e.g. Kreyòl, Patwa, or Sranan-Tongo, in their literary works. Maryse Condé sees the possibility for resistance to colonial oppression in the use of creole language in literature and expresses the “need for linguistic subversion” (1998: 103).⁷² In the decolonial period, the struggle for independence, as Torres-Saillant similarly argues, is construed “as a people’s continuous and necessary battle for language” (2013a: 18). In his definition of a specific Caribbean poetics, he pays attention to the linguistic possibilities, which writers like Kamau Brathwaite exploit in their *œuvre*, thereby “recasting of the old master’s *logos* into a regionally relevant speech of liberation” (ibid.: 22). Alongside that which is expressed lies the need of a “decolonized language, one that would *authentically* express the Caribbean worldview” (ibid.; emphasis added). Surely, it remains debatable what this authentic expression may be and whether there is a

71 One example is Jamaican Macka Diamond’s designated dancehall novel *Bun Him!!!* (2012).

72 At the time, European literature was dominant in the region and local writers adjusted their works in form, style, and language according to European models. Jacques Roumain was among the first to counter the imposition of the colonizer’s language on local literary production in the context of the Haitian *indigénisme*. Similarly, Claude McKay and Louise Bennett are well known for elevating patwa to a more prestigious part of Jamaican identity.

singular worldview shared by all Caribbean people which can be transmitted through literature and language use.

While this is just a very brief exploration of the topic, the point I wish to make is that language use in the medium of (Caribbean) literature is political, concerned with hegemonic formations. A constructed ‘authenticity’ achieved through the inclusion of idiomatic language is a marketable feature in ethnic writing, meaning here Caribbean novels of the diaspora in the U.S. and Canada. It is a means to represent an ethnicized identity, offering a glimpse into ‘real’ life experiences and community slang as demanded by the reading public.⁷³ In the same minority context, however, language use still constitutes one aspect of identity politics. It is a strategy adopted by the authors to claim recognition, establish cultural meaning, and produce consciousness – though not all claim to be political and resistant. It unsettles the reading process and challenges the reader unfamiliar with creole language (or Spanish as in Latina fiction). While the role of creole language use in literature has shifted, i.e. increased in recognition and familiarity, it remains a marker of lower status in the Caribbean (in terms of class and education), and of difference when spoken in the diaspora location (meaning migrant ‘Other,’ not part of the mainstream culture). It remains a political issue in terms however of both resistance and market customization.

2.4.3 Narrative Structure and Perspective

Each of the four novels selected here contains a first-person narrative of a personal story. The narrative seldom follows a chronological order. Multiple temporal levels intersect, an effect achieved through retrospective narration, analepsis, and the juxtaposition of different plot lines that belong to the life stories of several generations. The frame of the story constitutes an I-narration, usually by one adult woman and from a present stage. In retrospect and fragments, she retraces her own path of development, thereby recording a family’s migration story and individual trauma. These constitute the several embedded plot lines. Additionally, multiple sub-ordinated first- or third-person accounts from different generations lend the texts a polyphonic impression and offer a multi-

73 The use of creole language shifts on a “creole continuum” (Sheller 2003: 187) to be more easily accessible for a readership that is not familiar with the idioms, but desire their consumption nevertheless. Mimi Sheller remarks, “the metropolitan centre has in many ways embraced ‘creole cultures,’ getting close to them, letting them in, taking pleasure in consuming their exotic flavour” (Sheller 2003: 175).

dimensional perspective not only on an individual's life story but the historical emergence of a society (in a Bakhtinian sense but less universal).⁷⁴

The novels cover a relatively large time span as the narrative accompanies the individual up to twenty or forty years with only one focus on childhood experiences and the formative period of adolescence and adulthood.⁷⁵ It furthermore reaches far back in time in its tracking down the ancestral line. Stephanie Lovelady detects a commonality in many immigration and coming-of-age narratives that she describes as "a persistent tendency to look backwards" (Lovelady 1999: 30), an evident "pull of the past" the characters give in to – which corresponds to the generic proximity to the neo-historical novel. The "[f]ragments of memory" the reader is thus presented with, according to bell hooks, "are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed to give a 'new take' on the old, constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation" (hooks 1989: 147) The retrospective narration underlines the importance of remembering to retrieve a history marginalized or forgotten.

The formation of the migrating subject is neither linear nor coherent but fragmented and confusing. If the traditional form of the *Bildungsroman* is characterized by teleological development, owing this to the linear progression inherent in the process of formal *Bildung*, the circularity of these woman-narrated novels breaks with this tradition (cf. Künstler 2012: 42). What this shows is that (logical) consecutive stages of maturation, apart from biological aging, are an illusion. The circular structure of the narrative is achieved through memory fragments, flashbacks and forward movement owing to the unstable, fraught diaspora existence which contests coherent formation of the individual. Also, in the case of Silvera's and Espinet's novels, the ongoing narrative at one point returns to or catches up with the opening scene. The ending of the novels is thus never absolute, because coming of age in itself "suggests a process with no clear beginning or ending" (Rishoi 2003: 47).⁷⁶ Nevertheless, the narrative usually closes when the protagonists have reached a certain stage

74 Bakhtin claims that "[g]enerations introduce a completely new and extremely significant aspect into the depicted world" (Bakhtin 2010: 18). The depiction of the life stories of several generations and their contexts, what he calls "multi-generational time," creates "historical time" (ibid.).

75 Celis restricts her study to the investigation of childhood experience and early adolescence and the corresponding sexualization of the female body (cf. Celis 2015).

76 In her definition of the coming-of-age narrative, Rishoi finds that it usually "refuse[s] closure, preferring instead an ambiguous textual ending that affirms the provisional nature of identity" (2003: 63).

of completion or self-acceptance, a coming to terms with the self that often goes along with reconciliation of mother and daughter.⁷⁷

The coming-of-age novels read here open *in medias res* to perform a double initiation. The reader is thrown into the world of the characters to experience a similar abrupt moment of a 'secondary' initiation: First of all, the main characters have usually already come of age in a biological sense; they are being initiated, so to speak, with a certain age into cultural or context-specific moral values and normative conduct but still have unresolved conflicts or traumatizing memories to face. A blow of fate then functions as trigger that initiates the process of remembering their childhood years. This is crucial as it eventually leads to emotional maturation, healing, and reconciliation. This second 'initiating moment,' as I call it, in Silvera's novel is the grandmother's burial and reading of her will which catapults the protagonist back to her childhood. The same happens in the case of Espinet's protagonist whose brother's progressing disease and death functions as trigger to reflect on her becoming woman as well as in the case of Cruz' eponymous heroine Soledad whose mother's sudden emotional retreat and apathy have a formative effect on the mother and the daughter alike.

The temporal (and spatial) gap between the act of narration (narrative time) from an adult perspective of the childhood and earlier formative events (narrated time) creates emotional distance. This renders possible a more objective evaluation of the past on the part of the characters, which in turn offers the reader a more profound understanding of the protagonist's current disposition and motivation. At the same time, the first-person point of view (along with temporal distance and unstable psychological dispositions of some characters) creates a sense of uncertainty and unreliability, making the reader question some of the young women's decisions. Also, the descriptions of other persons through the I-narrators' perspectives make difficult an objective evaluation of these characters' comportment and surely direct readers' sympathies. Donette Francis summarizes the adult-narrated coming-of-age novels thusly:

Defying the developmental logic of the Bildungsroman, these coming of age depictions of Caribbean girlhood into womanhood portray girlhood from an adult perspective without any hint of sentimentality or romanticization. Instead these representations of unsuccessful adventure quests spotlight the interior lives of Caribbean women and girls to connect pivotal scenes of *subjection to subject formation*. (2011: 337; emphasis added)

77 Benítez-Rojo makes an interesting point saying that "the Caribbean *Bildungsroman* does not usually conclude with the hero's saying good-bye to the stage of apprenticeship in terms of a clean slate" (2006: 25).

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The Caribbean diaspora novel does not offer space for nostalgic sentiment nor a romanticized future. It is rather the processing of past inflictions of bodily and emotional harm that is constitutive to the formation of the subject. Such a scene of subjection is depicted, for example, in Espinet's novel in the 'gravel incident' in which the protagonist is made to kneel on stony ground until her knees start bleeding. This punishment, at the same time corporeal and psychological, is inflicted upon her by her father for allegedly improper feminine conduct and the transgression of ethnic boundaries (see chapter 5). The narrator discloses the mechanisms of power and body control that unjustifiably subject the adolescent female. Only from her adult perspective is she then able to assess the causes of this cruel treatment and eventually forgive him. The adult point of view provides the protagonist with more authority and insight in order to actively reflect on her own becoming thereby questioning certain aspects of gender-specific expectations, social requirements, or normative behavior which are perceived as confining and limiting to personal development.

2.4.4 The *Kumbla* and the Collective Novel

At the end of the novel *The Heart Does Not Bend*, Silvera's protagonist Molly Galloway comes to the conclusion that "we don't live our lives independent of each other. It's all a give and take" (263). These words, which she directs at her teenage daughter in an attempt of reconciliation, are relevant less because of their didactic purpose indicating that life is often about compromise, but rather for their insight that human existence is based on interdependence and mutuality. Contrary to the individualistic trajectories depicted in conventional versions of the novel of development, the novels that emerge against a minority background have the tendency to feature a more collective vision of subject formation. The life stories and fates of the characters depicted in multiple intersecting plotlines add to the communal character of the coming-of-age novels. Bolaki confirms this notion for ethnic American fiction whose writers frequently "communalise" individualistic forms such as the novel of development" (Bolaki 2011: 25). Likewise, in Black British writing, Mark Stein discovers the juxtaposition of several stories in what he terms the "*multiple bildungsroman*," referring in particular to David Dabydeen's *The Intended* (1991), in which "the

depiction of a variety of character developments allows the narrator-protagonist's formation to be seen in context" (Stein 2004: 150).⁷⁸

The aspects of community and relationality continue to be remarkable features in the coming-of-age form. As Wilson notes the protagonists are "defined by their connections to others" (Wilson 2008: 5). She differentiates the terms novels of "dialogic interplay" (6) and "relational autonomy" (16), two specific definitions that describe the different phases of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. The first focuses on the protagonist's early interaction with elders and peers as well as a playful initiation into her social surroundings. The latter implies the development of a young adult into a more autonomous being who balances out her desire of independence and intimacy always in relation to a larger context, i.e. "her nation, her race, the present as well as past and future generations" (Wilson 2008: 20). The applicability of the different terms and such a clear temporal distinction between girlhood and adulthood is disputable – especially as the coming-of-age novel usually sets out on a much longer journey accompanying the protagonists through these various stages of becoming woman. Nevertheless, the aspects of the dialogic and relational remain relevant: Édouard Glissant's *poétique de la relation* describes Caribbean identity as relational. He highlights that in Caribbean literature and culture "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (Glissant 2010: 11). Furthermore, Glissant's idea of a "collective novel" can be applied to the diasporic coming-of-age novel if considered as "the novel of the relationship of individual to collectivity, of individual to the Other, of We to Us" (1989: 87).

Certainly, all four writers discussed in this study write a collective novel carrying forward Glissant's idea, which makes them remarkably Caribbean. However, if the Caribbean novel of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was still concerned, and necessarily so, mostly with a community's emergence from colonial domination, the women-authored novels published after 1990 have notably moved on by adding depictions of individualist trajectories intertwined with the communal. George Lamming introduces the 1983 reprint of his *Bildungsroman In the Castle of My Skin* (1970) as follows:

The book is crowded with names and people, although each character is accorded a most vivid presence and force of personality, we are rarely concerned with

78 The pattern of such a multiple or collective coming of age is discernible not only in the novels included here but also, to mention two further examples, through the character constellation in Trinidadian-British Lakshmi Persaud's *Daughters of Empire* (2012) or in *Unburnable* (2007) by Marie-Elena John, a U.S.-based writer from Antigua.

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the prolonged exploration of an individual consciousness. The Village, you might say, is the central character. When we see the Village as collective character, we perceive another dimension to the individual wretchedness of daily living. (xxxvi)⁷⁹

Lamming thus 'communitises' the narrative form, foregrounding the village as an entity that needed to 'come of age' first. The focus on the collective, as he explains, allows him to represent economic hardship and colonial racism not as individual issue but structural problem. His anti-colonial 'village narrative' along with the depicted collective emergence serves as allegory for nation building processes and the formation of an ethnic-cultural identity. However, Lamming may be criticized for reproducing a nationalist, patriarchal discourse that sets in power a regulatory regime operating against women whose individual sufferings are anonymized by blending them into the communal structure of the village and nation.⁸⁰ Many women writers, on the other hand, while acknowledging the importance of their communities' sustaining network structure or solidarity, see the necessity of detailed explorations of individual consciousness and lived experience. This becomes clear, for instance, with regard to systematic and individual violence against women.

Caribbean women writers of the diaspora tend to highlight communal life, in particular the nurturing community of women, symbolized by the *kumbla*,⁸¹ and their bonds of solidarity the protagonists find empowering. This however is not supposed to mean that subject formation in these novels is always a

79 This resonates well with Makeda Silvera's short story "Her Head a Village" (1994).

80 On the criticism of Lamming's treatment of gender issues and female characters, see Simoes da Silva (2000).

81 *Kumbla* means cocoon implying safety, comfort, and protection or self-defense; it may translate to womb; it may also indicate vulnerability or confinement. Here, it is also a reference to the essay collection edited and introduced by Boyce Davies and Savory Fido, *Out of the Kumbla* (1990) I mentioned earlier, which amongst other things, deals with the voicelessness or absence and underrepresentation of Caribbean women writers. Emphasizing their feminist impetus, the two editors explain the meaning of the volume's title to signify "movement from confinement to visibility, articulation, process. As process, it allows for a multiplicity of moves, exteriorized, no longer contained and protected or dominated. 'Out of the Kumbla' is as well a sign for departure from constricting and restricting spaces. It further signifies the taking of control and [...] is above all an articulation of our presence on the literary landscape" (19). In Erna Brodber's *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), for example, the *kumbla* is a central trope. The chapter "The Kumbla" refers to the various meanings of the *kumbla*. In one instance, it takes on a rather negative connotation of over-protection: "But the trouble with the *kumbla* is the getting out of the *kumbla*. It is a protective device. If you dwell too long in it, it makes you delicate" (130).

harmonious endeavor. The negotiation of one's own identity, one's needs but also obligations within the (extended) family or community structure is often in conflict with a positive self-definition and wish for personal liberation, complicated further by a social surrounding perceived as alienating. The core of the family or community network usually constitutes a triadic interrelation of the grandmother, mother, and daughter – or their “inter- and intra-generational female bonding” (LeSeur 1995: 189) – an often complicated but necessary constellation emerging from the matrilineal structure of the households, which the novels suggest as a direct result of the economic situation, absent fatherhood, and transnational family patterns. What seems crucial during the early formative years of the characters is informal learning through storytelling as a source of knowledge to be passed on to the next generation. The grandmother's voice often serves as a narrative authority in the transmission of motherly wisdom and life philosophies. The construction of a female lineage or woman-centered genealogy indeed foregrounds women's agency and subjectivity. But this has the effect of marginalizing the male perspective and reducing representations of masculinity to stereotypical, often negative descriptions (see in particular chapters 4 and 7).⁸²

The *kumbla* along with gendered restrictions nevertheless can be perceived as confining – as is the case for Kincaid's *Lucy* or Cruz' *Soledad*. Interestingly enough, the characters do not always seek shelter in the close community, but hide in secluded places, on roof tops, in treehouses, or secret circles, away from the prying eye of mother, grandmother, neighbors, or educators. There, they can build liberationist spaces for self-development and sexual dis- or recovery. The importance of and comfort provided by the community should of course not be discarded, especially not in a minority context where the surrounding is perceived as alienating. For instance, looking at the representations of community in Toni Morrison's and Maxine Hong Kingston's novels, Pin-Chia Feng notes that “[a] sense of community, a network of relations, is of particular importance to ethnic women in their struggle against [...] racism, sexism, and classism” (1997: 12). Bolaki affirms this similarity, as many of the women characters in U.S.-ethnic literature “turn to less alienating spaces for empowerment and belonging, notably their local communities” (2011: 24-25). The community also in Caribbean women's writing provides safety and healing power, as writ-

82 María Cristina Rodríguez makes a similar observation in almost all of the twenty-four novels she studies. In the depicted narrative worlds, which apparently revolve around only dysfunctional heterosexual partnership, “[m]en enter the lives of these women and sometimes bring moments of happiness, but mostly they deceive, abuse, and abandon them” (2005: xv).

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ers like Silvera, Espinet, Danticat, and Cruz show in their description of empowering social and familial cohabitation.

2.4.5 Migrating Plots and the Diasporic

The context of migration, in which the four authors set their respective novel, causes shifting articulations of identity and positionality characterized by discontinuities and ruptures. The title of this second chapter, “Roo/utes of Development,” plays on the metaphors of roots and routes as paradigmatic for diasporic Caribbean culture and literature.⁸³ They are defining elements of Caribbean diaspora consciousness and transnational communities pointing to their multiple origins and destinations. The coming-of-age novels here are concerned with diasporic subject formation which manifests itself in the simultaneity of mobility and attachment, a combination that unsettles fixed, stable identity concepts. *Roots* signify origin – this may be a concrete location or imagined essence – and permanence; in some cases it may also mean a permanent state of ‘inbetween-ity.’ On the other hand, *routes* refer to a rhizomatic network of “[d]ecentered, lateral connections” (Clifford 1994: 306), interconnecting very diverse diaspora locations and subject positions which, as well, may constitute points of reference for identification.

Migration is a central aspect of Caribbean life, continuously shaping the socio-ethnic composition of the region and the respective host countries. In this context, identities, constructed as ethnic, gendered, sexual, cultural, and national, are complex and complicated, at times conflicting, even contradictory. Stuart Hall notes a “preoccupation with movement” (1990: 234) in the contemporary Caribbean film which he relates to the state of Caribbean people being “the prototype of the modern or postmodern New World nomad, continually moving between centre and periphery” (ibid.). The migrating subjects thereby undo this very same binary. Accordingly, recurring themes and motives in contemporary Caribbean literature are identities that are in flux, as well as imagined and real journeys, and nomadic movements.

The aesthetics of diaspora in the selected novels is realized in a “[t]wo-way gaze” (Page 2011)⁸⁴ directed both at the island and the metropolitan location.

83 As suggested by Glissant (2010), Gilroy (1993), Clifford (1994), and Ferly (2012).

84 This is not limited to Caribbean diasporic literature in the U.S., which Page’ selection of texts by Diaz, Danticat, and Garcia may indicate. Mark Stein identifies “the diasporic” as a distinguishing element also of the Black British novel of transformation, “reaching across space and time” (2004: 171).

Constant switches in location and temporal jumps create a dense web of migratory routes, reflecting the search of an uprooted self in a transnational constellation. The back-and-forth movements between the locations and in time not only fragment the narrative but also create decentered, multiple subject positions that unsettle fixed notions of place and belonging. At the same time, this creates the illusion of spatial proximity and emotional closeness in defiance of material boundaries that inhibit movements of the body. Noteworthy is the urge to rewrite the ancestral or natal land at the expense of a thorough description of the migrant location, which is to suggest that despite the fact that the permanent place of residence is in the North American cities, retaining connections to the Caribbean and temporary return is important for the protagonists' becoming. The characters tend to privilege the Caribbean space for the matter of healing and psychological survival. The constant evocation of that place may also indicate that the Caribbean forms (an imaginary) part of the Northern metropole.⁸⁵

The coming-of-age novel of the Caribbean diaspora is concerned with the effect of migration on individual subject formation. The narrative accompanies the protagonists on their journeys from the Caribbean to the Northern metropolis mostly in order to be reunited with an estranged mother or extended family. Yolanda A. Doub identifies the travel motif as one of the central plot-driving elements in Latin American novels of development.⁸⁶ While I do not wish to compare our respective text corpora on this issue, what I find interesting in her analysis is the contention that "the protagonists' awareness and interiorization of concepts of race, class, and gender [...] are influenced greatly by their experiences over the course of their travels" (Doub 2010: 6). Although the term 'travel' does not really capture the migratory experiences made by the female characters in the novels selected for this study nor their "diasporic sensibility" (Page 2011: 226), a similar situation can be detected in coming-of-age novels set in the Caribbean and diaspora location. The relationships of the self with the family, community, and general society constantly need to be redefined against the shifting backgrounds of socio-cultural spaces in which societal factors like class, gender, ethnicity, or sexuality take up new meanings. Notably, the often involuntary journeys of adolescent girls are central to the plot structure and constitute a break in the character's individuation process, which is usually marked by narrative absence. The arrival in the new location necessitates an

85 Kezia Page applies the term "diasporic sensibility" to describe "how Caribbean people have scattered to geographic spaces outside of the region and seeded Caribbean culture in these spaces often radically transforming them" (226).

86 Hence her descriptive term of "journeys of formation" in her title (cf. Doub 2010).

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attempt to belong, integrate, and find a routine; for others it goes along with confinement, isolation, and disintegration.

Likewise, the alienating experience of dislocation, the non-recognition of or by the mother, or direct confrontation with racism is accompanied by narrative gaps or ellipses, which indicates a profound break in subject formation – an indication of a certain rupture in the child or young woman’s emotional development leading to estrangement from the self and others. As Künstler points out with reference to Hispano-Caribbean migrant fiction in the U.S., the coming-of-age process and troubled psychological disposition correlate with the experience of immigration. According to Künstler, a “twofold transition” takes place with respect to personal development and maturation, the experience of passage, confrontation with the unknown, with regard to estrangement, adaptive difficulties, the feeling of not belonging, confusion, insecurity and disorientation, but also regarding a productive crisis, self-discovery, new opportunities and the beginning of ‘a new life’ (cf. Künstler 2012: 17).

In theory as in literary practice, diasporic formations, meaning both the creation and existence of diaspora communities as well as a subject’s being in diaspora, oscillate between a celebratory ethos of liberation and a melancholic sense of violent uprooting or loss. Despite the more negative and rather troubling experiences associated with migration, the move away from the Caribbean homelands is often perceived as liberating. The diaspora location provides the migrating subject with more opportunity and liberty, a promise which in many respects holds true. This should however not neglect the reality of discriminatory practices, the confrontation with and internalization of racial as well as sexual oppression and stereotypes at both locations, the confusion that comes with displacement, or likewise precarious living conditions.⁸⁷ Here Bolaki convincingly reasons that “[m]obility creates opportunities for reinvention of identity, but it also becomes entwined with trauma in many recent ethnic American novels of female development that focus on experiences of displacement and exile” (2011: 240). Importantly, she points out the central role the body plays in the context of displacement and traumatic experiences: “Often,

87 Antiguan writer, Jamaica Kincaid, in *Lucy* (1990) tells the story of a West Indian girl who comes to North America to work as an au-pair. Thereby, Kincaid covers such topics as the coming of age, female sexuality and agency, the dominance over men during the sex act, etc. The novel is often discussed as an example for the narrative representation of a liberating sexuality in the diaspora (opposed to sexual constraint back home in the Caribbean). However, Lucy’s emotional dependence on her mother back home in the Caribbean, tells a different story, also Lucy’s relationships to the men and her sexual experience seem to be rather meaningless, and there is an emotional void.

the body becomes the trope of exploring diasporic displacement and trauma, both personal and cultural” (ibid.).

2.4.6 Adolescence, Aging, and Bodily Transformation

The coming-of-age genre in general and the four selected novels in particular shift attention to the body.⁸⁸ Bolaki makes an important observation in her analysis of Audre Lorde’s so-called biomythography *Zami* (1982), stating that “[t]he climactic moment of coming to consciousness about identity are played out on the body” (2011: 192). Indeed, the body constitutes one of the essential aspects in subject formation since physical, emotional, and intellectual development cannot be conceived of or conceptualized in the body’s absence. In coming-of-age literature, the body, which is inscribed already with meaning, as I elaborate on in the next chapter, is highly significant for the narrative structure. According to Rishoi, “[t]he physiological changes of female puberty seem to work against the cultural pressure to ignore the body, resulting in a notable bodily presence in the narratives” (2003: 12). The role of the body and the interrelation of subjectivity and embodiment in the subject’s formative process are foregrounded.⁸⁹ Coming of age not just denotes the process of growing up but also highlights bodily transformation in socio-culturally specific terms. A feminist-oriented reading of the genre pays special attention to the female body to foreground the social, cultural, historical, and political significance of the body.

Of special interest is the individual’s corporeal transformation. These are, first of all, biological and primarily affect the materiality of the body, the changes of the body during puberty and the subject’s attempt to come to terms with her newly (because transformed) embodied identity. In Erna Brodber’s *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980) the protagonist, Nelly Richmond, describes her first menstruation: “‘-You are eleven now and soon something strange will happen to you. [...]’ I needed cleansing. [...] We had known that ‘it’ would come one day [...]. ‘It’ was a hidey-hidey thing ! It made you a whisper. [...] ‘It’ made me powerful too and in a strange way” (119-120). In Ramabai

88 I mention the body as the last of the major aspects that define the coming of age novel not because it is the least important. On the contrary, it constitutes the central aspect and shall as this final point serve as a bridge to the ensuing chapter.

89 More conventional genre discussions of the bildungsroman do not consider the body or embodiment to the same degree. This might be due to the association of the term *Bildung* with the cultivation of the mind, the civil character, and citizenship, while at the same time neglecting the physical aspects of the *Bildungs*-process.

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Espinete's novel (see chapter 5), Mona, the protagonist, too, notices the changes of her adult body as compared to her younger self in a photograph, seeing a "young Mona, her tough hairy forearms ready for anything" (147). Looking at her body now she realizes how "[t]hose hairs must have fallen off over time. I felt a pang of regret as I looked at the steady arms of that young girl, so sure of herself, so different from the older woman" (133). The characters' explanations shed light on a carefree childhood that ends as soon as the girls grow into an adult. Nelly becomes aware not only of her corporeal contamination, but also a certain "corruptive" power, "the power of a duppy" (120-121), associated with her period and sexuality affecting her surrounding's reaction towards her. In contrast, Mona draws a more depressing picture of a burdensome femininity full of insecurity and regret. Both cases exemplify the mystery and potential danger emanating from the female pubescent body. Espinete as well as Brodber link corporeal experiences such as menstruation to the discursive construction of the body, making clear its relation to societal expectations and practices of cultural normalization that determine what it means to become and be a woman.

Not only is physiological change represented in most novels of the genre, also sexual awakening is made explicit. As Rishoi argues "the journey of adolescence is also a physiological process that gradually transforms the body of a child into a sexually mature adult body" (Rishoi 2003: 48). Kempadoo's novel *Buxton Spice*, as a case in point, focuses on the coming of age of eleven years-old Lula. The girl describes her discovery of her sexuality and body as she secretly masturbates in the bathtub. She shares this sexual experience in the early pubescent phase with Makeda Silvera's Molly who hides with the girl from next door in her treehouse where they explore newly found bodily pleasures (see chapter 4).

Taking these examples as starting point, it can be observed that within such (trans)formative processes the growing into familial, societal, and cultural structures constitutes a major challenge for the young girls as well as the adult women. The formative influence of the social surrounding on the protagonists should not be underestimated. Rishoi, for instance, describes coming of age as

a complex of biological, cultural, psychological, and political events and changes whose meaning is largely determined by the expectations of the culture in which it takes place. And, although the bodily changes that accompany adolescence *are* universal, the meaning of those changes is socially articulated through discursive practices that serve to define and articulate the parameters of adolescence. (Rishoi 2003: 48-9)

The universal experience of adolescence, as pointed out already, is complicated and individualized through the surveillance of the embodied subject. The female body as well as woman's sexuality are regulated by a society's ideals, norms, and institutions, which the coming-of-age genre closely scrutinizes. What needs investigation are the ways the novels' characters perceive of themselves and experience their bodies. How does this *self-perception* change during puberty and how does the *gaze* of others – two simultaneously operating factors – too change? Is the assumption that migration and socialization in different cultural, socio-political contexts trouble this perception valid? Questions like these resonate with Anzaldúa's remark on the collisions of different frames of reference quoted earlier. Moreover, of particular interest in the respective analytical parts is the extent to which cultured, sexualized, gendered, racialized inscriptions fix the adolescent and adult woman's body within a social matrix of power relations. Instead of seeing the body as a fixed, stable entity, I argue along with Elizabeth Grosz: The body is subject to transformation and "must be seen as a series of processes of becoming" (Grosz 1994: 12).

3. The Making and Remaking of the Body: Embodiment, Subjectivity, and Lived Experience

The body is a most peculiar 'thing.'
(Grosz 1994: xi)

The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine.
(Butler 2004b: 21)

3.1 Whose Body Is This?

Bodies are fundamental components of literary texts, the coming-of-age novel in particular. As human bodies, as animals, aliens, or cyborgs, they populate fictional worlds. They take up space, literally or materially, in the form of ink and paper as well as symbolically and give meaning to or challenge contemporary discourses. They are 'unreal,' but come to life temporarily; not flesh and bone but perceived as multidimensional entities and acting beings nevertheless. Fiction offers readers glimpses into embodied life and bodily experiences, thereby suggesting alternative modes of being. When reading for the body in the text, attention needs to be paid to the ways the narrative produces certain embodiments and, in turn, bodies shape the narration. Which bodies are written about, what about their representation and construction, and which bodies are likely to unsettle normalized perception?

Indeed, Elizabeth Grosz could not have phrased it more accurately: The body is peculiar. It is "a thing and a nonthing" (xi) that can only be approximated, never explained entirely as the meaning of the body undergoes constant transformation. The body's materiality (corporeality) is bound to its social, cultural, and historical reality; it helps to produce such realities and is directly affected by the very same (embodiment). Social categories permeate the body and construct it as culturally specific, gendered, raced, sexualized, aged, or

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abled, determining the positionality of the individual who *has*, *acts*, and *is* that body. Before grappling with the body from a theoretical and literary studies perspective, I wish to take a detour through popular culture to exemplify the intersection of these social categories with politics and practices of the body.

Despite or rather because of its peculiarity the body sparks curiosity, or, as Tiffany Atkinson claims, “contemporary culture loves body-gazing” (Atkinson 2005: 2). We see this in the public attention paid to the body, especially to an overly sexualized female body; this we observe in the hype surrounding certain body parts generated by mass media. Especially female artists of Color and popular icons from the Caribbean and the U.S., such as Nicki Minaj, Rihanna, Jennifer López, or Beyoncé, celebrate global success with their (body) performances, playing on (but also being played by) the market value of their perceived exotic eroticism, showing off ‘what they’ve got,’ while still emphasizing their origins ‘from the blocks’ and being ‘down with the hoes.’⁹⁰ The eroticized female body itself is a common enough trope in western popular culture. The degree to which the Black female body is objectified and racialized under the consuming gaze that rests in particular on buttocks and pelvis prominently staged in semi-nude photographs or originally Jamaican dancing styles like twerking and wining, is troubling. Trinidadian Nicki Minaj’ “Anaconda” video (2014), for example, in which she extols the desirability of her behind, has stirred up the discussion on Black female ‘too-muchness’ and hypersexuality. The outrage following Minaj’ performance and her being publically body-shamed show the extent to which the display of the Black body, the ‘booty,’ and explicit sexuality are intertwined with discourses of race, power, and respectability politics. A panel discussion led by bell hooks, entitled “Whose Booty Is This?” (2014),⁹¹ takes issue with this intersection from a Black feminist vantage point. The participants address questions of bodily autonomy and ask who has or claims rights in and access to the Black female body and sexuality. Connected to these questions of ownership, I assert, is the persistence of racial stereotypes and the misperception of her sexual availability and vulgarity which erotic dancing styles like wining allegedly convey. The over-sexualization along a simultaneous under-valuation of the female body of Color results from an irrational fear of excessive Black embodiment that is regarded

90 The quotes refer to Jennifer López’ hit single “Jenny From the Block” (2002) and Rihanna’s performance in the video accompanying her song “Pour It Up” (2012).

91 The title refers to hook’s think piece “Whose Pussy Is This” (1989), in which she explores Black feminism and sexual autonomy in Spike Lee’s film *She’s Gotta Have It* (1986). The title of this sub-chapter is in reference to that. The panel was hosted at The Eugene Lang, New School of Liberal Arts, New York in October 2014; for a full-length live recording see hooks (2014).

to pose a threat to hegemonic whiteness and white culture in which the female body is supposed to be skinny and take up as little space as possible. In opposition, Minaj' parading her backside – “Oh my gosh, look at her butt” – reclaims and takes pride in her body – “I got a big fat ass” – to challenge the objectifying look.⁹² This ‘grotesque gesture,’ in a Bakhtinian sense, directs and plays with the gaze of the audience and male desire as an act of resistance against the commodification and fetishization of ethnicity and Blackness.

While the bodies in the novels analyzed here dance at most in a figurative sense on paper, the example illustrates the simultaneity of the body as both an object of fetishization and source of empowerment. It reveals the cultural signification of the body alongside its political function and the actual power played out on and springing from this body. These, in turn, are major points of concern of the writers this study brings together and motivate my reading of these texts. It shows the implications attached to definitions of and ascriptions to the corporeal as well as the hierarchization of certain body types embedded within specific contexts and power structures.⁹³ What is clear, our bodies are what elementarily constitute and position us in this world in interrelation with others. Our bodies have a certain materiality or weight, are always and already charged with meaning.⁹⁴ That way, bodies are of matter and do matter, to speak with Butler. The body's material reality and its symbolic force in discourses open multiple ways of interpretation. Not surprisingly, body politics and bodies in various shapes, sizes, colors, and genders have not ceased to raise curiosity and attention.

The Caribbean archipelago itself continues to be imagined and theorized in highly embodied and gendered terms. The virgin or maternal body as symbol of

92 On the discursive power of body parts, Jennifer López' body in particular, the associated cultural capital, ethnic identity, and her performance of *Latinidad*, or what the author terms an “epistemology of the butt”, see Negrón-Muntaner (1997): “‘Latino’ cultural practices tend to be managed discursively by ‘serious’ concepts such as class, language, religion, and family [...]. It was precisely the body, however, particularly the curves (or in less poetic Puerto Rican street language, the *culo*), that proved to be the most compelling way that Lopez and others found to speak about how ‘Latinas’ are constituted as racialized bodies, what kind of cultural capital is associated with these bodies, and how the body surfaces as a site of pleasure, produced by intersections of power, but not entirely under its own control” (185).

93 Such a historicity of the body is crucial for an engagement with the rights to and ownership of the body, which for some seem to be a natural given, while others are in constant struggle to retain this right, especially seen in the context of citizenship rights, feminist movements for abortion rights (“This Body Is Mine”), or expressed in slogans such as ‘No Body Is Illegal.’

94 This understanding contradicts phenomenological approaches to the body, as discussed below.

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the land and nation, in particular, has still a prominent role in contemporary theoretical approaches to the Caribbean and its diaspora. Taking this problematic embodied imagination of the Caribbean as point of departure, a question arises: Is the literature emerging from the Caribbean (imagined as ‘womb’) then always and already a literature of the body? Do the four novels under investigation here constitute an attempt at recuperating women’s bodies and lost territories?

The conflation of the region with the female sex is apparent, for example, in Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s postmodern concept of the Caribbean as a meta-archipelago which he proposes in *The Repeating Island*. Therein, he imagines colonization in a violent fantasy of rape of the Caribbean “whose vagina was stretched between continental clamps” (Benítez-Rojo 2006: 5). He metaphorizes the colonial encounter and the transatlantic slave trade as Europe’s forceful insemination of the Caribbean womb with Africa’s blood, to which he adds the labor pains of India with the introduction of indentureship, giving birth eventually to modernity and today’s capitalist world order. Although his work is important for Caribbean cultural theory in general and this line of thought productive for decolonial thinking, Brinda Mehta is right in her criticism of this reductive “geopolitical feminizing” (2009: 4) and the androcentric dynamic dominant in Benítez-Rojo’s and others’ works. In these depictions, Caribbean women do not appear to own their bodies and merely function as objects of a “‘cannibalistic’ economy of rape” (ibid.).⁹⁵ A similar point of criticism can be found in Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* (1995). She dismantles the sexualized terminology in patriarchal and early colonial narratives in which the Caribbean land figures as virgin territory, a space devoid of agency passively awaiting “the sexual and military insemination of [...] history, language and reason” by “white male patrimony” (30). This feminization of the land or what she terms the myth of the virgin or empty land – a territorial and sexual dis-possession – means a disavowal of agency both of women and those colonized, which Benítez-Rojo seems to be repeating.⁹⁶

In the Caribbean, as everywhere else, identities and subjectivity are connected to the body and the ways society conceives of it. Obviously, there does not exist a singular idea or concept of *the* Caribbean body. Body politics here is first and foremost defined against the complexity of racialized social stratifica-

95 Likewise, women’s contribution both to national independence and theory production often remains under-investigated or overlooked, which enforces masculinist power also on the discursive level.

96 One may also want to think about Glissant’s imagination of the slave ship as womb and the Middle Passage as point of origin for or giving birth to the Caribbean archipelago (cf. 1997).

tion and ethnic inter-relations. Throughout the centuries, Amerindian, European, African, and Asian conceptualization of embodiment and corporeality have come together and undergone constant transformation and alteration. In the Caribbean, in the course of colonization, first indigenous, animist world views of the unity of body, spirituality, and nature collide with Christian concepts of human embodiment in which the mind and spirit are valued over perishable bodily existence.⁹⁷ The situation is complicated further with the enslavement of Africans who brought along their own ideas of embodied being – such as the tripartite conceptualization of the body discernible in African-derived religions like Vodou in Haiti or the belief in the return after death to Guinea as the holy land of the ancestors – but joined the Amerindian population in their experience of bodily and psychological exploitation and violence.⁹⁸ Also, with the arrival of the numerous contracted workers from India the influence of Hinduism has added to already very diverse perceptions and understandings of the body (e.g. on a spiritual level the notion of transcendence and the permeability of the body, or religious concepts of purity and impurity, and the belief in an ever repeating cycle of being).⁹⁹

The following paragraphs shall highlight some important aspects of a body history and gender politics in the Caribbean context. They also outline some of the philosophical, sociological, and ethical approaches on embodiment and subjectivity that constitute the theoretical grounding of my investigation of the body and gender politics in the four diaspora novels. Theories from such di-

97 The pre-Columbian era is still under-investigated, apart from the origins, migratory movements, and settlements of the diverse indigenous population, such as Arawaks, Caribs, or Tainos, to name but a few, as well as conflicts among these diverse groups and their almost complete extinction in the course of imperial conquest.

98 While there is no doubt about this, what should be noted is that during slavery, colonialists attempted to erase forcefully the knowledge of African culture and customs among those enslaved. Whatever African-based theoretical visions of the body were at the time can only be assumed and would be vague and highly constructed and cannot be accomplished in the scope of this dissertation. The African influence on embodied resistance and performances of masculinity and femininity, for instance, still remains an under-investigated field within Caribbean gender studies, as Richard Goodridge makes clear (cf. 2003).

99 This rather general observation does not hold true for all Caribbean states to the same degree. The scheme of contract work was not put into practice by all post-slavery administrations. Also, the size of the work force of the indentured laborers, their places of origin, and the number of those who did return varied extensively. Throughout the twentieth century, the ways they have integrated and have been perceived by the rest of the population depend on the context and constitution of the respective Caribbean society. Chapter 5 elaborates in more detail on the Indian presence in Trinidad and the diaspora community in Canada.

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verse fields as phenomenology, Black feminism and womanism, poststructuralism, Indo- and Afro-Caribbean feminisms, as well as European and Anglo-American gender and body studies, difference and corporeal feminism are brought into relation. This takes into account the complexity of Caribbean history, the Middle Passage, and indentureship; the contact and creolization of people of African, Amerindian, Asian, and European origin who all brought their bodies in diverse constitutions and significations. These different lines of thought I wish to place in dialogue – with the risk of appearing eclectic at times – and avoid giving preference to European and Anglo-American theorization as suggested in decolonial theory. Caribbean literature shows that the body is myriad. It is thus crucial to pay attention to the particular ways that the novels, too, inform theories of embodiment and ultimately expand them, as they produce knowledge which the texts in turn help to circulate. Clearly, one single concept does not suffice to approximate bodies in their various dimensions, manifestations, and representations. Different concepts are relevant to theoretically grasp embodied experiences of the protagonists and through their ‘situatedness’ (cf. Haraway 1997) in the diaspora yet further layers of perception become relevant.

3.2 Skin-deep, Gaze-alert: Theoretical Explorations of the Body

The body is biological matter, cultural phenomenon, and political issue. The body is conceptualized basically through the interrelation of corporeality and the embodiment of the subject.¹⁰⁰ The first term describes the materiality of that what is biologically ‘real’ about the body (cells, tissues, genes, bones, organs, skin, breath, fluids, or sight, smell, speech, and so forth) as well as the reality of bodily experiences of what may be described as internal agitation, such as arousal or anger, and external inference, such as the sexual act or violence (taking aside for now the motivators behind and consequences of these experiences both on a collective and individual level). Embodiment, on the other hand, pertains to the constructionist dimension and symbolic side of the

100 Throughout this study I will use the term body entailing both the material and symbolic dimension. Where I find it necessary to separate the two to emphasize either the physical damage done to the body or its symbolic force only, I will make explicit use of either corporeality or embodiment.

body; it may also be thought of as political due to its centrality to one's sense of agency. What is of importance here is a complex set of societal, cultural, economic, and historical circumstances in which the subject is situated in. These circumstances produce different kinds of bodies by ascribing a certain meaning to the body material; they are also perceived differently by the thusly embodied subject. The two are inseparable: embodiment does not exist without corporeality and vice versa.

3.2.1 Situating and Regulating the Embodied Subject

Human subjectivity is produced by and through the respective social, cultural, technological, economic, political, and so forth environments. Here, Donna Haraway speaks about the "situatedness" of the subject, meaning the location and situation the embodied subject finds herself in. Haraway uses the figure of the cyborg – "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (1997: 474) – to disclose the many facets of social domination that interrelate with the situatedness of the subject and dismantle dichotomous categorical thinking that structure and construct our "lived social relations" (ibid.). In this regard, Rosi Braidotti, too, talks about an embodied position or the embodiment of the subject in which the biological and symbolic side of the body join. She contends that

[t]he body, or the embodiment, of the subject is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological [...]. In other words, feminist emphasis on embodiment goes hand in hand with a radical rejection of essentialism. (1994: 4)

Braidotti's approach as difference feminist to embodied subjectivity deviates from purely constructivist views of the body as she affirms and positively embraces the existence of sexual (and ethnical, cultural, etc.) difference, recognizing, however, "the dissymmetrical relationship between the sexes" (1997: 527). In the quoted passage, she draws attention to the intersection of the biological, symbolic, and sociological dimensions which shape the embodied subject in anti-essentialist terms.

Postcolonial feminism has long grappled with the essentialist constructions and representation of the enslaved body and bodies of color in colonial discourses as well as in contemporary Eurocentric literature and theory. They

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criticize the objectification and fetishization of the body and stereotypical 'Othering' of the subaltern subject within hegemonic Western knowledge production.¹⁰¹ Postcolonial feminists share the basic assumption that dualist conceptualizations of the body are damaging to a wholesome construction of the self as they are usually reductive and discriminating. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for instance, critically examines the epistemological, discursive production of the Third World woman in Western mainstream feminism in terms of a monolithic subjectivity ignorant of the multiple forms of oppression she experiences. Accordingly, the "average Third World woman" is "ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized" (Mohanty 2003: 22), dominated by a likewise monolithic local patriarchy, which Mohanty calls "the Third World difference" (40) – this, we find reproduced in the cultural coding of the Indian woman's body in the Caribbean as well. The self-representation of Western women, on the contrary, brings them forward as sexually liberated and emancipated, as "educated, as modern, as having control of their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions" (22).

Such dualist concepts have figured prominently in rationalists thought of the Enlightenment period and are inextricably linked to the elevation of the immortal soul at the expense of the perishable physical flesh. The Cartesian dualism, in particular, is usually referred to in order to illustrate how the mind has come to be associated with the male, and the male with the parameters of logic, rationality, culture, and civilization. The body is thus subordinated and associated with the female, as essentially irrational, emotional, and close to nature.¹⁰² The split of the mind from the body as ultimately unmaking or doing away with the body has been most influential in the denigration of the body, leading to a theoretical disembodiment of the subject in Western thought.¹⁰³

101 In this dichotomy the image of the chaste, pure, sexually passive body of the white woman contrasted with the likewise stereotypical representation of the Black and Indian woman. Sexual pleasure was located outside of western civilization and culture. Sexual debauchery in the colonies if not denied was frequently condemned as immoral and uncivilized. The objectification of the Black female subject as the colonial 'Other' as childlike, primitive, hypersexual, immoral, diabolic, seductive served to emphasize white superiority rendering the enslaved body ever more vulnerable both to physical as well as subsequently to epistemic violence (cf. Mohanty 2003; Spivak 1988; Boehmer 2005).

102 According to Grosz, this hierarchy is based on the notion of the female body as "frail, imperfect, unruly, and unreliable" (1994: 13).

103 In Socrates' thinking, for instance, the marginalization of the body is discernible with a simultaneous emphasis on the mind as source and constituent of a 'true'

Additionally, imperial race discourses of the Enlightenment built on a dualist body politic to justify and strengthen white supremacy in opposition to a supposed black inferiority.

Judith Butler is certainly among the most radical to do away with any kind of Cartesian dualist logic or 'natural' difference between the sexes, especially in the notion of gender performativity. Butler's work, influential also for queer studies, is motivated by the quest to identify those bodies that count as valued and valuable or abjected in societies and to dismantle those mechanisms that help to produce and sustain them as such. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler poses fundamental questions which are relevant for my reading of the bodies in Caribbean fiction and those influential systems they exist in:

How does the materialization of the norm in bodily formation produce a domain of abjected bodies, a field of deformation, which in failing to qualify as the fully human, fortifies those regulatory norms? What challenge does that excluded and abjected realm produce to a symbolic hegemony that might force a radical rearticulation of what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as "life," lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving? (Butler 1993: 16)

Butler describes the materiality and materializing effects of discourses on the body, the normative and regulating function of sex, as well as the performativity of gender within a heterosexual matrix, arguing that both gender and sex are discursive and socially constructed. Although Butler contends that "normative heterosexuality is clearly not the only regulatory regime operative in the production of bodily contours or setting the limits to bodily intelligibility" (17), race as social regulation remains a mere "addition" and superficially elaborated on. Heteronormativity, or compulsory heterosexuality in Adrienne Rich's terminology, as iterability¹⁰⁴ or ritual takes precedence in Butler's argument.¹⁰⁵

humanity (cf. Shilling 2005: 6-7.) This dualism is retraceable to ancient Greek ethics and philosophy.

104 Butler understands iterability as a ritualized process, "a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject." Although these conditions do not fully determine the production of the subject, Butler argues that performativity happens ("ritual is reiterated") "under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production" (Butler 1993: 95).

105 A clear shift in Butler's work towards a serious engagement with racialized bodies and mourning can be discerned starting with the publication of *Precarious Life* (cf. Butler 2004a, 2009).

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The meaning of the body is entwined with gender norms and norms of ‘appropriate’ sexuality that exist within a society and are re-enacted by and through the body. These norms depend on the historical context and are re-enforced by cultural, social, and political structures (cf. Butler 2004b: 20).

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where “doing” and “being done to” become equivocal. [...] The body has its invariably public dimension; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, bearing their imprint, formed within the crucible of social life. (Butler 2004b: 21)¹⁰⁶

What resonates in this for Butler unusually clear definition of the body are the same questions of ownership and bodily autonomy that have been raised in the chapter’s beginning. Importantly, the body here is regarded as both an object and a subject, as having agency and being acted upon.

However, in a discussion of the value or ‘irrelevance’ ascribed to an individual’s body it is insufficient to focus primarily on gender and sexuality as Butler does most of the time. Butler is certainly right in stating that the body is never one’s own alone, handed over to the “world of others.” But as this world is still structured according to the workings of the coloniality of power, the “doing” body and the body that is “being done to” continue to exist on unequal racialized terms. Hence, the questions of what counts as viable or unlivable are inextricably linked to issues of race and ethnicity and citizenship regimes. These questions have been raised also and more prominently by feminists like M. Jacqui Alexander (cf. 1994, 2005) and specifically for the Caribbean context.¹⁰⁷ There they need to be contextualized not only within the historical circumstances that allowed and legally sanctioned the violation and mutilation of Black bodies and disenfranchisement of non-white personhood but also within contemporary forms of dominance and subordination.¹⁰⁸

106 Grosz discusses the body as locus of socio-cultural marginality; bodies are sites of “social entry and exit, regions of confrontation or compromise” (Grosz 1994: 193).

107 See chapters 4 and 7.

108 Jacqui Alexander talks about heteropatriarchal recolonization and a neocolonial body politic that operates “through the consolidation of certain psychic economies and racialized hierarchies as well as within various material and ideological processes” (2005: 26). Likewise, her and Mohanty’s declaration that they “were not born women of color but rather *became* women of color” (9) – calling out Simone de Beauvoir – makes explicit where white European, second wave feminists have been in neglect.

In the Caribbean, the body is tied to a historical struggle over subjecthood, control, and ownership. The logic of slavery was based on the belief in the superiority of whiteness. The colonial mastery over the enslaved, working body worked along dualist power dynamics between the free versus the captive body, ruling and intact bodies versus ruled and broken bodies. The interrelation of body control, subjugation, power, and sovereignty is extensively elaborated on by Foucault in his concept of biopower. For him, disciplining measures are enacted on and through the body which he furthermore conceives of as the site of power and social control. He speaks about the systematic regulation of bodies and docility and contends that “the body that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skillful and increases its forces. [...] A body that is docile may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault 1979: 136). It serves to increase productivity and ultimately to sustain sovereign power. In a system of disenfranchisement such as slavery the female body was reduced to its workforce and reproductive capacity.

In this context, Marlene NourbeSe Philip provides an insightful reading of Foucault’s concepts. It is in the “the machine of the plantation” (1997: 92) where the management of bodies takes place to secure profit and the continued existence of the plantation economy and colonial, patriarchal dominance.¹⁰⁹ She makes clear how the enslaved Black female body, her womb as “the *raison d’être* of her importation to the New World” (91), became inextricably connected to the colonial project through the establishment of a ‘sexual economy’ of rape: “By far *the* most efficient management tool of women is the possibility of the uninvited and forceful invasion of the space between the legs. [...] The inner space between the legs linked irrevocably to the outer space of the plantation” (75, 93).¹¹⁰ Made explicit in this quote is how colonial violence is staged

109 Philip’s use of the machine is remindful, too, of the panopticon in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1975). The symbol may very well be applied to describe contemporary power relations in the Caribbean and the region’s dependency capitalism and sexual economy, and more precisely the management of bodies therein, to pinpoint the permanence and continuity of such hierarchical hegemonies. Another form of biopolitical power is the 1932 law of forced sterilization directed primarily against Women of Color in the United States. What we have here is an institutionalized form of racism attempting a regulation of the reproductive capacity of the ‘non-white’ body, to prevent a white nation from ‘Blackening.’

110 Hilary Beckles confirms: “The enslaved woman, therefore, was completely powerless before the law as far as her body was concerned. Legally she had no body of her own, and certainly no prior right to it. She could not legally deny her owner total access to it” (Beckles 2003: 147). Moreover, in “Caribbean slave societies, hegemonic masculinity ensured its own power primarily through the control of black bodies. White heterosexual males at the apex of society positioned themselves not only as economically and politically powerful, but also exercised ultimate sexual

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on the female body. Also, the violent intrusion into the “inner space” of the body or the threat of it functions as a demonstration of power and a tool both of discipline and punishment. To mention this is to take note of a violent history of the body and destruction in the Caribbean.

The body is subjected to multiple forms of control and disciplining measures. The terror of sexual violence is one form of bodily disenfranchisement and explicit means to exercise power over the subject. There exist other mechanisms more implicit in its operative functioning and ingrained in socialization processes such as compulsive heterosexuality and gender performances but also the gaze or in the Caribbean the regulatory social regime of respectability. The gaze is directed directly at an individual and depending on the onlooker maybe voyeuristic and oppressive – in the case of the one who stares or gazes – or subversive and affirmative – in case the one being gazed at looks back. As suggested by bell hooks, the gaze and the look, such as the phallogentric, racialized gaze hooks mentions, are embedded within structures of domination, inextricably linked to the visibility of physical attributes.¹¹¹ “The gaze is alert everywhere,” as Patricia Hill Collins puts it (1990: 195); it is political, dangerous, and a hurtful weapon. The gaze pierces through the skin; often it is oppressive and degrading. It may cause feelings of inferiority and conditions the individual to certain modes of behavior who then attempts to avoid stigmatization, shame, public embarrassment, or punishment depending on the social context.¹¹² That way bodies are controlled and kept in check. The critical, oppositional gaze as a “politicized looking” (hooks 1992: 116) can turn into a site from where to resist and retain agency. Literary texts, too, participate in the politics of the gaze by means of representation and confront readers with their own fears and prejudice, but also invite readers to read, or “to look differently” (hooks 1992: 130). The bodies in text (written about and upon) possibly unsettle “conventional racist and sexist stereotypical representations” as fictional char-

control over women’s bodies and physical control over black male bodies. They rendered black male slaves powerless through violent, physical control and by denying them legitimate access to both black and white women” (Davis 2006: 27).

111 Arguably, the gaze may be interpreted as an un-institutionalized form of a Foucauldian panopticon that puts the person being gazed at in “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault 1979: 201). See also Frantz Fanon’s essay “The Fact of Blackness” on the objectifying gaze of a self at the ‘other.’

112 Erving Goffman, to whom Judith Butler actually refers in her theory of performativity, writes about self-presentation and the adequate performance of identity, or rather the (punitive) consequences if we fail to meet the expected behavior (cf. Goffman 1959).

acters display their bodies “for that look of recognition that affirms their subjectivity” (ibid.).

3.2.2 The Captive Body and Lived Experience

Caribbean and African-American feminists are cautious about over-emphasizing the body’s symbolism at the expense of its materiality. They argue that the body is not just mere discourse or metaphor but corporeal experience and fleshy substance that may be embraced or rejected and subjected to the scrutinizing gaze. In the collection *Daughters of Caliban* (1997), Consuelo López Springfield makes clear where Butler’s argumentation fails to fully explain the body in the Caribbean against its colonial history.

[T]he depiction of the “body-as-metaphor” must be seen in the context of political systems where women’s bodies have been subject to abuse, rape, torture, and dismemberment precisely because this very treatment, through its interpretation as symbolic construct, has been an effective method of political control. Their reading of the body thus emerges from an ever-present threat to their own vulnerable flesh and blood, and the resulting symbolism is too close to the material body to allow for the comfort of seeing this danger merely as metaphor. (López Springfield 1997: 8)

The four Caribbean writers considered here in one way or another come back to this body in pain and agony and to wounded flesh to memorize psychic mutilation and corporeal suffering beyond mere metaphorical meaning.

Likewise, Hortense Spillers is cautious to consider the body solely as discursive construct and metaphor, and describes the atrocities of slavery as “*a theft of the body*” and “high crimes against the *flesh*” (Spillers 1987: 67; all italics in original). She distinguishes between flesh and body in order to differentiate the “captive” from the “liberated” body or subject. In the context of the “socio-political order of the New World” (ibid.), meaning colonialism and enslavement, for the captive African and indigenous bodies – objects of “otherness” and embodiments of “sheer physical powerlessness” – this distinction is crucial to notice the “*actual* mutilation” (ibid.) of the flesh. Therefore, she argues, “before the ‘body’ there is the ‘flesh,’ that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse” (ibid.). Yet, she departs with phenomenology in their view of the existence of a pre-discursive body material. In the colonial moment and set against ingrained power structures of inequalities (like racism, sexism, or classism) the body is never without

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meaning or neutral and impossible to be discoursed away.¹¹³ The flesh, in its “seared, divided, ripped-apartness,” is the “primary narrative” or testimony of colonial violence. While the flesh is being marked, branded, and engraved quite literally, the body displays or remembers what Brinda Mehta describes as the “violent wounds of history” (2009: 2).

Spillers’ statement, “This body [...] bears in person the marks of a cultural text” (67), brings up the idea not only of the body as decipherable narrative but also of the lived body that is being inscribed with and memorizes experiences. Indeed, social life is made up of multiple identity positions. Critical race theory and Black Feminism have consistently pointed out the social and cultural role of gender, race, class, religion, and ethnicity as intersecting with other societal factors to determine a body’s location as within or outside of a perceived normality. Both schools of thought define the body as lived, thereby focusing on the political implication of the embodied experience of these factors. They pay attention to interlocking factors that “produce a web of experiences shaping diversity” and a lived reality, as Hill Collins, contends emphasizing the “connection between experience and consciousness that shapes the everyday lives” (1990: 24) of individual beings in different ways.

The notion of the lived body and the concept of intercorporeality are important also in phenomenology. Intercorporeality refers to the relation of bodies with each other and their environments, of being in and opened to the world.¹¹⁴ The body, neither a static nor an unchanging entity, relates to a lived reality and is a concrete fact of the quotidian. This is a basic, universal assumption. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in *Phénoménologie de la perception*, develops the theoretical underpinnings of the *corps vécu*, the lived body. The subject be-

113 She also rethinks the conceptualization of gender and identity and the body in the Americas, contending how in contexts of dominance and oppression, gender differences “adhere to no symbolic integrity” (Spillers 1987: 66) and succumb to the hegemony of ethnicity.

114 Cf. Howson 2013: 72. Sociologist Chris Shilling shows that the body is “a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society” and proposes a “corporeal realism” as theoretical framework. Corporeal realism views social structures and embodied subjects as emergent phenomena that are bodily and socially generative and productive while also constraining and limiting over time. The notion of corporeality builds on a triadic understanding of the body as being simultaneously a “source for the creation of social life [...] as a *location* for the structural properties of society[...], [and] a vital *means* through which individuals are *positioned* within and *oriented towards* society” (2005: 10-11; emphasis in original). This brings to mind Giddens’ notion of individual agency and a subject’s capacity to intervene in her environment and potentially initiate transformation. Shilling, however, fails to include ‘race’ as category crucial for and constitutive of contemporary society in his depiction of the body as “surface phenomenon” (Shilling 2005: 5).

comes defined by means of her perception and embodied existence, and moves from *having* a body to also *being* that body which Merleau-Ponty conceives of as neutral and pre-personal. He considers the body “as a source of the self and of society” (1962: 56). The apprehension of the social world happens through the body. That way the body is lived and shaped by everyday experiences and activities of various kinds both consciously and unconsciously.¹¹⁵ Although I share the assumption of the body as lived, I wish to join common criticism of phenomenological approaches to the body mostly for its apolitical notion of a “pre-personal” (Morris 2008: 115) body in neglect of both power relations as well as differences in embodied perceptions that are indeed specific to gender, race, ethnicity, and culture.¹¹⁶

The assumption that the body is lived and shaped by its specific historical context as well as personal experience counters monolithic constructions of subjecthood as well as universalist notions of, for example, female embodiment. Without doubt, “[m]etaphorically and physically the body is one of the most immediate and poignant testimonies to lived experience, and as such it is one of the most complex and contested political texts” (Mains 2004: 190). If one follows Teresa de Lauretis, experience can be understood as

a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations – material, economic, and interpersonal – which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical. (1984: 159)

The *lived body* as the general or universal condition or fact of being in the world needs to be reconsidered by adding here the notion of *lived experience*, meaning the body as experienced specifically by the self and referring to individual and collective experience of inhabiting the world as well as cultural imprint. This emphasizes the heterogeneity of a lived body as the life of each

115 “The process is continuous, its achievement unending or daily renewed. For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one’s personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses, and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning, and affect) to the events of the world” (de Lauretis 1984: 159). This engagement is largely an unconscious process of the incorporation of certain values and meanings which are culturally specific and vary according to differences in subject positions.

116 See also Grosz’ criticism of Merleau-Ponty (e.g. Grosz 1994: 108-109).

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individual is altered, influenced, and produced by specific historical, socio-political, cultural conditions, which affects the ways the body is perceived by the self and by others. Grosz reconceptualizes the lived body “as it is represented and used in specific ways in particular cultures [...] interwoven with and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification, and representation” (Grosz 1994: 18).¹¹⁷ A lived body also communicates experience. The consideration of personal experience allows for a theoretical reconsideration and interpretation of individual reality which plays a role in the production of situational knowledge.

3.2.3 Racialized Body Politics and Respectability

Caribbean societies are generally described as creolized, yet they differ immensely in their ethnic compositions as they do with regard to their dominant discourses on cultural and racial difference along with corresponding political and social practices of inclusion and exclusion. Patricia Mohammed hints at the contradictions inherent in the racialized/racist body politics that dominate the region’s colonial and postcolonial societies, stating that a “mixed-race population was one of the early by-products of colonization and slavery, but one which was troublesome to a system which thrived on distinctions of race, class and colour” (Mohammed 2000: 23). The ‘mulatto woman’ particularly was regarded as unsettling to the black and white binary fostered by colonialism. The surveillance and “criticism of white creole women echoed colonial anxieties about the potential for the white female body to become the conduit of white racial degeneracy and imperial decline” (Jones 2015: n.p.). The presence of the *mulata* body fueled colonial fear for whiteness in her embodiment of ‘racial contamination,’ but also did not fit completely among the black population. Yet she was the epitome of ‘desirable exotic beauty’ and has become representative of national unity and harmonious race relations and the plurality of the de- and postcolonial Caribbean nation states.¹¹⁸ Her intermediate position in fact discloses the constructedness of race and its workings of power (cf. Mohammed 2000: 29). The figure of the ‘tragic *mulata*’ in twentieth-century literature and

117 This is also from where a collective standpoint and identity politics can be formulated.

118 The beauty and desirability of the creole woman is praised (and commodified) in Caribbean popular culture, for example by Jamaican dancehall artist Buju Banton in “Love Me Browning” (1992).

film is a popular icon that stages this conflicting racial identity in its gendered dimension (cf. Blanco Borelli 2016; see also chapter 7).

Contemporary Caribbean national discourses build on creoleness. To describe the ethnic composition and racially stratified society Mohammed alludes to, Percy Hintzen adopts the concept of the “Creole continuum” with Afro- and white creole adopting either end. This rather fluid color-class pattern “is to be constituted of various degrees of cultural and racial mixing” which bears witness to the region’s own diaspora history under European rule. “Distance from the ideal European phenotype and from Europe’s cultural practices determines and defines the Creole’s position in the social hierarchy” (Hintzen 2002: 93). Still, in many present-day Caribbean societies whiteness more than Blackness continues to be associated with social status, prestige, access to resources, etc.; here, Hintzen refers to Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital. The elite rhetoric of unity in diversity as promoted in Caribbean postcolonial states like Jamaica or Trinidad has the tendency to privilege certain cultural practices and ethnic affiliations while marginalizing others, like indigenous and Indian presences, thus hiding racist prejudice and practices of discrimination that are firmly in place. And while this is a very condensed take on one aspect of racialized body politics in the Caribbean that hardly explains its complexity, it is one aspect that accounts, for example, for the persistent sentiment of anti-blackness, for instance in the Dominican Republic that strongly values its European-Spanish heritage over the African legacy, a stance contrary to neighboring Haiti, where the affirmation of Blackness played a major role, for instance, in their struggle for independence.

Discourses on cultural identity often reproduce and strengthen racialized body politics. The presence of the contracted laborers from the Asian continent and their descendants destabilized the symbolic order of the “Creole continuum” in particular in Trinidad and Guyana. As Jennifer Rahim explains, from within the Indo-Caribbean community has arisen unease with the identity concept of creoleness, or *creolité*, being regarded as “an accommodation that privileges the Afro-Creole influence” (Rahim 2009: para. 3). The concept of douglarization, referring basically to the blending of Afro- and Indo-Caribbean elements and interracial union, has been suggested by several scholars in order to undo the political and cultural exclusion of the Indo-Caribbean experience from the national body politics but has been far less effective as identity concept than *creolité* (cf. Rahim 2009; Puri 2004).¹¹⁹ Similarly, the (transcultural) concept of *coolitude*, coined by Mauritian poet Khal Torabully in 1992, is suggested as a creative, affirmative identity concept for the Indian diaspora com-

119 This particular aspect will be dealt with in more detail in chapter 5.

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plimentary to Aimé Césaire's Afro-centric *négritude*. Both the dougla and 'coolie' body are perceived as the 'Other,' the abject that unsettles a symbolic hegemony, to use Butler's phrasing, and discourses of ethnic 'purity.' Many critics have pointed out the precarious condition of the female body in these constellations on which neo-/colonial and communal violence have been staged and claims for 'purity,' difference, and citizenship have been projected (cf. Thomas 2011: 8-9; Anatol 2015: 12). Thus, Indian womanhood, for example, has emerged to safeguard Indian ethnic identity and to secure Indian patriarchy in the diaspora leading to increased surveillance of her body and sexuality (cf. Reddock 1998a, b; Niranjana 2006).¹²⁰ Compulsory heterosexuality as well as strictly defined gender identities have helped to guarantee women's submissiveness (e.g. in some Indo-Caribbean families Brahminic ideals of femininity and masculinity fix the body in clearly defined roles). The untouched female body in particular has been considered as a bastion against miscegenation and as vehicle in the aspiration towards a respectable status.

If social capital continues to be connected to ethnic identity and race, or whiteness, 'moral capital' and status can be attained through respectability, which, however, is not detached from racial 'belonging' and ethnicity either. Under British colonial rule, a strict, racist politics of sexual control of the predominantly Black population was enforced by the colonizers through respectable conduct, which later helped to foster the pathologization of homosexuality. On the other hand, respectability was adapted counter-wise by the Black population as moral uplift and demarcation from the sexual excesses and perceived perversion of the colonizers (cf. LaFont 2001; see chapter 4).¹²¹ Today, respectability is part of a normative discourse of citizenship in the Caribbean, more aptly described as a heteropatriarchal body politics that transcends the distinc-

120 In particular due to the imbalanced gender ratio among Indians on the plantations, arguably, indentureship provided women with comparably more liberty as they were freer to choose their partners and obtain property. One argument of anti-indentureship campaigns in India itself was the perceived decline in sexual morality of women in the colonies. The paradox was that women were the gatekeepers of 'Indianness' in the diaspora but marked as the 'Other' within nationalist discourses in India (cf. Niranjana 2006). Two publications, *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture* (2013) by Gaiutra Bahadur and *Maharani's Misery: Narratives of a Passage from India to the Caribbean* (2002) by Verene Shepherd, reveal the precarious living conditions and pressure put on these women. See also chapter 5.

121 Bridget Brereton confirms for colonial Trinidad that persons were respectable by definition of their whiteness (1979: 211), which is valid still in the second half of the twentieth century when 'moral capital' continues to be associated with lighter skin. On the concepts of reputation and representability, see e.g. Besson (1993) and Rowe (2009).

tion between intimacy and public sphere by promoting personal and communal progress, middle-class values, thrift, education, consumption, Christian morality, and marriage (cf. Thomas 2004). Respectable life style is reproduced within the nuclear family and enforced through socialization. It functions also as a regulatory regime to ensure heteronormative gender performances and sexuality.¹²²

Especially in the Anglophone Caribbean, respectability has emerged as one of the pillars of national identity and upward mobility. However, its fragility becomes apparent considering the extent to which sexual deviance and other transgressions are perceived as threat to the battalion of middle-class morality (cf. Helber 2015; Thomas 2011; Alexander 2005). In the reading of the four novels, I refer to respectability as socially constructed and disclose the extent to which strict morality defines and constrains the protagonists' self-actualization and possibility of free sexual expression. This shall furthermore reveal in how far the homosexual body, the prostitute's body, and the HIV-infected body is perceived to be in disharmony with the respectable social body.

3.3 Beyond the Body as Text

EarthSilenceSoundBodyText
(NourbeSe Philip 1997: 91)

Despite its obvious material absence, the body is omnipresent in literature in multiple representations of corporeal experiences and embodiment.¹²³ Often, these literary representations disclose the political implications of the relation between body and identity and can unsettle and deconstruct normative views of subjectivity. Marlene NourbeSe Philip's narrative essay "Dis Place – The Space Between" illuminates how the once colonized Caribbean body is written back into the text and how corporeality may be transmitted via the text. In this respect, the poem in the subsection "Silence and the space between" is worth quoting here:

122 The entanglement of heterosexuality and citizenship in the Caribbean are "linked to desires for 'respectability' and 'decency' that are completely based on a western epistemological frame of reference – and, more specifically, on a colonial, pseudo-Victorian mutation of this order" (Kamugisha 2007: 35).

123 This does not mean that I conceive of the literary text as body itself. It is the body as text in the text, written about and inscribed with meaning that I deal with here.

arising from the body” (Punday 2000: 227), Punday’s suggestion of a “corporeal narratology” attends to the body as a textual element itself. He regards the body to be as crucial for the construction of a narrative as place, characters, and time. He points out narratology’s neglect of what and how bodies are represented and charged with meaning by the narrative and in turn shape the narration itself. The body, according to Punday, is made relevant for the narrative through the range and sorting of types of bodies, the distinction of human from non-human bodies and bodies from objects (although materialists might have a problem with the lack of agency he thus ascribes to inanimate things), the interaction of bodies and the relation to their environments, as well as the degree of the characters’ dis-/embodiment.¹²⁶ Lastly, adopting from Grosz the “corporeality of ‘touch’,” (236) Punday means to investigate the body as mediating instance through which reader, text, and characters are brought into touch or contact with each other.

Putting this approach into practice, Joan Riley’s *The Unbelonging* (1985) is an apt example. In this coming-of-age novel a young girl from Jamaica, Hyacinth, comes to live with her estranged father in England where she is confronted with the racism of British post-World War society and suffers from her abusive father. The sorting of bodies into Black/white and adult/child makes clear two things: first, the politicized racist scheme of white superiority into which the Black body enters; second, the vulnerability of the adolescent female body *vis-à-vis* patriarchal violence. Hyacinth is defined by means of her own body material with the white body as point of reference, “that skin that was so much a badge of acceptance” (Riley 1985: 75). Moreover, assigned to the setting of the school’s changing room is a racialized hierarchy of Black and white bodies, or to put it differently this kind of embodied space regulates the behavior of the subjects inhabiting it, exposing Hyacinth to the stares of her white classmates, her body set against the tiled coldness of the room. Her adult body is rendered dysfunctional through the shame caused by the very corporeal childhood experience of abuse and wetting the bed which has imprinted her consciousness. Despite her father’s absence his body still haunts her and materializes in her imagination leaving her sexually and emotionally immobile. The character’s refusal to engage with her surrounding and other human bodies can be interpreted as criticism of a society’s demands for human sociability, while at other times her seeking out company shows her want for conformity, approval, and belonging. Lastly, the reader’s position towards the narrative is not

126 Daniel Punday exemplifies his approach with reference especially to Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (cf. 2000: 237-238).

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only directed through perspective and focalization, but also Hyacinth's "highly marked physical embodiment," to use Punday's wording (234).

Although some observations Punday makes are problematic, especially with regard to his analysis of body 'types' which must remain within preconceived essential, stereotypical views on the body or the reproduction of an unmarked *whiteness*, the approach foregrounds the fictional body in multiple ways. The view of the body in relation, recalling here what Merleau-Ponty describes as intercorporeality, helps to retrace the formation of the subject in interaction with others and her situatedness in particular spatial and temporal context. Also, a close reading of the body automatically involves a closer look at the conditions that brought this body about. Hence, agreeing with Punday, a "[c]oncern for how the body is endowed with meaning within a narrative will usually touch on systems of meaning that extend far beyond the text itself" (229).

Caribbean writers, in the coming-of-age form in particular, approach body matters from different often conflicting perspectives. Novels such as *This Body* (2004) and *Out of My Skin* (1998), both by Tessa McWatt, or *The Farming of Bones* (1998), by Danticat, make explicit (not only) in their titles a concern with the body. They then reveal the limitations of the physical body, while also highlighting its symbolical force.¹²⁷ In addition, novels such as Marie-Elena John's *Unburnable* (2007), Maryse Condé's *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (2003), or *Sirena Selena vestida de pena* (2008) by Mayra Santos-Febres, hint at corporeal in/destructiveness and the pain the subject experiences with and through the body. Santos-Febres, for instance, illustrates how cultural and heteronormative codes are inscribed on the sexual body and may eventually be subverted through gender transformation and drag performances.¹²⁸ Just like NourbeSe Philip's poem, these novelistic "Textbodies" document the violation and colonial subjection experienced by the female and non-normative or queer body, but also the protagonists' rebellion against these very same experiences and their desire to disrupt and interrupt the silence that has surrounded them, and become a source of knowledge about a silenced past.

The body is fundamental to our being as well as repository of individual experience and collective memory. In the four selected novels the body does not forget but remembers always. Reading the body "as both a palimpsest and as a

127 The title of the novels by Trinidadian Harald Sonny Ladoo, *No Pain Like This Body* (1972), or Barbadian George Lemming, *The Castle of My Skin* (1953), are suggestive of the interest in the corporeal in earlier Caribbean literature.

128 Two further examples are Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998) or Achy Obeja's novel *Memory Mambo* (1996).

thing in a state of permanent becoming,” as suggested by Vanessa Agard-Jones (2013: 187),¹²⁹ highlights on the one hand the processual becoming of embodied subjectivity. On the other hand, the metaphor of the palimpsest implies that the body (as a lived body) is written upon and re-inscribed with meaning and by experience. These inscriptions may leave traces – *visible* on the skin, like stretch marks of puberty or pregnancy or scars caused by injury or physical violence; and *invisible* as emotional scars caused by violent intrusion, depression, or trauma; or even as *symbolic* for migration and exile (as a form of embodied memory). The body bears the imprints and evidence of the past and present, they cannot be erased entirely but shining through will be remembered. In this sense, the body is never a *tabula rasa*. The idea of the body as palimpsest furthermore implies the possibility for transformation of the subject, becoming another body but not quite completely. That way, bodies in agony or a tortured body may be written over again and reclaimed in positive terms, as the endings of *The Unbelonging* or, as will be seen, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, indicate.

As mentioned earlier, the novel of development elaborates on individual development and a subject’s dis-/integration into society, thereby disclosing mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion as well as societal forms of discrimination which are articulated through citizenship status. Hence, the body is not only a locus of memory and remembrance, but also a political issue that matters in the articulation of citizenship rights and, in many cases, the denial of the very same. Exclusion or inclusion is generated, among other things, through perceptions of the corporeal and ascriptions to or inscriptions on the body. Writing the body in case of Caribbean and diaspora literature is also writing about and challenging both legal and cultural concepts of citizenship. The coming-of-age novel that centers on the body, sexual autonomy, and citizenship rights foregrounds the legal, juridical dimension of embodied identity. Francis’ book on feminine citizenship in Caribbean literature focuses on the political dimension and regulation of intimacy and the private sphere in postcolonial societies. She introduces the concept of sexual citizenship to juxtapose – via a racialized, female gendered body – intimate and archival violence, i.e. the exclusion from historical record, with practices and the status of citizenship as

129 Vanessa Agard-Jones, a political anthropologist, conducts research on the body, agriculture, pesticides, and postcolonial power relations in Martinique. What I find interesting and relevant here, is that she understands the body as product of social relations and as assemblage “containing multiple forms of agency and bearing the traces of multiple forms of power” (2013: 187). Although not applied in a strictly narratological sense, her use of the metaphor of the palimpsest is insightful for how bodies are constantly evolving and relate to their context of global capitalism.

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well as national and/or diasporic belonging (cf. Francis 2010).¹³⁰ She analyses various scenes of subjection and sexual violence in the novels of five diaspora writers, among them Edwidge Danticat and Angie Cruz. In her analysis ‘the body in pain’¹³¹ takes precedence to show Caribbean women’s struggles for political rights and access to civic participation. At first it may appear as if Francis were substituting one stereotype of womanhood with the other, that of strength and resilience with pain and agony.¹³² She does so, however, not in order to reduce Caribbean women to a status of victimhood, but to unravel the politics of silence in Caribbean communities and official historical records that obscures not only intimate violence but also “forbidden intimate desire” (10). The exploration of the body in pain, she argues, probes “the politics behind those intimate histories concealed from view to reveal the cultural mechanisms utilized to hide these often violent practices by casting them as benign traditions” (10-11). Reading the body based on this premise brings into relief the pain inflicted onto the body and felt by the embodied subject. Women writers like the four under discussion here – and here I wish to draw from Francis’ argument – “provide the textual space for bodies in pain and for Caribbean women and girls of different races and ethnicities to *dwell* on the sad or depressed body as both aesthetically and politically generative and enabling” (11). Consequently, of issue is not the spectacular representation of violence or the intensity of pain itself, but rather what these bodies reveal about regulatory regimes within a society and their origins and how they may be subverted.

Another concept that grasps these complex issues in a similar way is Guillermina De Ferrari’s idea of the *vulnerable body* and *corporeal fragility* paired with the assumption that the body is capable to produce social meaning, which I find highly productive for the analysis of the four novels selected here.

130 Francis understands sexual citizenship to incorporate not only a “politico-judicial contract” but also practices of sociocultural belonging, “which includes sexual practices such as the freedom to choose to reproduce or not, the liberty of sexual expression and association, as well as the more conventional articulation of protection from sexual violence” (2010: 4). Drawing from David Evans’ understanding that genders, bodies, and sexualities are political issues and matter for citizens, she extends the concept of sexual citizenship to emphasize how “bodily regulations also apply to different racial and gender configurations and to examine how the intimate domain reveals the concealed sexual qualifications of political rights for all citizens” (ibid.).

131 The term is a reference to Elaine Scarry’s insightful monograph of the same title (cf. 1985).

132 The tendency in pre-1990 Caribbean women’s writing to essentialize the Black body as site of strength or nurturing in form of the stereotypical desexualized maternal body has been contested (cf. Brand 1994; Donnell 2006).

Interestingly, she notes two interrelated trends in the recent literature from across the Caribbean – and this observation can certainly be extended to the diaspora literature: “a preoccupation with the local cultural and political circumstances that have resulted from colonization, and an exhibitionist attitude toward the body in its most vulnerable states” (De Ferrari 2007: 2). All bodies are vulnerable to outside forces and ascriptions and fragile when it comes to their (material) constitution. But, the notable concern with the body in Caribbean writing, according to De Ferrari, derives from the symbolic and actual dismemberment and appropriation of human bodies that constitutes the point of origin of the Caribbean as we conceive of it nowadays (cf. De Ferrari 2007: 3). What is instructive about De Ferrari’s thinking are the myriad dimensions the body apparently has in Caribbean fictional writing – e.g. the raced and gendered, the childhood, the soiled, the abject and ill, or erotic and hypersexualized body (cf. 25-26) – which she links across temporal and spatial distance through the notion that the body in its vulnerability constitutes a creative “site of memory and contestation” (3). She shows that “the myth of the vulnerable body” is in fact a literary strategy adapted by the authors to “unmake local colonial subjectivities as well as to establish their own Caribbean poetics within the framework established by the creative violence of history, which they transcend nonetheless” (ibid.).¹³³ Reading it thusly, the vulnerable body provides “fertile semantic grounds for negotiating the political through the personal” (26), which resonates with a feminist understanding of intimacy in which the personal is always political.

The following reading of the coming-of-age novels reveals that the body is multi-dimensional; that it is at the same time discourse and matter, process and status, is palimpsestic and inscribed with meaning. The four contemporary writers considered here critically engage with the gender and body politics in the Caribbean and its diaspora communities. In one way or another, their protagonists need to negotiate their embodied existence and rights to ownership of their bodies within post- and neocolonial conditions of dominance and power. In these personal stories of migration, intimacy and the body are always sites of struggle for autonomy and control revealing the extent to which women’s sexuality is surveilled and restricted. As a matter of fact, in many cases, the sexual encounters described in the novels render the female body vulnerable, often leaving the protagonists in shame. Thus, the social pressure and stigmata connected to the female body is very much present in each of these texts,

133 She builds on Glissant’s foundational conceptualization of the Caribbean in terms of “Relation” and the “absence of uninterrupted Filiation” (De Ferrari 2007: 22), or the missing root.

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which leads me to the following questions: Which bodies are made meaningful through the narrative? What silences do these bodies reveal? How is the body inscribed by history, culture, and the nation? As this study contends, Silvera, Espinet, Danticat, and Cruz narrate stories of bodies that want to belong but also offer stories of those that refuse to conform. These fictional bodies can be messy, unruly, and disobedient. Some of them appear to be extraordinary, grotesque, rebelling, while others are regulated, corrupted, or cooperating. A corporeal narratology that understands the body as palimpsest in tandem with its fragility (though avoiding a single focus on its vulnerability), then, foregrounds the intertwining of body and text. It engenders an analysis of the ways the narrative structure of the coming-of-age novel manifests itself via the maturing body and different stages of womanhood; how bodies act as medium of communication and to get in touch; how the privileging of certain bodies makes one question social perceptions of the world.

4. Erotic Power and Motherly Bodies in Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend*

Recognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama.

(Lorde 2007: 59)¹³⁴

4.1 Introduction

The first and so far only novel *The Heart Does Not Bend* (2002) by Jamaican Canadian writer, feminist, and activist Makeda Silvera is dealt with in this first analytical chapter. Silvera was born in the Jamaican capital of Kingston in 1955 and migrated to Toronto in the late 1960s, just when the city's Black community was 'coming of age' and the political activism of anti-racist movements, in which Silvera has played an important role, inspired by the Black Power movement in the United States, was ripening. She is the co-founder of Sister Vision Press, the first publishing house for the writings of Black women and women of color in Canada.¹³⁵ With her sociologist study *Silenced* (1983), she has been among the first to make public the struggles and inhumane living conditions of Caribbean domestic workers within Canadian society. She has

134 Parts of this chapter have been published in the article "Sexual Citizenship and Vulnerable Bodies in Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend* and Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging*" in a 2016 edition of *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* (13.2) and in the article "Caribbean Canadian Feminism and Decolonial Practice in Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend* and *Her Head A Village*" in a special issue of *EnterText* on "Crossing Thresholds – Gender and Decoloniality in Caribbean Knowledge" (2018).

135 Sister Vision started to publish in 1985. The aim of the pioneering project was to increase the visibility of writers of color who remained generally excluded from both the mainstream and the alternative feminist literary communities and publishing houses (Ruth 2003: n.p.).

written articles for the journals *fireweed* and *Contrast* and edited various collections of poetry and creative writing, such as *Fireworks: The Best of Fireweed* (1986) or *Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology* (1991).¹³⁶ She is the author of the short story collections *Remembering G* (1991) and *Her Head a Village* (1994). Her feminist idea which she expresses throughout her oeuvre is intersectional and moves beyond white European, Anglo-American and -Canadian definitions of feminism in its focus on Black lesbian subjectivity and Black women's lived experience of racial, sexual, and gendered oppression in a majority white society.

Silvera, like other established writers of Caribbean descent such as Dionne Brand, Afua Cooper, Olive Senior, Claire Harris, or Nalo Hopkinson, has contributed to shaping the fields not only of Black feminist thought but also of Caribbean literature in Canada (cf. Williams 2008).¹³⁷ What adds to the rich, heterogeneous character of Caribbean Canadian literature are, for example: experiments with form and genre as in Hopkinson's speculative fiction *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998); non-fictional investigations of Black women's history in Canada as in Cooper's *The Hanging of Angélique* (2006); Brand's explorations of a cosmopolitan and multicultural Toronto in *What We all Long For* (2005); Shani Mootoo's literary transgressions of heterosexual identities in the novel *Cereus Blooms At Night* (1996); or representations of diasporic identities of Indo-Trinidadian-Canadian migrants in Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* (2003). While testifying their strong links to the respective Caribbean homes, the authors are also deeply connected to Canadian soil – *rooted* and *routed* both ways.

The novel, while retracing the coming of age and migrant story of a young woman in Jamaica and Canada, foregrounds the issues of destructive gender relations, homosexuality, and bodily vulnerability. The focus of my analysis is placed on the coming of age of the protagonist, Molly Galloway, who needs to negotiate her becoming woman between the island home Jamaica and the new metropolitan home of Toronto while also dealing with the estrangement from her mother and the unspoken truth of her and her uncle's homosexuality. The

136 Further works edited by Silvera are *Black Girl Talk* (1995); *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature* (1995); and *Má-ka Diasporic Juks: Contemporary Writing by Queer of African Descent* (1998).

137 By no means do I wish to diminish the work by writers such as Austin Clark, Dany Laferrière, Neil Bissoondath, or Cyril Dabydeen in shaping Caribbean literature in Canada. For a more in-depth discussion on Caribbean-Canadian literatures see Clarke (2005) and Bucknor and Coleman (2005). See also the work by Rinaldo Walcott, sociologist and critic in Black diaspora cultural studies, who has published extensively on Black Canadian culture and writing with a focus on queer sexuality, masculinity, coloniality, and citizenship (e.g. Walcott 2003).

chapter addresses the effects migration has on Molly's individuation process and familial interrelationships by paying attention to the ways she experiences her body and sexuality and relates to the women of her family.

Furthermore, I investigate the narrative representations of the homoerotic and maternal body as well as performances of masculinity to question gender conformity and the notion of 'respectability' through which certain bodies become a threat to hegemonic formulations of citizenship and Jamaican identity. The colonial continuity of these formulations, as Mimi Sheller points out, are particularly visible in the gendered codes inherent in the culture of respectability which is "based on the middle-class patriarchal Christian family, as well as expectations of heteronormative 'whiteness'" (Sheller 2012: 129). I suggest to read the main character's personal relationships through Audre Lorde's "The Uses of the Erotic" (1978) in order to deconstruct those heteronormative notions of masculinity and femininity the novel identifies as destructive.

The next section, first, briefly summarizes some aspects of the socio-historical, political, and cultural context of Jamaica including the concepts of 'creole multiracialism' and 'middle-class respectability' as the pillars of Jamaican cultural identity, citizenship, and the perception of appropriate sexuality. For the reading of Silvera's novel, the historical and contemporary contexts is necessary to comprehend how normative conceptualization of sexual morality developed and how in the colonial situation particular sexual practices were defined as 'normal' or inappropriate which ultimately affects today's conceptualizations of body politics in Jamaica and in extension also within the diaspora community. In the following, I also describe the migratory movements from Jamaica to Canada which have led to what Andrea Davis and Carl E. James call Jamaica's "multiculturalizing presence" (cf. Davis/James 2012) in Canada particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, and conclude by focusing on Black Canadian women's writing of which Silvera's work is foundational.

4.1.1 Jamaican History of Post-/Colonialism and Migration

Jamaica is the largest island of the Anglophone Caribbean with a population of about 2.7 million people according to the census in 2011 (cf. "Population Usually Resident in Jamaica"). That Jamaica used to be a slave society that relied heavily on sugar production accounts for the ethnic composition of its population with a Black majority, a white and mixed ethnic minority, as well as a small East Indian, Syrian, and Chinese population. The social division along

class lines, education, and achievement is inseparable from the "colour line" (Vickerman 2007: 485). Colonialism and the postcolonial processes of state formation, led by the small white and creole elite, condition the inseparability of ethnicity and race from class but also gender within politics and social hierarchies.

Jamaica was colonized by England in 1655, after the island had been under Spanish rule for 150 years, to start off a "sugar revolution" (Higman 2011: 98) that expanded into the global, highly capital-oriented triangular trade between Africa, the Caribbean, and Europe. The second half of the eighteenth century marks the culmination point of the colonial enterprise with Jamaica as one of the greatest exporters of sugar in the Caribbean.¹³⁸ What emerged during this time – not only in Jamaica but also on other islands – was a multi-racial but strictly hierarchized social structure. These plural societies, Higman confirms,

consisted of segments defined by ethnicity and culture, and sharply distinguished from another in terms of status and legal and political rights. In this model, the highest ranks were occupied by whites who held to a Europe-oriented culture, whereas the lowest ranks were made up of enslaved field labourers who looked to Africa for their cultural roots. (Higman 2011: 138-9)

Against this background, creolization, a process of cultural and ethnic intermixing and assimilation, began to shape Jamaican society, however, as Brathwaite observes, it benefitted the European minority (cf. Brathwaite 1971).

Colonization and enslavement were always accompanied by resistance from those enslaved (most famously in the Maroon Wars during 1720 and 1739). The Christmas Rebellion of 1831, an event of passive resistance in which equal treatment and payment for field work were demanded, preceded the abolition of slavery in the colony. After Emancipation the British Crown compensated plantation owners for the loss of slaves but did not secure sustainable living and working condition for the formerly enslaved masses. Among the Black population there was a growing dissatisfaction with the land distribution, working conditions, and access to education and property, but also with the inequalities based on culture and color. Increases in taxes, worsened living conditions, and extreme poverty culminated in the Morant Bay Rebellion in 1865. This rebellion, although unsuccessful, strengthened the want for political and economic enhancement, for the right of legal representation and the definition of a Jamaican identity that values as well the African heritage and cul-

138 During the period of slavery, lasting officially from 1651 until 1867, more than one million persons mainly from Africa's West Coast were deported to Jamaica (cf. Helber 2015: 39).

ture.¹³⁹ The last two decades of the nineteenth century are foundational not only for a national consciousness but also for the emergence of a new middle class and enhanced labor migration.¹⁴⁰

The first half of the twentieth century saw the beginning of nation building processes and decolonization. The installation of democratic rule and self-government along with the founding of the two major parties, the *People's National Party* (PNP) and the *Jamaica Labour Party* (JLP),¹⁴¹ eventually led to independence and the formation of the sovereign state Jamaica on August 1, 1962 (cf. Sherlock/Bennett 1998). In now postcolonial Jamaica (in a strictly temporal sense) national unity was suggested and a common shared cultural identity pushed, thereby promoting the creole multiracial society (cf. Thomas 2004). Although the national slogan "Out of Many, One People" celebrates ethnic diversity, it was meant to exclude race as meaningful for the postcolonial society and cover up hierarchical racial relations. As consequence, the newly defined *Jamaicanness* widened the gap between the creole, or 'brown'¹⁴² elite and the Black, African descended majority, mostly members of the working class. Jamaica's hegemonic cultural identity, as Patrick Helber argues, has increasingly been defined and appropriated by the middle class to privilege European and U.S.-American worldviews and respectability as life style and morali-

139 Official acknowledgement of this aspect, however, would only be realized partially with national independence almost a hundred years later and politically installed under P. J. Patterson's administration between 1992 and 2006. Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) developed the "idea of one great international organisation of black people, educated, financially independent and having pride as a race" (Sherlock/Bennett 1998: 298). With the founding of the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association) he aimed at realizing the idea of Black consciousness, solidarity, and unity, taking race as important reference point for identification. His ideas of a transnational Blackness and 'Back-to-Africa Movement' turned him into an unpopular figure among the political elite in Jamaica.

140 There was a large increase in the regional demand for workforce to build the Panama Canal and to work the banana plantations in the Americas.

141 In 1938, Alexander Bustamante founded the alliance *Bustamante's Industrial Trade Union* as a reaction to strikes and famine. Norman Manley then founded the first party, PNP, collaborating at first closely with Bustamante. A conservative turn in Bustamante's political position led him to distance himself from the more socialist PNP to found the JLP in 1943. Both actively called for self-rule and reforms to install general elections thus contributing significantly to Jamaica's independence. The two-parties system is still in place today.

142 In Jamaica, according to Thomas, "the 'middle class,' the more fortunate,' the 'rich people,' and the 'upper sets,' fall into the range of color categories usually referred to as 'brown'" (Thomas 2004: 24). The creole elite, their 'brownness' is "an intermediary color and class construction that is linked historically with the population of free people of color that emerged during the slavery period" (ibid.).

ty codex but excluding Black urban working class culture that has been perceived as backward and not respectable (cf. Helber 2015: 43). The politics of identity formation has not only solidified paternalistic social constellations of the nineteenth century, but also juxtaposes citizenship, propriety, and heteronormative sexuality to condemn sexual and gender deviance (cf. Thomas 2004: 56-57).

Despite initial rapid economic growth and the emergence of a more influential middle-class, the majority of the population continued to live in precarious conditions. Poverty, urbanization, illegal housing, and violence became social problems. Riots in the 1960s and 70s were directed “against the deep-seated inequities inherent in Jamaican society” (D’Agostino 2009: 112), fuelled by elitist politics, ‘party clientelism,’ and a patronage-based democracy, or so-called “garrison politics.” The society was parted by the rivalry between the two parties and their leaders who instrumentalized the urban population especially young men of Kingston’s ghettos. Against this background, performances of virility and the glorification of the ‘gun man,’ violence, and urban working-class “*badmanism*” (Hutton 2010: 27) have come to define dominant masculinity.¹⁴³

Jamaica has maneuvered into an economic crisis as a result of global capitalism along with neoliberal politics on part of the Jamaican government and austerity programs. State interventions by the U.S., structural adjustment programs imposed by the IMF and World Bank, international drug trade, control of local tourism and industry by multinational corporations continue to slow down economic recovery. The decline in domestic and international economy accompanied by social unrest has led to large-scale migration to the United States and Canada after Great Britain tightened the immigration laws. In the mid-1970s the numbers of Jamaican migrants increased especially from the middle- and upper-classes, being dissatisfied with then-Prime Minister Michael Manley’s policy of democratic socialism (cf. Jones 2008: 20), while since the 1980s members especially of the lower classes have increasingly left for North America. Today, an estimated number of 3.3 to 3.5 million persons make up the Jamaican diaspora community world-wide. The number of emigrants has remained constant during the first decade of the 21st century at five to six persons per 1000 residents, or 13,000 to 16,000 emigrants annually, in the period from 2002 until 2013 (cf. “Components of Annual Population Growth and Rates”). Of

143 See Hutton’s article “Oh Rudie” (2010) on the intersection of popular culture, performances of masculinity, and postcolonial politics. He describes the phenomenon of ‘rude-boy culture’ as subversive to elitist politics. Silvera’s novel, too, stages this aspect of Jamaican masculine identity.

interest is also the generally high willingness among Jamaicans to migrate (cf. Thomas-Hope 2002: 86, 91).

In general, diaspora Jamaicans maintain close connections to the island and participate actively in and influence the regional cultural and political life from afar. With the regular remittances of money and other goods, the transnational community furthermore provides the major source of income for the Jamaican state and economy surpassing even the tourism sector. Consequently, as Jones testifies, “[e]migration from Jamaica and the transnational flows that have developed between the island and its primary destination countries have become not only an economic strategy for Jamaicans, but also a culturally and socially desirable practice” (Jones 2008: 1). While migration and life in North America or Europe for many offers prospects of improved living conditions and social mobility, for some it also means liberation from mechanisms of oppression and discrimination with regards also to sexuality and gender. In many cases, the diaspora location allows LGBTTIQ-persons to live more openly.¹⁴⁴ Writers and artists who left Jamaica like Thomas Glave, Makeda Silvera, Staceyann Chin, or recent Booker Prize winner Marlon James, who have come out as gay, continue to work as activists and speak out about the lack of rights for non-heterosexual persons and homophobic violence.

Canada is now home to the third largest Jamaican diaspora community, which ranks among the country’s fastest growing ethnic community.¹⁴⁵ According to the 2006 census, 231,110 persons claimed Jamaican origin (single and multiple ethnic origin responses; cf. “Ethnic Origins, 2006 Counts, for Canada”), among them 123,420 Jamaican-born (cf. “Immigrant Population by Place of Birth”). Most of them live in downtown Toronto or the Greater Toronto Area. The country looks back to a long-standing history of Jamaican immigration

144 In the queer movement, the acronym LGBTTIQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and -sexual, intersexual, and/or queer identities. It acknowledges the diversity of gender and sexuality beyond heteronormative, binary understandings of gender.

145 The “era of racially preferential immigration policy” (Walker 2012: 27) officially ended with the introduction of the organized domestic scheme in 1955, allowing a small number of women from the Anglophone Caribbean to enter Canada annually as domestic workers. Due to a lack of workforce on the Canadian labor market, large migration waves were then encouraged by the introduction of a point system in 1967. The law favored skilled and professional workers by ranking “independent applicants [...] according to certain objective criteria concerning education, skills and resources” (Whitaker 1991: 19), as well as language, sex, marital status, and children. Selective admission and racial profiling and restrictions, however, continue to exist.

with the largest number of migrants arriving since mid-1900.¹⁴⁶ The immigration policy's focus on education and skill brings with it an immigrant population with a comparatively high level of training and professional expertise. While many Jamaicans in Canada have obtained a secure socioeconomic status, the majority still lives in inadequate conditions with a lower average income than the general population (cf. "The Jamaican Community in Canada"). Likewise, while many claim a strong sense of belonging to Canada (i.e. over 80 % according to the "Ethnic Diversity Study"), still more than half of the Canadian population of Jamaican origin have experienced racial discrimination (cf. "The Jamaican Community in Canada"). Despite the state's open, multicultural policy and higher living standards as compared to other minority groups, the Black Jamaican minority is still confronted with "pervasive patterns of social and economic marginalization" (Walker 2012: 33) vis-à-vis white supremacy.

Multiculturalism, on the one hand, facilitates the integration and accommodation of diverse ethnicities, but, on the other hand, it privileges white Anglo-Canadian identity. Every-day and institutionalized forms of racism continue to limit citizenship rights, access to education, housing, and professional career. Images of a 'problematic' Black masculinity in association with high crime rates are still pervasive. Without further critical investigation they reproduce among the population common stereotypes of a "Black Canadian identity, marked by performances of hyper-masculinity and physical aggression" to which Jamaicans have become tantamount, as Davis and James find (2012: 11). In opposition to this perception, studies like the one by Davis and James consider "Jamaica as integral, rather than marginal, to Canada's developed economy" (ibid.) and multicultural society. Thus, this and the subsequent chapter shall furthermore highlight the diverse ways Caribbean – Jamaican and Trinidadian – diaspora literature enriches the multicultural constitution of Canada's society.

4.1.2 Black Canadian Feminist Thought

Since the last two decades in particular, the theorization and academic visibility of Black (and/or African Canadian) feminist thought in Canada have in-

146 As Joseph Mensah confirms "one of the first large groups of Blacks to enter Canada was the Maroons of Jamaica, who landed in Halifax in 1796. Also, during the First World War, Jamaican Blacks were among those recruited to work in the coal mines [...] and the shipyards" (2002: 98).

creased.¹⁴⁷ Publications in the field explore, amongst others, Black women's histories, their struggles and possibilities of resistance, educational and schooling matters, as well as multiple forms of discrimination in Canada (cf. Massaquoi 2007; Wane 2002).¹⁴⁸ According to Yvonne Bobb-Smith, what historically defines a Caribbean-specific feminism in Canada are the "opposition and resistance to a dual system of capitalism and patriarchy" (Bobb-Smith 2004: 167) which are experienced as equally oppressive. She adds that their continuous struggle "for liberation has produced a counter ideology to many ideas of women's roles in Western society" (ibid.). Different to white (especially middle-class) Canadian feminism, this ideological counter-discourse takes note of the often lower level of education of migrant women and lacking resources; it re-evaluates the domestic sphere and family not as an oppressive, patriarchal space but as a microcosm of self-expression and freedom; it is sensitive to ethnic and gender diversity and often neglected issues of racism.¹⁴⁹

While acknowledging close proximity to Black feminism in the United States both intellectually and with regard to shared lived experiences, Black feminist thought in Canada is also different.¹⁵⁰ This is mainly due to the lesser degree of academic institutionalization, on the one hand, and, on the other, to a different history of slavery and racial segregation, the overall smaller size of the Black population in Canada as compared to the U.S., the different patterns of community building, predominantly in metropolitan areas, as well as a different migration policy that has targeted the attraction of skilled labour while discouraging reunification of families and denying racist profiling (cf. Mullings 2004: 136).¹⁵¹

147 An early foundational key text in the field is *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up": Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (1994) edited by Peggy Bristow with contributions by Afua Cooper and Dionne Brand, among others.

148 The 'denominators' 'Black' or 'African' as unifying categories may seem slightly problematic here, because it glosses over ethnic diversity and heterogeneity among the Black population in Canada. But, it is a politically useful term, a common ground for self-affirmation, identity politics, and empowerment. On this point, see for instance Bucknor and Coleman (2005). Rinaldo Walcott critically examines how Blackness in Canada usually conflates with Caribbean (Jamaican) diaspora identity, arguing that "it is around Canadian blacks of Caribbean descent that definitions of blackness in Canada are clustered. The hyper-visibility of Caribbean blackness makes indigenous black Canadians invisible" (2003: 46).

149 This is also pointed out by Silvera, most expressly in her study *Silenced* (1983).

150 Important for the theoretical groundwork of Black Canadian Feminism are, for instance, Barbara Smith, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, or Audre Lorde.

151 On the 'color line' in Canada, see Mathieu (2010), especially chapter one. On community building and migration policies, see Mensah (2002).

Black feminist theory and activism in Canada aims to achieve equal participation and recognition. It not only critically examines the multiple and intersecting factors of oppression that shape women's lived experience, but also focuses on solidarity in the common struggle, which is regarded as source of strength and as liberating practice (cf. Wane 2002). In this respect, "Canadian Black feminist theory is the articulated consciousness of Black women's awareness of their place in the Canadian state and a cultural narrative that explains Black Canadian women's understanding of themselves" (Massaquoi 2007: 13). It is "grounded in the specific materiality of Black women's lives, while acknowledging uprooting, movement, and reconstitution, and interrogating the dominant racialized and gendered discourse of the Canadian nation" (ibid. 7). As a discipline of knowledge it recognises the important and crucial role of Black women in shaping Canadian history since the seventeenth century. At the same time, it reveals the public denial of slavery as part of Canada's national history.¹⁵²

A founding figure for Black feminism in Canada, Silvera's political agenda is noticeable also throughout her fictional work. In an interview, she positions herself and her work at the intersection of multiple societal factors and self-identifies as: "I am a woman living in a patriarchal society. I am black living in a racist society and a lesbian living in a homophobic society. I'm a Caribbean-born Jamaican, with all the stereotypes. These factors are intricately linked to who I am and occupy a large place in my work" (Ruth 2003: n.p.). Influenced at an early stage of her career by Audre Lorde's work, the anti-racism by intellectuals such as Malcolm X, and the creative work by artists of the Harlem Renaissance her work is always creative and political at the same time and cannot be separated from its individual historical and spatial context. As the quote makes clear, Silvera transgresses several borders of a perceived 'normativity' that tends to exoticize Caribbean women's bodies and exclude non-heterosexuality, Blackness, and working-class migrant identity. Her work is groundbreaking, because she explicitly addresses the issues of racism and classism but also homophobia both within the Jamaican community as well as the Canadian society.

For instance, the sociological study *Silenced* (1983) documents one aspect of Black history in Canada from the perspectives of Caribbean migrant and work-

152 An important documentation is *The Hanging of Angélique: The Untold Story of Canadian Slavery and the Burning of Old Montréal* by Afua Cooper, in which she confirms that "[f]rom 1628 to 1833, slavery was a legal and acceptable institution in both French and British Canada and was vigorously practiced" (2007: 70). Cooper offers a detailed analysis of the nation's history of slavery and the role of enslaved women in particular.

ing class women. The study contains several interviews with women from the West Indies who came as domestic workers to Canada, first in the course of the West Indian Domestic Scheme in 1955, then after the introduction of the point system in 1967. Silvera denounces common practices of economic exploitation and the degradation experienced by the women working in this sector – “an occupation which is not seen as ‘respectable’” (Silvera 1986: 39) in Canadian society. As one of the first written documents on the gendered experience of Caribbean labor migration in Canada it is exemplary for how these women have been denied full rights of participation as citizens and were subjected to discrimination and sexual harassment by their employers and government authorities.¹⁵³ It further reveals the fact that the emancipation of white middle-class women, who were increasingly entering the labor market at the time, would not have been possible without the support of their domestic ‘servants.’ “[T]he humiliation of being a legal slave” (12), in Silvera’s choice of words, becomes symptomatic for the struggle against continuing neo-colonial oppression of African Caribbean bodies in contemporary Canada – and this is the background against which Makeda Silvera’s work is set.¹⁵⁴

The essay “Manroyal and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians” (1992) elaborates on the notion of “Black women’s strength” as a particular expression of the “cultural continuity of [her] struggles” (521) for recognition as a Black lesbian woman and inclusion in Jamaica and Canada. Silvera argues for solidarity and coalition building among homosexual People of Colour in order to gain more acceptance and visibility within the own community as well as recognition by white mainstream feminisms in

153 In the applications, gender, marital and children status needed to be indicated. Preference was given to those women without spouse and offspring in order to avoid family reunion in Canada. As a consequence, many women concealed the existence of their children back home in Jamaica for which many were deported years later.

154 Those epistemes and approaches (artistic, intellectual, feminist etc.) that are directed against the “colonial matrix of power” (Quijano) and which attempt to undo neo-/colonial dominance, institutionalized racism, or heteronormative family structures, for example, contain decolonial potential. *Silenced* constitutes a source of empowerment and liberation by giving a voice to women who have been relegated to the margins of Canadian society. Arguably, “[a]llowing these women to speak,” as phrased by Amy Kebe (2008: 277), does, however, poses a further problem concerning power relations along the dividing lines of class and education. This relates to the problem of *representation* – who is allowed to speak for whom – which Gayatri Spivak famously elaborates on in the essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) and illustrates the complex structure of writing subaltern histories into mainstream discourses.

Canada.¹⁵⁵ A “family/community coming out,” the text is, she explains, an “exploration of a Caribbean lesbian sexuality” and “how deep it is buried in people’s family history, and the silence that surround this” (Silvera 1995b: 407). A relic of the colonial period and imperial body politics of reproduction as well as Caribbean nationalist claims for respectability, it is this enforced, uncomfortable silence around homosexuality in Jamaica and the diaspora community that she attempts to break by carving out a space for queer identities. It is also this silence that is the central issue in the novel and negatively influences much of the characters’ decisions and mobility.

The title of Audre Lorde’s poem “There Are No Honest Poems About Dead Women” constitutes the epigraph to Silvera’s novel. Lorde (1934-1992), whose parents were Caribbean immigrants in New York and who grew up in Harlem, was a (self-defined) Black lesbian feminist, writer, mother, and civil rights activist. With the poem, Silvera introduces some of the book’s main subjects, such as death and resentment, as well as the second most important character, Molly’s grandmother Maria, whose death marks the beginning of the story. In dedicating her novel to Lorde, she also writes the novel explicitly inside the tradition of a radical Black lesbian feminism concerned with interlocking forms of social inequalities.

4.2 *The Heart Does Not Bend*: Adolescence and Non-normative Sexuality

The Heart Does Not Bend tells the story of the family Galloway in five generations and their history of migration and displacement from Madagascar across the Atlantic to Jamaica, Canada, and the United States. Protagonist and first-person narrator is Molly Galloway, at the point of narration an adult woman in her thirties who retrospectively narrates her *coming-of-age* and *not-coming-out* story as homosexual woman. The reader accompanies her from adolescence to adulthood, from the 1960s up to well in the 1990s. Her process of self-actualization is complicated by the difficulties she experiences as Black migrant woman in Canada but also the conflicting relationships to her grandmother, mother, and her own daughter as well as her shifting position within this in-

155 It was not until 1998, six years after the publication of the essay, that J-FLAG, the first Jamaican human rights organization for lesbian, all-sexual, and gay persons was founded.

tergenerational triad. In addition, the social stigmatization and silencing of her and her uncle Mikey's homosexuality impact negatively on Molly's transition to womanhood. Central to the plot are Molly's attempts to come to terms with her sexuality, to be a lover, and to become a caring mother and independent of her grandmother Maria, the strong, unbending matriarch who continues to control the lives of the family even after she has passed away. Maria's death in Jamaica frames the novel: The narrative starts *in medias res* during the reading of her will (the narrative present), which initiates Molly's journey back to her childhood days in the Caribbean and her move to Canada. The novel's ending returns with Molly to Jamaica shortly after the funeral.

Molly recalls how she grew up with her grandmother and Mikey in Kingston during the time of Jamaica's independence in the 1960s. Her mother, Glory, and her uncles, Freddie and Peppie, had already left for Canada to seek better opportunities. At the age of fourteen, in 1971, Molly moves with Maria to Toronto joining her mother and the rest of the family. The reader is provided with two different versions of what has led to their departure. Molly recounts her annoyance with Maria's strictness and repeated alcohol excesses, which she refuses to endure any longer and writes a letter to her uncle asking him to move in with him in Canada. Maria communicates later that their departure was due to Mikey's openly lived homosexuality and the shame he apparently brought over the family in Jamaica. The relocation, however, negatively affects Molly's sense of self, especially since she does not easily reconnect with her mother and becomes an outsider at school because of her Jamaican looks and accent. Maria, too, has a hard time adjusting to the new place and takes to heavy alcohol consumption and, later, fervently to religion. When Molly becomes pregnant and is abandoned by the baby's father (Justin, a friend of Glory's partner), Glory throws her out of the apartment. She does not sympathize with her daughter who, like herself, seems to become a teenage-mother without a proper education.

After several years of adjustment problems and feelings of confinement, Molly falls in love with Rose, a young woman from Grenada whom Molly admires for her independence and her strong will. Molly finds comfort in the relationship to Rose, who encourages her to attend university in Texas; she does so very much to Maria's dislike, since for her homosexuality is shameful and a sin according to biblical and Jamaican moral norms of respectability. Molly eventually breaks up with Rose and accompanies Maria back to a desolate Jamaica, where Maria dies. Molly seeks for a connection to her natal land and finds comfort in visiting her childhood home. She uses the time after Ma-

ria's funeral for an attempt to reconcile with her estranged daughter, who is now a mother herself, apparently continuing the cycle of teenage pregnancy.

In her reading of the novel, Sharon M. Beckford elucidates on "the shifting phases of womanhood and the realities of sexual difference" (Beckford 2011: 218). She describes these phases as "archetypal patterns" by comparing the novel to the Demeter/Persephone myth and the staging of womanhood and the cyclic development of female subjectivity both in the myth as well as the novel. The body becomes the central element of *The Heart Does Not Bend*, especially through the novel's representations not only of aging, maternity, and virginity, but also by discussing issues of self-/alienation, exclusion, and discrimination. Drawing from Beckford who highlights "sexuality as a conflict in Molly's process of individuation" (220), I wish to retrace her individuation by investigating Molly's various personal relationships. Beside the strong intergenerational connections to maternal figures, the sisterhood and bonds of solidarity among girls in their process of becoming woman constitute a typical feature for woman-centred coming-of-age narratives. Molly's individuation and socialisation from girlhood to being an adult woman is shaped by various important relationships significant for her understanding of gender roles and sexuality (cf. Beckford 2011: 242).

Maria's death at the beginning of the novel forces Molly to undertake a painful journey of self-discovery during which the reader is taken through the different stages of subject formation and is confronted with the contradictions inherent in the formative process of becoming woman, the various roles Molly must perform, and expectation she needs to fulfil. Told retrospectively from the I-perspective of Molly, the story focuses on her coming of age influenced and shaped by various persons and often opposing life-styles. From the start, her insecurity regarding her sexual identity and desire permeate the narrative, embodied, too, by the different characters like Petal, Punsie, or Mikey in her adolescence phase, and Rose in her adulthood. It is her home space in Jamaica in particular that stands in for heteronormative socialization and her sexual awakening – the latter oscillates between a heterosexual crush on her best friend Punsie's brother and the queer, homoerotic experience she shares with the girl next door, Petal.

That the move from Jamaica to Canada means deprivation and separation from her friends is indicated by Molly shortly after settling down in Toronto: "We missed our home and our freedom. Perhaps I missed it even more than Mama because I longed for my crowd, for Punsie, Junior, the others on the street and even Petal" (102). The change of home location thus goes along with restrictions and limited self-determination. It also hits Molly particularly hard

because she leaves the peer group which is extremely important for adolescent socialization. Molly's friendship to Punsie, for example, is crucial with respect to Molly's awareness of sexuality and sex education. They share secrets about their pubescent bodies as well as their experiences with boys. "Punsie, mi granny say if a boy kiss mi or touch mi, ah can get pregnant. Is true?" Punsie laughs about her friend's naivety: "Yuh too fool" (67). In reality, the grandmother's warning serves as means of both deterrence and surveillance. Molly, whose "periods started" at almost fourteen of age, needs to be prevented from "getting close to any boy, not a touch, not a kiss" (66). That the adolescent body is potentially in danger and dangerous is made even more explicit earlier when Maria forbids her granddaughter to go out, saying "Mi nuh want nutten happen to yuh. Mi have to deliver yuh to yuh mother in good condition" (62). The female body is objectified as a commodity that in any case must be kept in good, respectable order, meaning unspoiled and virginal. The warning is repeated when Molly wants to join her friends for a birthday party and Maria locks her inside the house with the explanation "Mi nuh want yuh spoiled. Mi nuh want to hand over any damaged goods to yuh mother" (81). That way she is punished and denied autonomy. Maria watches over Molly's adolescent body as she had monitored her own daughter's sexuality – though unsuccessfully ("mi had to get her off de island – mi was afraid she would mash up herself wid baby after baby" [119]).

Also, Molly turns to her best friend Punsie when she is ashamed and confused after having caught her grandmother with the gardener "doing things" (55). It is not completely clear whether she is outraged because she considers this as an act of indecency, or whether she is rather unknowing about what was going on when she heard the bed "creaking." Punsie, who is obviously more informed when it comes to sexual intercourse, lectures her friend, "What yuh going on like dat for, yuh don't know is a natural thing for a man and woman? [...] Girl, now yuh know 'bout de birds and de bees" (56). Punsie's uncomplicated treatment of the matter is noteworthy, her perception of "natural" sexuality, however, is entrenched in a body politics that normalizes sexuality in strictly heterosexual terms.

If Punsie is important for Molly in her heterosexual initiation, it is Petal, the girl who moves in next door, who embodies Molly's wish to push the boundaries of this normativity. Petal is marginalized by society, because she is an albino. Her difference transgresses socially acceptable norms and ideals relating to the body and beauty and she is made fun of by the children in the neighbourhood, but endorsed by Molly who starts to visit her in her tree house. In the scenes of sexual awakening that take place in the seclusion of the tree house,

when the two girls discover their curiosity for each other, we find a playful initiation into same-sex desire, which for Molly will be realized fully when she meets Rose. Molly remembers the encounter clearly:

Petal had two matchboxes with two grasshoppers in each waiting. We chewed on them, savouring the juices. "Don't swallow," she said to me, "ah want to taste yours." She squeezed my lips open and we exchanged grasshopper juices. She held on to my tongue and I did the same with hers. Then she pressed her body against mine and lay on top of me. She pressed me hard and let out a sigh. (53)

During the encounters she experiences her body in yet unknown ways, finding comfort in the touch of her friend – "I had been thinking about Petal and how good I felt when she rubbed against me" (55). That her desire for her friend's body may be forbidden is indicated by Molly not telling Punsie about the secret meetings with Petal. On the other hand, however, for Molly same-sex attraction is not completely alien to her, observing Mikey kissing his boyfriend (cf. 60) or seeing two of his female friends dancing closely together (cf. 59). Actually, the deviance in her uncle's behavior is made clear to Molly, who anticipates this already, by Petal who yells at her that her "uncle is a battyman" (66). Petal's own perceived 'otherness' as albino then underlines the same-sex encounter as even more deviant, abnormal act.

Molly learns from a young age that society, in general, is homophobic. As she matures, her desire to embrace her sexual preference is repressed by her family's homophobia. Silvera, then, might also be suggesting that there are many Mollys in this world, who are unable to self-actualize because of sexual oppression by society and familial expectations. (Beckford 2011: 220)

Christine Kim questions the actual existence of Petal and sees in their homoerotic relation a projection only of Molly's imagination. She describes this as a fruit of Molly's "fantasy of queer sexuality" (Kim 2006: 72). Whether Kim's statement is true or false is not of significance, what is, according to Beckford, is that "Silvera's use of Petal as Molly's initiate into sexual difference is a powerful commentary on identity and difference, suggesting that difference is considered 'abnormal,' and is, therefore ridiculed by society" (2011: 245). The novel makes explicit that whereas sexual intercourse is apparently natural for a man with a woman, as Punsie remarks, it is condemned in same-sex relations. Maria's rant much later reveals this, since "man do not lie wid a man as one lies wid a 'oman. [...] And dat go for 'oman, 'oman thing. Destruction can only follow" (187).

The tree house constitutes a safe space for Molly to escape from her grandmother's surveillance, her alcohol excesses, and the constant fights between Maria and Mikey. Even more importantly it is her space of socialization and corporeal experiences where she can self-actualize and try out her sexual fantasies. It symbolizes the freedom and privacy she is deprived of when moving to Canada. A similar safe and queer space in which the body can move freely is created by the regular parties Mikey and Frank host (cf. 58-59). Beyond those spaces that re-/produce normative corporeality, here the maternal body can be sexy, homoerotic desire is not stigmatized or prohibited, and the adolescent body is not under observation.

4.3 The Missing Body: Absent Motherhood and Breastfed Existence

While the novel closely examines the strength and weaknesses of the *present* mother figure, the novel also critically questions the issue of *absent* motherhood in Jamaican families. Economic hardship and labor migration lead to transnational family constellations in which the structure and duty of caring must be re-negotiated and parent and child may be alienated from each other.¹⁵⁶ One major aspect of Caribbean families, especially those of the lower classes, that Silvera reveals is the prevalence of the woman-headed household with a simultaneous insignificance of the nuclear family.¹⁵⁷ The dominant fig-

156 On the intersection of maternity, migration, and diaspora identity, see Charmaine Crawford who suggests that transnational motherhood “counters dominant notions of motherhood linked to the institution of motherhood under patriarchal capitalist relations” (2012: 331).

157 That many Jamaican families display a matrifocal structure and value the role of the mother does not mean that they claim the dominant role in their communities. Eudine Barriteau, quite to the contrary, argues that Caribbean societies tend to be patriarchal and have an unequal gender system that intersects with class and ethnicity (cf. Barriteau 1998). Scholarship on family compositions of African-Caribbean households offers various explanations arguing that either “maternal families were an adaptive strategy to the slave system”, or “stemmed from the traditional African system that survived in spite of the African’s forced migration” (Prior 2005: 373). While these historical explanations are certainly true, the economic situation, migration, and patterns of sexual behavior account for female centered households in contemporary Jamaica and, partially, in the diaspora communities. This adds to the critique of the Eurocentric concept of the nuclear family which does not fit the

ures in the Galloway family are the women, which the novel underlines by relegating the (rather flat) male characters to minor positions.

The separation of mother and daughter negatively impacts on the individuation of the child or adolescent and, in turn, may also trouble the emotional attachment of the mother to the child, as is the case Glory's relation to Molly, which Maria taunts her with yelling at her daughter "yuh don't even turn mother fi Molly yet" (92). In the context of migration and transnational family structures, the practice of grandmothers' (or members of the extended family) raising their grandchildren may, in some cases, "retard the development of womanhood" (Beckford 2011: 223). Accordingly, what is at issues in Silvera's text is "the inner confusion that the grand/daughter experiences when she first has to decide whom to recognize for nurturing her, and second, whom to respect as the authority figure in her life" (ibid.). In her criticism of "interfamily adoption" (ibid.), which is the term Beckford uses, Silvera furthermore asks for the role the biological mother is left with and whether she "can even develop a relationship with her daughter without appearing to be overbearing and interfering, or to be holding a contrary perspective to that of the grandmother – as the mother-substitute figure" (ibid.). Molly herself reveals the tension to her mother upon their reunification in Toronto: "I'd hoped for love and tenderness, yet I knew she could never take my grandmother's place" (89). Molly discloses her disappointment with Glory's lack of affection. Yet, she also reveals her own reluctance to bond with Glory and to accept anyone else as mother figure and authority but her grandmother.

Molly, too, is faced with the difficult decision to seek education and (personal) advancement and to leave her daughter in the care of others, which will result in the profound estrangement of her daughter. At the age of 27, she moves to Texas without her daughter in order to attend university.

I didn't want to leave my daughter, but I knew I couldn't take her with me. For a brief moment I understood why Glory had left me with Mama to come to Canada. [...] And so, with the promise for a better future for me and my daughter, I left her with Mama. It seemed the right thing to do and it was what I knew: to make a better life one had to go away. (163)

Molly describes her inner conflict revealing her understanding for her mother as well as the apparent commonness of leaving, meaning migration. However, this separation from her daughter is at the same time one step in her own indi-

postcolonial Jamaican context and neither the region's migrant or diasporic condition where single motherhood, multiple partnerships, and the phenomenon of so-called 'barrel children' are often by necessity part of the family patterns.

viduation necessary for her development and self-actualization especially in terms of her sexual identity, because once in Texas her relationship to Rose can flourish.

The Heart Does Not Bend intertwines the negative side effects of migration with issues of interfamilial relations, motherhood in particular. Molly and Maria experience difficulties to acclimatize to the new surroundings in Toronto. Even after living with Glory and her partner for a year “we still weren’t used to our new country, our family and our apartment” (88). As Jamaican migrants they have hoped for a more comfortable life in the North; the reality, however, turns out to be not as accommodating. What also becomes clear is that after reunification, Molly will not succeed to establish a meaningful or emotional relationship to Glory, who has become too estranged.

At first I had secretly hoped that Mama’s move would allow my relationship with my mother to change for the better, since there would be just the two of us, but it didn’t. When I sometimes tried to hug her, she would pull away. We didn’t do anything together. [...] I must have reminded my mother of the father I never knew. Perhaps I reminded her of the shame she felt when she discovered she was pregnant. She found fault at my every twist and turn. My English was bad. If I expected to reach anywhere, I better learn to talk good, she said. My breasts were too big, my eyes too knowing. (120)

With the topic of absent motherhood, Silvera points to another issue that turns out to be problematic in the unification of mother and adolescent daughter: the unexpected maturity and sexuality of the pubescent body. When Glory left Jamaica, Molly was still a baby. Now a grown young woman, she seems conscious of her sexuality; the sexual attraction and attention she receives from the opposite sex does not go unnoticed. Molly describes her looks to the reader (“I was tall for my age, slim like her, but my breasts were already rivalling Sophia Loren’s, and I was very conscious of them as I sat next to my mother” [90]), contrasting her body to her mother’s (“Glory was thirty now, tall, slender, her breasts the size of small Jamaican oranges” [89]). She earns the approval of Sid, Glory’s partner, and his friend Justin who compliment her (“Yuh really growing into a looker” [97]), much to her mother’s dislike.

Similar to the adolescent female bodies that I will look at also in the three novels that follow, Molly’s body is gazed at as dangerous and loaded with guilt: “I had to be home right after school or I’d have a lot of explaining to do, especially to Glory, who figured my breasts were going to get me into trouble [...] like I was a walking time bomb because of the size of my breasts” (95). It seems like what Silvera is hinting at here is a culture in which the ‘breasted’ (i.e. sexualized) Black female body provokes “trouble”; a culture in which the young

woman is taught to be ashamed of her body and of attracting the gaze of others. In her analysis of the lived body and woman's sexuality, Grosz pointedly summarizes the social significance even stigma of the female breast. In referring to Iris Young, she elucidates the "specificities of female embodiment and lived experience" as well as a society's "ways of compartmentalizing their [the women's] bodily unity" (Grosz 1994: 108). She continues explaining how "[i]n the experience of breasted existence in a sexist society, for example, breasts are an inherent bodily attribute subjectively lived and at the same time function as objects, both for men and for women" (ibid.). To this, Silvera alludes in making explicit how the female breast is a marker of gender identity and already sexually charged, implying that women live and experience their bodies in ways different to men but also that the sexual body of a black girl like Molly – "a walking time bomb" – has further, meaning racial implications than that of white girls.

The over-sexualization of the young woman's body is disclosed in a further instance. One evening, Molly dresses up for a dinner party to which Justin, whom she feels attracted to and who will eventually father her child, is also invited. She recalls "buying a halter top [...]. I had bathed and combed my hair carefully [...] feeling quite pleased with myself. Suddenly I saw Glory's face reflected in the bedroom mirror" (95). Glory is outraged upon seeing her daughter's attire and turns to Maria for support: "Mama, you call dis a blouse, dis little piece a cloth dat barely cover up her tittie dem?" I stood there, half frozen with embarrassment" (96). Maria, on the contrary, finds nothing wrong with the top and Molly's body. In psychoanalysis, the mirror stage indicates a moment of self-recognition. In the mirror scene staged here, quite to the contrary, it marks a moment of non-recognition and dis-identification; the child is not seeing herself in her mother nor is she seen by her, which may be caused by migration and absence and the thusly created emotional distance.

The scene contrasts the mother's sense of propriety and the daughter's wish for self-expression. It reveals the discrepancy and conflict between self-perception on the one hand, and her mother's gaze and social expectations regarding the adolescent body's decency on the other. Coming of age and sexual development as a natural process goes hand in hand with the increased policing of the female body, emblemized by the spiteful and jealous gaze of Glory. Glory seems to be unable to cope with a pubescent daughter and her blossoming sexuality. She sees in her a rival. The situation escalates when Molly is pregnant. Glory tells her to get an abortion and throws her out of the apartment, feeling confirmed in her assumption, accusing Molly that she has seduced her own partner. She reproaches her daughter and insults Molly, "Yuh

is a blasted dutty wretch. A sneaking bitch [...]. Ah only hope to God is not Sid” (159). Migration leads if not to dysfunctional family structures then in some cases to a dysfunctional mother-daughter relation, in which jealousy and rejection cannot be dealt with adequately.

4.4 The Matriarchal Body and Black Women’s Strength

A central issue in *The Heart Does Not Bend* is the quest for identity alongside the issue of maternity and often troubled relationships between mothers and their daughters. The motive of motherhood and representations of the maternal body are prominent in general in the literatures of the African diaspora. Denise DeCaires Narain confirms that the predominant literary representation of the Black female body manifests itself in particular in the “figure of the all-powerful mother” (1998: 258).¹⁵⁸ The archetype of the strong and nurturing but asexual mother figure pervades much of Caribbean women’s writing. In critical readings of these texts, the maternal body has often been interpreted not only as a trope for nature and fertility but also as allegory for the nation and, in the maternal body’s capacity of reproduction, the guarantee for the nation’s ‘survival.’ For example, in *Allegories of Desire: Body, Nation, and Empire in Modern Caribbean Literature by Women*, the author examines allegorical representations of Caribbean mothers and daughters suggesting that their bodies record a violent history and serve as “glosses for the geographical landscapes they inhabit” (Adjarian 2004: 11). She furthermore argues that “as much as the women to whom those bodies belong are daughters of human mothers, they are daughters of specific (mother)lands as well.” Their bodies “become (re)producers of historical truths that transcend the genetic and biological to include the national” (ibid.).¹⁵⁹

Maria fulfills partially the stereotypical role of the mother as healer and nurturer especially in the life of her granddaughter. The bond between grandmother and grandchild and the protecting capacity of the maternal body is revealed in the following quote: “Every night yuh sleep right under mi breast”

158 Patricia Hill Collins confirms the prevalence of the image of strong Black motherhood and a certain representation of motherhood in African American communities ranging from the “happy slave” to the “matriarch” (cf. 1990: 176).

159 On the relationship of Caribbean women to body and land, see Florence Ramond Journey (2009); on the interconnectedness of motherhood, mothering relationships, home, and history, see the edited volume by Verena Theile and Marie Drew (2009).

(119). Molly furthermore remembers, “[y]ou held me, steadied me so I could float till I wasn’t afraid anymore. I always started off in your arms” (9). She takes Molly in, takes care of her, and raises her while Glory leaves the island for better opportunities in Canada. When Molly is pregnant, she receives from Maria the love and support she is denied by her biological mother Glory, who has never learnt how to become and be a mother: “I was thankful I had my grandmother to teach me how to be a mother. [...] I loved my grandmother’s pure and simple generosity, the return of the unconditional love I’d had throughout my childhood and now enjoyed again with my baby inside me” (160). That this love, however, is by no means unconditional becomes clear when Maria exerts her power and excludes her from her will upon finding out about Molly’s relationship with Rose. Moreover, Maria’s loving and caring characteristics are contrasted by other, more revengeful and unforgiving character traits; this, in particular, when her children fail to be obedient. The novel opens with the reading of Maria’s will, in which she bequeaths all her money and property to Vittorio, her careless and criminal grandson. Mikey, disinherited because of his sexual identity, comments: “Mama is a wicked, revengeful ‘oman. How she could do dis? Wherever she gone, she won’t find peace” (5). The opening thus reveals the resentment and anger the family members harbor towards Maria.

Maria is an ambivalent character who alternates between being benevolent and careworn. Indeed, though, the reader does not obtain an objective description of Maria free of Molly’s emotions and personal biases. Her actions, feelings, and animosities towards other persons are all filtered through Molly’s perception. At one point, Molly herself admits her unreliability when she evaluates Mama’s affairs and relationships: “Men had caused her so much grief, but if she were telling this, she might tell it differently” (160). Adding to this, on a paratextual level, the epigraph “There are no honest poems about dead women” questions her reliability right at the beginning suggesting that what follows is not an honest account of a dead woman’s life. Molly’s retrospective account is biased revealing her actual ambivalence towards her grandmother.

Nevertheless, Maria’s strong voice the reader hears through Molly’s account creates the impression that the story is as much about her. Her thusly created omnipresence supports her status as the center and the pillar of the family Galloway. As the narrative continues and retraces the genealogy of six generations of women, Maria takes on the dominant role of the matriarch, or

the unbending heart as the novel's title implies.¹⁶⁰ Beckford characterizes Maria as "the archetypal black mother figure" (2011: 220). She points out that Maria is imbued

with so much power that she is revered, however grudgingly, by her family. [...] Maria has power – primarily the negative freedom to destroy – to continue or not continue a legacy. Accordingly, in her portrayal of Maria as matriarch, Silvera disrupts the common belief that woman-headed households are powerless and (re)presents an alternate depiction of a woman-headed household as powerful – one that accounts for some peculiar historical factors. These factors are informed by race, gender, and sexuality in a "Christian and patriarchal" Jamaican society, as well as in Canadian society; they illuminate the shifting characteristics that at once eliminate and preserve some of the stereotypical characteristics of woman as matriarch. (227)

That Maria embodies a conservative Christian Jamaica and respectability, the moral standard about which the novel is actually critical, becomes obvious in her name. Not only does her name underline her role and authority as mother, as archetypal of motherly love, devotion, and communal care in Christianity, it also stands for a certain, rather conservative interpretation of faith, strength, and virtue.

In Black women's fiction, matrifocality, the "control over resources and authority to make household decisions" (Prior 2005: 375), is frequently translated into woman's strength. Living in Kingston, Maria is used to being the breadwinner, providing for herself and her granddaughter. She owns the house and runs her own business. By taking to drinking and taking her binges out to the street and nearby rum shops (cf. 62-64), she enters a masculine connoted space and transgresses normative notions of gender and feminine behavior. Of her grandmother's inappropriate behavior Molly is reminded by her friend Punsie: "Look pon fi mi father – him do de same, except him a man" (64). This transgression furthers her status which resembles that of the patriarch but is ultimately denied to her once she lives in Canada. But, how does *The Heart Does Not Bend* at the same time claim and contradict the dominant image of "Black women's strength" and the maternal stereotype? Is the novel a celebration of self-sacrificing, devoted, unselfish motherhood?

Describing the portrayal of Black women in African American literature, in the essay "This Disease Called Strength," Trudier Harris takes up on the stereo-

160 From Molly's perspective the six generations of the Galloway's women are her great-grandmother Mammy, grandmother Maria, her mother Glory, Molly herself, her daughter Ciboney, and Ciboney's daughter Maud.

type of female strength and the essentializing versions of Black motherhood. Harris argues that African American writers have created the image of "Black women's strength" in order to write back to common negative depictions of Black female identity and to contrast strong Black womanhood to the "perceived weakness of white women" (Harris 1995: 124). The characters are regarded as "towers of strength against the degradation of slavery [...] against the abuse of husbands and the demands of children. They were towers of strength in taking care of their families [...] they formed the pillars that supported the black churches" (109). In addition, "Black women were the spiritual as well as the physical healers" (ibid.). To a certain degree Maria indeed embodies this tower of strength as she is represented as strong and powerful throughout much of the narrative. The first proverb in the novel introducing the *Prolegomenon* supports this: "What is said over the dead Lioness's body could not be said to her alive" (2). The lioness – equally stereotypical in its transmission of a certain image of motherhood – lays claims to power and authority: She defends the own territory, does not accept a rivalling party, and protects the herd sometimes to the point of her own exhaustion.¹⁶¹

Harris, however, also identifies major problems with this concept pointing to the negative consequences for the image of the woman in general and the mother in particular.

Seldom have we stopped to think, however, that this thing called strength, this thing we applaud so much in black women, could also be a *disease*. Yet the very virtue so praised historically has, in African American literature, become its own form of *ill health*. Strength frequently perpetuates *dysfunction in literary families*, where the strong characters and actions of black women become *malignant growths* upon the lives of their relatives. Unaltered and uncontained, the *virus* of strength becomes *its own reason* for being for these women, and no matter how compelling the reason, the *illness* still *dominates* their lives. (110; emphasis added)

161 The lioness not only symbolizes woman's strength, but is also the female counterpart to the Jamaican Rastafari symbol of the lion thus opening up a space for women's empowerment within Rastafari as postcolonial counter-hegemonic movement of resistance that has been criticized for its misogyny (cf. Lake 1998; Chevannes 2001). Queen Ifrica, Jamaican reggae artist and rastafari 'feminist,' in the track "Lioness on the Rise" (2009), praises the strength of the lioness: "When the roll is called up / I'll be standing taller / To face the darkest and the hardest of times / We'll be taken care of / All the children there of / But if it's required we'll be on the frontline."

Strength is considered as a parasitic element crippling/sickening the maternal body but also invading in the lives of those close to her. Molly is well aware of her grandmother's influence and flaws: "Of course, there was also the larger problem of Mama interfering too much in her adult children's lives" (108). As a matter of fact, Maria remains dependent on others needing her (cf. 166).

In drawing a partially negative image of Mama, lending her draconian, authoritarian features, Silvera feeds into Harris' critique of maternal, "emotional domination, [...] tyranny" (Harris 1995: 111), and unquestioned authority as side effects of the illness of strength. Maria is frequently read as Molly's antagonist, the person who prevents her granddaughter's happiness and sexual self-fulfillment in her relationship with Rose. Nurturing her physically and emotionally, she also puts a lot of pressure on Molly. "If it wasn't for mi, yuh would never see life" (119); this having been said for not unselfish reason after an argument with her children, she expects indefinite gratefulness, demands uncritical devotion, her decisions go unquestioned, and she plants deliberately a constant sense of bad conscience in Molly. Also, whereas Maria complains about her daughter in law Val how "she bossy" and "cyan even give mi a little time wid mi son" (121), Val confides in Glory that Maria "is a handful. There is nothing I can do right. I don't even recognize my own kitchen. [...] She is the authority on everything" (122). The kitchen, obviously, serves as space in which the struggle for women's authority takes place, a struggle that Maria at all cost needs to win. In Jamaica, the domestic sphere constituted financial independence and success rather than oppression and confinement for Maria. This reconfiguration of the domestic sphere contradicts a liberal, Euro-American feminist epistemology that regards domesticity as patriarchal tool of oppression.¹⁶²

Moreover, Maria Galloway despotically rules over her children's lives, finds fault in every single decision they make, unable to see anything positive in her children: "Uncle Peppie had no guts, Glory didn't love her enough, Freddie had abandoned her, and Mikey was on the road to destruction" (166). When Maria is about to leave for Jamaica, Glory and Molly have one serious conversation in which Glory blames her mother for "ruin so much people life. Give out bad advice and defend people failures. [...] Just like she never have any right fi tek yuh out of mi house" (201). Maria's constant interfering in her children's lives, her almost threatening dominance, the inability to confer her strength upon the next generation turns them away from her and separates them from each other

162 A Womanist approach, on the contrary, re-evaluates the home as a meaningful space of personal freedom and motherhood, since both was denied to Black women during slavery. Womanism is one branch within Black Feminism (cf. Walker 1991).

creating a dysfunctional family (cf. Harris 1995: 118). Not free of fault, Maria, too, is "almost too strong for [her] own good" (Harris 1995: 110) even after her death. She disinherits her children and granddaughter, bequeaths her grandson Vittorio all her money and property.

Nevertheless, a consistently negative description of Maria, reading her one-sidedly as antagonist to Molly and the rest of the family, would not do justice to her character. Maria is not always the stronghold; her body is not always nurturing or protecting but also wears the wounds and scars of migration. That she is not granted her own narrative voice throughout the novel undermines her authority. Molly and Maria suffer equally from being trapped in the claustrophobic space of Glory's apartment, which symbolizes the diasporic condition as well as migrant life in Toronto in the 1970s and 80s. Maria saying "[s]ometime ah wonder why ah left and come here" (118) expresses the longing, disconnectedness, and uprootedness that is integral to the diasporic experience. Her heavy consumption of alcohol may be regarded as a therapeutic strategy of denial, to forget temporarily the hardship she continues to suffer from. Maria's attempt to rule over her family needs to be related to the migrant context and to her marginalized status as a Black woman in a majority white society. She needs to compensate for her loss of power, independence, and autonomy. She does so by drinking, taking fervently to religion, or taking over her daughter-in-law's kitchen – the only available space for her empowerment and agency.

Silvera's novel, like her non-fictional writing and short-stories, reflects on the lives and hardships of Black immigrant women. The Galloway women's lives, their outsider status in a "gendered diasporic social space" (Kim 2006: 68) is determined by limited access to resources and citizenship, limited mobility, dependence, and anonymity. Later in the novel, when back in Jamaica, Maria will tell her sisters about the plight of the domestic workers from the West Indies. Unlike the stories Aunt Joyce tells about her work experience and good life in the U.S. "dem is not de story [Maria] hear in Canada" (226), hinting at the miserable living and working condition of these women in Canadian families. Staying on temporary visas and working permissions, they are subject to the arbitrariness of state authorities, which renders their citizenship status volatile.¹⁶³ Molly, too, as the migrant 'other,' her body marked as 'different,' experiences this isolation, the exclusion from the community of schoolmates, "I was the odd girl out and hadn't made any real friends. [...] they never invited

163 For a detailed discussion of the status and practices of citizenship, the simultaneity of *being* and *acting as* a citizen, see, for example, Lister (1997).

me” (90). Glory also warns Molly to beware of Canadians, “their undisciplined manners” (91) and racist prejudice Glory herself has been confronted with.

Although Maria “was never the type to stay at home” (94), life in Jamaica taking place outside in the streets, in Canada she has to give up her independence and is confined to the house to “watch [...] the world on television” (95). She settles into a tedious daily routine that does not leave much space for joy and self-fulfillment. The only refuge seems to be a nearby park, where Maria befriends Paolo, an Italian immigrant who is “just as lonely” (106). Bored, unbelonging, “so vulnerable, so helpless” (113), Maria, indeed, “suffers an identity crisis and becomes alienated from her Jamaican *self*” (Beckford 2012: 89). Her status as citizen back in Jamaica is in stark contrast to her situation in Canada where her position as matriarch is now threatened and she is ‘degraded’ to partial citizenship. She turns to drinking again to compensate for her feeling of isolation, uselessness, and loneliness. Whereas Maria could easily cover her alcoholic escapades in silence when in Jamaica, she is not able to do so at Glory’s home – “this wasn’t her house” (117). Although her children do not confront her directly, they take the liberty to decide what is best for her, thereby further patronizing and disempowering her.

The difficulties both Maria and Molly experience during the first couple of years, their failed attempt to re-create a home are representative for migrant life in the diaspora. Loss of agency goes along with oftentimes inhospitable conditions in the host country and unfulfilled promises in the foreign. That Maria refuses to be victimized and remain passive she proves herself by taking on a job providing childcare and moving in with her new partner, Melbourne (the uncle of her daughter-in-law). Both of this she does against the will of her children; what matters, however, is “that she was once again mistress of her own house” (153).

4.5 Erotic Bodies

Harris furthermore identifies the denial of active sexuality as another symptom inherent in the “illness” of the strength of Black women. With Maria’s character, Silvera reproduces the stereotype of strong Black motherhood, but, at the same time, contradicts this image by depicting her as sensual and by allowing her weaknesses. In her representation of the maternal body, Silvera critically examines the archetype of the Black mother attempting to subvert the “imperi-

al culture's view of motherhood: mothers are virtuous, mothers are asexual" (Ruth/Silvera 2003: n.p.). This is achieved in the novel particularly in Silvera's portrayal both of Maria as a sexual, erotic woman with bodily desire as well as of Molly as lesbian, suggesting "an alternative form of motherhood" (Kebe 2008: 291).

The description of Maria's eroticism and her active sexuality contradicts the notion of Black women's strength that either excludes sexuality all together or includes it in an excessive, hypersexual form. It is Maria's lived sexuality – the affair with the gardener Myers, the liaison with her ex-partner Oliver, the acquaintance with the Italian immigrant in Toronto, and finally her last partner Melbourne – that defies stereotypical representations of the maternal body and a certain image of "Black women's strength" embodied in the matriarch. While by naming the character Maria, Silvera invokes the image of the virgin, the embodiment of pure maternity and immaculate conception, she then contrasts this image to another female figure: Sofia Loren. In the novel, Loren is the embodiment of sensual femininity and eroticism, described by the young, pre-pubescent Molly, who watches her in the movies, quite explicitly in erotic terms: "Her lips were tomato ripe, her body generous, her eyes hungry [...], she was beautiful" (38-39). She identifies her grandmother with the Italian actress, noticing that Maria "looked every inch like a black Sophia Loren" (58). And she "watched her dancing to a mento beat, [...] her dress hugging her Sophia Loren breasts. [She] wanted to dance like her when [she] grew up. [She] wanted her breasts and floating hips" (32). Different to the rather negative reference to the female body and breasts earlier, here a positive notion of the "breasted existence" (Grosz) is paired with sensuality and femininity defined in corporeal terms but desirable. Interestingly, as Molly observes, "Sophia Loren looked so strong, she could protect her daughter from everything" (39). Of significance here is the intersection of the erotic beauty of Loren with her motherly strength, like the lioness mentioned earlier, and Maria's blackness suggesting that Black women as mothers can indeed be both.

Molly, too, transgresses normative expectations of motherhood through her sexuality. The homoeroticism and same sex desire described in the novel counter the long literary absence of lesbian bodies in Caribbean fiction which Dionne Brand denounces:

In a world where Black women's bodies are so sexualized, avoiding the body as sexual is a strategy. So is writing it in the most conservative terms, striving in the text for conformity to the norm of monogamous heterosexual male gratification. Leaving pleasure to men, that's a strategy, too. I know that not talking

about the sexual Black female self at all is as much an anti-colonial strategy as armed struggle. (Brand 1994: 27)

Brand adds that paying too much attention to a non-sexual, maternal Black body while at the same time ignoring its eroticism has been a strategy adopted by many African Caribbean and American women writers until well into the 1980s to write back to the dominant image of the hypersexualized, exotic Black body. Audre Lorde links this neglect of the erotic to existing structures of oppression. She declares that “[i]n order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various *sources of power* within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a *suppression of the erotic*” (Lorde 2007: 53; emphasis added).¹⁶⁴ According to Lorde, the erotic is made up of human need, psychic (cognitive, spiritual) and emotional components, as well as bodily, sexual expression and satisfaction. It has been successfully oppressed within misogynist social structures, misnamed and abused as the mere sexual or pornographic: “The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women” (Lorde 2007: 58). The corruption and distortion, according to Lorde, stem from within Western societies promoted by “European-american traditions,” heteropatriarchy, and global capitalism. It is women’s true knowledge of the erotic that leads to self-fulfilment, completion, and eventually to empowerment.

Silvera privileges lesbian erotic and intimacy as source of power, using Lorde’s phrasing here, that goes beyond the mere sexual. That the lesbian body is imagined in erotic and described in positive terms is seen early on when Molly recounts her uncle’s ‘gay parties’ and the ways she notices the persons, i.e. embodied subjects, in the room along with her own attraction (“The sweating bodies gave off a wonderful heady smell. [...] I was watching Helen and Angela dance. They danced slowly, their bodies pressed against each other in the heat [...]. I stood nearby, their bodies brushed mine, and I trembled” [59]). The relationship of Molly and Rose constitutes, on the one side, a transgression of accepted sexuality and, on the other, a celebration of the Caribbean female body and lesbian sexuality. Molly meets Rose, who is also an immigrant from the Caribbean, for the first time at a doctor’s appointment with her daughter feeling instantly attracted to her. “She was from Grenada, the Isle of Spice.

164 Lorde introduces an ontological approach to the ideal of the erotic and self-knowledge, which is essentially woman-centred, see her philosophical political essay “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (1978).

Mountainous, lush, fertile. Grenadians say, 'Throw a seed on de ground and fruits, vegetables, flowers spring up.' Rose was all that: sensuous, lush, warm and generous" (162). Similar to the descriptions of the dancing couples at her Uncle Mikey's parties when she was still a girl back in Jamaica, Molly in referring to Rose emphasizes her bodily sensuousness and eroticism. Rose in emblemizing nature and evoking Molly's affinity to it can be read as a reversal of what is perceived as 'natural' and 'unnatural': a lesbian erotic, here seen as the 'natural,' crosses categorical understandings of heteronormativity. The evocation of nature, the equation of a natural imagery with the female body and sexuality is not merely essentializing (see also chapter 7), but rather a narrative strategy to 'naturalize' homoeroticism and the performance of lesbian sexuality. That Rose may in fact be the completion of Molly's sexual quest, even her individuation, is indicated by the names Petal and Rose. Molly realizes that "Rose was everything I had liked about Punsie and Petal" (164). Tellingly, the petal and the rose strongly symbolize Molly's affinity to nature as well as her sexual maturation and erotic consciousness.

The Heart Does Not Bend testifies women's empowerment and celebrates a lesbian erotic and sensuousness, implying that within the homoerotic body lies strength. The sex act between Molly and Rose is the only one explicitly mentioned in the novel and intimately described.

We soaked up glasses of rosé wine and savoured the taste of each other's tongues. I let her suck on my breasts and held my breath as her teeth grazed them. I pulled her up on me, caressed the nape of her neck and her black locks, rich with the smell of spice. I tasted her nipples, then rolled on top of her, my tongue tracing her sinuous body. I knelt between her legs to sweet pleasures. Spent, I luxuriated in her scent into the morning. (169)

The novel gives precedence to women's lived experience. It emphasizes relationality on an interpersonal level as Molly tells Ciboney, "we don't live our lives independent" (263). This sense of community, solidarity, and mutuality is the quintessence of Lorde's thinking and features in many woman-centered novels to challenge an ideology which promotes individualism and egotism. Moreover, heterosexual relations in the novel seem to limit women's happiness and self-fulfilment, are disappointing and destructive.¹⁶⁵ The novel suggests

165 The relationship of Molly's uncle, Freddie, and his Italian wife Bella is one example to illustrate this point: "One day Bella left. She left to save her life. [...] We all knew from way back that Uncle Freddie was a woman-beater" (153). Also, Maria expresses her frustration with her partners: "love is a terrible weakness dat mi can't afford. It hurt mi every time" (79).

that the erotic and personal fulfilment are not accessible in heterosexual partnerships, because they remain, and arguably so, locked within aggressive masculinity reproducing patriarchal, oppressive structures of exploitation.

Returning to Dionne Brand's statement on the narrative absence of the erotic, sexual Black body, Silvera, in writing a sensual Black lesbian erotic explicitly into a larger literary discourse and linking motherhood to an active sexuality counters such stereotypes which imply a denial of Black women's sexuality. Amy Kebe, in her reading of the novel, furthermore argues "the black female body, which is usually the prime marker of discrimination and oppression, is [re]appropriated by Silvera" (Kebe 2008: 291-292). Silvera privileges Black women's agency and "articulates a powerful counter-discourse to homophobic and ethnocentrist notions of masculinity that consider lesbianism a threat. [...] By 'queering' the racist heteronormative hegemony of the nation, [...] Silvera deconstructs the heteronormative myth that women's bodies are only for male consumption" (ibid.).

4.6 Sexual Citizenship and Respectability

At the age of fourteen in 1971, Molly and her grandmother move from Kingston to Toronto, to join Molly's mother, who migrated to Canada when Molly was still a baby. Maria pretends that the reason for them leaving Jamaica is Mikey's open homosexuality and relationship to Frank, an upper-class fashion designer. In the following, I discuss Mikey and Molly's sexualities and argue that Silvera criticizes anti-homosexual attitudes and compulsory heterosexuality in the formulation of respectable citizenship and belonging to Jamaican communities, which Thomas describes as "heteronormative conceptions of the social body" (Thomas 2011: 171).

Suzanne LaFont, in her essay on the development of sexual morality in Jamaica, discusses sexual intolerance towards "same-sex sexual acts and heterosexual sodomy" (LaFont 2001: n.p.), i.e. oral and anal sex. She ascribes the origin of a rigid heteronormative ideology and appropriate sexual practices to the colonial past and European domination. The Enlightenment period has strengthened a binary gender system and patriarchal social hierarchies, which was also transferred from Europe to the colonies via the notion of respectability, Christianity, and normative views of sexuality. Far from home, the Europeans displayed a loose sexual behavior, which was justified by a promiscuous,

uncivilized Black sexuality as promoted by colonial, racist ideologies. Specific sexualities and sexual mores, as “fluid, multifaceted, historically constructed phenomenon” (LaFont 2001: para.12), then emerged in dialectic negotiations between the colonizers and colonized. Both groups rejected some sexual practices while embracing others depending on the perceived immorality of the ‘other.’ However, within an extremely power-related hierarchy, the colonizer still had the control to use, to abuse, and exploit the enslaved body (cf. Stoler 1989). Well aware of their own powerless position, this had consequences on how the Black population perceived *white* and elite sexuality, but also on how the Black female body and its availability was subsequently constructed within Jamaican society. As a reaction to the perceived “morally deficien[cy]” and “sexual hypocrisy” (cf. LaFont 2001: para.51) of the elite, the notion of respectability gained increasing importance, including a narrowly defined heterosexuality and morality that resulted in the perception of homosexuality as a decadent western (meaning *white* and colonial) or upper-class sexual orientation and practice.

Deborah Thomas defines respectability in the Anglophone Caribbean as a “value complex.” It emphasizes “the cultivation of education, thrift, industry, self-sufficiency via land ownership, moderate Christian living, community uplift, the constitution of family through legal marriage and related gender expectations, and leadership by the educated middle classes” (Thomas 2004: 5-6). As an inherently patriarchal, heterosexual concept, respectable citizenship and the “appropriate expression of sexuality and intimacy” have been redefined by “political and cultural elites, middle-class professionals, and most religious communities” (Thomas 2011: 170).¹⁶⁶ The legal prohibition of homosexuality, the ‘buggery laws,’ is stated in the *Offences Against the Person Act* (1864) under the headings of “Unnatural Offences” and “Outrages on Decency.”¹⁶⁷ The law itself is a legacy of British colonial rule. The post-independence Jamaican government, however, chose to include these laws in the new constitution to use them as an instrument for national politics to regulate citizenship; they are an effective means of biopolitics to exert power over the civil body by criminalizing and pathologizing ‘deviant’ sexualities.

¹⁶⁶ LaFont concludes that “creole sexual ideology approved of sexual activity as a natural part of human pleasure, but sexuality had to be expressed within the confines of respectability” (2001: para.57).

¹⁶⁷ “It is a common understanding that the issue of gayness must never enter the ‘national arena’ or at least not in any way that gives the issue any political legitimacy” (Williams 2000:108). Prime Minister Portia Simpson-Miller set equal treatment of homosexual persons on her political agenda of the election campaign in 2011, but so far, sadly, the annulment of the buggery laws has not been put forward.

The concept of respectability concerning sexuality finds way into the novel through Maria who contends that “man do not lie wid a man as one lies wid a ‘oman. [...] And dat go for ‘oman, ‘oman thing” (187). Arguably, as “Maria,” she already embodies Christianity and as such also respectability. However, as the previous section on the maternal body has shown, Maria refuses to be fitted neatly into this stereotype. Also, Mikey’s homosexuality ‘queers’ the respectable social body. Early on in Molly’s childhood, she senses that something is ‘wrong’ with her uncle; something she does not quite understand yet; something that troubles her grandmother; something that is silenced. There is pride in Maria’s voice when she talks about Mikey’s job but at the same time concern when she thinks about him not having a girlfriend. Once Molly overhears Mama saying

‘Ah only hope to God him find a nice girl soon. Ah can’t tell nuh lie, ah really worry sometime ... ah don’t know how him turn so. Ah love him wid all mi heart, but ah wish him was more like Peppie. Even like Freddie, [...] a little more manly, especially in de voice. [...] From him born him different. Him tek him whole physical features off Mammy, same small bone, all him have from him father and me is de blackness.’ (28)

Torn between humiliation and shame for his allegedly effeminate masculinity, on the one hand, and, on the other, fear and concern for Mikey’s well-being, Maria demands that her son stays in the closet, that his sexuality belongs to the intimate domain only: “Ah telling yuh fi yuh own good [...]. If yuh a go do it, do it under cover. A danger yuh putting yuhself in” (65). By linking appropriate behavior to heterosexuality and confining homosexuality to the private sphere, the dominant or “strong community” (Yuval-Davis 1997: 4), which sets and controls the moral codes and norms within a society, limits Mikey’s agency and right to self-determination, sexual expression, and bodily autonomy – four constituents of his status as citizen. Richardson points out that “sexuality is commonly understood to belong to the ‘private’ sphere, but more especially so in the case of lesbian and gay relationships. For lesbians and gay men the private has been institutionalized as the boundary of sexual citizenship and social tolerance” (Richardson 2000: 120). Accordingly, in the novel, the threat of violence of “man come in wid gun and machete fi kill unnu ass?” (65) when transgressing heteronormative boundaries is, as Andrea Davis states, “metaphorically and literally [...] the socially defined punishment for homosexuality that Mama does not question” (Davis 2004: 68). The queer body that does not conform is put under surveillance and public scrutiny. In fact, it does not own the right to intimacy. The threat of “man coming in” rather proves that a private

space detached from the public where queer bodies may be safe does not exist, is an imaginary – and both spheres are highly politicized arenas.¹⁶⁸

The Heart Does Not Bend links the question of sexuality to the question of national politics and juxtaposes sexuality with concerns relating to religion, race, nation, and class (cf. Davis 2004). By condemning homosexuality as a foreign, white people 'way,' Maria considers global and transnational links as threat to Jamaican constructions of heterosexuality, family structures, and masculinity.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, homosexuality as "Satan work" (185) presumably contaminates Jamaican society and corrupts national politicians and wealthy business men, which Maria describes as the "battokrisy" (228).¹⁷⁰ Non-conforming, queer bodies and homosexual desire are considered as a threat to heterosexual masculinity, social and communal structures. Maria reminds Mikey that he is only "a poor uneducated bwoy" (65), that he is used and exploited by well-off men, who take advantage of him and his lower social position. "[D]em money man will run lef yuh at the smell of trouble" (65), they will sacrifice him for the sake of their own survival, not taking the risk of being discovered in their 'deviant' sexual activities. Inherent here is the critique of the denial of rights to sexual citizenship, but also that access to citizenship is inseparably linked to prescribed forms of gender, sexual, and class performances.

When Maria returns to Jamaica much later, she reunites with Mikey but very soon spoils their relationship further. "So who de bwoy yuh live wid and in a business wid? [...] Den yuh nuh 'fraid a de talk, unnu nuh 'fraid people shoot unnu? [...] A sin, yuh know. A sin. De world nuh love mampala man [...]. A only fire waiting fi yuh" (229). Blinded by her almost fundamentalist religiosity and anti-homosexuality, she is unable to realize that it is not her son who

168 The phrase 'The personal is political' is the celebrated slogan of the second-wave feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s, especially in white European and American feminism.

169 "Baby," one of the short stories in Makeda Silvera's collection *Her Head A Village* (1994), picks up the similar idea of a perceived link between homosexuality, white culture, and migration: In Toronto, a group of Jamaican men is gossiping about two Caribbean women who, once in Canada, "get influence in dis lesbian business [...] adopt[ing] foreign ways" (71). They argue that same sex desire does not exist in the Jamaican community, especially not in the working class, but is a direct result of transnational circulations. See also Thomas (2011: 128).

170 Maria's point of view needs to be contextualized in contemporary Jamaican politics. P.J. Patterson, Prime Minister from 1992 to 2006, saw himself confronted with rumors of his homosexuality so that he felt the urge to emphasize his heterosexuality publicly. "My credentials as a life-long heterosexual person are impeccable. Anybody who tries to say otherwise is not just smearing but is engaging in vulgar abuse." *Jamaica Gleaner* <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/pages/gay/homophobia.html>

needs to be blamed, but societal norms of gender and sexuality; she is unable to accept her son and acknowledge that Mikey has made a living for himself despite the social stigmatization of his sexuality. After all, his business career in fashion design and his financial success defy all prejudice and stereotypes of the degenerated gay man. In fact, Mikey “survive[s] without any help from de family [...] not walking and begging on de streets. Me nuh wear tear-up clothes and mi nuh walk and holler and mi nuh tief” (230). In spite of being an ‘unrespectable’ citizen, he contributes to the economic survival and progress of the nation state more than many others (cf. Davis 2004). Thus, Silvera radically undermines the link between national identity, heterosexuality, and virile masculinity, a link that needs to be re-negotiated both in Jamaica and the diaspora.

Molly’s relationship with her grandmother turns out to be problematic when Molly falls in love with Rose. Unable to confront her grandmother with her relationship, Maria finds out eventually and “all hell broke loose” (184). Molly suffers the consequences for overstepping respectable codes of social, sexual behavior, which Maria, too, has incorporated. “Ah don’t have to tell yuh dat it nuh right, a Satan work. [...] Look pon yuh, a nice attractive girl, yuh can get any man out dere, even a husband, and yuh go tek up wid woman. It nuh right. [...] First Mikey, now mi one and only granddaughter” (185). Also, she makes a point saying “[d]em is white-people ways” (187). Interesting here, again, is the connection Maria draws between homosexuality and *whiteness*, Christianity, respectability, and (sexual) citizenship in order to support and legitimize the rejection of homosexuality: “Mek friend wid yuh Bible, for a de only weapon dat can drive Satan away. Yuh know seh dat di wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Neider di sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders. [...] It nuh right, it dangerous” (185-7). Thereby, she seals Molly’s fate of social exclusion. Molly feels guilty. Overpowered by her grandmother’s strong influence on her life, Molly’s sense of responsibility, and having been socialized into heteronormative power structures, she abandons her lover. Maria punishes her by emotionally excluding her from the close family circle. “They—[Maria], Vittorio and Ciboney—were the family [...] while my life was tearing up like an old worn-out rag” (195). Being left out of Maria’s will, Molly feels her grandmother’s judgment even after her death, which complicates her attempts to reconcile and come to terms with her sexuality. Respectability as battalion of middle-class morality becomes damaging to the individual.

Molly’s story is as much about the responsibility and expectations to fulfill the role assigned to her by the family and community, as it is about the struggle for the right to free sexual expression, personal freedom, and desire. Maria’s

sexual intolerance and rejection of Molly's and Mikey's sexual orientation and choice of partner needs to be read against the influence of Christianity in Jamaican society. 'Good Christian' conduct is one of the pillars of the notion of respectability and middle-class lifestyle. The deep-seated religiosity, in which Maria finds solace and comfort when in Canada, however, translates into emotional violence when dealing with the persons who in fact need her.

Molly and Mikey are denied the liberty (and legal right) to express themselves sexually. Molly observes that the family back in Jamaica has never "accept[ed] Mikey's difference" (227), however there is no mentioning about her own "difference" since neither Molly nor Maria have ever told them anything about Rose. "The grand-aunts and cousins knew little about my personal life back in Canada" (227). Molly is not going to disclose her sexuality in front of them, but rather "take[s] the coward way out" (205). Mikey is excluded, his name never mentioned in family meetings (cf. 89), his sexuality covered up in silence; his sister, Glory, "pretend[s] that his relationship with Frank didn't exist" (111) and Maria, although she misses him badly, cannot bring herself to forgive that she had to leave her house and life in Jamaica because "fi him careless living" (115). Molly is disinherited and emotionally excluded by her grandmother as a deserved punishment for her transgression. The pressure within the community certainly affects her agency and limits the access to sexual rights.

Silvera furthermore shows how the private, intimate sphere is invaded by the political. Sexualities which do not conform to the norm need to be hidden, and if practiced then only secretly. Molly as well as her uncle Mikey transgress those sexual and gender norms that have been set by their social environment; consequently, their bodies are made vulnerable and sites of violation. Molly, because of her homosexuality and her migrant status, risks being doubly marginalized, both within Jamaican society, represented by Maria, and the community in the diaspora in Canada. Maria's "social anxiety" (Kim 2006: 64) and religious fundamentalism translates into sexism and homophobia, which prevents her from accepting her children's queer sexual identity and relationships. The dominating "gender ideals and heterosexual social scripts" (Kim 2006: 67) within the community and family in Kingston and Toronto regulate the intimate sphere and sexualities of the two Galloways. The queer body and same sex desire (gay more than lesbian) are considered a threat to heterosexual masculinity and the 'healthy,' fertile social bodies that are needed for the survival of the nation state. On the intersection of the body, sexuality, and citizenship Jacqui Alexander states:

Although policing the sexual [...] has something to do with sex, it is also more than sex. Embedded here are powerful signifiers about appropriate sexuality, about the kind of sexuality that presumably imperils the nation and about the kind of sexuality that promotes citizenship. Not just (any) body can be a citizen any more, for some bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non-productive of babies and of no economic gain. Having refused the heterosexual imperative of citizenship, these bodies, according to the state, pose a profound threat to the very survival of the nation. (Alexander 1994: 6)

Homosexual practices challenge those norms that are meant to pathologize queer sexualities, and unsettle the institutionalization of heterosexual hegemony. In order to achieve social control over the body, to condition the body to be more compliant, and productive, individuals are socialized into a heteronormative power matrix (Butler), internalizing certain structures of a so-called ‘normality.’ In *The Heart Does Not Bend* it is the socio-cultural construction of respectability, the Bible, and fundamentalist Christianity embodied in Maria that serve as legitimization for the punishment of the “sodomite,” of “homosexual offenders” (186).¹⁷¹ To further reveal the constructed notion of gender performances as well as a good heterosexuality versus an evil homosexuality, the following sections draw attention to the text’s construction of masculinities. The novel plays with binary constructions of a body politics that Silvera is in fact quite critical of.

4.7 (Imperfect) Masculinities and Embodied Badness

Linden Lewis understands masculinity and femininity as the “ontological process of becoming aware of [and internalizing] societal roles and expectations that are inscribed on the text of the body” (Lewis 2005: 2). The typical stereotypes Silvera employs and criticizes are those that, according to Lewis, have been prevalent also in scholarly literature about Caribbean men, which he very critically examines. Often, these texts describe

171 By way of a very brief preview: Ramabai Espinet, like Silvera, writes social taboo surrounding homosexuality and queer bodies into her novel. As the following chapter on *The Swinging Bridge*, a coming-of-age novel set in Trinidad and Canada, will demonstrate, the character Kello transgresses Indo-Trinidadian notions of patriarchal, heterosexual codes of morality and respectability, which are also at issue in *The Heart Does Not Bend* (see chapter 5)

Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend*

the Caribbean male as powerful, exceedingly promiscuous, derelict in his parental duties, often absent from the household and, if present, unwilling to undertake his share of domestic responsibilities. The Caribbean male also comes across in this literature as possessing a propensity for female battering, and a demonstrated valorization of alcohol consumption. (Lewis 2003b: 107)

The Galloway family's men Oliver, Freddie, Peppie, Mikey, and Vittorio Oliver overly embody the stereotypes of masculinity such as the irresponsible, violent, cheating, dishonest, effeminate, or coward man. Silvera, in part, reproduces stereotypical constructions and performances of gender, while criticizing patriarchal social structures that favour this kind of manhood and pressure young men into such behavior. In the novel, the negative images of masculinity are enacted especially by Freddie, who abuses his girlfriends, fathers babies, and refuses to take care of them, as well as by Vittorio, who is careless and proves to be a failure through his criminal record. In addition, Sid, who, after Glory leaves his wish for children unfulfilled, finds his masculinity validated in extramarital affairs, which eventually leads to their separation. Maria turns a blind eye to their behavior, justifies or even encourages them in their conduct.

Arguably, Silvera, too, deliberately and strategically applies such stereotypical representations of gender conventions and aggressive performances of masculinity in order to privilege Black women's subjectivity as well as to criticize dominant ideologies and the status quo of multidimensional oppression. Unfortunately, positive examples of Black masculinity are found wanting almost throughout the entire novel, apart from the character of Mikey whose manliness nevertheless is questioned by his surroundings. These rather one-dimensional representations lead to the assumption that Jamaican manhood is in crises and imply a need for self-definition.

The prevalent image of Jamaican masculinity, reproduced and re-worked in fiction and popular culture, has its origin in the garrison policies of postcolonial Jamaica and the glorification of the 'gun man' among the urban working class, where the display of strength has oftentimes guaranteed survival (cf. Hutton 2010). On the other hand, these images need to be set against the migrant context in Canada. Canada's discriminating surroundings as well as social and economic marginalization, stigmatizing Black male bodies in particular of the lower class, may lead to crime and dysfunctional relationships. On this Davis comments: "The redefinition of black masculinity as a celebration of the reputational traits of physical strength and sexual virility are clearly not enough to protect black men. It highlights their vulnerability and leaves them

susceptible” (Davis 2006: 37).¹⁷² The display and performance of tough, violent manliness is imperfect, meant to compensate for the loss of economic power and racial stigmatization. The novel refers to these extra-fictional accounts of Black Jamaican masculinity in Canada and hyperbolizes these images.

The brothers Freddie, Peppie, and Mikey embody opposing forms of masculinity and sexuality: “‘Him different from him born,’ [Maria] repeated. ‘When Peppie a fly kite and knock marble, Mikey playing dolly house wid Glory. When him turn teenager, him tek to de sewing machine more than Glory’” (28). Also, Maria’s comment on Mikey’s fragile physique, his unmanly voice and indifference towards women all hint at his effeminate homosexual masculinity. Molly, too, takes note of her uncles’ diverging tastes and behavior. Here, musical elements are included to aestheticize the differences especially between Mikey and Freddie.

Freddie loved Audie Murphy, Alan Ladd and John Wayne and outdoor sports. Mikey stayed indoors and was partial to sewing and planning dinner parties. The one passion they shared was music, but even in that they had different tastes. Freddie loved rocksteady, Duke Reid and Sir Coxstone, Prince Buster and street dances. Mikey loved American R&B, Johnny Mathis, Jackie Edwards, Little Richard and Frank Sinatra ballads. (31)¹⁷³

Freddie’s preference for Western movies and John Wayne is a further example of the celebration of heroes and guns, which Hutton specifies in the “rude body narrative” (cf. Hutton 2010). This underlines the link of Freddie to a performance of urban badness. On the other hand, Mikey’s preference for U.S. popular culture gives the impression that the queer body is an ‘import’ from North America, threatening the nationalist construction of ‘Jamaicaness’ (cf. Thomas 2011).

The lineage of a destructive heterosexual masculinity is continued by Freddie who has taken this up from his surrounding and his own father, Oliver who

172 “A current perceived crisis of gun violence in Toronto’s black communities has led to an increasing criminalization and marginalization of black men and Jamaicans, in particular. Jamaican men have come to represent for many white, as well as middle-class black Canadians, a deep fear of black masculinity—the kind of masculinity that has to be kept in check and guarded lest it upset the delicate balance of this liberal democratic state” (Davis 2006: 23).

173 The music genres of ska and rocksteady have their origins in Jamaica’s urban ghettos of the 1950s and 60s and are often considered as counter-cultural, decolonial movement to elite assumptions of the Jamaican nation state. Hutton connects the popular music of the time to masculinity and ‘authentic’ expressions of urban badness (cf. Hutton 2010).

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used to beat Maria and is “still running wid de woman and de rum” (71). Freddie names his second son after his own father: Vittorio Oliver. This is not only an expression of Freddie's wish that his son will follow in his father's footsteps. His name is thus symbolic for Maria, above all, is the one who is the most critical of men in general:

Mi had it rough, life never easy fi mi, even now ... [...] Man nuh good, yuh can't depend on dem. Dem is just a necessary evil. Ah glad Freddie left de island. Peppie will tek care of him. Teach him responsibility. Thank God Glory gaan. It would a pain mi fi see her go through pickney after pickney wid dem wutliss man, wid not a penny in a dem pocket. All dem have is promises.... (63)

Of course, Maria's perception of men needs to be ascribed to her own experience and disappointments, that she ruined her youth because she fell in love too easily with a man of the wrong, because higher, class, and another one who lied and betrayed her. Although she “had it rough wid dem wutliss man,” the fact that Maria bequeaths all her belongings and property to her grandson, a male heir, thus punishing the female family members, proves her ingrained sexism, her preference for the men in her family. Maria, too, fails in her attempt “to interrupt the pattern of destructive masculinity” (Kim 2006: 67). Vittorio is not punished, gets away with his behavior, is even rewarded by a society that is unaccommodating to deviant, non-normative bodies, while situating the heterosexual male as the most representative, prioritized social body. Beckford claims that most characters in their own ways support “the patriarchal system in its need to perpetuate itself” (217).

Maria's relief that her sons and daughter have left Jamaica suggest that the diasporic space offers the possibility for a more responsible, caring, and loving masculinity, a gender role that apparently is impossible in Jamaican postcolonial society. In Canada, however, the ways her children enact their expected gender roles, Maria's contradictory reactions and double standards, show that in the diaspora no significant changes can be expected and that Maria in part is actually responsible for their behavior; she has incorporated certain gender roles and what is socially accepted. In such a constellation, Molly struggles to fit in. These negative male role models render it impossible to comprehend why for Maria, homosexual relationships are still not an option. This is due to a socio-cultural environment that naturalizes the heterosexual body, while it polices non-reproductive sexual practices (cf. Alexander 1994). Through Maria, Jamaican and patriarchal expectations of gender and sexuality are reproduced within the family in Canada, which is reminiscent of Judith Butler's definition of gender identities as “a performative accomplishment compelled by social

sanction and taboo [...] with clearly punitive consequences [...], those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished” (Butler 1988: 520, 522). Thus, the efficacy of cultural norms framing individuals and their sexuality reaches beyond geographical borders. The boundaries of the micro-cosmos of the transnational family seem too strong to grant access to a possibly more open sexual politics in Canada, which, at a first glance, negatively impacts on Molly’s right to free sexual expression. The diaspora community here is seen as island within.

The reiteration and enacting of political and cultural structures enforces social scripts of respectable citizenship as well as heteromascularity. However, Silvera succeeds in creating a space for homo- and female erotic agency by a celebration of sensuous homosexual bodies and love making, and in particular, by the silence surrounding heterosexual acts and refusal to depict heterosexual masculinity in positive terms. In its depiction of irresponsible men and destructive masculinity, *The Heart Does Not Bend* criticizes patriarchal structures of power. The novel’s partially stereotypical illustration of feminine and masculine gender roles and embodiments of hetero- and homosexual identities, a strong masculinity contrasted with an effeminate manhood is a strategy to challenge essential notions of hegemonic masculinity and a critique of destructive heteromascularity.¹⁷⁴ Arguably, Silvera confronts her readers with their own expectations of and association with Black masculinity. The author may be criticized for this simplistic binary and for making use of the same strategy – ‘silencing’ – in order to criticize a discourse that she disapproves of. Indeed, the question whether “the master’s tool will dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde) remains open. However, I argue that this radical feminist stance is an attempt to center-stage certain subjectivities and counter a body politics which has marginalized woman-gendered, Black-racialized, lesbian-sexualized identities.

4.8 Genre Transgression and Diasporic Journeys

Indeed, central to the novel are characters and bodies that transgress normative notions of gender and sexuality which do not fit in neatly in the majority society neither in Canada nor in Jamaica. Arguably, the process of individuation as

174 This is a narrative strategy Silvera makes use of in several short stories, for instance in “Baby” in the collection *Her Head a Village*.

homosexual Person of Color, which Silvera makes the subject of her novel, may be understood as a queering of the genre that traditionally depicts normative socialization of a heterosexual subjectivity. The novel demonstrates the extent to which the coming-of-age genre is able to accommodate and juxtapose multiple forms of marginalization. These pertain not only to Black subjectivity and homosexuality but also to the linguistic level of the novel and its usage of 'non-standard' English, which may be conceived of as a transgression as well.

If the overall concern of the novel is sexual transgression and the non-conformity of the queer subject through her situatedness outside the heterosexual matrix, a transgression of formal, generic nature is accomplished through linguistic creolization. Silvera makes strategic use of the Jamaican language, being well aware of that "patwah was never recognised as anything but the language of the illiterate masses" (1995b: 415) in Jamaica and also stigmatized within the Canadian host society. In postcolonial Jamaica, patwa, ill-reputed as 'broken' English, continues to be perceived as a social marker of low strata. The colonial education system and dominance of the white and creole elite in particular contributed to the stigmatization of the language used predominantly by the working-class or rural population. In recent years, there has been the move towards standardization of the language through dictionaries and acceptance of patwa as an academic language, advocated most prominently by Carolyn Cooper.

Although patwa can be read as a "language of power, of self-determination, of pride, of resistance, of comfort, of inclusion, of solidarity, of struggle and of voice" (Henry 2012: 100), the stigma associated with the language persists also in the diaspora. According to Annette Henry, "the ideological biases against Caribbean Creoles are deeply entrenched in the dominant society and in our cultural memory of shame and inferiority vis-à-vis an imposed British standard" (ibid.). She furthermore states that "Black/Jamaican students are often stereotyped as deficient because of their language and sometimes erroneously placed in remedial classes or embarrassed by teachers in front of peers" (Henry 2012: 99). In Canada, where Jamaicans compose a minority group, language is a marker of difference, and may thus lead to exclusion and marginalization.

Language use in the novel creates communal belonging and constructs a space of home and diaspora identity. In this context Marta de Luna speaks about language as a "conveyer of culture" (2008: 53). At the same time, however, patwa as a marker of ethnicity distances the characters from Canadian mainstream culture.¹⁷⁵ By way of code-switching, the narrative voice of Molly

175 Beckford (2012) analyses the use of food and food metaphors as well as the act of cooking as cultural practice to establish a sense of community and belonging.

alternates between patwa and English. She reproduces her thoughts in English, but speaks mostly patwa and only English at times depending on both the temporal and geographic setting as well as to whom Molly talks. Molly recounts in retrospect her coming-of-age after she has socialized in the Canadian context and education system; thus English is the dominating code projecting the diasporic situation. The use of patwa in her speech in Canada is less frequent than in Jamaica; she would speak patwa to Maria but not to her daughter Ciboney. Molly's in-between position is clearly expressed in the form of code-switching, which one may also interpret as a sign of confusion – after all Molly's individuation process is interrupted by migration. Her language use marks Molly not only as an outsider within Canadian society but also as a “foreigner” when she travels to Jamaica, as a male nurse comments on their way to the hospital in Kingston, “Yuh a foreigner, right? Mi like how yuh mix de Jamaican” (236).

Maria speaks consistently Jamaican. For her, it is “the language of home, her family, her feelings, her heart” (Henry 2012: 99). She is the one who has lived most of her life in Jamaica and it is quite common that the Galloways as a working-class family in Kingston's down town in the 1960s and 1970s speak patwa. She is also the one who has the most trouble adapting to the new environment, which is also due to her age and unemployment status. Ciboney and Vittorio, on the other hand, have both not taken to patwa which indicates that they are more integrated in Canadian society and do not identify with or deliberately distance themselves from their Jamaican background. This is a strategy to express identity and to represent processes of cultural exchange and transculturation in a diasporic situation.

The linguistic level of *The Heart Does Not Bend* bears resemblance to much of Jamaican and Jamaican-diasporic literatures.¹⁷⁶ The written form is “simplified” and resembles English more than patwa actually does, placing Jamaican speech on a linguistic continuum. In a transnational context, language changes and is adapted in order to make it readable for an audience unfamiliar with the Jamaican language. It combines English and patwa into a “hybrid form of [...]

176 Claude McKay was one of the first writers to use Jamaican Creole in his novels. His novel *Banana Bottom* (1933) is a celebration not only of Jamaican identity but also of African cultural heritage. Louise “Miss Lou” Bennett, one of Jamaica's most famous poets and literary figures, is well-known for the extensive use of patwa as an artistic medium. She has contributed to the public recognition and acceptance of the language. In the poem “Bans O’Killing” (1944) she criticizes with much irony the linguistic imperialism, hierarchization, and standardization of the English language. “Meck me get it straight Mass Charlie / For me noh quite undastan, / Yuh gwine kill all English dialect / Or jus Jamaica one?”

the standard and the vernacular dialect" that "reinforces the importance of two linguistic codes in the Caribbean [...] complementing each other in an attempt to describe more truthfully the realities of the languages and cultures of Caribbean people" "Creole language is much more effective to render Caribbean cultural experiences than English because it is used as a form of resisting assimilation to the 'metropolis' and as a subtle weapon of resistance" (de Luna 2008: 48). By including patwa as the spoken language in the dialogues, Silvera not only lends an 'authentic' voice to her characters (cf. Silvera "The Characters Would not Have It"), she also destabilizes the linguistic dominance of standard English – the colonizers' language.

While the novel in terms of its representation of sexual-queer identities, use of language, as well as the evocation of the colonial and (an almost extinguished) indigenous history may transgress the genre's usual foci, the structure hints to a common narrative organization. Similar, in fact, to Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*, the novel is divided into four main parts that correspond not only to Molly and Maria's migratory movements but also, and more importantly, to the various stages of Molly's subject formation. These four stages of maturation create an inner structure of a rather chronologically narrated memory process, embedded within the narrative frame of the *Prolegomenon* and *Epilogue*, both set in present day Jamaica. We can observe a circular pattern as the narrative returns to the place of departure in Jamaica and the initiating event of the funeral. The narrator in her account may not jump back and forth in time and space, as the narrator of *The Swinging Bridge*, for instance, does. The novel, nevertheless, imagines a diasporically fragmented identity. Beckford confirms this observation: "The characters' existence is marked by experiences of dislocation, displacement, exile, and fragmentation – all characteristic of a diasporic consciousness – that produce within them a sense of alienation from self and place" (Beckford 2011: 20). The feeling of alienation and disorientation as well as the intimate link between geography and personal history is exemplified well in Molly's observation: "For the past was where we lived" (88). Silvera, in the narrative pattern, retraces the routes and roots of Caribbean migratory subjectivity, the need of the diaspora subject to know her origin. "The search for self [...] concerns a search for origin, an indication that in order to know one's self and one's destiny, one must know and understand the past" (Beckford 2011: 3).

That this past that continues to 'haunt' Molly and Maria reaches far back in time is made explicit by Molly's great-grandmother in Jamaica.

Is about 1890 mi born yuh know, so mi pon dis earth long time. Mi see whole heap, mi born not far from here, Port Antonio. Dem time whole heap of ship use

to come in from all over de world and dock dere. Is right dere dem dock mi grandmother, tek her from Madagascar, bring her pon slave ship to here. (47)

The quote is significant for several reasons. For one, it reveals a history of enforced displacement and enslavement. It chronicles the past of the family and points to the colonial heritage that is still defining for the Caribbean. It also localizes one part of contemporary Jamaican creole culture in the African island state of Madagascar. Thirdly, the middle passage and the imagery of the slave ship are strikingly evoked here. For Gilroy, the ship is a (transcultural) microcosm, “a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” (1993: 4), symbolizing at once deterritorialization and a counter culture of modernity. In the ship and the Black Atlantic is expressed both the co-existence of Black history and present as well as the idea of a dynamic identity, which Silvera creatively interprets by means of the coming-of-age genre. Now, if Gilroy’s cultural concept of the Black Atlantic encompasses primarily the African continent, the United States, and Great Britain, Silvera suggests to extend it to include not only the cultural production circulating in the transatlantic triangle of Africa, Northern Europe, and the United States but also Canada and the Caribbean as further cornerstones of this diaspora consciousness. Silvera complements Gilroy’s conceptualization by adding a Jamaican-Canadian feminist and literary perspective.

Silvera’s diasporic coming-of-age novel reflects on subject formation across time and space. The novel connects the Caribbean and Canada by its investigation of the Jamaican presence and migrant life in Toronto. It also retraces the African diaspora journey and ancestral connections, which is accomplished in particular through the inclusion of African proverbs (cf. Beckford 2011). By naming one of her characters Ciboney – (Molly’s daughter who embodies the following generation of Jamaican migrants in Canada), Silvera furthermore evokes the indigenous history of the Caribbean.¹⁷⁷ The African diasporic, or Black Atlantic journey is retraced on an intra-textual level, which is achieved through the inclusion of African proverbs as chapter headings. These are: the Congolese “What is said over the dead lioness’s body could not be said to her alive”¹⁷⁸; the Nigerian, Oyo “Earth is the queen of beds”¹⁷⁹; the Yoruba “You

177 The Ciboney are an indigenous people originally from South America who later lived mainly in Cuba and Haiti. See *Encyclopædia Britannica* “Ciboney” <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/117529/Ciboney> [accessed 6.1.2014].

178 <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/esdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=12&msg=1130853485> [accessed 23.07.2019].

179 <http://proverbsafricanliterature.wordpress.com/country-profile/west-africa/nigeria/> [accessed 23.07.2019].

cannot shave a man's head in his absence"¹⁸⁰; the Ashanti "No one tests the depth of a river with both feet"¹⁸¹; the Guinean "Around a flowering tree one finds many insects"¹⁸²; another Congolese "He who is free of faults will never die"¹⁸³; and the Fulani/Niger-Congolese – from which the novel's title derives – "The heart is not a knee; it does not bend."¹⁸⁴ One may assume that these phrases disrupt the narrative and reading process or have a didactic purpose. The proverbs, though, have a rather ornamental function, introducing the following chapters (or 'foreshadowing' the events). Although they are translated into standard English, they function as a third structural level, whose proverbial elements bind the narrative back to African origins and thus charge the Jamaican-Canadian story proper with the qualities of a transnational, trans-historical tale of Atlantic connectivity.

At the very end of the novel, after Molly's funeral, Molly and her daughter Ciboney are not yet "ready to face home – the snow, the cold, the emptiness" (256). They visit the old home on Wigton Road in Kingston's Downtown. Ignoring Aunt Joyce's warning about the "duttiness" (257), Molly soon realizes how much the Jamaica she remembers has changed. "The sidewalks are littered with garbage, broken bottles and dog shit. Skinny stray dogs circle each other, vying for chicken bones. Barefoot children in tattered clothes run about the streets" (257). Walking through the dead-end street where she used to live, Molly becomes aware of the damaged pavement, weathered houses and shacks, the once beautiful house shabby and run down and lush garden now covered with concrete. The motives of a degenerated society and politics, poverty and unrest, as well as the unfulfilled promise of independence are striking. Returning to Jamaica does not seem to be an option. The nostalgic look back is clouded by the 'real' condition of what once used to be her home. The novel crosses strict categorical thinking of diaspora in which the home space is overly celebrated. It becomes clear that Molly needs to decide actively for and settle in her life as a 'New Canadian' citizen. One may ask whether fictional characters like Molly contribute, if only to a small degree, to the "multiculturalizing" of Canadian culture?

180 <http://lifelinesproverbsliving.blogspot.de/p/ashanti-yoruba-swahili-and-zulu.html> [accessed 23.07.2019].

181 http://www.special-dictionary.com/proverbs/source/a/ashanti_proverb/ [accessed 23.07.2019].

182 <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/proverbs/guinean-around-a-flowering-tree-one-finds-many-insects/> [accessed 23.07.2019].

183 <http://www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/esdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=12&msg=1130853485> [accessed 23.07.2019].

184 <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/proverbs/fulani-peul-the-heart-is-not-a-knee-it-does/> [accessed 23.07.2019].

4.9 Concluding Remarks

Patricia Hill Collins interlinks homophobia and racism maintaining that the homophobia Black gay or trans-persons experience cannot be separated from the oppression based on race, class, and gender (cf. Collins 1990). Similarly, Silvera is daring her readers to be conscious of this intersection of multiaxial differences which simultaneously affect each individual's life, however in different ways meaning oppression for some and privileges for others. With her fictional and non-fictional work, Silvera carves out a space in which queer persons of color are made visible to create emancipatory potential. Her own experiences of migration, racism, sexism, and homophobia, the struggles with Jamaican constructions of respectability, but also her family's strict Christian moral values are integral parts of her writing. She seeks to provide answers to the questions of "[w]hat happens when specific gender roles as well as sexual orientation do not find a space of acceptance within the dominant patriarchal society?" (Beckford 2011: 5); of what happens when specific racial and sexual inscriptions do not fit into the dominant mainstream culture as is the case with Black diaspora or Jamaican subjectivity in Canada? She suggests a reorientation on love, feeling, and solidarity within Canadian feminism and demands, as she puts it, "a rhythm that is uniquely ours – proud, powerful, and gay. Being invisible no longer. Naming ourselves, and taking our space within the larger history of Afro-Caribbean peoples. A dream to be realized, a dream to act upon" (Silvera 1992: 532). Silvera has thus actively shaped Black Caribbean Canadian feminist thought.

Literary scholar Andrea Davis rightly claims that Silvera's writing "challenge[s] dominant discourses of exclusion especially as those discourses influence debates about identity and engage questions of (un)belonging" (Davis 2004: 66). The novel raises issues of citizenship and socialization along the lines of sexuality and a perceived deviance in the postcolonial state of Jamaica as well as in the multicultural society of Canada, itself a colony of the former British Empire, and elucidates how migration shifts the meaning of national belonging. The focalization and narrative perspective privilege Caribbean women's voices, erotic agency, and Black female embodiment, while constructing and marginalizing a destructive masculinity. A reading of the novel with Audre Lorde's approach to the erotic, feeling, and sharing, places Silvera's work in a larger Black feminist tradition that is now increasingly visible in Canada.

Makeda Silvera's *The Heart Does Not Bend*

Silvera introduces characters who challenge different norms, associated, amongst others, with citizenship and the discourse of respectability, which promote a fertile, reproductive body and pathologize a queer sexuality. Moreover, Silvera's feminist writing is an attempt to deconstruct the colonial continuity of relations of domination and social stratification based on race, gender, sexuality, class, and migrant status. The body politics invoked here is intertwined with modernity and coloniality, to adopt the decolonial paradigms of Lugones and Mignolo, suggesting that it is crucial to delink institutionalized forms of citizenship and national cultural identity from exploitive heterosexist, gendered, racialized, and capitalist hegemonies. This implies a radical reconfiguration of social, economic, and political conditions to engender a way of thinking across and beyond fixed categories and to initiate social progress based on equality.

5. Dirty Skirts and the Other Body: Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge*

*Free as the wind up in the sky / Free as the world that is my home
Free anywhere that I might roam [...] / Free in my way with everything.
(Espinet 2003: 295)*

*Rover, wanderer, nomad, vagabond / Call me what you will
But I'll take my time anywhere / Free to speak my mind anywhere
And I'll redefine anywhere / Anywhere I roam, where I lay my head is home.
(Metallica "Wherever I May Roam," 1991)*

5.1 Introduction

By describing herself as a wanderer and "citizen of the world" (Espinet/Savory 1995: 112), Ramabai Espinet's nomadic subjectivity defies essentialist notions of cultural identity. She was born in Trinidad's second largest city, San Fernando, in 1948, where she grew up in a Presbyterian, middle-class household. Her ancestors came to Trinidad from India in the 1870s in the course of Britain's indentureship scheme. Together with her family, she moved to Canada in the 1960s, where she lived in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. She obtained a PhD in English literature from the University of the West Indies, engaged in creative writing, and, important for her literary career and the feminist impetus of her work, got involved in the women's movements in the Caribbean and North America. Having divided her time between the Caribbean and Canada, Espinet has made her permanent home in Toronto. She teaches English and Caribbean Studies, and pursues community work in order to promote the Indo-Caribbean diaspora heritage in Canada. She is a novelist, short story writer, and author of juvenile fiction. She has published children books, such as *Ninja's Carnival* (1993) and *The Princess of Spadina: A Tale of Toronto* (1992), a collection of poetry, *Nuclear Seasons* (1991), as well as the novel *The Swinging Bridge*

(2003). The performance pieces "Beyond the Kalapani" and "Indian Robber Talk" are two earlier critical attempts by Espinet to give an understanding of the history of the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean to an international audience unfamiliar with this period.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, she is founding member and activist of the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA). Her edited collection *Creation Fire: A CAFRA Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry* (1990) features the work of some 120 writers, bringing together as one of the first collections worldwide several poems by Indo-Caribbean women, and actively contributes to the shaping of a "Caribbean feminist poetic" (Espinet 1990: xxi) – a poetic that adds "something distinctively woman-centred to the Caribbean literary canon, and something distinctively Caribbean-centred to the global feminist poetic and to global feminism as a whole" (ibid.: xx).

Literary and feminist scholar Brinda Mehta notes that Espinet's "writings inscribe the negotiations of Indo-Caribbean female subjectivity and exilic identity within a tradition of postcolonial writing in North America and Trinidad to establish an important feminist poetics of literary and cultural representation in Caribbean literature" (Mehta 2006: 19). Espinet criticizes the invisibility of Indo-Caribbean women and their marginalization in society, academia, and arts: "In every quarter of activity, whether in art, literature, public life or otherwise, the Indian woman is underrepresented, and where she is represented she is not seen as an equal participant" (Espinet 1993: 42). In spite of these facts, she does not simply reproduce a discourse of victimhood by evoking common stereotypes, such as the beaten, single Indian woman or the disenfranchised housewife, figures who indeed roam her work; but in order to show that these images are actual circumstances of a particular lived experience, she makes stereotypes visible and ultimately deconstructs them. As a liberationist practice, Espinet suggests the possibility of an alternative development and empowerment for these women from within their subaltern experience. Thus, her work is testimony to the strength, resilience, and creativity of Indian Caribbean women as well as their contribution to the continuing *kala pani* history of displacement and relocation. The *kala pani*, the Hindi term and concept of the 'Black Waters,' separates India from the 'New World.' In Hinduism, crossing the *kala pani*, which for the indentured laborers was an unavoidable journey,

185 The play "Beyond the Kalapani," the creative output of her work within a women's collective, was staged in Toronto in 1992 at the World of Music, Arts and Dance (WOMAD) festival (cf. Mahabir/Pirbhai 2013: 17). "Indian Robber Talk" was performed at Toronto's Caribana, at Desh Pardesh, a local arts festival, and Rhythms of India in 1993.

implies a cutting off of the bonds to the ancestral land of India and the contamination of caste and religion.¹⁸⁶

By way of recuperating personal memories and national histories, Espinet's novel investigates the coming-of-age process of a heterosexual woman of Indian Presbyterian upbringing in Trinidad and Canada. The postcolonial textuality of this debut novel, meaning a literary examination of hegemonic (colonial) narratives and a rewriting of the (rather Eurocentric) *Bildungsroman* genre and historical novel, recovers the silenced history of Indian women, who came as contract laborers to the Caribbean. This is achieved through foregrounding the triple experience of Indo-Caribbean-Canadian female subjectivity which I will later on define as the diasporic *kala pani* continuum that engenders fluid identity formations. In the novel, Espinet not only deals with inter-ethnic conflicts, racialized body politics, the inequalities of urban and peasant lifestyles, as well as (ethno-)spatial separation in Trinidad, but also problematizes issues of (racial) identity, assimilation, and belonging of twice migrants as well as everyday forms of racism in Canada from a woman's point of view. Through this perspective, Espinet is able to show the limitations of ethnic and gender ideologies that aim to put Indo-Trinidadian womanhood into place. She breaks taboos surrounding diverse issues such as discrimination, gender normativity, domestic abuse, homosexuality, and aids.

This chapter focuses on the subject formation of a protagonist who, to borrow from the lines of the Metallica song above, is a nomad and wanderer who takes the liberty to speak her mind. Her coming into consciousness is inextricably linked to her brother's death and to the unfolding matrilineal history of indentureship in the Caribbean. In order to locate the novel's settings and historical issues, the chapter first briefly traces the socio-historical development of the Indian diaspora experience in Trinidad and Canada, which Espinet meticulously describes and fictionalizes throughout her work. Furthermore, I reflect on current perspectives of Indo-Caribbean women's writing and build up on Brinda Mehta's literary diaspora concept of the *kala pani* as a feminist poetics which attempts to deconstruct dominant nationalist constructions of Caribbean history and identity. The close reading focuses not only on body politics, sexu-

186 This is summarized by Brinda Mehta: "According to Hindu belief, the traversing of large expanses of water was associated with contamination and cultural defilement as it led to the dispersal of tradition, family, class, and caste classifications, and to the general loss of a 'purified' Hindu essence. *Kala pani* crossings were initially identified with the expatriation of convicts, low castes, and other undesirable elements of society from the mainland to neighboring territories to rid society of any visible traces of social pollution; those who braved the *kala pani* were automatically compromising their Hinduness" (Mehta 2006: 24).

ality, and Trinidadian respectability inscribed in particular on the female body but also on the process of becoming the 'other' body both in racialized as well as sexual(ized) terms. Also, as in the previous chapter, I situate the novel within a diasporic coming-of-age poetics, in this case set in Canada and Trinidad, in which this particular *narrative* schema is interrupted by the Indian *Ramayana* epic,¹⁸⁷ transgenerational time, and storytelling (cf. Francis 2010; Pirbhai 2013).

5.1.1 Creolization and *Douglarization* in Trinidad

The twin islands Trinidad and Tobago, with the capital Port of Spain, ranks among the more prosperous states within the Caribbean.¹⁸⁸ According to the census in 2011, the country has a population of about 1.3 million people (cf. "Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census"). The heterogeneous ethnic composition of its society with 37.8% East Indian, 36.5% African, 16.2% Mixed-Other, 8.2% Mixed-African/East Indian, as well as Causasian, Chinese, Indigenous, and Syrian/Lebanese testifies the cultural diversity of the whole Caribbean region.¹⁸⁹ It is due to the indentureship period, which the British Empire installed immediately after the abolition of slavery, that Trinidad has such a large East Indian population, similar to Guyana and Suriname. Correspondingly, the major religious groups are Christians, Hindus, and Muslims.

In the course of the first Spanish settlement starting in 1592, the local population of about 30,000 Caribs and Arawaks was almost extinguished.¹⁹⁰ Trinidad

187 In Trinidad, the ancient Indian epic poem *Ramayana* is "the most popular Hindu religious text" (Singh 2012: 20). The epic contains an idealization of gender and family. Caribbean feminist Patricia Mohammed explains the text's lasting importance for contemporary gender performances: "Rama provides the model on which Indian masculinity is constructed through mythology, Sita embodies femininity, the ideal of female love and devotion and a lesson to all women on how they should behave in their daily lives" (Mohammed 1998: 395).

188 This is especially due to its highly profitable oil and gas industry, which bestowed an economic boom and wealth on Trinidad's society during the 1970s and early 1980s.

189 Whereas Tobago, the smaller of the two islands, has a more homogeneous population with over 85% persons of African descent and accordingly a small Indian minority, Trinidad has a more diverse ethnic population. In addition due to the distinctive political, cultural, socio-historical, and economic distinctiveness of each island, this work focuses on Trinidad. See "Person Variables."

190 The indigenous population has not been erased entirely. Today, there is an estimated population of Amerindians of about 300, living in the Santa Rosa Carib Commu-

remained an insignificant, undeveloped outpost of Spain's colonial advances for the next two centuries. Under the promise of land grants and the protection by the Spanish government a small number of mostly wealthy (Roman Catholic) French settlers and their slaves from other colonies began to arrive in the colony starting in 1779. Their number steadily increased when foreign immigration was officially accepted under the *Cedula of Population* in 1783. One far-reaching consequence relating to the decree was the transformation of Trinidad into a slave colony. Moreover, in contrast to all the other colonies in the West Indies, the *Cedula* granted land ownership and citizenship rights to the free colored propertied class.¹⁹¹

By the end of the eighteenth century, Trinidad had turned into a plantation society, the white French outnumbered the Spanish population, and the group of enslaved persons exceeded the number of all other groups. Historian Bridget Brereton states that "the new post-1783 society was essentially Afro-French [...] [and] the cultural orientation was French West Indian" (1981: 22).¹⁹² As the Spaniards established trading activities with other French and British colonies, the British began dominating the trade and increasingly gained control in Trinidad which turned out to be of geopolitical importance for Britain for the colonization of the Americas (cf. Brereton 1981: 18, 32). When France, Spain, and Britain entered into war in 1796, Trinidad was the first to be attacked by the British naval force, captured in February 1797, and was declared a crown colony in 1802; Tobago came under British rule in 1814.¹⁹³

nity of Arima in the Central North of Trinidad (cf. Premdas 2007: 28). Bridget Brereton summarizes the fate of the Amerindians under colonial rule and their legacy for Trinidadian culture (cf. 1981: 20-22).

191 Brereton offers a concise discussion of this period and the outcomes of the *Cedula*. Not only did the demographics and size of the population on the double island change drastically, but also the formerly uncultivated land was developed into a wealthy, productive plantation economy (producing cocoa, sugar, and cotton) and slave society (cf. Brereton 1981: 12-27). The loss of landownership among the Spanish settlers as well as the changing occupation by Spaniards, French, and British colonialists led to resentment among the Spaniards and long-term conflicts on the island.

192 Thus, although a Spanish property, the revolution in France and Haiti also engulfed this Caribbean island especially as those escaping the French colonies found 'refuge' there, which contributed to a further increase in the numbers of French and free colored French settlers.

193 Trinidad fell under the personal control of the military governor Thomas Picton, who, according to Brereton, installed a "monstrous tyranny," a "regime of impartial terror [...] virtually free from imperial control" (1981: 33-34), operating with brutal force until 1802.

After slavery was officially abolished and plantation owners found themselves in need of cheap labor, the British crown introduced the system of indentureship in the colonies. Starting in 1838, contract workers from India, especially from the rural areas in the North, such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, as well as Chinese, Syrian, or Portuguese laborers came to Trinidad. The indentureship period lasted from 1844 until 1917, with a transitional period of five years. During this period, 143,939 indentured workers were imported from India to Trinidad (cf. Shepherd 2002: 4; Brereton 1981: 103). In the last decades of the nineteenth century during the depression of the sugar market, the indentured laborers sought job opportunities in other areas and instead of repatriating to India, many bought land from the British Crown and “began to recreate Indian villages on these settlements” (Mohammed 2002: 133). For many of them, repatriation had already been out of the question due to religious reasons, amongst others. One particular explanation lies in the Hindu belief that once the *kala pani* was crossed, one had ultimately broken with the mother land. The introduction of the indentureship system had far-reaching consequences for the ethnic composition of the island and led to racist conflicts.

In the nineteenth and twentieth century (until today), the social stratification of the Trinidadian population was primarily based on the factors of “[c]lass, colour, caste and race” (Brereton 1979: 212), with Indians and poor Blacks occupying the lowest position initially, and whites and Creoles the top. The opposition between the African and East Indian ethnic groups was a result partly of the separationist policy of the British colonial authorities, partly mutual contempt among Indians and Blacks based on racist prejudices. The formerly enslaved African population despised the newly arriving plantation laborers from India, whom they perceived as the foreign, exotic ‘other,’ for undercutting their wages and being allowed to retain Indian (mostly Hindu) customs, culture, and religion. For many Indians, on the other side, African and Creole culture equated with immorality, wanton display of sexuality, idleness, and a dysfunctional family structures (cf. Puri 2004; Mohammed 2002). This ethnic divide was fostered by the white ruling elite and Canadian Presbyterian missionaries who helped to establish an educated middle-class comprised of mainly Indians who had converted to Christianity. The Christian converts, in turn, were disdained by Hindu and Muslim Indians for betraying their culture and soiling what became a constructed notion of essentially pure ‘Indianness’ (cf. Brereton 1979, 1981).

Especially for women, Joy Mahabir explains, the crossing often created the opportunity “to [re]invent their social and cultural identities” (2013: 152). Interpreting *kala pani* in terms of its emancipatory potential, it enabled Indian

women to redefine their social position within the post-abolitionist plantation society and local community structures, challenging gender roles, family scripts, and their “confinement within Hindu patriarchal structures” (Mehta 2004: 5; cf. also Mohammed 1999). The unequal gender ratio among the contract workers initially put women in a better, more liberal position. They received payment for the work on the plantations, chose their partners more freely and were less likely to endure domestic violence. However, it is recorded that women suffered from violence from overseers or their partners, because “in a situation where women were scarce, the possession of a wife was an important symbol of status and masculinity on the plantation” (Brereton 1979: 182). Women who were widowed or single women who had been raped or engaged in consensual sex were regarded as impure. Violence against women was not uncommon, since the infidelity of women meant the loss of pride and self-esteem among Indian men (cf. Reddock 1998d: 42-45).

Indian, meaning here Hindu, religious practices, traditions, and values, from the beginning, were adapted to a certain degree to the new context and mixed with local, already established African, indigenous, and European forms. Brahmin notions of womanhood, which were retained by many, defined women’s role and place in society solely in relation to men who “were deemed to be the masters and providers, while women were the commodity and possession of the male” (Mohammed 1999: 64). Furthermore, the colonial authorities not only restricted Indian women’s emancipation by refusing to sell land to single women, they also policed the marital and family unions of the indentured workers by not legalizing marriages that were established under Hindu law. Patriarchal social and family structures, following Indian models, were re-established especially throughout the first half of the twentieth century, which confined Indian women usually to the domestic sphere.

Interestingly enough, it can be attributed to the indentureship period that ties between Trinidad and Canada have developed. Presbyterian missionaries from Canada initiated the conversion of many Indians to Christianity and supported the establishment of a prospering middle class. In this constellation, the family offered a safe space, but also restricted the Indian women’s participation in the public sphere by standing guard over their daughters’ bodies, sexuality, and purity to avoid creolization. Feminist and sociologist Patricia Mohammed further observes that religious festivals and rituals, the *pujas*, myths, the *Ramayana*, or the screening of Indian films since 1935 informed and conveyed gender identities and performances. These ideals of Indian femininity and masculinity, on the other hand, conflated with other gender systems and changed significantly in the contact with Creole, indigenous, or Western- and African-

derived cultures. Hence, "despite the overwhelming influence which mythology and symbols may have had on the construction of gender, the influences of the new society had its impact on both men and women, thus allowing a negotiation with the lived reality" (Mohammed 1999: 92).¹⁹⁴

The year 1962 marks a significant turning point in the national history as Trinidad and Tobago gained independence from Britain. The anti- and decolonial movement was led by the first Prime Minister and historian Eric Williams, a nationalist and member of the *People's National Movement* (PNM), founded in 1956, and who governed the island state for twenty-five years. The proclamation of national unity at the time meant first of all socio-economic advancement especially for the Afro-Creole majority. Williams' nationalist, rather Afro-centric policy led to the rise of the Black Power movement in Trinidad but also fueled anti-Indian sentiments among the population (cf. Singh 2012: 64). The permanent political and social unrest was met by severe economic crises in

194 Scholarly work with a focus in particular on Indian culture in the Caribbean and a feminist scope is, for example, the volume *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women* (cf. Kanhai 1999), containing a selection of academic articles and personal narratives. Rosanne Kanhai, the editor, has chosen the term *matikor* for the title to lay open the book's women-centered and Indo-centric approach. The event *matikor* is a Hindu ritual for women and takes place the night before the wedding. It is the sexual initiation of the bride in which the older women share their knowledge about sexuality and oftentimes perform explicit dances using faked phallic forms. Thus, *matikor* offers an alternative space of performed tradition and female empowerment celebrating the woman's body and sexuality temporarily free of both patriarchal and colonial authority. This ritual, nevertheless, follows heteronormative codes of conduct and is not a space of same-sex erotic desire (cf. Mehta 2004). Kanhai's second edited volume *Bindi: The Multifaceted Lives of Indo-Caribbean Women* (2011) brings together scholarly articles with a feminist scope discussing religion, constructions of the self and subjectivity, activism, strategies of survival, and creativity. Again, the *bindi* is symbolic for the Indian presence in the Caribbean, its transformations and adaptation as a fashion accessory stands for the fluidity of culture in general and of 'Indianness' and Hinduism in particular (cf. Kanhai 2011: 2-3). Additionally, selected studies of importance have been done by Patricia Mohammed, a sociologist, feminist scholar and activist, who has published widely on gender relations, women's issues, the creolization of Indian women, and concepts of Indian families. One of her monographs is *Gender Negotiations Among Indians In Trinidad 1917-1947* (2002), an edited collection is *Gender Realities: An Anthology of Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought* (2006). Historian Verene Shepherd's documentation *Maharani's Misery* (2002) recounts the sexual violation and subsequent death of a woman contract laborer on an emigrant ship. It mirrors the lived experience and personal history of "sexploitation" (Shepherd 2002: xviii) of Indian women during the 'Middle Passage.' In addition, Rhoda Reddock has published extensively on slavery, plantation workers, Indian women and indentureship, for example in *Women, Labour & Politics in Trinidad & Tobago* (1994).

the 1980s which helped a political opposition, the *National Alliance for Reconstruction* (NAR), a coalition of four parties, to come into power for four years.¹⁹⁵ The newly founded *United National Congress* (UNC), which has been the mouthpiece of the Indian population, took over the government after the elections in 1995; for the first time in the national history, with Basdeo Panday, Trinidad and Tobago had an Indian prime minister.¹⁹⁶ Continuing until today, the ethnic division of the Indian- and African-descended majority is reflected in the two party-system and the election results. A racially stratified society, Trinidad is still characterized by discrimination and inequalities in the distribution of property, access to resources, professions, and education.¹⁹⁷

The political situation as well as economic crises throughout the second half of the twentieth century forced many Trinidadians to emigrate. As this coincided with the relaxation and removal of discriminatory immigration laws in Canada, a country to which Trinidad has long established exchange, many of the migrants have settled down there – among them a significant number of Indo-Trinidadians encouraged by the influence of the Canadian Presbyterian church who helped to facilitate their arrival in Canada. During the time period from 1960 until 1980 about 175,000 persons left Trinidad and Tobago, followed by a large wave again in the 1990s; between 2000 and 2011 more than 15,400 persons left the Caribbean island, with the majority moving to the United States (especially New York City) but also to Canada and the U.K.¹⁹⁸ The Canadian census of 2006 counted a total of 65,540 Trinidadian-born immigrants, of which almost three quarters moved to Canada before 1991, living mainly in the Metropolitan Area of Toronto.¹⁹⁹

As an ethnic group, persons of Indo-Caribbean descent in Canada occupy a marginalized position in terms of access to economic capital and skilled labor

195 The early failure of the 'National Alliance' was due to the rivalries between the ethnic groups of the Indian and African and Creole population but also between the two islands Trinidad and Tobago.

196 After six years in office, he was succeeded by Patrick Manning of the PNM. In 2010, again, the UNC took over office and installed Kamla Persad-Bissessar as first female prime minister of Indian descent until 2015.

197 Khan comments: "In Trinidad's origins as a colonial possession, a system of stratification based on a class-race-color hierarchy laid the foundations for a postcolonial society whose hallmark has been ethnic group competition, fostered by class inequalities and state control of certain resources, and couched in terms of racial antipathies between Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians" (Khan 2004: 9).

198 According to the "Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census", in that time period, more than 9,000 migrants settled down in the U.S. and about 1,800 in Canada (cf. 354, table 22).

199 Having been asked for the ethnic identity, a number of 58,415 indicated as ethnic origin 'Trinidad and Tobago' (cf. "Ethnic Origins, 2006 Counts, for Canada").

(despite their usually high level of professional skills)²⁰⁰ but also, as sociological research proves, with respect to their ethnic identification and positionality within the Canadian multicultural society. As a matter of fact, until today the census does not provide detailed information on the ethnic composition of the migrants from Trinidad (or Guyana as another case in point). For Caribbean women and men who are of (South Asian) Indian descent, according to Dwaine Plaza, “such views pose problems of invisibility in terms of their birthplace and cultural roots. Indo-Caribbean people living in Canada are often mistakenly classified with East Indians from Sri Lanka, India, or Pakistan based on their physical appearance. Most Indo-Caribbeans themselves, however, do not easily see themselves melding into these East Indian groups” (Plaza 2004: 243-44). The omission of the category, according to Frank Birbalsingh, leads to a statistical invisibility which in turn negatively impacts the ways the community and culture of Indo-Caribbean migrants are perceived. “To be grouped with South Asians whose numbers are much greater, and whose cultures are significantly different, may indeed threaten the survival of Indo-Caribbean Canadians by swallowing their culture into a larger group identity that erases its special features and renders them invisible” (1997: 217).

Since Espinet's novel grapples with the issue of racialized body politics in Trinidad and the diaspora and how it affects a Presbyterian Trinidadian family of Indian descent, this section, rather one-sidedly, privileges this perspective, bearing in mind, however, that as a result of colonialism and partially misled decolonial policies,²⁰¹ the conflicting relations were difficult for all ethnic groups involved. For the purpose of this chapter, I refer to Mohammed's and Reddock's definition of Trinidadian Creole identity and creolization (broadly referring to cultural and racial 'mixing'), summarized subsequently.²⁰² Also, the

200 “The proportion of skilled and professional people among the immigrants from Trinidad is high. In the period 1967–90, 8 percent of the immigrants were classified in the managerial, professional, or technical category, 12 percent as clerical workers, 14 percent as skilled workers, and less than 10 percent as unskilled labourers. The selection process of Canada's immigration program has favoured immigrants who are highly educated and well qualified, but unfortunately a number of variables, including racial discrimination and non-acceptance of out-of-country qualifications, have allowed the human resources of Trinidadian immigrants to remain largely untapped” (Ramcharan 1999: n.p.).

201 This process has been described as “ethnopoliticization” that “consists of the mobilization of one or more groups according to their ethnic identity for political ends” (Garner 2008: 99). My thanks to Sinah Kloss for making me aware of the parallel in the politics of ethnic relations in Guyana and Trinidad.

202 ‘Creole’ derives from the Spanish word *criollo*, referring originally to a person born in Latin America and of European, i.e. Spanish, descent. The term was then used to describe processes of acculturation, assimilation, interaction, and exchange between

concept of douglarization and Shalini Puri's notion of the 'douglar' as 'in-between-figure' will be taken into account. Both concepts constitute part of a body politics at the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender, and class as well as affecting modes of living or conviviality in the Caribbean (and diaspora).²⁰³

The period of decolonization and independence and the nation building processes in the mid-twentieth century engendered a celebration of ethnic pluralism and an accentuation of cultural mixing. Trinidad celebrated itself as a "callaloo society" (Stoddard/Cornwell 1999: 339)²⁰⁴ or "rainbow country" (Mohammed 2009: 58), in which a Creole national cultural identity has been expressed euphemistically through the motto "Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve." This 'together-ness' and oneness as a reflection of a country-wide creolization suggests a unity where there is none. In Trinidad, the difficulty with Creole and creolization is that it historically refers to the syncretism and intermixture of African and European cultures disregarding the Indian, Asian, and Middle Eastern migrants to the Caribbean and their presence in Trinidad (cf. Brereton 1979: 1).

In her seminal study "The 'Creolisation' of Indian Women in Trinidad" (1988), Mohammed argues that from the perspective of the Indian population, Creole used "to refer to descendants of African slaves to distinguish them from indentured Indian immigrants, 'creolisation' was viewed as synonymous with the absorption of Black culture at the expense of one's own" (Mohammed 2002: 130). The gender discriminatory aspect inherent in this concept manifests itself in the fact that women were disrespected for engaging in creolization more than men. According to Mohammed, referring to an Indian woman as creole was an insult for those "women who mixed or consorted with people of African descent, especially men – Indian women who changed their eating and dress habits and who adopted non-Indian social customs" (Mohammed 2002: 130). The following three-fold definition of 'creole' is provided by Rhoda Reddock as it is used in Trinidad and Tobago:

Africans and Europeans in plantation societies. The most prominent study on creolization and *créolité* especially in the French Caribbean is provided by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant (1989) and for the Anglophone Caribbean by Kamau Brathwaite (1971).

203 See also Roopnarine (2006) on the conceptualizations and the categorization of multiple identities of Indo-Caribbeans or Caribbean East Indians.

204 Aisha Khan (2004) offers a comprehensive study and ethnographic research on Trinidad and South Asian religious and cultural identity. She applies the term "callaloo nation" – callaloo is a Caribbean dish, a stew made up of a variety of vegetable, spices, and sometimes meat – as a symbol for ethnic diversity and the mixing of cultures.

it is used in three senses: (1) to refer to an amalgam of descendants of Europeans who still dominate the local economy, known locally as French creoles; (2) primarily by Indians to refer to persons of African descent, also referred to by a Hindu derivative 'kirwal' and (3) to refer to cultural artifacts of the dominant culture viz. creole food, creole bacchanal etc. The term 'Creole' therefore for Indians is strongly identified with Afro-creole culture and creolisation is seen by many as a process of cultural domination. (Reddock 1998a: 65)

In general, the Caribbean region's concentration on *créolité* or creolness has caused a devaluation of Indian culture. To this, Mehta adds that

Creoleness has, to some extent, furthered the divide between blackness and Indianness by often excluding the Hindu experience as a strategy of moving away from Indianness and indigenized Indo-Caribbean customs. This exclusion has, consciously or unconsciously, affirmed the superiority of Creole culture at the expense of the "primitiveness" of "coolie," or indentured, culture. (Mehta 2004: 7)

The quoted passages attest to the marginalized status of Indian, or deprecatingly *coolie*, culture within the dominant Creole culture, although Indian descendants make up almost half of the population today.²⁰⁵ That interethnic mixing is not desirable from the perspective of many Indians, that Afro-creolization is condemned, is reflected in the Hindi-derived term *dougl* which in its Caribbean translation names the offspring of mixed Indian and African ancestry; the Hindi original pejorative meaning of "dogalaa" is "bastard," "hybrid," or "mongrel" (cf. Allsopp 2003: 200). The *dougl* identity has been rejected by African and Indian descendant groups alike for various reasons.

In *The Caribbean Postcolonial* (2004), Shalini Puri discusses theories of hybridity and cultural identities in relation to nationalist discourses, forms of resistance, and feminism in the Caribbean. She looks at the local racial conflicts between Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians, creolization, and female sexuality as it is dealt with in literature and popular culture, such as calypso or chutney-soca.²⁰⁶ On a cultural-political level, the tensions between the two major ethnic groups found expression in the so-called "douglarization debate" (Puri 2004: 192) in the

205 It should be noted that since the 1990s the political participation of the Indian group has increased. The UNC was the governing party from 1995-2001; from 2010-2015, Kamla Persad-Bissessar (UNC), of Indo-Caribbean descent, was the first female prime minister and leader of the governing coalition at the time.

206 Anita Baksh discusses the novels by Lakshmi Persaud, Jan Shinebourne, and Shani Mootoo through a postcolonial and feminist lens arguing that they "disclose the oppression and abuse as well as the struggle and resistance that exist within Indo-Caribbean communities" (Baksh 2011: 208). Baksh highlights the possibilities and limitations of Puri's dougl poetics to "describe hybrid cultural production" (209).

1990s. The debate as such has turned into a public discussion on racial purity, hybridity, the modernity/tradition dichotomy, as well as cultural and ethnic contamination. It divided not only the African and Indian population, but also the Indian community itself into the more progressive and more conservative leagues. The latter in particular promoted femininity, the female body, and Indian women's virtue as guardians of the "Mother Culture" (Puri 2004: 190). A feminization of Indian culture as victim discourse depicted African and Creole culture as violator feeding into common stereotypes of Black's hypersexuality, single motherhood, and irresponsibility on the one side, and Indian, Brahmanic tradition, purity, and family values on the other (cf. Puri 2004: 195). Both terms, creole and dougla, thus include a highly racialized rhetoric of social and cultural belonging and inclusion, but also of assimilation, exclusion, and, consequently, stigmatization of the respective 'other.'

Despite its negative connotation and cultural devaluation, Creole national culture is increasingly embraced by Indo-Trinidadians for a possible inclusion into the multi-ethnic society of Trinidad in the twenty-first century. However, partial refusal of creolization cannot be denied:

[T]he constantly emerging space of creoleness in the region is as much Indian as it is European or African at this time. Yet there is an Asian resistance to becoming subsumed into a politics of blackness. It can be argued that to associate with blackness is to side with the losing rather than the winning team, where whiteness has already attained superior class status even without political power. (Mohammed 2009: 67)²⁰⁷

As such, the Creole space, it seems, is now more affirmative of Indian culture, supporting the reality of Trinidad's ethnic composition. A reevaluation of the interethnic relations can also be observed in the census of 2011 offering in the category of ethnic composition the option of "Mixed-African and East Indian" ("Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census": 15); that way the government at least legally recognizes the existence of persons of mixed parentage, but at the same time avoids the terms *dougla* and Creole as form of identification. Nevertheless, the still strong interconnectedness of Creole with African-derived culture in the racialized environment of Trinidad keeps parts

207 Patricia Mohammed uses "Asian as a collective identity for all the ethnic and racial groups who were introduced to the Caribbean from the Asian continent and sub-continent" (2009: 60).

of the Indian population averse to creolization, either turning to white 'Western' culture or emphasizing their 'Indianness'.²⁰⁸

5.1.2 *Kala Pani* Continuum: Indo-Caribbean Women's Writing

Caribbean women writers of Indian descent, for a long time, have been subjected to a discursive silencing and invisibility both on the literary market and in research. As a matter of fact, the increased publication of their works, whether in the region or the diaspora, is a rather recent development only since the 1990s.²⁰⁹ In addition, twentieth-century Caribbean fiction has often reproduced essentialist representations of Indian womanhood.²¹⁰ Reasons for this long and notable silence are manifold. Generally, there was social exclusion and stigmatization of the Indian population and "society refused to acknowledge their presence as co-workers and fellow citizens" (Mehta 2009: 22). Access to education was limited for girls and women who were oftentimes bound to 'traditional' gender roles and the domestic sphere. Publication opportunities and public interest in their work used to be scarce.²¹¹ Not surprisingly, Mehta finds "a serious pedagogical and scholarly flaw in the field of Caribbean studies by exposing a wide theoretical and literary gap in the analysis of Indian construc-

208 Several studies reveal the extent to which creolization intersects with modernization, being either embraced selectively or rejected by Indo-Trinidadian men and women (cf. Mohammed 2002; Hosein 2012). Creolization and modernization are defined as being "gender differential" (Hosein 2012). This indicates that men and women and those who identify outside this gender binary are affected differently by it.

209 Notably, a category of Indio-Caribbean writing came into existence outside of the region with Guyanese writer Rooplall Motilal Monar's *Backdam People* published by England-based Peepal Tree Press in 1985. The earlier generation of writers like V. S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon are considered exile writers who are concerned less with local issues and the East Indian history in the Caribbean than with migrant life in England. Guyanese Jan Shinebourne's *Timepiece* published in 1986 is usually referred to as marking Indo-Caribbean women writers' coming to voice.

210 The stereotypes of Indo-Caribbean femininity alternate between overly chaste, passive, religious, and tradition-bound, basically objectified into silent victimhood, or, on the other side, promiscuous and sexually wanton. The marginal position of "Indo-Caribbean female writers and feminist activism" applies, according to Mohammed, "also to the representation of Indo-Caribbeans in the fiction of the region" (Mohammed 2012: 2).

211 Poynting (1989) and Ramchand (1996) also discuss major reasons for the long absence of Indo-Caribbean women's writing pointing out disadvantageous "economic and domestic arrangements" (Poynting 1989: 244).

tions of female identity in Guyana and Trinidad and its determining impact on issues of race, class, gender and nationhood" (Mehta 2004: 3).²¹²

The by now regular publications of Indo-Caribbean women's writing are accompanied by an increased output of scholarly literature. For instance, the collection of essays *Critical Perspectives on Indo-Caribbean Women's Literature* (Mahabir/Pirbhai 2013) introduces new and already established writers and discusses current trends in this field of literature with a thematic focus on Indo-Caribbean identities and politics, feminist poetics, subjectivity, and diaspora spaces. The anthology is a further step towards the canonization and genre definition of Indo-Caribbean writing, contributing to its visibility in Caribbean literary and cultural studies.²¹³

In the light of a general discursive dominance of African Caribbean and Creole culture, literary scholar Brinda Mehta's focus on the Indo-Caribbean perspectives as well as her idea of the "*kala pani* discursivity" suggest an alternative approach that is more inclusive of diverse, other and 'othered' ethnicities. It makes explicit reference to the East Indian migrant experience in the Caribbean and the trauma of assimilation as a minority culture.²¹⁴ Her seminal

212 A further impediment has been the Afrocentricity of Caribbean nationalist politics, cultural identity, and postcolonial theory until well into the 1980s. First, the cultural, philosophical concept of *négritude* gained prominence for Caribbean identity in the context of Black liberationist movements throughout the Caribbean, later influenced by the Harlem Renaissance and Black Power politics in the United States. Then, creolization, which for a long time has epitomized Caribbean identity (cf. Brathwaite 2001: 114), dominated Caribbean literary, cultural, and feminist discourses. For an in-depth discussion on "négritude" and "negrismo" as signifier of Afro-Caribbean cultural identity as formulated by, most notably, Aimé Césaire from Martinique, Léon-Gontran Damas from French Guiana, and Senegalese Léopold Senghor, see Mamadou Badiane (2010). Jamaican Marcus Garvey advocated the emerging Black consciousness and pride in the Caribbean manifested in his idea of a transnational pan-Africanism in the first decades of the twentieth century. During the 1960s and 1970s, Guyanese Walter Rodney, activist and Marxist scholar, was most influential in the Black power movement both intellectually and politically. Yet, it is especially due to the rise of Black Caribbean feminism and women's movement as well the focus on creolization in Caribbean cultural studies that the works and research by and about Indian women from the Caribbean are also emerging.

213 An earlier publication is Krishna Sarbadhikary's *Surviving the Fracture* (2007) which features the writing of several Caribbean writers of Indian descent in the diaspora in Canada such as Cyril Dabydeen, Neil Bissoondath, Ramabai Espinet, and Shani Mootoo; to the younger generation of diaspora writers belong, for instance, David Dabydeen, Neil Bissoondath, Kevin Baldeosingh, Arnold Itwaru, and Sasenarine Persaud (cf. Torres-Saillant 2013a: 328).

214 In a public lecture held in Heidelberg on the 5th December 2012, Brinda Mehta elaborated on the term "*kala pani* discursivity" in connection with the representa-

Diasporic (Dis)locations (2004) is one of the most extensive monographs on Indo-Caribbean women authors, paying attention to the construction and literary representation of Indianness and femininity, and has encouraged much academic work in the field of Indo-Caribbean literature. She locates the *kala pani* as a distinct Indo-Caribbean feminist discourse within postcolonial thought, literary studies, and transnational feminism. Such a theorizing, she argues,

advances our ability to interrogate the positioning of Indo-Caribbean female identity at several levels simultaneously – most notably, the relationships between patriarchal strictures in the homeland and in the diaspora, between domesticity and cultural or intellectual formation, between women's sexuality and Brahmanical moral codes or epics such as the *Ramayana*, and between Negritude, 'coolie-tude', creolization and douglarization. (Mehta 2004: 10)

Thus, her approach of the *kala pani* as a discursive space articulates feminist, interethnic solidarity as well as women's resistance to patriarchy, domesticity, and Afrocentric creolization. Of significance here is her understanding of a *kala pani* poetics.²¹⁵

The *kala pani* is a discourse of rupture that initiates transgressive boundary crossings through creative (self-)assertion in literary production. [...] [It is an] act of naming a culturally specific woman-centred Indo-Caribbean experience through the discursive claiming of literary and cultural space. (Mehta 2004: 4)

Kala pani is introduced not only as an alternative concept to creolization, but also as a more inclusive, transnational feminist framework to theorize diaspora literatures which brings into focus Indo-Caribbean women's writing, and aims to reach out to other communities of People of Color and the Indian diaspora globally (cf. Mehta 2004: 15-16).

Mehta suggests a "*kala pani* poetics [as] a gendered discourse of exilic beginnings that simultaneously reclaims and contests otherness by highlighting the traditional invisibility of female historical subjectivity in androcentric colonial and nationalist narratives" (24). Poetics, in Mehta's formulation, can indeed be understood as a fictional act of 'world making'; it may be less concerned

tion and identity politics of "Indo-Caribbean-ness" in Anglo- and Francophone Caribbean writing. The book-length study published in 2004 builds the ground-work of her thesis.

215 Mehta juggles with three concepts of the *kala pani* either referencing the discursive, theoretical dimension, the socio-cultural, or the literary level. These are: *kala pani* discursivity, *kala pani* hybridity, and *kala pani* poetics (cf. Mehta 2004, 2006).

with certain rules or principles of structure and form, however it references ways of representation and identity constructions. Her literary diaspora concept counters this invisibility as it focuses on women's agency and their lived experience of Indian indentureship on the one hand, and, on the other, the ethnic diversity and difference in the region. Adding to her definition, Puri's *dougl*a poetics, referred to above, "could provide a vocabulary for disallowed, delegitimized racial identities" and it may constitute a "rich symbolic resource for interracial unity" (Puri 2004: 220-221). It is an approach to ultimately recover the term *dougl*a from its pejorative meaning. Implying resistance, it subverts and transgresses fixed ethnic and gender inscriptions on a literary, aesthetic, or popular cultural level in that it focuses on the creative potential of the *dougl*a's 'in-between' position or liminality.²¹⁶ Although the term poetics itself may not be the most appropriate,²¹⁷ both the *kala pani* and *dougl*a poetics, in a strict feminist usage, focus on Indian women's history and their marginalization in the Caribbean. The concepts evoke bonds of solidarity based on a shared experience of migration and displacement (both voluntary and involuntary), which marks a frequent point of reference in Caribbean literary and cultural production. They foreground the visibility of the Indian female body and its supposed threat to Indian patriarchal and Creole nationalist narratives. Thus, both concepts, in a minority context, make visible subaltern lived experience understood as a means of empowerment.²¹⁸

However, the *kala pani* poetics neglects several aspects. In many instances it is a one-sided celebration of the prospects offered to women by indentureship as well as women's initial new found liberty in the Caribbean. That women dared to cross the 'black waters' because they sought liberation and escape from Hindu patriarchy may be correct, but it was also the period of famine that

216 As Kamala Kempadoo affirms from her own positionality, "'Dogla' becomes merely a vehicle for breaking open existing categories, a basis for resistance to hegemonic racist ideologies and practices, a relational as opposed to a fixed essential sense of self. From my place, it stands for a re-examination of categories of 'race', provides me with a basis for a multicultural perspective, and enables a connection with peoples of various cultural histories, as well as with the contemporary dynamic of cross-cultural fusions and international migrations" (Kempadoo 1999b: 109).

217 Here, too, the literary and artistic representations of interracial identities or inter-ethnic identification that Puri refers to are, I claim, the predominant motives in the respective works rather than a poetics in a narrow sense.

218 However, its scope is limited to a focus on the Trinidadian context and the mixing of African and Indian culture. It does not include experiences of migration and processes of transculturation in the diaspora situation, for instance, in North America. The implementation of the term has not been successful neither in theory nor in practice, certainly due to its negative connotation and assimilationist meaning.

drove them away. Furthermore, it is not all-inclusive of other ethnicities in the Caribbean as Mehta claims. We may question whether it is really transferrable to other contexts of migration and applicable to Indian experiences of indentureship in other countries such as Mauritius, Fiji, or South Africa, where there existed similar indentureship schemes but different colonial conditions and ethnic compositions. The proposition of it as an alternative concept to creolization to include both African and Indian cultures and ancestries poses the linguistic problem that Mehta, and Puri too, have actually been trying to solve in the first place. Just like creolization is usually interconnected with the history of slavery, the African presence in the Caribbean, the mixing of the black and white population, as well as cultural and socio-political practices of resistance, the Hindi origin of the terms *kala pani* and douglarization evoke notions of purity and impurity, loss of Indian homeland, and is inevitably linked to the Indian presence in the Caribbean. Finally, the rather strict heteronormative focus of the approach despite its feminist, emancipatory concerns does not offer a concrete space to address and theorize same-sex desire, homosexual or transgender identities. This becomes clear in one of the chapters of Mehta's publication, "Sexuality, Violence and the Female Body Erotic" (2004), and her discussion of Shani Mootoo's novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* where her focus is on the female character Mala and the violation inflicted on her by her father. Certainly, each study necessarily has a limited scope, but it is a shortcoming of her work not to discuss the queer and transgender aspects of the novel, as given in the characters Tyler and Otoh. Likewise, her study on Espinet's novel is ignorant of the fact that the protagonist's brother is homosexual (cf. Mehta 2006).

Moving beyond these limitations but remaining within Mehta's terminological choice, novels like Ramabai Espinet's *The Swinging Bridge* are part of what I refer to as the *kala pani* continuum –meaning 'a continuous body or thing' – which is "expressive of particular cultural and historical moments and [...] moments of transition [and disruptions]" (Khan 2007: 659). The concept's aim is to be a descriptive tool of a constant process of moving and arriving, as well as dynamic cultural, gender, and sexual identities conscious of a specific lived experience, but trying to avoid being overly essentialist or claiming universality. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines continuum as "a continuous series of elements passing into each other." These elements may resemble also different stages in individual and collective development. In this respect, the continuum interconnects with the generic form of the coming-of-age novel in its depiction of human transition into adulthood and bodily transformation. Thinking such a continuum in its spatial, temporal, and corporeal dimensions, the novel situates

female subjectivity in relation to certain socio-historical, cultural, geographic contexts of indentureship and migration. Hence, a further aspect of the concept is the continuing and repetitious sense of rupture and displacements caused by boundary or border crossings and journeys, entailing loss, alienation, and trauma; on the other hand, such an aesthetic reproduction of migration experiences create the possibility for a new start and reconnections. Regarding this as a unifying feature in diaspora writing (or an aspect of a diaspora poetics) it is reminiscent of Boyce Davies migratory subjectivities, as elaborated on in the introductory chapter. The *kala pani* continuum does not seek to be all-inclusive of myriad forms of diaspora identities or experiences in and outside of the Caribbean, but rather suggests a literary meeting point.

Furthermore, the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines continuum as “a range or series of things that are slightly different from each other and that exist between two different possibilities; a compact set which cannot be separated into two sets neither of which contains a limit point of the other.” In this regard and in terms of an imagined ethnic, cultural identification with India, Trinidad, or Canada, subject positions need to be regarded as fluid, the degree of identification (or identity performance) may shift, drifting sometimes more to the one end and, at other times, more to the other; this is the case with the protagonist Mona, who experiences “a prevailing sense of in-betweenity, of constantly negotiating what it means to be Caribbean [or Indo-Trinidadian for this matter] in another place, as well as constantly attempting to reshape the migrant space” (Page 2011a: 15). Taking into account social stratification – which in Trinidad is mostly based on ethnic belonging – and the simultaneous existence of inequalities, the *kala pani* continuum is conscious of the interdependent axes of societal factors such as race and hybridity, ethnicity and creolization, class, gender, religion, sexuality, and age. The continuum offers space of existence not just for female sexual agency, but, too, for myriad transgressions, queer bodies, and homosexuality, regarded, too, as boundary crossings and largely ignored in the approaches by Mehta and Puri. I prefer to think of hegemonic bodies, whose existence I cannot argue away, as placed within the continuum in relation to and co-existence with marginalized, non-hegemonic bodies, rather than in a hierarchy of power relations.

Reading the continuum along with diasporic Indo-Caribbean women's writing in general and with Ramabai Espinet's novel specifically, the *kala pani* continuum renders possible the literary construction of identities and a Trinidadian diaspora history that privileges Indian marginality. It includes migration from India, experiences of indentureship and dislocation, Indian cultural heritage, Indo-Trinidadianness, as well as twice migration to North America and

circular movements between the various geographical spaces – in *The Swinging Bridge* these are actual for Mona and imagined for her brother, Kello. As a typical feature of diaspora thinking, it does not describe a final arrival, limited to a one-way journey from India to the Caribbean, but also opens the possibility of multi-linear movements from the diaspora location in North America, for instance, to the Caribbean or even India. These experiences are reconstructed in the course of the novel, the *kala pani* continuum evokes “a multilocational diaspora Consciousness” (Solbiac 2013: 231). A repeated sense of dislocation and of being the “Asian *Other*,” to borrow from Mohammed (cf. 2009), in Trinidad is reproduced in Canada, thus the body continues to be centered in its ethnic dimension, which becomes apparent in particular in the characters Mona and Mackie Singh, her father. As will become clear in the following close reading of the novel, the *kala pani* continuum is mirrored both in the formal aesthetics of the text, as it draws a continuous moving (in-)between histories, geographies, and identities, as well as in its content, as the novel's title already suggests. These aspects are embodied in Mona, who describes herself as a “wandering nowarian self” and whose arrival may never actually be accomplished. A further question the continuum deals with is of how racial and ethnic prejudice and heterosexism, framed by constructed notions of Indianness, modernization, tradition, and creolization, fix the adolescent female body and the homosexual male body within a prescribed matrix of power.

Similar to Black women's or 'Third World' writing that emphasizes a political agenda of reclaiming agency, the literature by Indo-Caribbean women “privilege[s] first-person or female-centered narratives that point to a politics of self-representation as well as the urgency to explore discursive gaps and historical exclusions” (Mahabir/Pirbhai 2013: 5). Espinet's novel fits these paradigms by rewriting and reconstructing a colonial and postcolonial history via the adult-narrated coming-of-age genre. Notably, the coming-of-age narrative constitutes a popular form among these writers and their quests for identity, possibly because it mirrors their own subject formation and coming of age as independent women.²¹⁹

219 The protagonist's coming of age in Lakshmi Persaud's *Butterfly in the Wind* (1990) parallels a nation's coming into being. Persaud's *Daughters of Empire* (2012) is a family saga and collective novel that evokes the colonial ties between 'motherland' and the colonies. Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) and *He Drown She in the Sea* (2005) intertwine several coming-of-age plots. *Buxton Spice* (1998) by Oonya Kempadoo tells the coming-of-age story and sexual awakening of Lula, a Guyanese girl at the age of ten. Laure Moutoussamy's *Passerelle de vie* (2000) and Elizabeth Nunez' *Bruised Hibiscus* (2000) likewise offer a coming-of-age narrative. Joy Mahabir's *Jouvert* (2006) fits the genre of the diasporic coming-of-age narrative

5.2 *The Swinging Bridge*: Nomadic Bodies and Routed Existence

Set in Trinidad and Canada in the second half of the twentieth century, Ramabai Espinet's debut novel recounts retrospectively the coming of age of Mona Singh, a Trinidadian woman in her forties who lives in Montreal from where she sets out on a journey of self-discovery. The reader learns that she left Trinidad with her parents and her two younger siblings in 1970, moving from San Fernando to Toronto. The older brother Kello had already left the island several years earlier, after an irreconcilable dispute with his father, and moved to England. Mona, too, once in Toronto, leaves the parental home to study and become a film maker in Montreal.

The novel opens with a diary entry by the date of January 15, 1995: "I live in the eye of a storm. My whole life arches backwards and forwards according to the speed of the gust around me" (5). Here, the protagonist ponders on the confusion that characterizes her life, thereby evoking the title imagery of the swinging bridge. The plot reveals that Mona, who is now hiding in the metropolitan anonymity of Montreal and struggling with a documentary on Haitian migrant life in the city, is running away from her Indian-Caribbean Presbyterian upbringing in a respectable middle-class community in San Fernando after independence. Her adolescent life there is dominated not only by postcolonial ethnic relations but also by prescribed gender roles and her authoritative father, who is frustrated with Trinidad's Creole national politics and, driven by his contradictory perception of modernity, sells the family's property and moves his family to Canada. However, instead of the hoped-for economic uplift, what they encounter is disempowerment and marginalization as immigrants, similar to the discrimination against East Indians they experienced on the Caribbean island under the government of Dr. Hector James, who is reminiscent of then-Prime Minister Eric Williams.

A call from her mother (who informs Mona about Kello's illness) suddenly brings back unwanted memories (cf. 6). Mona relocates to Toronto, finds out about the truth of her brother's sickness, and, in what becomes a key scene of remembrance, starts to clear out the attic of her parents' home, where she finds letters, notebooks, and photographs. Now involuntarily and fragmentary closing in on her are a traumatic past of abuse and the awareness of her own vul-

and *kala pani* continuum in that it describes the journey of a woman from Trinidad to the U.S. and Canada. Andrea Gunraj's *The Sudden Disappearance of Seetha* (2009) is a family story that takes on the form of a multiple coming-of-age story.

nerability. When Kello's HIV-infection is at a final stage and his death immediate, he asks Mona to return to Trinidad and buy back the family's property in order to reclaim a stake in their natal land and a piece of their identity.²²⁰ This trip will unravel the family secrets of love and betrayal surrounding Mona's cousin Bess, her grandmother Lily, and her great-grandmother Gainer Beharry, who arrived from Calcutta in 1879 and who embodies the family's Indian heritage. This mission leads her to recollect the family's history of indenture-ship and migration, but also helps Mona to reconstruct the lives of the women in her family and eventually reconcile her with herself and her past.

The novel knits a complex web of different subplots and interweaves the voices of four generations (focusing on the family's female members), filtered by Mona's perception. All of the novel's three main parts begin with a prelude entitled "*Kala Pani*," highlighted in italic script, and frame and connect the different strands of the plot. Read together, the preludes narrate the life stories of both Mona's great-grandmother Gainer, her widowhood and solitary crossing of the dark waters, as well as her grandmother Lily, who was forced into marriage and publicly shamed for a forbidden love interest (cf. 261). Thus, *The Swinging Bridge* portrays the migratory subjectivity of Indian contract workers and the maternal lineage, or the roots and routes, of Indo-Caribbean existence along with conflicting images of womanhood that oscillate between Brahmanic morality, Christian or 'westernized' ideals, as well as Caribbean creole and respectable notions of femininity. The protagonist's narration reveals that the *kala pani* crossing the foremothers undertook continue to affect the following generations. The loss of reference points and a "trauma of dislocation" (Mehta 2006: 30) lead to psychological insecurities and an unstable psyche, as it can be observed in Mona and her nomadic self.

Of further significance is the novel's concern with memory and forms of commemorating a women-centered history of the Indo-Caribbean, on the one side, and of Caribbean immigrant life in Canada on the other. During Mona's visit in Trinidad, her cousin Bess curates an exhibition on the Indian cultural heritage in Trinidad for which the museum needs to be built and the exhibit items need to be collected in the first place. This project reveals two things: First, the absence of Indian culture from the collective memory, its not being part of Trinidadian culture, is unmistakably made clear. The absence of this site of remembrance seems symptomatic for a larger erasure of Indo-Caribbean

220 In the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean, landownership for the working-class Blacks and Asian indentured laborers signifies resistance to their disenfranchisement by the colonial authorities and the predominantly white or white-creole elite (for Trinidad, cf. Brereton 1979, 1981).

history. Second, although she is one of the initiators of the museum project, Bess' name is subsequently erased from the information sheet (cf. 301), which is emblematic for women's subordination in the public sphere and their exclusion from official, professional positions. In addition, the documentary *Mona* produces constitutes another medium to acknowledge and remember Caribbean women's place in society. The film documents immigrant life in Canada by showing the hardships of Haitian women in Montreal. *Mona* feels guilty about the removal of Cecile Fatiman, an important figure in the Haitian Revolution, from the script. This erasure, in turn, becomes a driving force for *Mona* to produce her own film on Gainder and close a gaping void, i.e. the absence of the single Indo-Caribbean woman, or the *rand*,²²¹ from the historical record. To fill this obvious gap becomes the driving force behind *Mona*'s own coming into being and attempt to make sense of her life.

Of the four selected novels, *The Swinging Bridge* probably interlinks most profoundly the process of coming of age with notions of diaspora identity (Hall) and migratory subjectivity (Boyce Davies). *Mona*'s father's striving for social mobility, modernization, and respectable mores, the Indian community's repudiation of creolization, as well as further alienation in Canada have a tremendous impact on *Mona*'s upbringing, her individuation, and self-perception. The first break in her individuation caused by displacement occurs at the age of seven. Before moving to the city of Fernando, *Mona* lives in a village in a rural area during the 1950s and 60s, a time she remembers fondly. "The night sky over Manahambre Road was clear for miles around. Nothing but the stars high above and the moon sailing cleanly over the celamen tree. [...] I was a happy child. I lived in this magical world until I was seven" (98). In this retrospective view, the world of her childhood becomes nostalgically idealized and is depict-

221 *Rand* is a Hindi word for widow but also used as "a term of abuse in addressing women, a slut" (864). Espinet takes issue with this outcast figure, her disempowerment, and the social stigmatization of emancipated women who are regarded as threat to the social order. *Mona* and her cousin discuss the gender politics behind a museum's exhibition displaying certain aspects of Indo-Trinidadian history while leaving others out. "[T]he grand picture is still what everybody wants. The righteous Indian family, intact, coming across the *kala pani* together. Like the way migration is presented today. Not this story. Not a journey of young widows looking for a new life. Wife-murder? Beatings? [...] The *rand*, casting her vivid shadow upon the face of indenture, obscured for more than one century, [...] own-way women who had tasted freedom and refused to bargain for less." Meanwhile the men, the *jahaji bhais*, the ship brothers, are "boiling with anger and shame at having to settle for other men's leavings, having to take for their wives *rands*" feeling forced to invent "new codes that would force women down in their knees, back into countless acts of self-immolation" (297). Mehta's reading (2006) offers a more in-depth discussion of this subject.

ed as a safe space. Whereas the urban environment is described in less enticing, less positive ways, the cleanness and clarity of village life stands out; but she is pulled out of her cocoon and moved to the city. With their ancestors' uprooting from India a century earlier, the family Singh's migration to Canada means a double displacement, leaving Mona disoriented and full of uncertainties which leads to her "emotional underdevelopment" (Morgan 2011: 226). The protagonist, comments on her perception of her uprooted family life which she links to Indian (diaspora) identity in the Caribbean:

If you happen to be born into an Indian family, an Indian family from the Caribbean, migratory, never certain of the terrain, that's how life falls down around you. It's close and thick and sheltering, its ugly and violent secrets locked inside the family walls. The outside encroaches, but the ramparts are strong, and once you leave it you have no shelter and no ready skills for finding a different one. I found that out after years of trying. (15)

What is striking here, is the contrast between the unsteadiness and uncertainty that Mona describes as characteristic for the Indo-Caribbean lived experience and the 'groundedness' as well as the seeming stability and security provided by the family and indicated by the walls and ramparts.

The protagonist's development – in the quote above, Mona refers to her coming-of-age as a learning process during the "years of trying" – is exemplary for the Indo-Trinidadian history of the *kala pani*, the crossing from India to the Caribbean, that Mona continues in her nomadic journeys between Canada and Trinidad but also through imaginary – through the history of her ancestors – India. Especially through the character Mona, the novel takes issue with the narrative representation of an unstable sense of self or, in more positive terms, of an identity in flux. While the constant movement and circularity evoked by the narrative pattern are implicit of this fluidity, the protagonist herself is quite explicit about her sentiment of restlessness and the desire to roam around. As a child, she and her cousin invent a game that they call the "nowarian game" (152). Mona plays the role of the traveler, a "road-weary wanderer" looking for a room for the night, moving on the following day. The idea of "becoming a nowarian" (ibid.), the up-rooted body being at home nowhere, that Mona has even as an adult emphasizes routes as subjective reference point but also indicates a nomadic life style. The idea of nomadism in the Caribbean context can be found in Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*. In reference to Deleuze and Guattari, who "extol nomadism, which supposedly liberates Being, in contrast, perhaps, to a settled way of life, with its law based upon the intolerant root" (Glissant 2010: 11), Glissant then asks if "[r]ather than the enjoyment of freedom, is no-

madism not a form of obedience to contingencies that are restrictive [...] driven by some specific need to move” (ibid.: 12). What is of significance is the obvious urge of the Caribbean subject to remain in movement (swinging) which does not seem to happen by choice but by circumstance and external force.

The title imagery of the swinging bridge serves several functions and is referred to in various instances throughout the novel. It is a metaphor for the different poles, two ends of a continuum. Mona, who repeatedly describes herself as the wanderer, shifts or swings between these ends, even worlds as the following quote indicates. Here, the bridge furthermore serves as a connecting element: “Underneath the mask of everyday life lies the swirling sea of memory and desire, of dreams and mythmaking. In the separation of these two worlds we perish. The bridge between them arches high above a raging river, held in place by silken ropes, ropes strong as gossamer” (304). If water defines Caribbean identity still today, the symbolism of water, especially in the “sea of memory,” evokes the transatlantic crossing during slavery, the dark waters during indentureship, as, for instance, in *kala pani*, but also contemporary migration. The sea not only bears witness to but also archives a history of displacement and relocation – not least because of the drowned, sunken bodies on the grounds of the Black Atlantic (cf. Shields 2014: 24-28).

5.3 Dirty Skirts: Adolescence, Female Honor, and Respectability

The Swinging Bridge illustrates how social and community structures along with gender and ethnic inscriptions establish normative codes of shame and honour and constrain the protagonist’s subject formation. When Mona visits her brother in the hospice, she muses about her life and the passivity she always and unwantedly finds herself in:

I was never free to do what I really wanted. Something always got in my way, somebody else’s agenda, some course of action that had to be taken, some call of duty. [...] ‘But you are free, Mona. You can do anything you want to. Just do it [...].’ I said nothing, thinking about how I had always insisted on my freedom to do whatever I chose and had ended up doing so little. What was my explanation? What was the hidden obstacle that I simply could not get beyond? (200-201)

The conversation between Mona and Kello discloses the dimension of her inner conflict and insecurities. It also reveals the extent to which the wish for liberation and self-fulfilment stands in contradiction to outside forces or social demands. The hidden obstacles Mona mentions refer to the incompatibility of the interior and exterior reality on the one hand,²²² but also (and again) hint at the concealed stories of her foremothers.

In this context, the image of the swinging bridge is further symbolically charged referring to the limitations imposed on girls.²²³ When Mona as a young girl visits her cousin Sonia during her school holidays, they may experience "incomparable freedom" (85), the advice, "Roam freely but remember not to go further than the swingbridge" (85), given to Mona by her aunt, however, is a warning sign. Auntie Alice indeed alerts about the torrential river, but the bridge in this instance also marks the boundaries of the subjective space of movement along gendered codes of conduct. The swinging bridge itself stands in for Mona's own unsteady path over what she perceives to be the abyss of domestic, married life and respectability, into which she under no circumstance wishes to fall ("The one thing I did not want was domestic life" (39)). Treading on it can be dangerous, because she can 'fall from' or 'into' expected behavior. That Mona does go further across the bridge to rebel against gender conformity and to prove herself is shown in the challenge to cross the bridge she is put to by a boy from the area, who is "keen to put [her] in [her] place" (85-86) – the place of a "country girl" (85). Although the boys swing the bridge with vehemence, she manages to traverse from one end to the other. Yet, she never gets the chance for revenge or to enjoy her victory and is left with her rage about "his little manish attitude, as if he was sure that he was better than I was and would always be" (87). At an early age, Mona develops a feminist understanding of what she experiences as unfair treatment of women and girls. She constantly questions the social constructions of gender and propriety that assign women to domesticity, "early marriage and a life bound to a washtub, scrubbing dirty clothes and smelly diapers" (135). The wish to assert control over her own life, the refusal to be caught within the "eternal domestic trappings" (181), on the one side, and, on the other, her confusion caused by the need to fit in enrages her but also freezes her to passive immobility.

222 See Hurrelmann's definition on socialization to which I refer in chapter 2 (cf. Hurrelmann 2002).

223 In another instance, the movement of swinging is synonymous with liberation and escape: "Careless is being on the swing at school, [...] flying free of all the little rules and laws that entrap. Swinging at the top of the world, past the treetops; swinging and never falling" (137).

One day, Mona experiences a situation of complete helplessness and exposure. Her mother sends her to town with the warning not to talk to strangers and to beware of taxi drivers. In front of the shop an “ordinary working man” (42) comes up and speaks to her pretending he owes Mona’s mother money which he presumably needs to retrieve from his home first. Mona follows him to a taxi. They stop at an open field, he grabs her arm and tries to wrench her to the coppice of a cocoa tree with the intention to rape her.

I stood still. More cars passed but none stopped. A bullying red-eyed man, probably the girl’s father or uncle, was trying to make her do something. The girl’s legs were curved inwards at the knees, a sign of her unwillingness. Something in the scene must have seemed odd to the Muslim man who had craned his head around for a second look. (44; emphasis added)

It is in this instance that the narrative switches from first to third person narration and the mode of focalization uses a camera perspective, depicting the scene as an eye witnesses may have observed it. Mona, too, becomes witness to her own violation. The young man only stares, so does a maid who steps out of a house nearby. In retrospect, the adult Mona directs the focus of the reader: “The eye of the world was on that scene” (44), like the lens of a camera through which she as a researcher and document film maker would also look. This further manifests itself in the way she describes sequences of the past in her personal account: “A montage of images [...] bisects my life at odd moments. Sometimes the memories slough off all colour and become precise black-and-white shots” (102). In order to increase the accuracy and validity of her memories, to translate these images into coherent text, she adds specific dates, historical facts, letters, and diary entries to the narrative. This, in turn, bridges the multiple points on the continuum and adds to a perceived ‘authentic’ historical script. At a first reading, this kind of stage direction seems slightly over-determined to make sure the intentional twist in the narrative technique does not go unnoticed. Yet, for Mona, due to her profession, it seems only natural to record incidents that way, it helps her to memorize precisely what should not be forgotten, it strengthens her position as a reliable narrator. The distance the adult Mona creates to her young self and the violent experience is a strategy of self-protection. Implied here, furthermore, is a critique of the cowardice of bystanders who remain passive in the face of the girl’s immediate danger, a position which readers are made complicit with due to the voyeuristic gaze of the camera.

Mona returns home late and recounts the details of what has happened. Her mother is worried, but instead of consoling her, she shakes and scolds her,

afraid of that her daughter has been touched and soiled by the man. "It too disgraceful. [...] Nobody will believe you didn't go with that man under that bush. [...] You is such a fool" (46). That she seems to be more concerned about the family's reputation and of what people will think, telling her daughter to keep quiet about the incident, discloses a double standard and the sexual vulnerability of girls. The family, too, fails to offer a safe space and protection for the adolescent girl. The silence enforced on Mona's experience and the fact that Mona's mother needs to lie to her husband about it, because "nobody in our family ever said anything about anything" (38), shows the hypocrisy not only among the Singhs but in the Indo-Trinidadian middle-class community. This hypocrisy, interlinked with gender relations and body control, is framed by notions of respectability against which Mona and her friends are going to rebel when they found the "Dirty Skirts Club" (141).

In the previous chapter, I already discussed the intersection of intimacy, homosexuality, and respectability in Jamaican communities. In the Anglophone Caribbean, respectability as a socio-cultural script of behavior includes education, social mobility, thrift, religion (meaning Christianity), marriage, and family commitment, and is directed at a heterosexually normed middle-class culture, which corresponds to the ways the novel reconstructs respectable social identity. What respectability means and entails in the Trinidadian context is important here. Especially since the late nineteenth century, Trinidad's society was divided along ethno-racial lines but also into those who were respectable and those who were not (cf. Brereton 1979: 211). Respectability was essentially modelled after European culture and life style. Whereas white (meaning European) and lighter-skinned persons were regarded as more respectable on the basis of their skin color, "[w]ith non-whites, on the other hand, and notably with blacks and East Indians, the onus was on them to prove their respectability [...] by their education, attainments, occupation, and style of life" (Brereton 1979: 211). Accordingly, the value complex has been selective, excluding Black urban, working-class and poor Indian working-class culture. Hinduism, in addition, practiced especially in the more rural areas, was seen as backward, whereas the modern, progressive life style in the city was desirable. Among the growing Indian middle-class, respectability was widely propagated by Presbyterian churches and schools. Creolization was regarded as a threat by Indian families, because it allegedly entailed miscegenation and moral degeneration especially of the girls. Sexual and moral double standards were widely accepted placing women at a disadvantage in terms of a gendered, raced, and classed morality. Moreover, as Gabrielle Hosein argues, "[j]udgments about masculinity among males relied on control of female sexuality. Thus, from childhood,

Indo-Trinidadian girls' bodies and desires were implicated in an explicitly gendered framework of individual respectability and reputation, and community honour and shame" (Hosein 2012: 4). A discussion on respectable performances of gender as well as notions of citizenship and family structures inevitably foregrounds the female body and sexuality.

In order to acquire a respectable status as an Indian family in Trinidad, one possibility is to obtain a 'proper' education. Since the Singhs belong to the lower middle-class, living now in the prospering urban center of San Fernando, this is easier than if they were of working-class status. Mona, like all the women in her family, spends her high school years at La Pastora, a Presbyterian girls' school in San Fernando. This is the time of her formative years, when Mona is supposed to be educated in appropriate feminine behavior. The school enforces a certain standard of education along with a desired ideal of appropriate femininity among its pupils: "Good women were trained to serve; even our school motto reinforced this" (143). Girls who want to become respectable young ladies need to display propriety, act according to certain gender roles, and follow a strict code of morality and sexual behavior.²²⁴ Mona remembers "what false steps not to make because you could lose everything, thinking how not to shame everybody [...]. Tiptoeing through life, frightened, following rules and laws that hold down your skirt, your hair, your mind" (137). The strictness of the school's education is mirrored in the disciplining measures of the body. Thus, the girls are taught to walk straight adopting an "erect posture" which, however, "must look natural" (165). The upright body posture is underlined by the rule to wear a school uniform, which Mona describes as uncomfortable (cf. 136). "They were made of navy blue woolen serge straight from the mills of England" (141). The British-styled school uniforms make obvious the persistence of the colonial influence on Trinidad's education system and the continuing authority of the British Empire over the former colony. It may also be read as an imperial 'containment' of the body.

At the same time, the years Mona spends at La Pastora are also the period of her youthful rebellion, well aware that "[o]ne false move could cost everything – my whole life. No time for carelessness, for slackness [...], doing the thing" (139). Placed under scrutiny, the adolescent female body is cause for worry and becomes a source of anxiety; sexuality apparently needs to be con-

224 Mona finds a parallel to her grandmother's life, her confinement and rebellion. "Lily, my Grandma Lil, yearning to rise over rooftops and kitchens and dirty wash-tubs, rising in rebellion against the marriage they would make for her [...], rising to meet a desire no one before or since would ever know, desire for a boy with no world to live in" (261).

trolled. To counteract this confinement and the surveillance, Mona and a few of her schoolmates found a bond of sisterhood, the "Dirty Skirts Club" – a direct reference to the constraining uniform. "How precarious our lives were – Rossanna, Susie, and the other Dirty Skirts, brave and bold, wanting it all, recklessly inventing our own world. It wasn't so long ago that they would have married us off before we reached the age of danger" (146). In this quote, in the change from narrating I to a collective us, Mona shifts the focus away from singular subjectivity to a unifying childhood experience of the girls. Reputation and respectability (which apparently can only be achieved in marital unions), shame and honor are regulating forces which have a strong impact on women's embodied being and sexual expression, especially of Indian girls in Trinidad as the novel emphasizes later on.

The "Dirty Skirts Club" creates a space of personal empowerment and agency where a group of pubescent girls are free to discuss issues pertaining to their sexually maturing bodies. The girls meet outside of their home, but within the confinements of their school, talking after lunch about romance and other "Hot Things" (142). In contrast, the explanations regarding their bodies and sexuality offered "in a clinical way" (140) by their mothers are seen as useless information ("A map of the body's inside organs could not tell us how to find our way through the minefield" (141)). A comparison of such spaces of sexual and self-discovery in the four novels under consideration here reveals how important these spaces outside of home are for the adolescent girls' sexual initiation. Among their peers they are able to develop a more wholesome sexuality. For Molly it is the tree house in which she and her friend Petal hide for their first erotic encounter; for Soledad it is the rooftop of her family home which constitutes a liberating surrounding to meet with her lover. Both spaces offer a perspective from elevated positions. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the protagonist Sophie, in contrast, has none of this, which is only one of the reasons for her conflicting relation to her body.

The attempted resistance enacted by Mona and her friends is directed "against the politics of respectability and the rigid policing of their bodies" (Hamilton 2013: 76). The rigidity manifests itself in the school uniform the girls are supposed to wear. They decide to show their protest against the daily inspection of their attire by soiling their skirts, also in opposition to the "neater girls [whose] skirts remained *immaculate* all day long" (141; emphasis added) – the adjective may be read as a reference to the Immaculate Conception to accentuate the religiosity and purity promoted by the school. The dirty skirt implies a symbolic soiling of womanhood and rejection of domestic life. No matter how hard the girls try to soil and knitter their skirts, they would not show

any stains, any sign of their rebellion; “these were not ordinary skirts and they stood up to our punishment without flinching” (141). De Ferrari, who underlines the inseparability of skin, clothing, and identity, contends that “dirt may not just ruin someone’s clothes, but ruin an image of the self as well” (112). Cleanliness, in contrast, as a marker of class identity, is a sign for decency and respectability; it goes with the requirement to look representable at any time. However, the “guerilla efforts” (142) the girls undertake on their skirts to overthrow a gender system that renders them powerless and to protest against the rigid rules that define womanhood are not rewarded with success.

The novel makes clear that respectability not only is negotiated along the lines of gender and sexuality but also intersects with ethnicity and racist prejudices. The discrimination Mona and her ‘Dirty Skirt friends’ experience because of their ethnic, meaning Indian, background takes place within the confinements of the school and its promotion of a respectable body politics. Their teacher catches the girls reading secretly U.S.-American love comics – a kind of “slackness” that supposedly “is not for girls like [Mona]” (143). Miss Camilla Lee, the young and “very religious” form teacher, who is described as “a ‘red’ girl of mixed African/Chinese ancestry” (143), lectures and reports the girls. She exposes them in front of the class, all of them “were Indian” (144). Looking back on this incident, the protagonist finds an explanation for her teacher’s reaction ascribing it to the prejudices against the East Indian population which clearly intersect with the social factor of gender.

I realized later [...] that racial differences probably led Miss Lee to view our behaviour as predictable and deplorable. There was talk how Indian girls were hot hot from small—no wonder they had to marry them off as children, and no wonder wife beating and chopping was so common among those people. They were not civilized or ‘creolized’ enough. They did not reach the approved standard of proper Trinidad society. We were hot coolie girls [sic.] who had to be brought in line. (144-145)

Despite the national credo, “all ah we is one” (144) that the school has also adopted and which apparently advocates unity and sameness but covers up the existence of inequalities based on difference, racist stereotypes are firmly in place and continue to define ethnic and personal relations. The quoted passage takes up an orientalist motif that depicts the Indian woman either as chaste, submissive or as ‘hot’ and voluptuous.²²⁵ This hegemonic discourse as a form of cultural imperialism constructs the (colonized) Indian body as an abject other.

225 This motif is a commonality in European travel literature on India of the 18th and 19th centuries especially in the context of *sati*, the funeral ritual of widow-burning.

Not only “hot hot” Mona also evokes the image of the ‘fallen woman.’ Tellingly, her parents name her after their favorite U.S.-American song “Ramona.” While this may seem like an affectionate gesture at first, Mona clarifies that the song, in fact, “told the sentimental tale of an American Indian girl’s seduction. Fancy naming me after this girl, destroyed and abandoned!” (29). One may ask whether the precarious, marginalized status of the indigenous population in the U.S. to which Ramona’s American Indian identity alludes to is meant as a parallel to the likewise precarious situation of the Indian population as ethnic minority and, likewise, Mona’s unbelonging.

While respectability is a way to achieve social standing and a certain degree of self-realization and power in the postcolonial society of Trinidad, such a socio-cultural division into those who are respectable and those who are not, however, does not leave much room for alternative forms of self-expression and bodily self-control. A body politics based on such a differentiation renders adolescent girls more vulnerable to judgmental looks. For the girls, their dirty skirts seem to be a possibility to enact a gendered form of resistance against sexual control. But, in addition to the rigidity of the school, Mona receives further disciplining from her father, which negatively influences her emergence as a self-confident woman. Thus, it takes her years to find out that it is “okay to be like me too, the young Mona, her tough hairy forearms ready for anything” (147).

The disciplining measures Mona is put to and that perpetuate patriarchal dominance are recounted in three ‘scenes of subjection.’ Francis analyses the ‘scenes of subjection’ in Danticat’s novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, adopting this conceptual framework from Saidiya Hartman “to mark incidents in the novel where a woman’s body is subjected to violence – whether it is sexual, physical or psychological assaults” (Francis 2004: 77). These scenes in Espinet’s novel are framed or connected not by a skirt but a short, ‘unruly’ dress that functions as symbol of indecency and a double standard. For the annual school bazaar, Mona’s aunt sews a “nice cool dress for a nice cool girl of sixteen” (170), which especially her father considers as dirty and overly sexual due to its inappropriate shortness. The dress underlines the need to look presentable and, like the skirts the girls are supposed to wear at La Pastora, should indicate propriety and respectability. “The bazaar was a fashion parade for old and young, and schoolboys and young men gathered to gape and admire” (171). The bazaar transforms into a fashion show in the context of which the female body is exposed to the gaze of male spectators. Mona’s wearing the short dress against

See also chapter 3 where I elaborate briefly on Mohanty’s criticism of the Western construction of the “Third World woman.”

the will of her father is an attempt of resistance to that gaze and the patriarchal control of her body, expressing, too, her desire to break out of the stronghold of women's sexuality. The punishment she later has to endure for her transgression leads her to make the decision to leave home, just like her brother Kello did before. Mona refuses to embody the stereotype of the submissive, passive victim.

The day when the bazaar is taking place, no one in the family wants to go, so Mona is allowed to attend by herself, proudly wearing her new dress. Her mother, again, strictly advises her to take only a taxi with other passengers inside. On the way back, Mona takes the seat in the front, and as the driver is complaining about the degenerated state of Indian girlhood, girls' alleged preference for "Creole boy" and their wanton display of sexuality, she receives his harsh looks: "Nowadays all de girls going in for Creole boy. Watch dem nuh, in dey tight tight skirt and tight pants, looking for Creole boy. Indian boy eh good enough for dem. Indian boy go see real trouble [...]" (172). The driver reproaches Mona, who in this instance takes on the "gendered burden of shame" (Hosein 2012: 10). This shame pertains to the sexual female body, but is furthermore juxtaposed with racialized notions of (Indian) masculinity and male sexuality. The other passengers seem to agree with him that it is Indian boys who suffer from rejection and emasculation by a virile Creole sexuality. Meanwhile, Mona's discomfort increases and "while he raged against the fallen state of young Indian girls and the resulting deprivation of Indian boys, I felt almost naked in the shift dress. My bare legs were exposed; I wished now that I had not shaved them" (172). Exposed to the insults by the strangers, she feels naked and unprotected. Her shaved legs, perceived as tantalizing, indicate vulnerability standing in stark contrast to an earlier scene in which body hair means confidence and toughness. Mona finds a photograph of her younger self "show[ing] a thick layer of hair on her arms [...]. Those hairs must have fallen off over time. When did my rough, tough hairiness disappear? I felt a pang of regret as I looked at the steady arms of that young girl, so sure of herself, so different from the older woman" (133). The removal of hair is a cultural practice to gender the feminine body as different to the male. This inscription turns the once tough, steady into a shameful, docile pubescent body.

Another experience, which further inscribes Mona's body as a sexualized entity, is a family trip to the beach. On their way, they stop for refreshments at a bar whose owner, as Mona cannot help but notice, does not stop to stare at her in her dress. Da-Da who also takes note of this, imbued with reproach, turns to her and yells, "[g]et in de car and stay there, you little bitch. Flaunting yuhself up and down looking for man. All yuh lil girl so damn ting with all

yuhself. Stay dey and keep yuh lil tail quiet" (174). Calling Mona the "lil girl", is a denial of agency and strategy of belittlement by her father. Although just "lil," she is nevertheless objectified as a female-bodied person and doomed to silence. Instead of rebuking him for his behavior, the blame is projected on to her, the victim, for attracting the lustful, voyeuristic gaze of the shopkeeper with her appearance. Consequently, overcome by "a deep wave of shame, remembering how the shopman had looked at [her]" (174-175), she feels guilty, uncomfortable in her own body which for her is unnaturally sexualized. The girl's body is loaded with guilt and she further internalizes an inferiority complex based on gendered, sexualized, and racialized inscriptions on and of her body.

The conflict between Mona and her father culminates at the point when he finds out that his daughter is dating Bree, a "red boy, an obvious mixture of African and other races" (182). This reveals Da-Da's own racist attitude as the reason for his strictness, rather than the worry for his daughter "to get on the wrong track" (209), as he pretends. It escalates when Father Singh returns home drunk, finding Mona once more "in that ho dress" (178), which according to him arouses sexual desire in other men. He insults and slaps her and makes her take off the dress to burn it. The image of the dress captures her rebellion against patriarchal expectations of female adolescence and control of the body and sexuality; his burning of it the attempt of reclamation of lost power. As a form of bodily punishment, she is forced to kneel on the gravel in the yard until the blood runs down her legs, the blazing afternoon sun hot on her. Mona is publicly shamed for transgressing respectable codes of adolescent sexual behavior. Adding to this, the ethnic tension within Trinidadian society connected to the fear of 'douglarization' (meaning racial 'contamination') is staged upon her body. While Mona is on her knees she is being watched by "a big-mouth boy [who] shout[s], 'Ay, girl! Whey you do? You take man or what?'" (180). This expression clearly shows that Mona's adolescent body is perceived as an available object and it is this accessibility which renders her body even more vulnerable to the male gaze.

The concept of respectability is opposed to slackness as another performance of gender juxtaposed with a racialized ethnic identity. Earlier, Mona's thoughts ramble about "what fathers or brothers or uncles would do if they caught wayward girls in slackness. When I thought back to those times, it seemed obvious that other girls – black, Chinese, mixed, the few white girls in the school – did not live with the same threats" (138-139). Here the novel is clear about the constraints put on Indian Caribbean femininity and girlhood. Da-Da defends himself: "if we didn't take sufficient care, she would run wild,

she would turn into some slack woman, drinking in clubs, smoking cigarettes, and hugging up all kinda man” (206). This is where the contradictions lie. Modern, urban life is associated with lower class slackness corrupting the individual. Young Indian women in particular are in need of safe-guarding, no matter how brutal and degrading the methods. Da-Da regards it as his duty to protect his daughter’s virtue and chastity, a protection which he enacts violently (on Mona’s body). The strict policing of women has a historical continuity (seen, e.g., in Mona’s punishment on the gravel yard, a disturbing reminder of the treatment enslaved persons received during slavery, cf. 206) and may also be attributed to the more independent lifestyle some women from India were able to lead in the early periods of indentureship. To regain control over women and female sexuality, patriarchal authority among the Indian community needed to be re-established; women’s emancipation from this regained authority is considered unruly comportment. This becomes apparent in a scene much later in Mona’s adult life when she joins her cousin Bess at a committee meeting of the Indian Heritage Museum. Here, she overhears a conversation among a group of men, members of the committee who complain about Bess’ active participation in the organizing procedure but refusal to provide the food:

‘If woman is trouble! All ah them feel they too damn great now [...]. Getting vex because we ask them to do the Indian delicacies. Since when Indian woman can’t cook, eh? [...] A real tempest in a teapot, if yuh ask me.’ [...] ‘Long time I telling allyuh that girl is trouble [...], what kinda example she is for Indian girls, eh? She ain’t no Sita, let me tell you.’ (283-4)

The quote evokes the ‘Ram-and-Sita-paradigm,’ meaning Brahmanic prescriptions and expectation of gender roles (especially womanhood) and morality. That ‘modern’ Trinidadian women do no longer fit the image of the Sita fuels the fear among Indo-Caribbean men (referred to as “backward” by Bess [cf. 285]) of losing patriarchal control in the diaspora against the background of modernization.

The perception of modernity Da-Da seeks in the city may entail progress and social mobility, political power and the rightful claim of participation of Indian Trinidadians in the nation building process, but it is apparent that this is a male dominated public sphere. At the same time, Mona feels newly imposed limitations and observes a more violent treatment of girls by their family. “For Indians, life in Trinidad at that time was a mess of contradictions. [...] Perhaps our parents were convinced that in this newer, freer world, with new rules being invented overnight, safeguarding their daughters’ honour had become much more complicated” (187). Progress and social change does not necessarily

entail liberty and independence for women. Women's emancipation is regarded as a threat to the normative gender order and made responsible for Indian Trinidadian men's loss of control. Their women are supposed to embody the faithful Sita and be the "guardian of Indian culture via [ther] body and [their] morality" (Hosein/Outar 2012: 1), or be a respectable wife to embody Christian values.

For Mona, to unravel her memories is important in the exploration of herself and coming of age. She reconstruct her family's matrilineal history through her great-grandmother's songs²²⁶: "These songs were my bounty, swinging open a doorway into another world, returning across the *kala pani* to the India the girl Gainer had left, alone. They told a tale of love and loss, distance, journeying, hope, hardship piled upon hardship, and, in the end, the triumph of fidelity" (293). It is this journey across the black waters to India Mona needs to make, crossing the threshold into the other world that is so much part of her identity and helps her to be "alive again" (277). Whereas both Lily and Gainer are forced into married life, Mona succeeds in breaking out of marital confinement by never attaching herself to a partner. According to the norms of Indian Trinidadian femininity she has been socialized into, she does not reach 'true' womanhood; in her very own feminist ideal of a woman's liberty, however, she actually does, which makes her coming of age in a feminist sense a successful one. Mona, "the family rebel" (52), transgresses ethnic, gender, and generational boundaries. Her relationship with Bree, for example, crosses the respectable codes of Indian girlhood and racial purity, and feeds into the ambivalence of national cultural politics that officially celebrates "a Creole bacchanal, multiracial, multicultural" (67), but at the same time keeps the dominant groups through a discourse of 'othering' apart. Mona's refusal to integrate, adapt, and conform – her soiling of her skirt – thus functions as a counter-narrative not only to Christian moral values and traditional Hindu understandings of appropriate gender performances embodied by Ram and Sita in the *Ramayana* script,

226 Espinet's novel "chronicles the multiple exiles that are part of the Indian experience in the Caribbean and North America" (Mehta 2006: 20). Reconstructing a female genealogy, the novel lends precedence to the lives of the family's women, "commemorate[ing] the maternal roots and routes of Indo-Caribbean history" (ibid.). The songs Gainer sang, and which Mona retrieves, are archival sources. "[T]hey sang the words of love and loss, they sang moral tales and stories of surviving their new life. Gainer sang these songs and Grandma Lil hid them for safe-keeping in the back of her shop books. Lily recorded them for her daughters, for my cousin Bess, for my sister Babsie, for me, for all the women to come, for my film that would tell Gainer's story" (198).

but also to a harmonious integration into the social, normative order prescribed by a teleological *Bildungsweg*.

5.4 The Dougla Body and Representations of Racialized Identities

The real problem is how we fit into life here. You know people talk about Trinidadian culture and another culture called Indian culture? So Trinidadian culture don't have place for Indians too? And you know, is not only the prejudice against Indians by Creole people and white people and red people and Chinese people I talking about. Is the way Indians hate their own background. People like our family, Presbyterian people and middle-class people, they hate the history that marks them as coolies [sic]. (Espinet 2003: 285)

The previous sections have focused on adolescence, intersecting gender roles and conventions, as well as sexuality and ethnicity. Coming of age and processes of identity formation in Trinidad are negotiated amongst others through ethnic belonging as well as practices and mechanisms of exclusion. While critically reflecting on this process, the novel refers to a concrete postcolonial setting of nation building, creole politics, and the definition of a cultural identity. Thereby, the novel juxtaposes body politics and those formative processes that are constitutive of the coming-of-age genre and which pertain to the subject (or subjectivity) and to culture, the nation state, or society alike. Espinet explicitly addresses the problematic situation of a postcolonial, racially stratified society locked in ethnic conflict, a result of colonial rule that has established socio-political structures of inequality, fostered by a political elite that has not yet succeeded to integrate all groups equally within the nation's cultural identity and condition of *créolité* after official independence. It is furthermore revealed in how far Indian culture and the *dougla* body have been subjected to processes of 'othering' which has led to self-denial among parts of the Indo-Trinidadian population.

The novel describes in several instances the negative perception of (East) Indian culture in Trinidadian society – the denial among the Indo-Caribbean population itself and their discrimination by the white, black, or Afro-creole population. At the age of eleven, Mona is determined “to leave Trinidad for somewhere better” (40), possibly England or North America but not India. For

the young protagonist, India, "a place [her] ancestors had left more than a century ago" (40), is a nebulous fantasy and imagined space of backwardness and poverty (cf. *ibid.*).²²⁷ Her determination to leave discloses a migratory desire for upward mobility and economic advancement that migrants from the Caribbean hope to experience in the metropolitan centers in the North.²²⁸ More importantly, however, her remark – "I was glad they [her ancestors] had left [India]" (40) – reveals her initial rejection of her ancestral roots and ignorance of her family's history, instigated in part by the Canadian Presbyterian mission,²²⁹ imperial dominance, and a general neglect of Indian culture among the Indo-Caribbean communities after indentureship. During her quest for selfhood, however, Mona also sets out to unlearn her prejudices against 'Indianness' and will discover that part to be valuable for her identity. The novel thus unfolds a discourse of discrimination aiming to deconstruct related stereotypes – which is associated with the pedagogical purpose of this work of fiction.

In the course of the missionary work of the Presbyterian Church, many of the Indian, mostly Hindu, population of indentured laborers have converted to Christianity. The willingness to convert and adapt to western standards may also be due to the racial discrimination and stigmatization of Indian culture as backward, foreign, and exotic. A conversation between Mona and Kello reveals the hardship, unfair treatment, and racism their grandparents suffered from. "Pappy had lost his job in the sugar factory. [...] He was fired because he cussed up a young white overseer. The man horked and spat near Pappy's foot and called him a stupid bong coolie [sic.]. For nothing, just because he was white and could do it" (58).²³⁰ In relegating Mona's and Kello's grandfather to a sub-

227 She shares this view with her father who, in a letter to a Trinidadian newspaper in 1964, explains how his ancestors had left India, a country which he describes as "a backward system of arranged marriage and suttee [widow burning]" (74).

228 I should mention that this short episode, in which her desire to escape and thoughts of fantastical getaways (cf. 40) are revealed, is placed right after the scene in which Mona's uncle sexually molests her mother (and later Mona, too) and right before the rape scene with the taxi driver I described above. Mona wants to flee from sexual violence. That way, it is indicated that bodily integrity and sexuality, too, are factors related to the desire of migration.

229 "From the mid-19th century, the Canadian Presbyterians, whilst still colonists ruled by Britain, had started a campaign aimed at converting the 'heathen' population wherever these could be found. [...] In 1868 they despatched [sic.] the Nova Scotian John Morton to Trinidad" (Samaroo 2009: 31). The missionary work's aim was not only a religious one of conversion but also to create nuclear family structures based on a European model.

230 At the age of five, Mona is confronted with the racism against Indians and made aware of her alleged difference when she is called out by some girls as "coolie." Her reaction to this illustrates her own incorporated prejudice against Indianness: "Until

ordinate position and using the racist, pejorative ‘c-word,’ the overseer marks Indian subjectivity as inferior to white superiority. The narrative continues to reveal Trinidadian Creole society as a hostile place for “early Indians like our own grandparents, ignorant in the ways of the Creole culture, [who] needed to work out a means of survival in the face of so much hostility” (59). Finding themselves in an ambivalent position within the colonial, social make-up of Trinidad, conversion and membership of the Presbyterian community, thus, maybe perceived as a strategy to survive and belong, but goes along with the detachment from foundational roots, which, as a consequence, leads to “psychological alienation” (Mehta 2006: 28) and disavowal of the Indian heritage. The name change of Mona’s grandfather from Ganga Singh to Stephen, his “Christian name” (63) under which everyone in the town apparently knows him, serves as an example but seems rather symptomatic for the transformation and adaptation and possible loss of cultural, ethnic identity.

The denial of Hindu belief as part of (the own) Indian culture in Trinidad as well as juridical strategies of exclusion and othering by the majority society manifest themselves in the legal status of Hindu weddings and the general social perception of the ritual ceremony. While cleaning up the attic, Mona finds her grandfather’s letters, one of them sent from his first wife, Etwaria the ‘bamboo wife’ who is never mentioned in the family. The reason for this is immediately disclosed by the narrator’s explanation:

the marriage was a Hindu ceremony conducted “under bamboo,” in the bamboo and tarpaulin tents that Indians in villages built for their lavish wedding ceremonies. These weddings were not recorded legally. [...] These church people from Canada interfered so much with our lives; to me [Mona] it was very puzzling. Big strong men like Pappy and Mr. Bhim up the road, allowing a few white men to rule their lives and tell them who to marry and who to leave. [...] Or how, if we were Etwaria’s grandchildren, born out of bamboo, we would all be illegitimate. Pappy’s land could never have been ours. (63-64)

Clearly, addressed here are issues of citizenship status and rights in relation to ethnicity and religion – to be precise, Hinduism partially adapted to the circumstances created by indentureship and plantation life. Marital and family affairs – Hindu weddings are as the quote indicates not recognized by the law and church – as well as landownership and inheritance patterns are regulated and controlled by the colonial government and “missionary interventions” (64). The interference with privacy and family life, undermining those cultural prac-

the moment I heard the words [...] I had been just a girl. [...] A coolie was a nasty ugly thing. I hated coolies” (204).

tices and social conduct that are perceived as threat to morality and respectability based on Christian values, negatively impacts the perception of Indians and local practice of Hinduism. As children, Mona and Kello attend a Hindu wedding, giggling throughout the ceremony demonstrating their misunderstanding and disrespect until they are rebuked by their grandmother: "we should understand that not everybody was Christian like us. But Kello had just one question for Mama: "They poor?" She nodded, and he looked wise and nodded too" (64). The novel problematizes the second-class status and ridicule of Indians who have not converted to Christianity, hence are considered as poor, backward, and simple. Confusion and neglect connected to the embarrassment and stigmatization are also caused by the Christian socialization of many Indians who as a result turn to 'Western' ideals perceived as more 'modern,' but also keep certain aspects of Hindu tradition alive: "It was a time when newly educated people would throw out almost everything Indian at first, and would slowly gather back into their lives only those relics that were essential for survival" (29).

In her reading of the novel, Mehta points out that the "novel demonstrates how the conversion to Christianity reinforced the precarious position of Indo-Caribbean Christians through mediated identifications, a disavowal of history, and the internalization of Western referents" (29). Indeed, the novel highlights and critically examines the Indo-Caribbean population's assimilation of Western-European and Creole culture. As Mona observes:

By the time my parents were born, many Indians in Trinidad had become Christian converts, and those who had not still took advantage of the church schools set up by Presbyterian missionaries from Canada. A precarious middle class had begun to spring up among those formerly doomed to indentured servitude. [...] Indentureship was over; it had ended in 1917, before they were born, and denial had set in. (28-29)

Belonging neither to the majority African-descendent nor to the white, European population, conversion is regarded as desirable since it provides access to social structures and education and in the longer term facilitates access to capital and the more prestigious professions (cf. Brereton 1981; Samaroo 2009). It also provides a way out of labor bondage and plantation history and economy – singing Presbyterian hymns, "[o]ur hearts flew up to heaven, and all the soot and flying dust of burning cane vanished into the smoke fires of hell while we ascended skywards [...]. The hymns [...] promised us neutrality and a bigger place in which to live" (30). Canadian Presbyterians have thus helped in the creation of a small, rather isolated Indian middle-class that adopted a Western-

ized life style and distanced itself from Indian culture and Hindu values. "Like their parents before them, abandoning Hindu and Muslim traditions in favour of education, Muddie and Da-Da anchored themselves insider their Presbyterian community, building a slow, deadly respectability" (29). The precarious situation of this Presbyterian Indian-Caribbean middle-class the quote above alludes to refers to what Espinet describes elsewhere as an "invisible buffer class" between rural, non-Christian Indians and the more affluent, urban, and Creole population (Birbalsingh 1997: 165; interview with R.E.).²³¹

The Indian-Caribbean and, or dougla body is set in relation and opposition to the Creole, black body, as the following sections show, but there is also an expressed preference for European culture, U.S.-American lifestyle, and whiteness. Mona's mother, Myrtle, styling in the fashion of Jeanette MacDonald, a U.S.-actress of the 1930s and 40s, and her father, Mackie, looking like Clark Gable, copying the "big big life on the Hollywood screen" (28), embody westernized ideas of modernness. Mona's description of her parents at that time adds to this perception:

my parents, stylish and cool, keeping in step with the fashion of those far-off times in cosmopolitan Trinidad, once dubbed nothing less than 'the Paris of the

231 The novel critically evaluates the position and influence of the Canadian church as well as the economic and political engagement of white missionaries in the colony. "The Canadian missionaries had brought sweetness and light to us on their terms, wrapping us in a tight cocoon while they enjoyed the privileges of whiteness in a colonial society. New converts were not allowed to smoke or drink, a rule probably established to rein in the estate drunkenness of Indian labourers on payday and to quiet the night-time cries of beaten wives. But Da-Da and his friends scoffed at such absurd attempts at control. The business interests of key church figures were no longer hidden" (81). A further contradiction lies in the sexual conduct of some. Apparently, being in the colony provides white persons with the privilege of a more liberal life style and of engaging in 'unrestrained' sexual conduct. The relationship of Lotte, a young teacher from Canada of German descent, to "her lady friend," Lorna, their indecent behavior, is eyed with disapproval: "You think they could make zami open so in de Prairies where Lotte come from? Them reckless prairie men wouldn't stand for it. They would beat them like snake, yuh hear? But here they could come brazen so and do anything just because they white. And everybody here fraid to say a blasted thing" (156). In the Anglophone Caribbean, the expression 'making zami' refers to a lesbian relationship, but can also mean a close, intimate friendship among women. *Zami* has a derogatory meaning, but is also used positively to celebrate women's sexuality (cf. Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*). Implied here, too, is that Canada is not a safe haven for homosexual persons either. While in Trinidad they enjoy the privileges attached to their skin color and live out their sexuality relatively free in the white community, back home in the Canadian countryside they would certainly face social exclusion and threat of bodily harm.

West Indies'. [...] Their glamour they got from the movies of the day; their noble ideals they got from the book-club membership that brought Lloyd C. Douglas, Pearl Buck, and Émile Zola into our home. Their moral rectitude, though, they got from the Bible and the evangelical enterprise of the Canadian Mission. [...] All that backward [Indian] stuff was best forgotten. (29)

Against this background, Mehta, again, argues that by “[i]nternalizing the racism of dominant stereotypes characterizing Indians as backward, unrefined, and lacking in moral integrity, the parents become colonial caricatures who overtly discard Indian traditions as a means to acquire a passport to Trinidadian respectability” (Mehta 2006: 29). Their caricaturing or their (non-subversive) mimicry of Western culture is hence closely connected to their aspiration towards respectability; it is associated with their struggle for approval, belonging, and propriety and, indeed, ideals of culture and civilization that are apparently entangled with creolization: “They were not civilized or ‘creolized’ enough. They did not reach the approved standard of proper Trinidad society” (145)

Their ambivalent position is obvious. “If there is to be no more Mother India, where do we stand? Is our right to exist as Indians, with a distinct way of life, now threatened?” (74) In this quote resonates a sense of mourning for a lost mother country and roots lost in the *kala pani* crossing as well as doubts regarding the own right to exist. If the Indian subject has been stigmatized since indentureship and throughout the first half of the 20th century (which the generation of the grand- and great-grandparents demonstrate), Indo-Caribbean identity continues to be marginalized in the first decades after independence and throughout the nation building processes and anti-colonial politics that focus on African-centric Creole culture (as the generation of Mona’s parents show; and the consequences of which Mona needs to bear, which adds a gendered component). What does the novel associate with Creole culture, what kind of body politics is promoted, and how does the family Singh relate to it and fit in? Despite the relative comfort and social uplift provided by the Church, both the Presbyterian mission and the strictness of the Indian community alike restrain social activity and life. “Young men like Da-Da felt a reckless need to break out of these constraints, but where could they go? They drank and smoked and gambled, embracing the Creole culture with a vengeance” (82), and loved “calypso, steelband, and Carnival” (70) – all of which symbolizes African-Creole culture. In search for a space of self-realization, the ‘new’ generation of Indo-Trinidadians adopts Creole culture which, quite on the contrary, is regarded as more liberal and liberating in terms of sexuality and consumption, seemingly offering a space of resistance to the rigidity of, as Mehta

finds, the “socialization imposed on them by a Hindu patriarchy, in the name of cultural integrity” (2006: 29).

Creole politics and creolization, as the novel suggests, is further intertwined with gender and sexuality politics: a Black hypersexuality in opposition to an effeminate Indian manhood in particular, as well as body ideals of beauty and Creole femininity. The historian Rochelle Rowe investigates the juxtaposition of beauty contests with discourses of nationalism in Jamaica of the 1950s. She argues that the diverse bodies on display are meant to suggest racial harmony (cf. Rowe 2009: 36). While Trinidad’s society shall not be conflated with the Jamaican one, there are, however, similarities when it comes to the struggle for independence which the two former British colonies achieved in the same year as well as their nationalism and strong focus on a ‘happy hybridity’ or creolity that local women embody. The spectacle of the paraded female bodies, following Rowe’s argument, may be regarded as marketing tool “in the construction of a multiracial modern Jamaican identity” (ibid.: 37). The novel highlights the popularity and success of Trinidadian beauty queens. “Trini women were the most beautiful in the world” which is due to the “mixture of races” within the “cosmopolitan population” (173). The local beauty pageants in Trinidad that the novel refers to, too, are part of a body politics to promote the national credo of unity. Usually, the selected winner is a girl who embodies perfectly the Creole ideal prevalent within the society. Such is the case with the contest at the annual bazaar I have referred to above: the queen crowned one year is an icon of the national identity, described by Mona as “a lovely red girl, mixed-up-just-like-callaloo” (173). Against this beauty ideal, the Indian female body (the ‘coolie’ or dougla; cf. 203, 75) is set to emphasize its corporeal difference and the racial inscriptions, defining Mona’s position within the social hierarchy.

The novel not only addresses the marginalization of one ethnicity but also draws a complex portrait of a racially stratified society where the national credo “all ah we is one” (70), promoted in the novel by the first prime minister Dr. Hector James, called De Doctah, which resonates as well with Trinidad’s official national motto “Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve,” seems nothing but an illusion.²³² Set against the decolonial context of the 1960s, “a time of promise and excitement” when “Massa day done” (70), the ruling government promotes an ethos of togetherness, national unity, and a unique cul-

232 Mackie Singh wonders “why couldn’t we make a place where every creed and race had an equal place, as the new anthem proposed?” (71). The multi-ethnic composition of the society along with a racial divide is disclosed, for instance, by Mona’s account of the earlier loan system: “Money was needed and banks were for white people, for the local whites and high-browns. ‘Not for poor people, coolie people and black people. [...]’” (253).

ture – “a Creole bacchanal, multiracial, multicultural, cosmopolitan” (67) – but in effect does not hold up to its promise. Mona's father, Mackie Singh, is an idealist and fervent admirer of the government's celebratory attitude and embodies the wish for oneness. He “held fast to the romantic idea of a body politic that would accept people of every creed, every race. He saw himself as an Indian man and a Trinidadian, neither cancelling out the other, a natural inheritor of the Creole culture he loved” (71). However, he realizes that the promoted national unity does not incorporate Indo-Caribbeanness and that the interests of Indians are not included in the nationalist aspiration and economic advancement of the country. Disappointed and disillusioned, he turns his back on James' politics, turning increasingly to Hindu nationalism. He expresses his frustration in several letters to a local newspaper which he signs – not without cynicism – with *Noam Maharaj* (cf. 73, 74, 76; Mahārāja is Sanskrit meaning ‘great king’ or ‘ruler’), speaking for the Hindu and Muslim Indians (cf. 69). These letters, which, and arguably so, Espinet intends to be archival sources, explicitly address the hypocritical rhetoric of the government and the ethnopolitization practiced by the ruling elite. He unveils the politics of the prime minister to be nothing but a “partisan display of power for the benefit of the black population” which is destructive to “any vision of oneness and equality” (72). That the postcolonial Trinidadian society is meant to benefit the African-descended population in the first place seems obvious to Mackie. In fact, he accuses “De Doctah” of preferential policy and racism as he labels “the Indians of this land, as a ‘hostile and recalcitrant minority’” and relegates them “to the dungheap of history” (73).

Moreover, one of the letters addresses the juxtaposition of issues regarding racial purity and sexuality. The body politics of creolization favored by the ruling party favors interethnic unions which Mackie perceives to be an attempt to extinguish the Indian population if it is forced and does not happen ‘naturally’ over time (cf. 74).²³³ The fear of intermixing, of a contamination of the Indian body (and just to be precise, the same fear exists also among the African-Trinidadian population) evokes the figure of the *dougl*a and the discourse surrounding *douglarization*. The narrator will recall later

how Indian men were enraged at what they perceived to be a coercive drive to intermarriage between Indians and Africans in the Trinidad of the fifties and

233 A body politics of separation but ‘mixing’ is made clear in the brilliant description of the city: “San Fernando housing its twin but separate populations, African and Indian, [...] inveterate mixers seduced by curiosity and a taste for difference, whose blood and semen and juices would solidify and form the rickety bridge across which others might begin to cross the rapids” (103).

sixties. That deep-rooted fear had never gone away. I had heard only recently about protests from the Indian community in Trinidad about forced *douglarization*. But *douglia* was such an old term for a person of mixed African/Indian ancestry. (75)²³⁴

The douglia is described as an ethnic in-between figure and as such embodies a social taboo of interracial unions and the fear of cultural contamination. The “douglia in-betweenness has often been a source of derision, alienation, misperception and social rejection.” (Mehta 2004: 14). As struggles for ethnic hegemony are staged on the body, the *douglia* body is perceived as proof of “the contamination and dilution of Indianness” (Puri 2004: 193).²³⁵ The definition of a national, cultural identity has turned into contested terrain and is further intertwined with a restriction of sexual conduct and morality especially on the parts of women.

Similar to her father, Creole culture is embraced by Mona, too, to break free from imposed conventions and strict rules, to challenge a respectable performance and the behavior that is expected of Indian girls.²³⁶ Mona’s body, sexuality, and morality become the battlefield of conflict between Creole, Indo- and Afro-Trinidadianess; her behavior the measure for the degree of respectability and man’s authority. At the age of seventeen, Mona is in a secret relationship with Bree, “[r]eal name Carlos Antonio Gonzales [...], a red boy, an obvious mixture of African and other races” (182). When her father finds out about this relation, he severely punishes her for transgressing the unspoken prohibition to ‘mix.’²³⁷ The relationship with Bree brings shame over the family and community. However, it is not just Mona’s behavior that leads to the escalation of the situation. Mackie transfers his overall political disappointment in to the private sphere; it culminates in domestic violence. Mona is the main target of his outbursts and violent assaults. The political conflict which is at the same

234 Similar to Shalini Puri who discusses identity formation and cultural and literary production under the concept of douglia poetics from a theoretical viewpoint, Espinet takes up on the douglia discourse from a fictional, literary perspective.

235 Puri argues that “anxieties around racial ambiguity are often expressed as disavowals of the douglia – either through the discursive repression of the douglia or through explicit attack on the category” (Puri 2004: 190).

236 Hosein associates creolization with the “loss of [...] Indo-Trinidadian female honour” with a display of a “more assertive sexuality, greater freedom from patriarchal control, and association with Afro-Trinidadian bodies and practices” (9).

237 This example shows to what extent national politics, the struggle for hegemony among ethnic groups have been staged on the female body, Indian femininity, and sexuality (cf. Puri 2004: 189-191). It has also disclosed the complexity and confusion of identification either with Indian or African (or both, or even Trinidadian), which alludes to what Gilroy describes as a “double consciousness” (Gilroy 1993: 1).

time a conflict of identity is staged on the female body and her required purity. Njelle Hamilton summarizes this thusly, the body of “the Indo-Trinidadian woman became the site of angst over nationhood, and the two main ethnic groups, locked in a stalemate over sexual politics, found themselves in a stalemate over national and cultural politics as well” (Hamilton 2013: 79). Years later, Kello will accuse his father of his violence making him aware of his own racism (cf. 206) which is just underneath the surface of his alleged love for unity. The punishment for Mona's forbidden desire of the ‘other’ also reveals the hypocrisy among the ethnic groups. Kello confirms this by saying that “it was about her black boyfriend. The red boy she was in love with. [...] You [Mackie Singh] did this to a girl who showed the kind of courage that our pissy little Presbyterian world wouldn't allow” (206). A culture of ethnic dominance fueled by discussions on racial purity keeps the ethnic groups apart. “[O]ur racial difference was solid, immense, never leaving us...the great wedge that had driven us apart” (189), as observed in the novel.

The reference to Carnival season, especially the scenes of the opening parade, the *J'ouvert*, adds a further gendered and sexual component to the way the novel represents Creole culture, thereby indicating its ‘Afro-Centrism’ and exclusion or rather ridicule of Indo-Caribbeanness. On the one hand, Carnival is an essential part of Caribbean identity; having emerged out of the colonial context, it is, amongst others, a cultural practice of resistance and subversion. It creates a space temporarily free from regulation and conformity, where gender performances are undermined and transgressive behavior is rendered possible. In such a “reckless space without boundaries” (99), the grip of patriarchal dominance and sexual morality is loosened, “turning upside down the order of the world we knew. Everything was reversed: man turning into woman [...], and woman turning into man” (98). The novel describes such a space but connotes it with an excessive Black sexuality that Mackie perceives as repulsive (“Da-Da [Mackie] came home sickened by the revelry” 100). He and Mona used to celebrate and enjoy this season until the year when Mackie is disgusted by the increasing vulgar display of the body and sexual immoderateness. At one point, accompanied by the calypso tune “My Pussin” by Lord Kitchener, “a stunning black woman, her eyes glazed with the night's rum, danced out of the band and up to Da-Da, [...] voluptuous, dressed in tight pants [...], her closed fists positioned at crotch level, both thumbs making scooping movements” (101). Lord Kitchener sings “*Is my pussin / Is my pussin / Is my pussin / Is my pussin / I bathe her, feed her, clothe her from small / Man take way yuh hand from she / Doh touch my pussin at all*” (101). Mackie remains motionless, expressionless which is contrasted to the woman's enticing, active sexual body that she is in control

of; in this instance an erotic Black female body that the Indian man is not supposed to touch. Moreover, the appearance of “a stout dark-skinned man, drunk and staggering,” who “walked up to an electric light pole and began to rub his genital area on it in desperate circling motions[...] the outline of his penis was visible, almost bursting out of his tight gun-mouth pants” (101-2), not only serves as an example of a certain (threatening, virile) Black sexuality, but is for Mackie also a proof of the degeneration of the society dominated by the African-Creole population.

On the other hand, Carnival is also a comment on politics and the progress of the nation. Current political events or random happenings are performed and ridiculed, as for instance the murder presumably by an Indian man or the hanging of two Indian men (cf. 100). For Mackie, Carnival symbolizes Creole national culture and as such is then rejected by Mackie taking it as an offense and an example of how, to speak with Rhoda Reddock, “the dominant creole culture imposed its idea of culture and identity on the entire population” (1998b: 423), linked to the “low moral standards of creole society and the African population [...]. In this situation it is the Indian women in particular who have to be watched for it is they who have the responsibility of maintaining the image of the culture” (Reddock 1998b: 425). For Mackie this is further proof of the threat of contamination of the untainted Indian female body through black sexuality and the degeneration of the whole country he once loved.²³⁸

The character Mr. Singh, his political acumen and relation to his daughter, reveals how frustration and disempowerment can lead to domestic violence and alcohol abuse. The source is the ethnic conflict between the African and Indian population as well as a social hierarchy based on respectability that privileges *whiteness*. Da-Da compensates the loss of power and social control with violence. The novel thus implies that a destructive masculinity partially originates in the socially perceived alterity of the Indian body as well as the overall economic and social disenfranchisement of the Indian population.

Being perceived as the Asian ‘other’ (cf. Mohammed 2009), the family Singh occupies a precarious position trying to integrate into the Creole project of nationalism but struggling to retain Indian cultural identity keeping a distance to the dominant Afro-Creole culture, which further alienates the family. At the same time, they suffer from invisibility and alienation from the Hindu, and likewise a smaller Muslim, community as being not Indian, i.e. Hindu, enough and are blamed of having betrayed their culture as Christian converts. This, furthermore, connects to the Indians’ “continued insecurities surrounding their

238 On Indian women’s sexuality and its representation in Trinidadian popular culture, such as chutney-soca and calypso, see, e.g., Niranjana (2006).

rights of citizenship” (Reddock 1998c: 193) that stems from their position “outside of the cultural mainstream and their continued need to prove their ‘Trinidadianess’ and improve their social status” (ibid.). As the novel indicates the missionaries’ strong influence within the still colonial social structures led to an estrangement of “the Indo-Trinidadian community from their values and culture, they also result in making women like Mona strangers to their bodies” (Hamilton 2013: 76).

5.5 Estrangement and Becoming the ‘Other’ in Canada

Presbyterian Indians became Indo-Creole-Canadian. This represents a double colonization, because the Canadian ‘way’ was largely made up of a colonized world view, and we became another colony within an existing British Caribbean colony. (Birbalsingh 1997: 164)

The decades following Trinidad’s independence are marked by ethnic conflicts, economic decline, poverty, and, as a consequence, large-scale migration in particular to North America. For the family Singh, too, the factors behind the emigration are economic, political, and family-related. When Mona’s father feels overpowered by disillusionment and frustration unable to pay the mortgage and full of worry for his daughter “to get on the wrong track” (209), he decides for the family to move to Canada (cf. 27). The narrator, once again, sets her account of this relocation in a concrete temporal frame and contextualizes it historically against the background of contemporary migration policy:

The migration of many families like ours took place with a rush in the sixties and the early seventies. After Enoch Powell and the British anti-immigration policies of 1968, England had closed down. We could no longer see it as the mother country. Many families like ours came to Canada, the natural home, perhaps, for Indian / Presbyterian people. We arrived in 1970. (104)

What resonates here is the novel’s underlying criticism both of Great Britain’s migration policies of the 1960s directed especially against immigration from the West Indies as well as the conflicting, unequal relation between the former colony and the imperial power, the “mother country.” On the other hand, the narrator, too, hints at the close ties between Canada and Trinidad which have been established since the end of the nineteenth century fostered by the Pres-

byterian Church. Although Canada, a former British colony itself, is referred to as the “natural home,” a sense of home in the new world is not easily established. The family Singh finds themselves in a likewise marginalized position as in Trinidad in terms of the lack of economic capital and the racialization or ascription of ethnic identity. While the latter pertains primarily to the changing perception of Indo-Caribbean identity and the ethnic label of ‘South Asian’ in Canada, in her narration, Mona also contrasts the whiteness of Canadian society (aesthetically evoked by snow and winter) to their ‘brownness.’ For instance, she refers to her uncle who has moved to Canada at an earlier stage and settled down in the country, as she notes, “locked in his prairie whiteness with his ultra-Canadian family” (132). Although the narrator remains vague about the meaning of the denomination of ultra-Canadian and her uncle’s apparent acculturation, it seems obvious that Mona, her family, and other immigrants from the Caribbean do not fit in within the boundaries of WASP-identity.

Alienation, emotional detachment, and outspoken racism become clear in Mona’s depiction of migrant life in Canada, the Canadian landscape, and climate. In her first year in Canada, Mona writes in her diary that she “had come to the edges of the First World and had been set adrift” (243). At that time, the more visible ‘Caribbeanization’ of the city that Mona observes in the 1990s had not yet taken place (cf. 103). A negative, hostile, cold, and white imagery of Canada persists throughout most of the novel (cf. 49, 50, 165).²³⁹ This symbolizes the “misery” (165), estrangement, and discrimination they experience despite the multicultural harmony officially promoted. “When I arrived in the early seventies, Canada was a white country. If multiculturalism was an idea, it never touched me,” an observation emphasized by “a wall covered with graffiti that read Keep Canada White” (243; 104-5). Mona points out that the “racism of this place [...] was always ready to crack you across your back when you least expected it” (47). If Canada is praised for its openness and liberalization, the novel explicitly addresses the problems and lived experience of racism and exclusion

239 She recalls the coldness especially in situations in which her brother’s sickness is too real and close for her to endure, the helplessness of her parents too much to sustain her. Thus, Kello’s death turns into both an emotional and bodily experience for Mona. In stark contrast stands the comforting warmth, safety and softness of their Trinidadian home she endearingly describes as “a cocoon” (24). The description of cold winters, as in Espinet’s novel such as the “harsh Canadian winter” (50), is a recurrent theme in Caribbean diaspora writing – and in migrant fiction in general – frequently employed to symbolize racism, alienation, and solitude. Jamaican-British writer Joan Riley, for example, in her novel *The Unbelonging* (1985) evokes cold weather as an uncomfortable contrast between the host country England and the warm Jamaican home of the protagonist. The spatial description of bathrooms and their tiled coldness further adds to Riley’s aesthetics of trauma.

which do not have a place or do not even exist in the hegemonic public discourse of diversity and integration nor the "elaborately concealed Anglo-Saxon attitudes" (54).

The novel reflects on the marginalized position of Caribbean migrants: their insular status and the reduction of their subjectivity to skin color, meaning their embodied being defined solely in racial terms on. Mona assesses their social status and terms of existence thusly:

We had reproduced our very early life here in many ways; being in my parents' house again brought this truth home to me. We, and others like us, were living in our own insular world, oblivious of how we appeared to the rest of the society around us. However protected we had been in our little Presbyterian world in San Fernando, one shove into the bustle of Port of Spain would put us squarely back into our places as country Indians, nothing more. All it took then in Trinidad was looking Indian; all it took now in Canada was skin colour. We had not moved one inch. (81)

Mehta analyzes this scene, explaining how

the mimetic reproduction of the first crossing a century later revives the primal trauma of unbelonging when Indianness persists as a visible marker of difference. The spatial mobility of migration does not complement the illusion of social mobility in Canada, leading to the very same impasses that the family attempted to escape in the first place. (Mehta 2006: 30)

In this respect, Espinet critically evaluates not only the national politics regarding cultural identity in postcolonial Trinidad – the seemingly hopeless situation of a nation locked in ethnic conflict, and of a Creole elite that has not yet succeeded to integrate all groups equally –, but also the failure of the multicultural promise of the Canadian government leaving many migrants disempowered and without prospects. This point is further strengthened by Mona's incomprehension regarding the delusions attached to migration and upward mobility. "Why did people leave the place they were born for an illusion of a better life? [...] All of us migrants, the Chinese man, the black waiter, Da-Da never finding a place here [...] – why did anyone leave?" (26).

Estrangement and racialization are most dominant in the protagonist's characterization of her father. Mona notices how her father's "body [has] grown heavy over many winters of inactivity" (79). His body displays his disillusionment and frustration. Unfulfilled dreams and ambition, again, were turned down by racial politics and produce a passive migrant body. As well, the novel takes issue with ethnic labelling that constructs an artificial group identi-

ty, lacking, however, historical significance and reference potential. Accordingly, Mona describes her father who, back in Trinidad, "had been [...] a striking figure in any gathering," is now "against the Canadian landscape [...] only a *brown Indian* man, his impeccable sense of style unnoticed, his appearance ordinary. An elderly *South Asian* man, I thought that's all this country can ever make of him" (79; emphasis added). The term of South Asian reduces Mr. Singh to an unrecognizable ordinary appearance as a "brown man." The novel indicates that Canadian society deprives Indian migrants from the Caribbean off of their identity and history by placing them within the constructed community of what the census labels as 'South Asian.'²⁴⁰ The novel criticizes the label for its racialized connotation and as a discriminating strategy by Canadian migration and identity politics in that it constructs an 'other' opposed to a white Anglo-mainstream body. The homogenizing and essentializing notions of what 'Indianness' or 'Asianness' are defined to be, are in their consequence ignorant of specific diaspora histories, differences in migration patterns, and diverse Caribbean identities. "[I]n an attempt to produce an easily knowable difference" (Rahemtullah 2009: para. 3), the Indo-Trinidadian presence in Canada is erased from the North American country's migration history irrelevant to fit into the multicultural landscape.

The 'invisibility' of Caribbean migrants of Indian descent in the example above is a matter of a statistics which falsifies ethnic belonging. The invisibility of the body of color is furthered in personal and professional relations accompanied by its criminalization. A disembodiment of the migrant subject takes place in the scene when Mona's father goes shopping and is ignored by the cashier and other customers. He rages: "So you didn't see me here all the time? I look invisible to you? You don't have the manners, the simple courtesy to treat all the customers here the same?" Alarm bells began to go off all over the store" (105). In this incident of every-day racism, Mackie fails in the attempt to reclaim his agency and right of equal treatment. He is first ignored but when he dares to raise his voice, make himself visible, he is put in his place, criminalized, an alien other.

In her book *Plantation Memories* (2008), psychoanalyst and postcolonial theorist Grada Kilomba writes about the structures of every-day racism and its colonial continuity. She analyzes the psychological effects of the "traumatizing contact with the violent unreason of the *white* world, that is with the unreason

240 The ethnic group described by the label "South Asian" counts among Canada's "visible minorities" under which Indo-Caribbean is often grouped and which also includes, for example, "East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc." (cf. "Visible Minority Population and Population Group Reference Guide, 2006").

of racism" (Kilomba 2008: 20). The exposure of the embodied subject to discrimination and mechanisms of social exclusion is unmistakably made clear in the novel. On a train ride from Montreal to Toronto, Mona is unexpectedly confronted with the racist attitude of another passenger who reproaches her shouting "Why don't you go back to where you came from" (47), leaving her in a state of shock, "close to tears at the unkindness of life, of the racism of this place that was always ready to crack you across your back when you least expected it" (47). The insult, 'to go back,' brings up the troubling question of origin to indicate her foreignness and her belonging to another place but not here. The exclusion and marking of the territory as Anglo-Canadian place her outside the national imagination.

Mona's unbelonging and "psychic disorientation" (Birbalsingh 1997: 218), that may be associated with her sense of nomadism or 'nowharianism,' stem from uprooting and disconnection from her childhood home as well as her 'double' socialization in Trinidad and Canada. Remarkable here is the textual absence of more than twenty years of Mona's life in Canada – the time spanning from her arrival in Montreal in the early 1970s until well into the 1990s, the time she starts the narration. Whereas Mona's description of the period from girl to young woman (the adolescent phase) is very vivid, throughout the adult years it seems there is no significant character development, the more contemporary context of the narration is seemingly at a standstill. This not only slows down the process of story-telling but also has an effect on how the reader perceives the adult Mona, namely as being in stasis, inactive, in limbo. The gap of more than twenty years is evidence that the family's move to North America critically impacts on her individuation, troubling her process of becoming an adult woman. This second *kala pani* crossing renders her speechless, almost traumatized, which is indicated by the memory fragments closing in on her. Hence, this textual silence indicates that her migrant life in Canada along with the experiences of racism constitute a trauma that Mona is not yet able to face and put in words – being marked as the 'Other body.'

5.6 Gay Politics, Bodily Decay, and the Patriarchal Order

If the novel deals with 'otherness' mostly in racialized terms, otherness in terms of sexuality, or queerness, enters the novel via Kello's body and sexual identity. Mona's older brother and his homosexuality are often overlooked in

scholarly publications that discuss Espinet's novel (cf. Mehta 2006; Solbiac 2013; Hamilton 2013).²⁴¹ This is surprising, and may be due to the rather flat character description; but it could also hint at the perception of homosexuality as tabooed topic. Joel Kuortti's essay on the novel's silenced (diaspora) narratives briefly discusses how "Kello's hidden homosexuality deconstructs the existing gender structure in questioning the heteronormative matrix" (Kuortti 2008: 321) – into which Mona herself does not fit because of her own rejection of married life. In fact, the novel's explicit mentioning of "the politics of being gay" (160) extends the literary discourse of *kala pani* to also include sexualities and gender identities that are outside of heteronormative inscriptions of the Indian male body. The extent to which the homosexual body is perceived as deviant and transgressive, but also as threat to social normality despite its marginality is underlined by Kello's sickness and the process of bodily decay that the novel reconstructs in aesthetic ways.

Kello plays a key role in Mona's life and initiates her full subject formation. He does not get along with their father, whose drunkenness frequently turns into rage. The "big row" (17) at Christmas in 1958, when Kello was almost strangled by his father, made him, according to Mona, a man at the age of nine. He leaves home early and later goes to live in England to obtain a university degree. The absence of her brother is a painful experience for Mona, who is now the target of her father's abuses (cf. 161). From the U.K. he moves to Canada in 1970, about the same time as the rest of the family, where he works as engineer and prospers by investing in the stock market. He gets married to a Canadian woman of Italian background. Like Mona, but different to their siblings, Babs and Johnnie, he feels very attached to their home in Trinidad, which is the reason for him to buy back the land of his grandfather that his father has sold and thus interrupted the paternal line of inheritance.

Kello, as it turns out, is separated from his Canadian wife and children, and lives with his partner Matthew. This, however, he keeps a secret from his family. He confides in Mona only at his deathbed, which, together with the fact that Kello has not come out officially, underlines the discomfort related to and the suppression of homoerotic desire. The two funerals taking place, a public one and a private among those who knew (cf. 217), are emblematic for the secret of Kello's life and his tabooed sexuality. Social constraints and family relations hinder Kello to lead his life as an open homosexual person ("Had he come out to his wife?" [160]). Living "quietly, outside the gay community" (ibid.), the gay community in Toronto does not seem to offer a space for him either – here, the

241 In Mehta's case this neglect is due to her feminist though heteronormative focus on the women characters (Mehta 2006).

reader can only suspect that Kello's ethnic identity (or racial difference) vis-à-vis the predominantly white gay community may be problematic. Mona's initial reaction to Kello's revelation of his sexuality mirrors her own discomfort with same-sex desire and internalization of normative assumptions of sexuality. "I felt my foundations rocking. I had never thought of myself as homophobic and found my inability to take in Kello's unknown life surprising. [...] I had never felt a guardedness between us before" (52).²⁴² While Mona restores the stories of the family's rebel women within a patriarchal system, the narrative of homosexual intimacy and same-sex desire remains obscured and anti-homosexual social structures remain largely unchallenged.

In addition, the novel not only deals with deviant, transgressive sexuality, but also, similar to Jamaican Patricia Powell's novel *A Small Gathering of Bones* (1994), tackles the problem of AIDS and society's difficulty to deal with the HIV-infected body adequately. Mona's questions – "Why would he want to keep it secret? [...] And how did he get AIDS? Promiscuous sex? Needles? Was Kello gay? Sure we weren't such creeping, crawling hypocrites" (48) – reveals the ignorance and the stigma attached to the infected body and shows the hypocritical attitude within the family that Kello, different, apparently, to Mona, is aware of. Kello prefers to die "without the whole tribe of relatives whispering and shooshooing about him in the way that they will if they know any of this. [...] Taking man and battyman this and that, and heaven knows what other nastiness and bacchanal" (ibid.). Mona's suggestion of possible causes of the disease, ranging from promiscuity over drug abuse to homosexuality, in fact discloses common prejudices against AIDS through a questionable identification and stigmatization of so-called risk groups, whose members are already suspect only because of their membership and not their actual behavior, and the general conviction regarding the moral reprehensibility of the infected subject. The use of the pejorative Caribbean creole term "battymán," as in Silvera's novel, furthermore indicates a homophobic discourse through the term's disparagement, rejection, and pathologization of anal sex. This discourse goes in hand with a particular belief about the body and sexual normality constitutive and foundational of family, citizenship, and the nation state (cf. Alexander 1994).

242 Mona indicates her own socialization into heteronormativity when she thinks back to her childhood and the woman from the church community, Miss Lotte, and her "lady friend" from Europe, Lorna. They were called "the two Ls" the two lesbians? early sexual try-outs, with the "zami rumours at school" (156) and her relief to find out that "tryouts did not qualify as making zami" (156).

If the novel discusses the silencing of AIDS and homosexuality within the family, it also reveals the anti-homosexual attitude of an otherwise liberal Canadian society and its reservation towards infected bodies. On one of her visits at the hospice, Mona encounters a man on the street and begins to “wonder[...] what he thought of an AIDS hospice being planted in his solid neighbourhood” (55). In this case, homosexuality unsettles a petty bourgeois lifestyle and morality. The quote, too, expresses the skepticism, even fear towards the disease. This middle-class neighborhood of “settled values, Victorian chic, and [...] fake gentility” (54) stands in for a heteronormative concept of citizenship and a particular body politics that excludes unhealthy subjects.

The visible bodily transformation indicates Kello’s progressing sickness and imminent death. “He looked thinner too, although when he held me I found that his arms had not lost their wiry strength. But the biggest change was in his sallow complexion, that and his glittering, slightly mad eyes” (51). This aesthetics of decay comes to the fore also in the description of Kello’s “thin brown skin that would disappear soon, turned to dust, this bravery” (207). Not without a tint of pathos, the sick, sallow body, the perishing body, hints at the vulnerability of the body and dissolution of the homosexual subject. As Kuortti concludes, “the novel seems to fail in deconstructing the heteronormative matrix. Women are bound to stay put and homosexuals to die” (Kuortti 2008: 322). Arguably, the death of Kello, indeed, can be interpreted, as Espinet’s failure to liberate same sex desire from the closet – different to Shani Mootoo’s short story “Out on Main Street” or the novel *Cereus Blooms at Night*; her priority, and this is underlined, for example, by the narrative authority Espinet’s female protagonist has, lies with heterosexual women’s emancipation from gender oppression. In addition, Kello’s death-ridden body, like Mackie Singh’s ghostly appearance, may be a manifestation of the family’s sufferings and diaspora journeys (the diaspora body turns into a body in pain). The debilitated male body symbolizes not only the precarious status of Indian diaspora communities but also the weakness of the male heir. Also, death (at a first glance) seems to be Kello’s punishment for leaving home too early, for the rebellion against his father’s authority, and, ultimately, for the sexual transgression of heteronormative boundaries.

However, Kello’s death – Kello who “had always left his own stamp on the world” (15) – may not mean the complete defeat of the homosexual subject. Counter to the seeming dissolution or disembodiment of the gay subject runs Kello’s attempt to secure his position in the family lineage. In fact, he reinforces the patriarchal order through ownership and heritage by repurchasing the family’s estate in Trinidad, which, at the same time, materializ-

es the connection to a home space from the diaspora location. He makes Mona responsible to act on his behalf, so that she can re-connect to her home and, in the long run, her identity; he bequeaths the property to his children with the hope that his children will take an interest in their roots and their father's place of birth. "My seed – it exists. It'll surface in time. Nothing perishes" (166). Kello's remark, on the one hand, is meant to reassure the dying subject his significance after death. The idea of the imperishability makes room for a religious interpretation of reincarnation in Hinduism and introduces a cyclical moment (the circle of life, death, and rebirth) as defining of the coming-of-age novel. On the other hand, it constitutes a patriarchal claim in existence and promotes a particular body politic considering the male seed as origin of human kind. Moreover, through Kello (and his financial means), Mona buys the land and obtains a place in a traditional male line of heritage, though her relation to property is completely at odds with that of her male relatives. "I couldn't help trying to tell him how ownership meant nothing to me. I wondered to myself about the men of the family and their very different responses to land" (55).²⁴³ While Kello connects identity and existence to land, Mona's quest for belonging and history is less materialistically motivated. However, while Kello is fading out, Mona fades into the role of sole heir (the first in line as second-born child), in this instance reversing conventional gender roles and workings of (paternal) inheritance (cf. Donnell 2006: 169).

What is of interest is the parallel between the brother's death and Mona's own revival. Kello's death initiates the protagonist's own coming-of-age process and coming into being which the novel further illustrates by contrasting his decaying body with Mona's awakening body. Yet, if Kello is Mona's "second self" (51), as she claims, but is dying, what happens with the subject, the perception of the own subject status, if one part is missing? "I was suddenly overwhelmed by the finality of it all and broke down. [...] something was being pulled from under my feet and I was landing on ground that I could not feel, not with my toes, not with any part of my body" (49). The sadness over the loss (mourning) becomes a corporeal experience of pain. Kello's inevitable death confronts Mona with her own life and "unfulfilled ambitions" (62) and her cau-

243 The novel's concern with land ownership and its colonial and gendered implication is revealed in several instances. For example, Mona's cousin Bess, who is an illegitimate child, needs to fight for the right of ownership of her grandmother's house to which she is not legally entitled to. The extent to which the postcolonial state continues to exert biopolitical power and control over the population and their sexual behavior through property rights is disclosed by the "legislation about inheriting property [which] was still colonial to its core, ignoring illegitimacy and the straying habits of ordinary people" (123).

tious, passive behavior, her “hanging suspended in mid-air, waiting and watching for some twist of fortune” (79). She reflects the fact of Kello’s death on to her own life. “Kello’s life would be over, but who was Mona? Had I even made a life for myself?” (94). If he is dying, her disorientation and disconnection from her own self may be regarded as some kind of social death.

The death of Kello further triggers a sudden emergence and subsequent negotiation of multiple traumatizing experiences. His terminal illness initiates Mona’s recollection of the family history and acceptance of the past. Kello reconnects Mona with her family, enables her to reconcile with her father and forgive him. Likewise, after years of emotional distance, Mona manages reconnect with her mother. Furthermore, the revelation of his sexuality confronts Mona with her own reservation towards homosexuality, serving the purpose of sexual education and breaking the taboo of AIDS. Finally his burial brings together the extended family, scattered in North America and Trinidad. Kello’s body dies and Mona awakens, a development symbolizing their spiritual interconnectedness – hence the term ‘novel of awakening’ seems relevant here. Kello’s death and their father’s aging, too, his fragile body, linked to Mona’s awakening indicate that women’s empowerment and the revaluation of their contribution to the survival of the Indian community may be possible only with the death of patriarchy – which equals a radical feminist statement. In this vein, Mona concludes her narrative by stating “I was alive again” (277).

5.7 Historiography and the Diasporic Coming-of-Age Narrative

In her critical, non-fictional essay, “The Invisible Woman in West Indian Fiction” (1989), Espinet laments the absence of the Indian or Indo-Caribbean female subject in Caribbean fictional writing which goes hand in hand with her status – peripheral at best – in national(ist) discourses and official historiography.²⁴⁴ “*It is an untold story*” (3). With these words, Espinet commences her novel – a first-person, adult-narrated, women-centered coming-of-age novel. It is clear that a very specific story, which as the novel indicates has been subjected to historical erasure, will not remain untold any longer. This sentence also

244 The novel’s ‘purpose of revelation’ is further indicated in the novel’s epigraph reading “raise a cloth from a covered face” quoted from Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957).

begins one of several what may be called historiographic inter- or preludes entitled "*Kala Pani*." These interludes (cf. 3-4; 117-9; 247-9), which are set apart from the main body through italic script, introduce each of the novel's three parts and thus disrupt the main narrative. Mona reverts to these historical fragments to substantiate the reliability of her memory and fill in the archival gaps of indentureship history and, effectively, her own biography and subject formation. The *Kala Pani* account claims historical accuracy; it also recounts the live story of Mona's great-grandmother Gainder and her journey from India to Trinidad. Mehta describes the novel as an "existential quest for selfhood" (Mehta 2006: 20), being intertwined with the live stories of her foremothers (or *herstories*²⁴⁵). In this respect, I argue, Espinet deliberately mixes the genres of the coming-of-age novel and neo-historical fiction,²⁴⁶ which ties in well with the "pedagogical impulse" of Caribbean diaspora literature that Elena Machado Sáez, for instance, points out (cf. 2015: 16).

Donnell characterizes the protagonist as "the perpetual historian and compulsive voyeur" (Donnell 2006: 168). Mona's profession as documentary film maker influences the way she perceives her surroundings and refers to her memories, and, on an upper level how the focalization directs the reader's view and attention. Her accounts, descriptions and self-characterization are highly self-reflexive, even objective and at times with a great distance. The narrator implies that her memory is in fact more precise than any official visual recording of the event and histories, which implies her claim to a more authentic perspective. Her status as documentary film maker lends her authority. "No camera could have recorded that day with the detail that was engraved on my memory" (41). In the course of the novel, her reliability, though, is questioned when she expresses uncertainty, "I replayed those memories in my mind, I

245 This is a term used in gender studies and feminist criticism to challenge the masculine and patriarchal claim within 'mainstream' historiography. Mehta calls out for "epistemological reevaluations of colonial historiography from its heteropatriarchal and elitist baselines" (Mehta 2006: 24), which she finds realized in Espinet's novel.

246 The neo-historical novel, according to Elodie Rousselot, is an emerging sub-genre of the historical novel which by re-visiting key historical events and moments and re-appropriating the past also connects to and comments on the present time while laying open its own constructedness (cf. Rousselot 2014). "Signals, beckoning me into the past" (5), Ramabai Espinet's narrator thinks, pointing out explicitly the pre-occupation of the novel with the past. In general, engaging with the own history is a common feature in Caribbean fiction. Interestingly, Torres-Saillant, though he does not differentiate historical and neo-historical fiction, argues: "The convergence of the 'historical imagination' throughout the area is such that it may well be almost redundant to speak of 'the historical novel' as a separate genre in the Caribbean" (Torres-Saillant 2013a: 106).

wondered, did they really happen that way” (151). The juxtaposition of an authentic voice with a possible unreliable narration thus makes us question the act of storytelling and construction of a supposedly authentic history, unraveling instead its fictional character.

A female genealogy, it lends precedence to the destiny of indentured women, thus “commemorate[ing] the maternal roots and routes of Indo-Caribbean history” (Mehta 2006: 24). The *Kala Pani* interlude reconstructs the voyage of *The Artist*, a ship that brought 285 women and 159 men to Trinidad – an unusual ratio as the narrator informs (cf. 4). It is the year of 1879; among the women who went to Trinidad are also those ‘pariah’ women, *rands*, who are excluded by Indian society, such as widows who after the ban of sati by the British colonial government in 1829 became social outcasts (cf. 3). The novel inscribes itself within a specific historical moment of colonialism, retracing the routes of labor migration from Benares to Calcutta, passing Madagascar and St. Helena (117), to Trinidad.

The evening darkens as they head out of the Bay of Bengal, India receding before the immensity of ocean billows, and now there is no horizon but water, nothing but pani, pani, pani. My foremothers, my own grandmother Gainer, crossing the unknown of the *kala pani*, the black waters that lie between India and the Caribbean. (4; italics in original)

Telling the *kala pani* history exclusively from a woman’s point of view is a way of reclaiming a lost story. Francis’ claim that Caribbean women’s writing often “resist[s] canonical historical representations by creating counterarchival sources to replot history” (Francis 2010: 6) may change our perception of fictional writing and ways of reading. In many respects Espinet’s novel reads like a history book, if that is a qualified claim. The difference is that it reads history against the grain offering an alternative version of Trinidad’s national history and Indo-Caribbean migration history in Canada. Mariam Pirbhai, too, comments on such a “historiographic impulse,” stating that

Indo-Caribbean women novelists arguably work in tandem with historians in the memorialization and excavation of women’s narratives, for they not only strive to fill in historical gaps but also to mobilize these stories as models of cultural and feminist agency for present generations. (Pirbhai 2010: 47)

The *Kala Pani* narrative transplants a historical ‘reality’ of facts, data, and realist descriptions of places into the realms of the fictional. Interestingly, the novel achieves an epistemological and cultural translation; its didactic purpose effectively educates readers within and outside the text. Mona as reader of her

grandmother's story and readers of the novel alike are asked to make sense of the text, to question the official narrative, and to dig deeper for a hidden 'truth.' They need "to weigh competing narratives, revise and dislodge previous knowledges, and slowly piece meaning together" (Puri 2004: 160).

The novel is subdivided into three parts, "Borrowed Time," "Manahambre Road," and "Caroni Dub," that reflect on the different phases of Mona's personal development. In a homodiegetic I-narration, the adult Mona of the 1990s recounts parts of her life in flashbacks, starting with her childhood in the late 1950s introducing an extensive cast of characters. Except for the chapters of the third part, the majority of a total of 25 chapters take place in the early days of postcolonial Trinidad of the 1960s and 70s. The narrative present is constantly interrupted by jumps back in time. Mona randomly remembers past incidents when she is either in conversation with her family and Kello or when she is clearing out the attic of her parent's house in Toronto. That way, the Canadian context, which is otherwise rather marginalized in the narrative, gains importance as narrative setting. Unlike the two preceding parts, part three, "Caroni Dub,"²⁴⁷ is set almost completely in the narrative present. In this chapter, Mona actually visits the Caribbean home to research for her documentary and to repurchase the family's property. This visit not only transforms Trinidad from an imagined home (a constructed space in the protagonist's memory) into a 'real' space, it also turns into a key moment in the completion of subject formation as the narrator reveals: "My research was yielding real gold this time, gold that would make sense of my own life" (294). It is a puzzle of both an individual coming-of-age script and collective history.

Mona's quest for identity and her disorientation are transferred to the reader, who is sent on an ocean voyage departing in India in the nineteenth century and then on a journey from Trinidad to Canada and back. The fragments and pieces of memory, Mona's questioning of whether they really happened that way, leave the reader at a loss, and add to the sense of displacement and confusion. The narrative structure conveys a sense of disorientation, thereby mirroring diasporic entanglements and evoking a traumatized subjectivity. This is achieved by a fragmentary narrative pattern and a continuing sense of rupture that pervades the text. The reader finds herself in diaspora, confused in time and space, surrounded by the deep waters of the *kala pani*. The structure of the novel relocates her in the diaspora *gefühlswelt* of living in different places but feeling at home in none of them, not at ease with the self. Instead of a migration story told from childhood to adult age, narrated stringently and chronolog-

247 Caroni is one county in Trinidad, located in the west of the island, and home to the largest sugar company, Caroni Ltd.

ical, which could have followed Kello's revelation of his deathly sickness as the *initiating moment*, the novel displays a labyrinth of thoughts, flashbacks, past and present incidents. This is a deliberate act of story-telling strategically applied to cause confusion, bewilderment, and insecurity.

The narrative movement of a back-and-forth is anticipated most obviously in the title of Espinet's novel by the swinging bridge. The structure makes sense with regard to the protagonist's need to look back, to confront, and ultimately accept the past as part of her being in and relating to the world. Typical for the woman-narrated coming-of-age novel, the narration and development are non-linear, refusing to create a static binary between past and present, a here and now versus a there and then. Rather, *The Swinging Bridge* suggests a dynamic interplay, swings between different spaces and times, creating a continuum in which individuation is possible. For this reason, the novel, despite the fragmentary revelations, offers narrative closure and a completed subject formation. While the story unfolds, the reader accompanies Mona and her "nowarian self" (152) on her journey of self-discovery, and will eventually be able to put together the jigsaw pieces that are buried in the recesses of Mona's mind. After reconciling with her past and "unraveling a too tightly wound cocoon" (304), Mona feels completely at home in Montreal without the acute desire to live anywhere else. "I am part of this city I live in, and right now I want no other place" (305). In fusing the Caribbean body, lived reality, and belonging with the urban surroundings of Montreal, the narrative is rooted in Canada and thus constitutes a diasporic coming-of-age poetics.

The fragmentary character of the novel is meant to indicate diaspora experience and existence. It furthermore accounts for individual dealings with traumatizing experiences.²⁴⁸ Boyce Davies talks about a literary strategy of healing when she refers to narrative acts of remembering through retrospective narration that include and emphasize disruption (cf. 1994: 17). The personal procession of the past and constant re-living of the trauma account for the uncontrollable and involuntary appearance of memory scraps. Mona's seemingly random statements of facts are in fact a therapeutic way to deal subjectively with her history and the things that happened to shape her identity. *The Swinging Bridge* illustrates a nation's history of trauma caused by colonial oppression and debilitating inter-ethnic conflicts fostered by an anti-colonial, Creole nationalism. Moreover, the novel provides a space to come to terms collectively with the traumata of diasporic dislocations and unbelonging which affects even the youngest generation of migrant families. Mona's younger sister Babs, for

248 The motives of trauma and survival, along with a more detailed discussion of trauma theories, are central to my analysis of the following two novels.

instance, was still too young when she left the Caribbean to think of Trinidad as her home, but does not fit into Canadian society completely either: "I too feel a sense of not being grounded anywhere. I can't remember a time when I belonged some place, when I was not an outsider" (229-30). This may speak to the diaspora community as a whole.

The issues of belonging and identification – as central aspects of the genre itself – with regard both to gender and ethnicity are further problematized in Espinet's novel. Religion and Hinduism are taken as reference points for diaspora identity construction and the position of the individual within society. The ancient Indian epic *Ramayana*²⁴⁹ the novel alludes to several times fulfils various purposes. The sacred text alludes to and materializes cultural, religious specificities that Indian indentured laborers brought with them and which are part of Trinidadian culture and a larger diaspora experience. It contrasts Hindu and Christian gender expectations and how both inform young Indian-Caribbean adult women's subject formation. It constitutes an authoritative script on virtue and morality: "In the world of the *Ramayana*, perfect virtue is rewarded, good overcomes evil and light triumphs over darkness" (Khan 2013: 22). Sherry-Ann Singh provides an extensive study of Hinduism in twentieth century Trinidad and the meaning of *Ramayana* and its written version the *Ramcharitmanas* that serve as "religious writ and as social doctrine" (2012: 7). Regarding the socio-religious changes in the period from 1917, after indenture-ship was officially over, until 1990, she argues that, "operating on principles parallel to those of the *Ramayana* tradition on a global level, local variations both reflected and generated the transformation of thought, attitude and action in almost all spheres of life" (Singh 2012: 26). Mona recalls those nights, before she moved with her parents from the Trinidadian countryside to the city, when she woke up to the singing of a beggar woman, Baboonie,²⁵⁰ who lives in a shack close by and is victim to the frequent abuses by the village men:

249 The epic *Ramayana* tells about Prince Rama and his banishment from his father's kingdom. Being forced to live in a lonely forest, he proves his courage and masculinity by fighting demons and monsters. After fourteen years he is allowed to return from exile to be crowned king and reunited with his loving, obedient wife Sita, who in order to prove her faithfulness to Rama has to pass a purity test in a trial by fire. Arguably, this test is evoked by the punishment Mona has to endure when she kneels on gravel in the hot blazing sun.

250 A "babu (baboo)" or "babuman" is Creolese for an "old East-Indian man, usu[ally] bearded and poor [...] of unsightly appearance" (Allsopp 2003: 54). Like the *bogeyman* in Haiti, the term is also used to frighten children. Baboonie seems to be the female equivalent in Trinidadian usage. The Hindi "Baboo" is also a courtesy title in addressing a male person. In the novel, "Baboonie" is translated with "young girl" (114). The name also contains "baboon" lending the woman animalistic traits, which

I listened to music and a story, till then unknown to me, coming through the wailing voice of an old beggar woman, crying through the rain, breaking up the classical words of the *Ramayana* with her own tale of exile and banishment, and in broken chords and unexpected riffs telling the story of a race. Of racial and tribal grief, of banishment, of the test of purity. (113)

The retelling of the *Ramayana*, which used to be done by a *pandit*, or priest, and its adaptation to the local Trinidadian context is, hence, a specific Caribbean form of women's agency. This female counter-narrative provides a space to express rage and suffering; to construct a community in which women may eventually be liberated: "Free in this land, free from stain / [...] Free, free again" (295). Mona's great-grandmother Gainer, too, "used to sing *Ramayana* [...] – not the real *Ramayana* you know. She used to sing the kind that village women would sing" (251). Baboonie, "a bundle of sticks and stones, whose bones remained unbroken" (112), was singing with a "strong voice" (114) fighting "off intruders upon her body" (113). Both women do not fit the normative perception of femininity. Singing and adapting the *Ramayana*, reinterpreting the holy scripts of ideal gender roles, conduct, honor, and strict distinction of good and evil, turns into a subversive, empowering strategy of resistance to men's enacted control over the female body to cope with and survive the inflicted pain. The divergence from the tale is necessary to fit the specific circumstances and women's lived experience during and after the indentureship period in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Considering the original pedagogical purpose of the traditional *bildungsroman* with regard to, amongst others, normative gender roles, morality, and codes of behavior, Espinet's coming-of-age novel transgresses such a convention. Her protagonist resists stereotypical requirements of the obedient wife and loving mother; the novel itself does not offer a sub-plot of love and romance.²⁵¹ Mona defies 'traditional,' respectable perceptions of Hindu and Presbyterian womanhood associated with marriage and maternity, by embracing Creole identity refuses to conform to ethnic separationist policies, and qua her migrant status is not part of the mainstream in Canada either. As such, the novel constitutes a criticism of the genre itself and its literary depiction of conformity. The novel's attempt is to reconcile the various, sometimes contradictory or opposing elements that inform Trinidad's multiethnic society and, likewise, a Caribbean diaspora consciousness.

is degrading and denies her humanity. However, since the ape figures prominently in Hinduism as well as in the *Ramayana* in the shape of the ape-like god Hanuman, Baboonie may be read as a female revision.

251 See Francis on the "antiromance" (2010: 4-7).

5.8 Concluding Remarks

The Swinging Bridge recounts a young woman's coming of age, the successful solving of her identity crisis, and the recovery of her great-grandmother's story, which is meant to be exemplary for the history of indentured women in the Caribbean. Espinet has composed a diasporic, feminist novel in which she (re)constructs a specific aspect of Caribbean diaspora history reading it against the grain by privileging Indo-Trinidadian subjectivity and focusing on the matrilineal history of indentureship. The protagonist, describing her diaspora identity as "nowarian," defies normative codes of Indo-Caribbean femininity and scripts of patriarchal family structures. This gendered version of the crossing of the *kala pani* is an attempt to deconstruct hegemonic discourses (relating to such diverse topics as gender relations, sexuality, ethnic identity, or historiography) that succeeds due to the strong narrative voice of Mona Singh as well as Espinet's meticulous research and account – albeit within the realms of the fictional – of the historical context. Espinet's critique is manifold: it is directed at the erasure of women from historical record, racial politics and creolization of Trinidad, patriarchy, the shaming of the adolescent female body, as well as the multicultural promise of Canada, migrant life, alienation, and racism. The issues she examines relate to questions of home and belonging, complexities of diaspora, and, eventually, its effects on a young girl and her self-perception. Espinet states that "[f]eminism – [...] meaning the empowerment of women on all fronts – is always part of my writing" (*Espinet/Savory 1995*: 111-112). In this statement, and arguably so, we find a reference to a politically engaged writing. She, like many other Caribbean women writers, aims to "carve safe spaces of self-affirmation for [herself] and [her] sisters" (Mehta 2004: 23). This notion of feminist solidarity translates into a textual healing of the body and the subject, meaning recognition, acceptance, and recovery, and a personal quest for identity via the genre of the coming-of-age novel.

Espinet's diaspora novel intertwines notions of home and away and merges the distinct locations of Trinidad and Canada into a transnational imaginary. Canada as home and diaspora location gains importance due to several factors: Toronto is the location where much of Mona's memories come back, Montreal is the city she returns to and makes her home eventually. (And if nothing else, Canada is also the adopted home country of the author from where she writes.) The bridge, shaky and pulled at, metaphorically connects Mona's childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. It connects the "two Trinidads" – the Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian communities, as well as myriad diaspora experiences and

locations. The crossing of that bridge and connecting its ends, is for Mona “a process that takes her back in order to move forward” (Donnell 2006: 170), thus symbolizes recovery and a necessary reconciliation.

Taking into consideration that Indo-Caribbean women’s bodies, sexuality, and morality have been locked in stereotypes which inscribe them “as Hindu, as passive, as heterosexual, as conservative, as submissive, as guardian of Indian culture” (Hosein/Outar 2012: 1), Espinet’s is an attempt to deconstruct this dominant cultural discourse in the Caribbean and Canada alike. Her novel and the paradigm of the *kala pani* continuum is part of the increasing body of diasporic literature and theory that “disrupt and dislocate existing hegemonic discourses: they rock the boat and swing the bridge of established truths” (Kuortti 2008: 311). The novel challenges established social categories of ethnicity, creolization, gender, citizenship, and belonging. It is a cultural artifact that makes visible Indian women’s agency within the history of indentureship but also uncovers patriarchal narratives of nationhood and exclusion. Ramabai Espinet’s literary and scholarly work thus adds a distinct Trinidadian voice for the cultural identification and survival of the Indo-Caribbean community in Canada.

6. Bodies in Pain: Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

I threw another handful for my daughter who was not there, but was part of this circle of women from whose gravestones our names had been chosen.
(Danticat 1994: 232-233)

6.1 Introduction

Edwidge Danticat is one of the most popular and successful Caribbean writers, who have made the diaspora their permanent home. Danticat was born in Haiti's capital of Port-au-Prince in 1969 as the first of four children of a lower class family. Because her father left Haiti for the United States when she was two years old, and her mother followed him two years later, she grew up with her uncle and aunt in the last decade of the Duvalier dictatorship. She left Haiti with her brother for Brooklyn at the age of twelve to be joined with her parents and the two younger siblings, who were born in the U.S. and she has never met before. In the beginning, the language barrier, precarious financial situation, and prejudices against Haitians rendered adjustment difficult. However, she never felt completely isolated, finding not only a supportive network in the Haitian community on Flatbush Avenue but also solace in contemporary literature, in particular African American and Haitian writing (cf. Munro 2010b: 19-21). Having decided to become a writer, she studied French literature and pursued a degree at the Fine Arts program at Brown University. Her graduation piece entitled "My Turn in the Fire" (1993), a fictionalized account of her own experiences, would later on turn into her first novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). In 2002, she moved to Little Haiti in Miami where she still lives with her husband and daughters. She has retained close connections to Haiti and travels frequently.

Danticat claims that "[t]he immigrant artist shares with all other artists the desire to interpret and possibly remake his or her world" (2010: 18). A prize-winning novelist, short story writer, and author of non-fiction, and poetry, she

has published the novels *The Farming of Bones* (1998), *The Dew Breaker* (2004), and *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013), her first novel set entirely in Haiti; she has written the non-fictional *The Art of Death: Writing the Final Story* (2017), the memoir *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), as well as *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010), a memoir and homage to Haitian artists. She is the author of the short story collection *Krik? Krak!* (1996), of young adult fiction and children's books such as *Behind the Mountains* (2002) and *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti* (2010) which recounts the catastrophe of the earthquake in 2010 from a child's perspective. Further, she is the editor of the two Akashic-volumes of crime fiction *Haiti Noir I* and *II* (2010, 2014). Her success as an Haitian writer is not only due to her thrilling storytelling but also to her writing in English rather than French or Haitian Kreyòl. In tearing down the linguistic barrier, she has made Haitian literature more accessible to a larger, international audience, comparable to Haitian-Quebecois Dany Laferrière who, however, continues to write in French and actually refuses to being subsumed under ethnic labels (cf. Munro 2007: 178).

Danticat is a politically engaged writer and commentator on Haitian politics, culture, and arts, a community activist who speaks on behalf of the Haitian migrants and refugees, as well as a critic of U.S. immigration policy.²⁵² In *Create Dangerously* she writes about her Haitian background and the social responsibilities of the artist not to remain silent on issues of human injustices. She comes from a place where writing when critical of the regime was considered dangerous (cf. Danticat 2010). Under the rule of the Duvaliers, dissidents, authors, and intellectuals disappeared, were imprisoned, tortured, or killed.²⁵³ Criticism of Haitian politics and the Duvalier dictatorship, the failure of Aristide's presidency along with an oppositional stance against occupation and the hegemonic influence by the North are strong in Danticat's *œuvre*. Likewise, her writing unveils the racist stigmata that define the Haitian body as an 'ultimate Other' in relation both to the Dominican neighbor as well as to the majority society in the United States. By writing intimate histories that engage readers in very sympathetic, compassionate, and emotional ways (cf. Fulani 2005: 77), she has successfully included "Haitian realities in the American imagination" (Chancy 2001: 17).

This chapter investigates the ways Danticat's debut novel stages sexual violence, bodily destruction, and healing, which are defining moments in the pro-

252 Danticat's uncle died while being held prisoner by the border control at the Krome detention center in Miami. Her publication *Brother, I'm Dying* depicts this family tragedy.

253 One may want to recall the murder of Jacques-Stephen Alexis in 1961.

cess of the protagonist's coming-of-age. At the same time as the novel tells a story in which intimate violence and the transmission of trauma seem to conflate with practices of socialization, it also suggests individual strategies of survival and a coming to terms with pain. As in the two preceding chapters, I first outline the socio-cultural context of Haiti and the recent history of migration to the United States, followed by a brief overview of the Haitian literature of the diaspora. The textual analysis, then, focuses on the subjection of the female body to state-sanctioned violence and sexual surveillance. With regard to this topic, the analysis connects to Donette Francis' work on *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in which she investigates the "scenes of subjection" that serve to "make sexual violations, here against black women's bodies, visible" (2004: 77). I draw attention to the novel's attempt to re-construct the body as site of memory where individual trauma, pain, remembrance, and forgetting collide. Additionally, I highlight in how far the female body becomes a source of shame, inextricably linked to gender and racial inscriptions. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* tells as a story of migration and illustrates that in women's bodies and their knowledge the connection to the island home remains intact and alive. Storytelling and the evocation of Vodou, especially through the goddess Ezili, not only unite the generations but also open space for healing and transgression.²⁵⁴ The final section takes issue with the generic features that characterize Danticat's first novel as a Caribbean diaspora coming-of-age novel as well as with the "Afterword" that the author has included five years after the novel's original publication as a deliberate, almost authoritarian attempt to reclaim the story.

6.1.1 Ayiti and the Tenth Department in the Diaspora

The first Caribbean nation to free itself from colonial bondage and to emerge as the first independent Black republic, Haiti still ranks among the poorest countries in the world today. "As Haiti begins its third century as a free country, the past still lurks in present crises, such as the disrupted attempts in 2004 to commemorate a Haitian Revolution that remains in many ways unfinished" (Dubois 2011: 286-7).²⁵⁵ The historian Laurent Dubois points out the continuity of

254 For a more in-depth discussion of the Vodou aesthetics and poetics in the fictional work of Edwidge Danticat and Myriam A. Chancy, see Beushausen/Brüske (2016).

255 The disruption refers to yet another military coup against then-president Bertrand Aristide; the involvement of the U.S. is still not completely clear. See Roland Péresse on the democratic development in Haiti in the early 1990s. He describes Aris-

dependency and foreign occupation which runs counter-wise to the nation's struggle for autonomy and self-government. Adding to this, authoritarian regimes, internal structural problems, corruption, and institutionalized state violence inhibit stability and democratic progress for the majority of the population.

On January 1, 1804, the western part of the island Hispaniola, Saint-Domingue, was returned to its original pre-colonial name Haiti, deriving from Ayiti, the Taíno name for Hispaniola meaning 'the land of mountains.' This day officially ended the systematic colonization and enslavement under French rule, which began in the first half of the 17th century when the Spanish crown ceded the land to France.²⁵⁶ By the eighteenth century France' richest colony, Saint-Domingue had become the most productive coffee and sugar plantation economy in the Western hemisphere, exceeding even the production rate of Jamaica. In 1791 started the decade of the revolution which ended with Haiti's declaration of independence in 1804 under the rule of Toussaint Louverture. That the various rebellions in Haiti – in contrast to any other Caribbean colony – would turn into a successful slave revolution is owed to several coinciding factors: The population of enslaved Africans by far outnumbered the ruling colonialists, which made slave revolts all the more a frequent occurrence. In 1794, a Jacobins-ruled France recognized the freedom of formerly enslaved persons and subsequently abolished slavery in the empire.²⁵⁷ In the course of the French Revolution, the administration of the colonies weakened and there was a flow of ideas on human rights and exchange of humanist and enlightened ideals of equality between the colony and the 'motherland.' The functioning communication networks among the slaves on the plantations and later a militarized offensive facilitated the revolutionary actions. Indeed, the revolution found support in the shared belief system of Vodou, which provided a

tide as a character who polarized the population and international community. The former priest, he writes, "is certainly one of the most controversial personalities on the world scene today. Evaluations of this man vary from adulation and worship by his followers, to charges of murderer and psychopath by his enemies and detractors" (1995: 1). The operation "Uphold Democracy" in 1994 secured the return of Aristide after the military coup and his ousting in 1991. In 2004, after another coup, he was exiled and accompanied out of the country by U.S. troops which Aristide later declared a kidnapping.

256 The introduction of the *Code Noir* in 1687 was meant to regulate slavery and the status and treatment of the enslaved population in the French Antilles (cf. Gewecke 1991).

257 On the Haitian slave revolts and the revolution as well as the connection to the French Revolution, see especially C.L.R. James seminal study *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938).

source of identity and resilience.²⁵⁸ Adding to this, the rivalries among the free population that were separated by skin color and property, the *grand blancs* and *petits blancs* as well as free *gens de couleur*, rendered difficult a common agreement on how to react to the force of the resisting majority.

The Revolution was successful in that it put an end to slavery. What followed were intense nation building processes accompanied by a search for identity. Blackness entered the national discourse of identity after the proclamation of the Black Republic, but does not obtain a primary role in its definition. However, Blackness emerged not as a marker of inferiority but “a banner for unity and mobilization around a common project of freedom and equality that defied racial and economic injustice worldwide” (Guerra 2014: n.p.). Along with these transformative processes, nevertheless, came civil war, authoritarian rule, and militarism.²⁵⁹ As a matter of fact, the revolution instigated not only hostility but also the fear throughout the colonial empire that other colonies could follow the example set by Haiti and turn against imperial rule. In turn, in Haiti, which was then politically isolated, the fear of invasion and renewed seizure was omnipresent, so that huge amounts of the budget went into mili-

258 Vodou refers to the large variety of African-derived religious practices that enslaved Africans have brought with them during the slave trade from the western coast of Africa to Haiti. The term Vodou originally meant “spirit” or “sacred energy” and derived from the Fon kingdom of former Dahomey, now Benin in West Africa. There exists a threefold definition of Vodou defining it, first, as specific “rites derived from the Arada and Nago”; second, as more inclusive of other rites “clustered around Arada and Nago, such as the Ibo”; thirdly, as the entirety of African-Haitian religious practices and its creolized forms (cf. Fernández Olmos/Paravisini-Gebert 2011: 117). Regarded as a spiritual philosophy of the Black majority population and poor country folks, Vodou oftentimes has falsely been connected with evil sorcery and black magic. Due to the limited knowledge of many within and outside of Haiti, Vodou believers have repeatedly been subjected to political and economic marginalization, stigmatization, and persecution throughout history. Vodou used to be Haiti’s major religion after independence until the Catholic Church returned in the 1860s and Vodou was officially banned. Former president François Duvalier rehabilitated the religion but misused it for self-fashioning and intimidation. Catholicism remained the single official religion in Haiti until 1987. However, the two religions have never existed in complete isolation from each other, which manifests itself, for example, in the comparison of the *lwa*, the different Vodou spirits and manifestations, to Christian Saints (cf. Fernández Olmos/Paravisini-Gebert 2011). The West African-derived religious practice in its syncretized form with Catholicism is an important element of cultural identity in Haiti.

259 In particular Jean-Pierre Boyer, second president of Haiti from 1818 to 1843, exercised an autocratic leadership style and pursued a policy of militarism (cf. Dubois 2012: 97). It was also under Boyer that the contract with France was negotiated that governed the indemnity Haiti agreed to pay to France.

tary defense.²⁶⁰ In fact, it was not before 1825 that France recognized Haiti as an independent republic and the U.S. did so only by 1862.

A further factor that lay the groundwork for Haiti's future crises was the demand of indemnity France imposed on Haiti for the economic loss and for recognition of their independent status. By 1914, about 80 percent of Haiti's national budget went to France and other creditors at the expense of the sustainable construction of national infrastructure and economy (cf. Dubois 2012: 8). Moreover, as a legacy of colonial governance, the population remained divided (cf. Smith 2009: 246). On the one side, there was the ruling, mostly Creole or mulatto elite (among them the *anciens libres*) in the south and urban center around Port-au-Prince, who kept state power, imposed high taxes, and wanted to retain the plantation economy; on the other side, the rural, mostly Black population (the *nouveaux libres*), who opposed plantation work, were in favor of agriculture and farming for the own subsistence and small scale export.²⁶¹ The nineteenth and twentieth century continued to be shaped by the social division of the population, political and economic instability, as well as exclusionary models of civic participation and citizenship. Dubois confirms:

The deep division over what Haiti should be has shaped the entire political history of the country. [...] In the past two centuries, this stalemate between the ruling class and the broader population has led to a devastating set of authoritarian political habits. Over time – often convinced that the masses were simply not ready to participate in political life – the Haitian governing elites crafted

260 Mimi Sheller points out the crucial role of the construction of a martial image of Black masculinity and patriarchy in the definition of Haitian national identity (cf. Sheller 2012: 142). She further explains that “a fundamental aspect of the Haitian nation-building project was the elevation of the black man out of the depths of slavery into his rightful place as father, leader, and protector of his own people” (ibid.: 148). This also had an impact on the role of women within the society, as Sheller argues: “In seizing the reins of power and constructing a militarized and masculine model of citizenship, the victors of this slave revolution created a political paradox that still plagues Haiti: The egalitarian and democratic values of republicanism were constantly undercut by the hierarchical and elitist values of militarism. The paramount sign of this fundamental contradiction was the exclusion of women from the wholly masculine realms of state politics and citizenship” (ibid.: 142).

261 A small rural elite owned the largest portions of the land. In land reforms, plots were more and more divided in ever smaller parcels. Haitian society differentiated, for instance, the *anciens libres*, the mostly mulatto population who gained freedom during slavery, and the mostly Black *nouveaux libres*, who were freed after the Revolution. While *creole* meant Caribbean-born, *blanc* used to designate any foreigner or foreign-born person. On the color ideology interrelated with gender in Haiti of the 19th century, see Sheller (2012: 149, 155).

state institutions that excluded most Haitians from formal political involvement. Although reformers occasionally pushed for a more liberal democracy, the elites always closed ranks whenever the question of sharing political power with the rural population arose. (2012: 6-7)

The often violent coups and failed attempts to establish a democracy served as excuse for external political interventionism, especially by the U.S. government who took a strategic geopolitical interest in Haiti. Its (imperial) occupation lasted from 1915 until 1934. Admittedly, their presence brought improvement of the infrastructure, education and medical system, but it bankrupted the Haitian state, because they took over the control of the national bank, and caused increased dependency on foreign investment. The Haitian government was forced to sell out the rights to infrastructural and agricultural projects to U.S. companies. The land expropriation and relocation of production to urban centers caused rural migration to the city and for the first time also labor migration within the Caribbean region. This led parts of the rural population to take up arms against the occupation, the best known being the rebellion by the Cacos, farmers from the impoverished countryside in the North, which was put down forcefully.²⁶²

After the occupation, the political, ideological climate was characterized by tensions between the *mulâtre* and Black elite as well as the competing ideas of Marxism and *noirisme*.²⁶³ One man who used the instability to his advantage was François Duvalier. A well-educated doctor and charismatic orator, he was able to unite a Black majority behind him. He declared himself president for life in 1964, which started his reign of violence and torture during which he eliminated much of the opposition. Duvalier used failing attempts at Marxism in his favor, promoting an anti-communist atmosphere thus securing the goodwill of the U.S. government who throughout the years would back his rule and turn a blind eye on the state violence. The dictatorship of “Papa Doc” Duvalier lasted from 1957 until his death in 1971, immediately followed by his son Jean-Claude

262 On the “Caco resistance,” cf. Dubois (2012: 225-231). Danticat makes reference to this historical event in the novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* by giving the protagonist the family name *Caco*.

263 Depending on presidency, Élie Sténio Vincent, president until 1941, operated the country in favor of the Black elite, however in a rather autocratic style suppressing political protest. He was succeeded by Élie Lescot, a *mulâtre* and pro-U.S. president, who was favored by the light-skinned population but alienated the peasantry and Black elite (cf. Niblett 2012: 3). The growing impoverishment of the rural population added to the insecure political climate and racial tensions.

"Baby Doc" Duvalier who continued the terror regime until 1986.²⁶⁴ Both secured their power with the support of the *Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale*, infamously known as the *Tonton Macoutes*, a terror unit that spread fear and violence. The Duvalier tyranny is also inseparably linked to the creation of the diaspora. It led to an immense exodus of the country's intellectuals and writers who went into exile in France, Quebec, and to the United States. It is estimated that about one million Haitians fled the country throughout the dictatorship years. In the early years of Duvalier, the large majority of the political refugees were intellectuals and more affluent Haitians who opposed the regime. (About 80% of the professionals and intellectuals had left the country by the mid-1960s in a so-called 'brain drain'). Soon after that – and once more increasingly after the coup against Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991 – especially impoverished Haitians of the lower classes left for the U.S. in hope for better opportunities, mostly by boat thus escaping severe economic conditions, political persecution, and natural catastrophe (in the so-called crisis of the 'boat people') (cf. Dubois 2012: 353).

As a matter of fact, neither the finis of the Duvalier era nor the new constitution of 1987, which was meant to nurture democratic transition, were able to bring the country relief or end the repeating cycles of violence in Haiti. On the contrary, Dubois attests the country a political exhaustion caused, among other things, by the "succession of military regimes [which] has left the country with almost no functioning social infrastructure" (Dubois 2012: 9). The new constitution of 1987, which among other issues included the recognition of Kreyòl as an official language and Vodou as second state religion next to Catholicism, has been regarded as an attempt to reconstruct the state from its core. However, the military and former followers of Duvalier opposed the democratic transition. In 1990, the democratic election of Jean-Bertrand Aristide brought some hope for change, but his unpopularity with the military and the elite led to a coup in 1991 and the killing of thousands of the supporters of Aristide's *Lavalas*

264 The end of the Duvalier-regime was due to many factors: Baby Doc's lack of political expertise and charisma, the pressure by the U.S. under Carter to loosen restrictions imposed on the population, the internal division among Duvalier's supporters, intensified civic protest (because of hunger, the fate of the 'boat people,' repressions of Haitians in the D.R.), openings of free radio stations, and newspapers increasingly critical of the regime. Duvalier first reacted with another wave of brutal repression and silencing of oppositional voices in the early 1980s – in his favor was the anti-Haitian climate and the refugee policy of Ronald Reagan in the States. The opposition grew stronger, also with the support of the Catholic Church, and after the killing of three students in 1985, the protest spread over the whole country. Jean-Claude Duvalier was forced into exile in 1986.

movement.²⁶⁵ Political and economic instability, high inflation, public protest, the persistence of corruption, and every-day occurrences of violence have taken a toll on the population.

Haiti, throughout its history as an independent nation, has been deliberately constructed and represented as the ultimate ‘other’ by both Caribbean as well as Euro- and American-centric discourses and imaginations. Haiti has been reduced to its ‘uncivilized alterity’ not only in Eurocentric discourses but also in the literature from within the Caribbean as well as in relation to other Caribbean societies. The stigmatization of Haiti as the ‘poorest country’ in the Western hemisphere, as a notorious place of ‘savagery’ and excessive, barbaric violence – what Michael Dash paraphrases as “the ‘Haitianizing’ of Haiti as unredeemably deviant” (Dash 1997: 137) – thus continues to dominate the image of Haiti.²⁶⁶ The earthquake on January 12, 2010 has re-opened the discussion on Haiti as a ‘failed state’ but also disclosed the perilous effects of neo-imperialist intervention by foreign aid, exemplified by the operation of MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti). The solidarity and support among the Haitian people, nevertheless, has led many to believe in another chance of reconstruction.

In 2017, Haiti counts a population of almost eleven million people.²⁶⁷ An increasingly transnational network has developed between the local and diaspora Haitian communities. As Bronfman argues, rapid changes of “democratic regimes, along with continuous pressure for neoliberal reforms on the part of international aid institutions, both drove Haitians away from the island and made them determined to participate in events from afar” (Bronfman 2007: 16). An estimated two million Haitians live abroad, having taken up permanent residency mainly in New York City, Miami, Quebec, Montreal, and in the metropolitan regions of France, but also on other Caribbean islands such as the Dominican Republic and the Bahamas. Dubois confirms a blurring of boundaries and borders through migration as well as the (local) significance of the diaspora: Haiti has become a

vast and seemingly boundless territory made up of communities not only within the borders of the country but in Boston, New York, Miami, Montréal, Paris,

265 In 1994, Aristide was reinstated with the help of U.S.-troops under Bill Clinton. In 1996, René Préval took over. Aristide was in power again from 2000 until 2004 when he was forced into exile, backed again by U.S.-intervention, this time, however, to his disadvantage.

266 On the global image of Haiti, see Borst (2015: 55-60); Munro (2010c: 1-6); Wagner (2010: 18); Trouillot (1995: 121-132).

267 Cf. “The World Bank Data: Haiti” (2019).

Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory

Guadeloupe, French Guiana, the Bahamas [...]. This diaspora was later dubbed the "Tenth Department" – an international supplement to the nine official districts within Haiti itself – as a way of acknowledging both how essential it is to Haiti's present and future and how firmly established these emigrants have become in their adopted lands. (Dubois 2012: 354)

The United States in particular are crucial for the development of the Haitian diaspora, being the major hub for migrants from Haiti. Between 1980 and 2008 the number of Haitian immigrant arrivals to the United States has quintupled (cf. Schulz/Batalova 2017). In 2015, approximately 670,000 Haitians lived in the U.S., making up the fourth largest group of migrants from the Caribbean, succeeding Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica (cf. *ibid.*). It was also the United States where many Haitians sought refuge after the earthquake. Tens of thousands Haitians were granted temporary residency. U.S. president Donald Trump has ended the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in November, 2017. This means that almost 60,000 so-called TPS-holders are obliged to return within a couple of months. Moreover, Haiti's national income is largely generated through remittances sent from abroad, especially from the U.S. (cf. "Migration and Remittances Data" 2017); political decisions and elections are commented on and influenced from Haitians living in the U.S. – a prominent example is the candidacy for presidency by artist and rapper Wyclef Jean in 2010, who, however, was considered ineligible for not having lived on Haitian soil long enough.

Among the members of the U.S.-Haitian migrant community there is a strong sense of belonging and identification with *Haitianness*, which relates both to identity politics but also the strategic multiculturalism fostered by the U.S.-migrant policies. For the second half of the twentieth century, sociologist and feminist scholar Carole Charles observes that in the urban "New York area, although there was no exclusive geographical concentration of Haitians, there was a clear *collective consciousness* of being Haitian, reinforced by language, a strong nationalism, and a distinct identification of Blackness" (Charles 1995: n.p.; emphasis added) – the latter aspect refers to the relation of Haitians to African Americans in terms of racial constructions, identity, and perception vis-à-vis the U.S.-mainstream.

Danticat, in addition, describes the complexity of diasporic belonging and 'ethno-cultural' identity which incorporates also the 'consciousness' of being American along with a 'collective' *Haitianness*. She self-identifies as "AHA," merging African-Haitian-American defying a single identity, which, and arguably so, testifies to an 'entanglement' within the Americas as well as the routes of the African and Caribbean diaspora (cf. Danticat 2001a). With this, she

acknowledges ancestral roots and colonial history, her birthplace Haiti as well as the close connections for those who were born outside the country, and lastly the U.S. as permanent place of residence. That home itself is a shifting concept and that for many Haitians the diaspora has become a point of reference for belonging is also addressed by Danticat:

My country [...] is one of uncertainty. When I say 'my country' to some Haitians, they think of the United States. When I say 'my country' to some Americans, they think of Haiti. [...] My country, I felt, was something that was then being called the tenth department. Haiti has nine geographic departments and the tenth was the floating homeland, the ideological one, which joined all Haitians living in the *diaspora*. (Danticat 2001b: xiv)²⁶⁸

Home may thus be unstable and ever changing: In the case of the Haitian *diaspora* (and this probably holds true for the Caribbean diaspora in more general terms) home is an ideological, or ideal, construct that transcends borders and territorial boundaries. It renders difficult too static concepts of citizenship and national belonging.

6.1.2 Haitian Literature of the Diaspora

The literature that has been developing in Haiti since the 1800s initially conformed to and was modelled after classical, canonical literature made in France, especially in terms of the narrative strategies and aesthetics (cf. Gewecke 1991).²⁶⁹ Starting in the 1920s with the beginning of the cultural movement of *indigénisme*, a nationalist, if not nativist literature developed, which was affirmative of Haitian culture and the African heritage (Vodou in particular), and was innovative with regard to form and content. Authors like Jean Price-Mars,

268 *Diaspora* is the Kreyòl-spelling that Danticat uses when referring to Haiti's Tenth Department.

269 Frauke Gewecke retraces the development of Haitian literature from its early years until the second half of the twentieth century. She argues that despite the proximity to the European and French literary tradition, a distinct Haitian literature slowly emerged. The cultural environment flourished somewhat in isolation from the European writing culture, which rendered possible the maintenance of African traditions as part of the local culture however adapted to the transformed social context, and developed further through oral transmission (cf. Gewecke 1991: 63). It should also be mentioned that the reading public was limited in size and that the majority of the Kreyòl-speaking Haitian population, illiterate by the majority, was excluded from the literature written exclusively in French.

for example, contributed to the development of a local literary tradition and dedicated his writing to *indigénisme* also as a means of resistance to the U.S.-occupation and as demarcation from the colonial French legacy; Jacques Roumain was committed to a critical social realism foregrounding the living conditions of the rural population; Jacques Stephen Alexis had a significant influence on the development of a *réalisme merveilleux*. What has emerged is a politically engaged writing, which in the course of the Duvalier dictatorship has intensified. Literary production was increasingly subject to censorship and many authors faced repression and persecution (in *Create Dangerously*, Danticat, too, describes this atmosphere of terror and violence that affected Haiti's literary scene). The almost thirty years of intellectual censorship during the Duvalier regime forced many writers and artists into exile, from where they continued their work to oppose and critique the regime.

In any case, the development of a strong critical literary voice in Haiti itself was almost impossible, which is confirmed by Haitian writer Yanick Lahens, who refers to the local writers of that time as "the lost generation" (Zimra 1993: 78). In addition to the political, ideological conditions of the past, the present precarious economic condition further complicates matters; the low income generated through literary writing, an insufficient local publishing industry and infrastructure, the high rate of illiteracy, as well as the low purchase power of Haitians negatively impact the development of a more established literary culture. For a long time, Haitian literature has been composed predominantly by writers located in the diaspora, mostly written in French and distributed primarily by Canadian and French publishers (cf. Gewecke 1991: 61). In the 21st century, international publishers show increasing interest in the literature from Haiti and make it available for the international reading public (cf. Borst 2015: 20).²⁷⁰

The development from a Haitian literature of exile (1960s/1970s) to a distinct diaspora literature (since the 1980s) is notable for instance in the writings by those authors who live in Canada (cf. Siemerling 2012: 208-209). Of interest, certainly, is the group of authors who went into exile in Québec. Exiled novelists like Émile Ollivier, Gérard Étienne, and Anthony Phelps, who left Haiti in 1964, or poet Joël des Rosiers, who went into exile later, have dedicated them-

270 See, for instance, the edited volume by Nadève Ménard (2011) on contemporary Haitian literature. Popular local Haitian writers are Évelyne Trouillot, Kettly Mars, Yanick Lahens, Lyonel Trouillot, or Gary Victor. The works of Frankétienne are important especially for the attempt to promote Kreyòl as 'adequate' literary language. Numerous artists in Haiti and the diaspora have begun to deal with the humanitarian catastrophe following the earthquake, such as Lahens in *Failles* (2010) or Mars in *Aux frontières de la soif* (2013).

selves to the form of a *littérature engagée*, a political writing that critically evaluates the Duvalier dictatorship and the violence they fled from.²⁷¹ The following generation of writers who migrated in the 1970s to Francophone Canada, such as Dany Laferrière or Marie-Célie Agnant, take on a pioneering role for the so-called urban “*fiction montréalaise*” (cf. Brähler 2013: 55-56; Kortenaar 2009: 562). As Haitian diaspora authors, they are also counted among the “Néo-Québécois” (Brüske/Jessen 2013: 10), representatives of a transcultural literature of Québec that shifts more attention to the present condition in multicultural Canada and life in North America, while seeking to retain the connection to Haiti.²⁷² Also, the former colonial ‘motherland’ France is home to a notable community of Haitian writers like René Depestre or Louis-Philippe Dalembert, whose work is also translated into German.

The far-reaching international reception of Haitian literature is certainly thanks to authors like Danticat or Myriam Chancy. Both of them compose their fiction in English and through their research and publication as literary scholars they contribute to the visibility of Haitian literature and Caribbean women’s writing on the literary market.²⁷³ The commonality in the choice of topics by Haitian local and diaspora writers offers fruitful ground for comparison of this yet quite diverse literature. Mostly, this literature takes issue with Haiti’s past and present, such as the massacre of Haitians at the Dominican-Haitian border in 1937, the dictatorship, the post-Duvalier era, the earthquake, and the debilitating after-effects. Some further recurring topics Haitian literature shares with the literatures from the Caribbean in general are social inequalities and

271 Phelps’ *Mémoire en colin-maillard* (1976) or Étienne’s *Un ambassadeur macoute à Montréal* (1979) are radical political novels characterized by an aggressive atmosphere of fear, terror, and cruelty, pleading for constitutional change and social renewal (cf. Gewecke 1991: 72). I elaborate on the aspect of Caribbean women’s writing as a form of political writing in the conclusion.

272 Dany Laferrière’s *Comment faire l’amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985), in dem der 1976 nach Québec ausgewanderte Romanautor mit den Auto- und Heterostereotypen weißer Nordamerikaner und schwarzer Einwanderer spielt, die Öffnung der haitianischen Minderheitenliteratur für das sie umgebende Hier und Jetzt (Brähler 56). Der auch jeglichen ethnischen Labels trotz, was er karikiert in seinem Roman *Je suis un auteur japonais*.

273 Chancy is an accomplished writer of fiction and a literary scholar who has published books on Haitian women’s writing in *Framing Silence* (1997), in *Searching for Safe Spaces* (1997) on African-Caribbean women’s writing of the diaspora, and, more recently, in *From Sugar to Revolution* (2012) on women writers of fiction and artists from Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic. The collection *The Butterfly’s Way* (2001) edited by Danticat brings together thirty-three Haitian diaspora writers who have made North America their permanent place of residence but feel rooted in both worlds.

racial discrimination, gendered forms of violence, sexualities, exile and migration, migrant and transcultural identity, the relation between life in the diaspora and memories of home, or African-creole culture (cf. Borst 2015; Dalember/Trouillot 2010; Gewecke 1991). In particular, Danticat's work suggests an interplay of individual lived experience and national and diaspora history, which achieves complexity through the underlying dynamics of intersectional patterns of inequality without being overly deterministic. Questions concerning identity and gender, a violent history, the notion of multiple homelands as well as a confusing sense of belonging are central elements of her writing. This makes her multi-layered work relevant for diaspora studies in general and further defines Haitian literature.

6.2 *Breath, Eyes, Memory*: Terrorizing and Terrorized Bodies

The novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is set in the second half of the twentieth century against the context of the Duvalier dictatorship, its aftermaths, and the emergence of a transnational Haitian community.²⁷⁴ The novel is an often painful exploration of a young girl's coming of age and her migration story. The roughly twelve years the novel covers in the protagonist's life are impaired by multiple forms of violence and traumatic events. Sophie Caco, the first-person narrator, grows up with her aunt Atie in the Haitian town called Croix-des-Rosets. Her mother, Martine, who was raped when she was sixteen years old, has fled from the memory to live in New York, leaving Sophie, who is conceived of this rape, with her sister in Haiti. As a consequence, Sophie, who considers herself rather the child of her aunt, gets to know Martine only through photographs, cassette tapes, and gifts sent from abroad.

Sophie is twelve years old when she leaves Haiti and her beloved aunt and grandmother Ifé to be reunited with her mother. The flight to New York, where she is picked up by Martine whom she does not recognize from the photos, constitutes the first profound rupture in her socialization process. The feeling of mutual estrangement between mother and daughter – obvious also in Molly's and Glory's reunion in *The Heart Does Not Bend* – becomes literally visible when Sophie finds an infant photo on her mother's shelf but detects no resem-

274 Unlike Silvera and Espinet, Danticat makes no explicit reference to the temporal setting through concrete dates. Arguably, this adds to the singularity of the story and lessens the claim for the novel to be representative of a nation's history.

blance between herself as a baby and the other family members. Adding to her increasing sense of alienation are her mother's frequent nightmares and soon Sophie learns about the reason behind them.

Sophie settles in a daily routine living a static life in isolation, moving between school and her mother's home only. When she is eighteen, she falls in love with the musician Joseph, her African-American neighbor, a sensitive, loving man who is twice her age. When Martine finds out about their secret encounters she begins testing her daughter's virginity, like her own mother did before, saying it is a mother's duty to protect her daughter's purity. This horrifies and traumatizes Sophie to such an extent, that one night she takes her mother's mortar and 'destroys' her hymen with the pestle. She eventually fails the test and is thrown out by her mother, whereupon she leaves with Joseph to Providence, gets married, and gives birth to a baby girl. For Sophie, the result of the rape-like testing is her developing body shame, bulimia, and sexual phobia, for which the only remedy seems to be the return to Haiti. This trip is the beginning of Sophie's journey of healing during which she not only confronts her family about the traditional testing, but also manages to reconcile with her mother. Martine, pregnant with a second child, still lives with the psychological aftereffects of the rape and makes an ultimate choice to come to terms with it.

Danticat explains: "I am drawn to stories that haunt me, that make me want to cry, and I tend to write those" (Alexandre/Howard/Danticat 2007: 164). The novel foregrounds personal, intimate, and political acts of violence inflicted upon women's bodies during (or by) the dictatorship and throughout the post-Duvalier era. These acts of cruelty leave the women characters temporarily or permanently shamed and dysfunctional. Understanding the body at the same time as a *terrorizing* entity and as a *terrorized* one foregrounds the connection of citizenship with systemic, governmental forms of oppression and intimidation as well as individual fear and anxiety. Both grasp the duality of the body as subject/object, of victimizer/victim, indicative of that the victim – under certain extreme conditions of fear and violence – can turn into the perpetrator, and vice versa. Bodily autonomy and practices of citizenship thus restricted and violated demonstrate the fragility of the embodied subject, that is nevertheless, as Danticat wishes to show, able to make choices and heal. In the novel, terror not only associated with Duvalier's *tonton macoutes* but also in form of sexual traditions of purity, racism, or social isolation manifests itself materially through tangible forms of bodily (self-)violation such as eating disorder, rape, or virginity testing, but also does so symbolically through emotional pain and trauma.

6.2.1 State Violence and Social Conditions of Rape: The Cane Field as Site of Exceptional Violence

Myriad manifestations of violence, a sense of fear and terror are present in Danticat's *œuvre*; bodies in pain and agony haunt her stories. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, too, most of the novel's characters are exposed to extremely harsh living conditions, emotional stress, and physical violence. There is Sophie's grandfather who dies from a heat stroke while working in the cane fields. His death is reminiscent of the many enslaved people who toiled and died on the plantations. It is symbolic of both the colonial continuity of labor exploitation and the precarious economic conditions in a country that drains its population. Of significance for the violence implemented by government forces is furthermore a students' protest against the repressive regime of Duvalier that young Sophie passes on her way to the airport in the capital on the day she leaves Haiti.²⁷⁵ Soldiers, in a murderous rage, are shooting; one of them injures a girl by hitting her with his gun, the blood streaming down her face – the first occurrence of the many bleeding female bodies in the novel (cf. 34). In addition, the murder of a coal vendor at the hands of some *macoutes* may be a minor event later on in the story but serves as an example of the random killings during the dictatorship and testifies to an atmosphere of fear among the population. That the coal vendor's name is Dessalines is an explicit historical reference to this important figure of the Haitian Revolution and Haiti's spirit of resistance that Duvalier and his despotism attempt to break. A neighbor's shout "They killed Dessalines" (138) would have resonated throughout the country almost two hundred years earlier, too. Here, the narrative draws attention to the repetitive pattern of history and directly refers to the commemoration of the Revolution and its bloody aftermath.

The destructive force of state-sanctioned violence manifests itself on the individual body through, for instance, sexual violation. The aftereffects of rape impinge upon the female characters, their subject position, and the ways they come to experience their sexuality. Apparently, Martine's rape and her bodily vulnerability lay bare a context of societal strictures and the patriarchal, colonial dispossession of the Black female body. Atie explains to Sophie: "Your mother and I, when we were children we had no control over anything. Not even this body. [...] We are a family with dirt under our fingernails [...], daughters of the hills, old peasant stock, *pitit soyèt*, ragamuffins" (20). The lack of

275 The protest Danticat describes in the novel possibly commemorates the students protest of 1985 in Gonaïves during which three innocent students were killed by government forces.

bodily autonomy especially for rural citizens like the Caco-women is linked to poverty and social standing.²⁷⁶ What is implied here is the appropriation of women's bodies by a ruling elite and a foreign occupation force within an exploitative system that re-establishes strictly classed and gendered hierarchies in which the female body does not become but rather continues to be 'rapable.'

Rape is a specifically gendered form of violence and dominance. As an extreme form of bodily disenfranchisement, humiliation, and degradation, rape is "a method of political control, enforcing the subordination of women" (Herman 1997: 30). Francis points out the "larger cultural systems" (2004: 81) in which violence against women is perpetuated and ultimately concealed "in the 'larger' political narratives of Haiti" (77). Zoë Brigley Thompson and Sorcha Gunne argue that against the colonial context of conquest and exploitation "the imaginative construction of the nation is often constituted entirely through the image of woman and therefore rape becomes an ideological weapon" (2010: 6). In the novel, too, sexual violence functions as a brutal tool of intimidation and repression embodied not only in the figure of the *tonton macoutes* but also in the protagonist's own mother. The protagonist takes note of the daily threats an entire population lives with:

Who invented the Macoutes? The devil didn't do it and God didn't do it. [...] But the Macoutes, they did not hide. When they entered a house, they asked to be fed, demanded the woman of the house, and forced her into her own bedroom. Then all you heard was screams until it was her daughter's turn. If a mother refused, they would make her sleep with her son and brother or even her own father. (138-9)

She is explicit about the sexual abuse and systematic violence the terror militia perpetuates under Duvalier. Their bodies are recognized as terrorizing entities who enter the intimacy of the familial sphere. The incestuous acts they enforce upon the family members, both male and female, ultimately destroy the safety and structural unity provided by the family. The violation of Martine's body should not be read solely as a metaphorical act of conquest and possession in which the body is reduced to its symbolism, but also as an act of force against the flesh. Nevertheless, if, as Mimi Sheller notes, the Haitian government considered necessary the militarization and masculinization of the state to defend itself from external (imperial) intrusion, the male citizen becomes the protector of a feminized 'Mother' Haiti (cf. Sheller 2012: 148-50). By means of the post-colonial patriarchal nationalist paradigm, acts of subjection and violence

276 On the disenfranchised peasantry in Haiti's rural region – in particular their resistance during the U.S.-occupation – see Dubois (2012: 22).

against Haitian women from within are then normalized or silenced by the state that fails intentionally to protect its citizens. The motive of the mother nation penetrated by its male progeny hence is not only an incestuous but a destructive one.

With Martine's rape, Danticat resorts to the cane field as the site of exceptional and spectacular violence. Similar to such writers as Junot Díaz in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), Julia Alvarez in *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), or Louis-Philippe Dalembert in *L'Autre Face de la Mer* (1998), Danticat aestheticizes violence as to be emblematic of twentieth-century Haiti and the Dominican Republic, i.e. the dictatorships of the Duvaliers and Trujillo, the massacre of Haitians at the Dominican border, or the U.S. occupation. In all these novels, the colonial space of the cane field, or the "killing field" in Danticat's phrasing (2010: 73), is the site where torture and murder happen, not in full view but still very much visible. These literary representations show how the public staging of violence generates fear and has the potential to intimidate a whole population.

The contemporary enactment of violence in postcolonial Caribbean spaces, Thomas argues, has "emerged from layered histories and therefore [has] layered, and sometimes unexpected, effects" (2011: 124). The systemic and state-sanctioned forms of violence that were installed with slavery continue to pervade throughout the decolonial era and seemingly stalemate the postcolonial state. In this sense, it is both spectacular and exceptional. Spectacular denotes the public staging of corporeal terror, representations, repertoires, and performances of violence that are informed by earlier imperial "spectacular techniques through which conquest over the bodies of others is either literal [...] or symbolic [...] to discourage breaches of the hegemonic order" (ibid.) – be it the imperial or heteropatriarchal order. It is exceptional because it is arbitrary, shaped both by colonial and neo-colonial power imbalances, and especially because it is repetitive in its every-day occurrence. Violence legitimized by governments and anchored within society becomes to be regarded as acceptable and accepted.

There exists hardly any other symbol for the pain inflicted on millions of Black diaspora bodies during and after slavery like the violence-generating and violence-perpetuating cane. The cane field as the site of Martine's rape with the cane serving as trope of colonial dis-/possession directly links her suffering to a long history of exceptional violence, i.e. enslavement. There is a corporeal dimension to the field work itself as bodily matter (like blood and sweat) leaks into ground. Can we read Sophie and Martine's suffering from the cane field, i.e. rape, as a collective embodied memory of that pain? The open, or seemingly

public site of the field but with its thick interior that is concealed by the grown canes blurs the line between the public and the intimate, it is where privacy ceases to exist.

The cane furthermore is a phallic symbol for sexual intrusion and gender hierarchies in which the female body appears sexually available. Exploitation of labor and land finds a parallel in the penetration of the black female body in the cane fields. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, too, identifies the cane field as a contested "site of sexual violence and exploited labor, a Caribbean landscape that was never a natural topos but one constructed for colonial purposes" (2010: 3). Martine's rape in the cane field that NourbeSe Philip circumscribes as the invasion of the "space between" (see also chapter 3) hints at the continuity of violence against women as an effective tool of oppression and intimidation. These exploitative and violent structures are inscribed visibly on the surface of Martine's body. When Sophie meets her mother for the first time in New York, she notices Martine's overworked, exhausted migrant body. Lean, scarred, sunburnt, "[i]t was as though she had never stopped working in the cane fields after all" (42).

What is also exceptional about the violence Danticat writes about, besides the intensity of experiencing one's own corporeality through pain, is the internalization of the near inevitability of violence. The Caco women, like many others, are made to live in the constant state of fear of falling victim to assault. Especially the coal vendor's killing, which brought back "frightening memories" (140), demonstrates the increasing likelihood of further, arbitrary violent crimes carried out by the regime's henchmen. These occurrences limit free movement and cause many to leave Haiti like a friend of Martine's sister or even Martine herself. "Next might be me or you with the *Macoutes*" (138) as noted by that friend makes clear the fragility of bodily integrity vis-à-vis daily violence. Thereupon Sophie's grandmother counters: "We already had our turn" (138), certainly knowing quite well that this does not guarantee safety. Does Atie's observation, "Maybe a good death would save me from all this" (140), hint at the impossibility to live in such an environment, at the extent of human suffering, or an alternative way out? It can be seen that these characters have been socialized into a culture of fear and condition of vulnerability that brings with it extreme or exceptional views of and on life.

6.2.2 Trauma and the Transgenerational Transmission of Pain

Literary studies have found interest in the ways narratives represent individual and collective traumata and how this contributes to the disclosure of historical gaps and silences. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is concerned with survival and the subject's 'restoration' after violence and traumatizing experiences. The term trauma has been adopted in psychoanalysis to describe in a metaphorical sense a wound of the soul or psyche (cf. Kuehner 2008: 35). In short, from a psychoanalytical perspective "a trauma is an event in a subject's life defined by its intensity, the subject's inability to respond adequately, the shock and the permanent pathogenic effects that it generates in the psychic organization" (Laplanche/Pontalis 1973: 513; my translation). Trauma theory differentiates between several forms of trauma such as the historical, structural, cultural, consecutive or transgenerational, or sexual trauma.²⁷⁷ In many instances, Danticat's coming-of-age narrative conflates with a trauma narrative. Trauma narratives are characterized by formal techniques such as fragmentation of narrative time and identity, flashbacks, ellipsis, the use of metaphor, witness through dialogue, or symptoms of dissociation, all of which are found in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (cf. Vickroy 2002).²⁷⁸ Danticat narrates the traumatizing experiences of individual women and their suffering from a society that insufficiently punishes sexual violence against women.

²⁷⁷ Trauma studies as critical field investigating especially cultural traumata and their representations emerged in the 1990s in the United States (cf. Andermahr/Pellicer-Ortín 2013). Cathy Caruth (1996) applies as one of the first literary scholars a psychoanalytical framework to trauma in narrative texts. Laurie Vickroy (2002) looks at trauma in postcolonial contexts and opts for the term "trauma narratives" in the analysis of novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) or *Jazz* (1992) or Jamaica Kincaid's *Autobiography of My Mother* (1996). Wulf Kansteiner is very critical of the contemporary use of trauma in cultural studies and the inflationary boom of trauma theory, a concept or diagnosis that used to be associated with the survivors of the Holocaust. According to Kansteiner, especially the notion of the cultural trauma and Caruth's version of a "trauma light" in fictional writing (cf. Kansteiner 2011: 116-117), to describe any form of violence and to illustrate the limitation of linguistic representation in fiction, has led to a relativization of the term (and in a last consequence to a relativization of the historical singularity of the Holocaust), as he argues, further emphasizing the subjective and cultural influences on the individual perception and experience of violence and trauma (cf. 2011: 132).

²⁷⁸ Storytelling and narrative are regarded as a form of healing and a cure (cf. Andermahr/Pellicer-Ortín 2013: 2-3).

Both Martine and Sophie's personal, sexual traumata²⁷⁹ become constitutive for the collective memory, or a collective burden in ethical terms. It is Martine's rape that haunts the entire story; and the resulting trauma structures the plot and impinges upon the characters' development, on Sophie's in particular who is made to recount it. "It took me twelve years to piece together my mother's entire story. By then, it was already too late" (61). Here, the protagonist reflects on how heavily her mother's past weighs upon her. For a short moment, the reader is left in suspense with regards to Martine's story but senses guilt on part of Sophie. She expresses her personal failure to save her mother and how much of her life has been spent to make sense of her mother's (and her own) existence.

After Sophie is born, Martine moves first to Haiti's capital as *restavec* and then to the United States to bring as much distance as possible between the place of her violation and herself. When Sophie joins her in New York twelve years later, Martine is reminded of the pain she has been trying to escape from. Her first words to her daughter, "I cannot believe that I am looking at you" (41), are less an expression of her joy but rather express her disbelief in and sudden awareness of the factuality of the rape. The arrival of Sophie triggers the trauma's re-emergence. Sophie later learns about her mother's pain from Martine herself:

'The details are too much,' she said. 'But it happened like this. A man grabbed me from the side of the road, pulled me into a cane field, and put you in my body. I was still a young girl then, just barely older than you. [...] I thought Atie would have told you. I did not know this man. I never saw his face. He had it covered when he did *this* to me.' [...]. (61; emphasis added)

Although Martine has never seen the face of the rapist, she is haunted by this image of the past almost every night. Although a stranger, she, as everyone else, knows her rapist to be a member of Duvalier's secret army. The faceless perpetrator stands in for a whole group, a mass being anonymous in its instigation of terror and a society's knowledge of the quasi every-day occurrences and instrumentalization of rape. The distant tone and her inability to name "this" as rape gives the impression that she does not associate it with her own self and has not yet processed the event. In her own account, she does not appear as acting subject but as being acted upon while being "grabbed" and "pulled." The agency is on the part of the violator who intrudes into her body. This also shows her troubled relation to her body which she does not seem to own and to

279 The *Psyhyrembel Klinisches Wörterbuch* provides a medical definition of sexual trauma and long-term symptoms (cf. 2014: 2151).

Sophie who is "put in" her body with force and to whom she hardly manages to connect. In the passive voice, the narrative fails Martine. Her refusal to relate to the rape and accept it as an unchangeable part of lived experience that alters her subjectivity dissociates her from her own body.

A characteristic trait of trauma narratives is the strong presence of the past in the present. In the quoted passage, this is accomplished by interweaving the narrated with the narrative time (cf. Anastasiadis 2012: 16). Three time levels and two memory processes overlap here to communicate this traumatizing experience from a distance. From an adult perspective in the moment of speech, Sophie remembers the moment her mother shared her memories of the rape. That way, the narrative avoids a spectacular narrative representation of the rape. Instead, it offers a rather neutral documentation shifting attention away from the rapist and the actual assault towards the victim and her individual strategy to regain bodily control.

Brigley Thompson and Gunne argue that rape narratives can become a feminist act and need to be told, "refus[ing] voyeurism and exploitation" (2010: 3), to denounce the 'rapability' of the female body. While this serves as a narrative strategy that could empower the victim of rape, in the case of Danticat's novel it also contributes to creating in Sophie what in trauma theory is referred to as 'postmemory' (cf. Hirsch 2001).²⁸⁰ In trauma narratives, the victim reconstructs the event retrospectively, transmitting her own memory to the other person, who then comes to experience the traumatizing event as her own. If this is a testimonial, Martine makes Sophie take part in her own violation. Becoming a quasi-witness of Martine's rape, Sophie's personal life story is partially replaced by her mother's experience. Both women then embody the painful memories which are thus inscribed in the text.

280 Marianne Hirsch refines the term as follows: "'Postmemory' describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. As I see it, the connection to the past that I define as postmemory is mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present" (Hirsch "Interview"). She pays particular attention to a generation's reaction to the repeated display (e.g. in literature and film) of Holocaust photographs in connection with the trauma and memory of the preceding generation (cf. Hirsch 2001).

That Martine has not sufficiently dealt with the rape becomes apparent when she recounts it to her daughter. The distant, objective tone is noted by Sophie who realizes that “[s]he did not sound hurt or angry, just like someone who was stating a *fact*. Like naming a color or calling a name. *Something* that already existed and could not be changed” (61; emphasis added). In her recount, Martine completely dissociates from the abuse and seems to trivialize it to an every-day occurrence. This is an individual strategy not of accepting and coping but of forgetting and denial which in fact is impossible as the event is engraved deeply in her body. Also, the sense of sobriety in her pointing out this “*something*” as if she were pointing to a color is indicative of the perceived ordinariness and omnipresence of violence that seems to determine Haitian society. In addition, Martine’s lacking anger about the rape is accompanied by self-hatred and shame. She alone carries the burden of being soiled underlining her helplessness fostered by an atmosphere of cruelty, general mistrust, and governmental tyranny. This is enforced by the silence surrounding the real threat, namely that of a woman being raped in broad daylight without punitive consequences for the violator in the name of a kleptocratic system that uses sexual violence and torture to silence dissident voices and keep those it governs under control under conditions of extreme poverty and injustice.

It is through Sophie that the details of the rape as well as Martine’s breakdown afterwards are transmitted in more detail.

He was a stranger who, when my mother was sixteen years old, grabbed her on her way back from school. He dragged her into the cane fields, and pinned her down on the ground. He had a black bandana over his face so she never saw anything but his hair [...]. When he was done, he made her keep her face in the dirt, threatening to shoot her if she looked up. For months she was afraid that he would creep out of the night and kill her in her sleep. She was terrified that he would come and tear out the child growing inside her. (139)

The narrative here reflects on the destruction of the subject through violence during which the body is reduced to an object robbed of its agency. At the time, Martine is unable to cope with the experience herself and remember it fully. She does not have (psychological) access to the violent act itself. The inflicted pain becomes unspeakable for the victim, which is why Sophie needs to narrate it in order to fill this gap. Marianne Rauwald discusses the impossibility to psychologically digest a traumatizing event of violence, to interweave its actual occurrence within the complex ‘net of biographical experience,’ and then accept it as part of a lived reality. Although the trauma is being inscribed *in* the body right at the moment of its occurrence and formation, the acute traumati-

zation is *outside* of the victim's psychological understanding (cf. Rauwald 2013: 21). For Martine, it is a profoundly corporeal process that makes her aware of her corporeal fragility.

Throughout the novel, Martine displays symptoms commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder that stems from moments of intense distress in which the subject comes to realize her integrity as destructible either through imagining possible or experiencing real pain (cf. Borst 2015: 30-40). Kilby explains the difficulty victims have to understand and deal with traumatizing pain since "trauma is not experienced at the time of its occurrence but later as a haunting presence. Trauma insists on a past that has never been present. Trauma is impossible to experience at the time and difficult to grasp in the here and now" (2002: 217). Nightmares are a typical symptom in which the event is re-lived outside the grasp of the person who suffers from it. Martine repeatedly goes through the painful event out of her own control and against her own will.²⁸¹ "The nightmares. I thought they would fade with age, but no, it's like getting raped every night" (190). In her dreams, she is haunted by the intensity of fear and pain she felt during the assault which renders it impossible for her to distinguish between the real and the imagined. In her dreams, in acts of self-mutilation she bites her own flesh. The narrator tells that "[a]t night she tore her sheets and bit off pieces of her own flesh when she had nightmares. [...] She tried to kill herself several times when I was a baby. The nightmares were just too real" (139) The maltreated body turns into the sole conveyor of the terror and the subsequent trauma. In repeated acts of self-mutilation she re-directs her rage against her own flesh. As Aleida Assmann confirms, "the body of the tortured or traumatized person constitutes the remaining arena of the criminal violence" (Assmann 2007: 90; my translation). The auto-aggression – a preliminary stage of her suicide – directed at the bodily material is her way to punish the body she has experienced as weak and destructible and has come to hate. Since that same body symbolizes for Martine the destructive force of violence, the attacks against her own flesh are also directed against the violator himself to possibly destroy what reminds her of the experienced violence. It is a

281 In the aftermath of life-threatening assaults, the victims, according to Judith Herman, often suffer from a "rape trauma syndrome" which stems from "having generally feared mutilation and death during the assault." The symptoms are "insomnia, nausea, startle response, and nightmares, as well as dissociative or numbing symptoms" (1997: 31). At this point, Sigmund Freud's foundational research on trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder should at least be mentioned. In his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, he deals with the unconscious and repetitive dimension related to the trauma and its inaccessibility (cf. Freud 2000: 274).

desperate attempt to regain agency via her body as the only thing she has control of.

The trauma is reactivated first with Sophie's arrival and intensified almost ten years later with Martine's second pregnancy leading to her suicide. Haunted by the memory, the trauma has neither temporal nor spatial limits as it has undertaken the journey and is transplanted from the Haitian cane fields to urban New York. Martine is reluctant to visit her place of birth (and trauma) because "[t]here are ghosts there that I can't face, things that are still very painful for me" (78). While latency and repetition are symptomatic to the stress disorder trauma victims often display, in the novel this also illustrates the impossibility to forget as well as the significance of the past for the present. The novel, however, is ambivalent with regard to the role of trauma and memory. With Martine's refusal to face the site of her violation, Danticat shows that the past may be too painful to remember and forgetting may in fact be desirable. But still, the women's bodies in pain evoke the ghosts of slavery that still haunt the Haitian imagination. The past of bodily disenfranchisement, humiliation, and psychological torture continues to constitute a part of Black diaspora identity.

The protagonist meditates, "[t]here is always a place where nightmares are passed on through generations like heirlooms" (234). In the intertwined (life) stories of Martine and Sophie, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* illustrates the mechanisms through which a daughter inherits the trauma of her mother, i.e. the trauma of rape and virginity tests. Athanasios Anastasiadis states that "[u]nresolved traumatic experiences can be transmitted from one generation to the next, as well as affect or disturb the life of the descendants. They can create problems with identity and cause generational conflicts" (2012: 1).²⁸² Martine passes her nightmarish fear and the trauma caused by the sexual violation on to her daughter. Sophie regularly awakens her from the nightmares only to find a terrified mother staring at her. "When she saw my face, she looked even more frightened" (81). In this moment of (semi-)unconsciousness of sleep, a victim of rape mistakes her daughter not only for a stranger but identifies her with the violator himself – a mother is afraid of her own child. Martine does not see herself in her daughter's face but beholds the rapist whose face she actually never saw: "He had it covered when he did this to me. But now when I look at your face I think it is true what they say. A child out of wedlock always looks like its father" (61). In Martine's eyes, Sophie embodies the sexual abuse and the resulting trauma that she has tried to escape from; with Sophie's presence

282 See also Rauwald and Quindeau (2013) who investigate the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next.

this trauma becomes even more real. The body of the child in its assumed resemblance to the father, the rapist, functions as a projection screen of the mother's fear. As the quote also indicates, in her assumed resemblance to the father, Sophie, "a living memory from the past" (56) as she observes herself, incorporates guilt for her mother's condition because the child proves the mother's infidelity. The switch of term from rape to adultery which Martine makes when she claims her daughter is conceived out of wedlock rather than from rape conceals the actual act of sexual violence and hints at the gendered implication of both adultery and rape. In this social discourse or convention the rape recedes into the background, is covered in silence, and the social stigma of shame is the mother's and child's to bear.

Sophie becomes indirectly a spectator of her mother's rape by witnessing her nightmares and her attacks against her own body. The daughter is compassionate with her mother and identifies with her: "My old sympathy was coming back. I remembered the nightmares. Sometimes, I even had some myself. I was feeling sorry for her" (169). This furthermore indicates the possibility of the transmission of pain and trauma, thus memorized by the lived body. Martine projects on to her daughter, physically through testing, emotionally through deprivation, as well as psychologically through the nightmares, the unbearable sentiment caused by rape and her own testing. In providing consolation and safety for her mother, Sophie must "surrender her own existential need for solace and protection" (Rauwald/Quindeau 2013: 69; my translation), because Martine is unable to take on the role of comforter but relies on her daughter to do so. "Are you scared too" (48). "Sophie, you've saved my life." (81) Martine transfers the violence and trauma involuntarily to her daughter, because she has not completely dealt with it yet. Judith Herman observes that the victim of severe violence "asks the bystander to share the burden of pain" (Herman 1997: 7). Since there were no eye-witnesses, it could be Martine's subconscious need to have it documented, to have someone, her daughter, speak on her part. Apart from this, due to the historical silence surrounding the issue, Danticat expresses a pressing general social need to have the violence against women documented, foregrounding the psychological side of the matter and effects on the victims.

Sophie's coming of age is overshadowed not only by her mother's traumatization but also by gender-specific education, the cultural demands of sexual propriety, and maternal abuse. The women in her family share the emotional scars and bodily wounds of having been "tested" by their mothers. The narrator compares these tests to "a virginity cult, our mothers' obsession with keeping us pure and chaste" (154). This places the adolescent virginal body under con-

stant surveillance, which is euphemistically framed by Martine questioning her daughter: “You’re a good girl aren’t you?” By that she meant if I had ever been touched” (60). At the age of eighteen Sophie falls in love with her neighbor, Joseph. When Martine finds out about the secret encounters, she starts testing her daughter’s virginity by inserting a finger into her vagina, although she clearly recalls how humiliating these tests have been for herself. If Martine indirectly transfers the scars inflicted by her rape to Sophie, she directly wounds her daughter by enacting the same tests she had to endure on her daughter’s virginal body. She, as her own mother, does not question this tradition that is sustained by a society’s obsession with female purity. Martine’s explanation (because her mother had done it, too) rather demonstrates her acceptance of certain norms of femininity as well as this rite of passage to be a mother’s natural duty. Testing, the novel indicates, is a cultural practice in which the adolescent body is claimed by the mother to secure the family’s reputation and respectable status. The value attached to virginity and normative gender roles that are experienced as damaging to the subject are nevertheless incorporated and transmitted, leading to a loss of bodily autonomy. By turning Martine’s apartment in New York into the site of Sophie’s violation, the narrative achieves a diasporic recreation of the brutal memory of violation in the migrant location.

Sexual violence for Sophie now belongs not to the past but the immediate present. Her mother’s nightmares have become part also of Sophie’s life through which she memorizes her mother’s pain but is reminded, too, of the pain inflicted on her own body by her mother and herself. The narrative conflates Martine’s and Sophie’s lived experiences:

After Joseph and I got married, all through the first year I had suicidal thoughts. Some nights I woke up in a cold sweat wondering if my mother’s anxiety was somehow hereditary or if it was something that I had ‘caught’ from living with her. Her nightmares had somehow become my own, so much so that I would wake up some mornings wondering if we hadn’t both spent the night dreaming about the same thing: a man with no face, pounding a life into a helpless young girl. (193)

Parent and child become interlinked in their nightmares. Like the *Marassa* twins, they stop being separate entities. Her mother’s rape becomes Sophie’s reality which leads to a complete identification of mother and daughter. The past enters the present as Sophie increasingly identifies with her mother’s memorized pain seemingly unable as well to differentiate the real from the imagined.

If sexual violence painfully connects mothers and daughters, the separation from the mother figure in the course of migration may become equally damaging to female subject development. Sophie's later sexual traumatization that will result from the testing finger of her mother is preceded by the uprooting from her Haitian childhood and trauma of a lost home. After Martine has left, Sophie grows up with her aunt. Her emotional attachment is symbolized through a mother's day card, Atie, however, refuses to take. The rejection first by Martine then by Atie accompanied by the decision to send Sophie to New York to her "real mother" (19), is incomprehensible for her and causes despair and depression. "I sunk deeper and deeper into the bed and lost my body in the darkness" (17). The darkness is emblematic for the wound of diaspora and displacement, the bed is the site of sexual trauma. The photograph of Martine on the night stand, which is the only image Sophie has of her mother, underlines further absent, threatening motherhood. Despite the distance, Sophie perceives a frightening presence of the maternal body and Martine watching over every step. "She witnessed everything that went on in the bougainvillea, each step, each stumble, each hug and kiss. [...] Her expression never changed. Her grin never went away" (8). While this could also be a sign of protection and an absent mother's attempt to fill a gap and simulate belonging, Sophie fears the penetrating gaze and unchanging smile of a mother she does not know. Here, Mireille Rosello detects a "surveillance device" that marks Martine's authority over her daughter – "the visual control that she exerts is almost infinite" (Rosello 2010: 125).

The absence of the mother turns into a fearful presence in form of two nightmares that Sophie has as a child. In the dreams, Sophie envisions a similar loss of bodily control that Martine, too, experienced during the rape, only now the perpetrator is not a stranger but the own mother. The dreams thus serve the purpose to foreshadow the inevitable intimate intrusion of the testing Sophie is put through. "I sometimes saw my mother in my dreams. She would chase me through a field of wildflowers as tall as the sky. When she caught me, she would try to squeeze me into the small frame [...] then Tante Atie would come and save me from her grasp" (8). The second dream Sophie has in the night prior to her departure envisions a similarly frightening encounter of mother and daughter: "My mother's face was in my dreams all night long. [...] She opened her arms like two long hooks and kept shouting out my name. Catching me by the hem of my dress, she wrestled me to the floor" (28). A convincing analysis of the scene is provided by Jana Evans Braziel: "The language here reiterates the violence of rape [...] and it powerfully, if also disturbingly, foreshadows Martine's sexual violation of Sophie through 'testing' her virgini-

ty. The dream threatens not only to harm Sophie's body, but also to destroy or annihilate her being" (Brazier 2003: 125). The face of the rapist Martine cannot see is with Sophie all along.

In retrospect Sophie narrates the several instances of testing and later her own act of self-mutilation. While testing her, Martine recounts tales of the *Marassas*, the Vodou twin deities which here serve as motif of doubling,²⁸³ which are meant to keep Sophie's "mind off the [mother's] finger, which I knew one day would slip into me and condemn me" (155). The hook in her childhood dream then becomes a painful reality that will condemn her to future body shame and self-hatred. Sophie remembers her mother's attempt to distract her from the test by telling the story of the *Marassas*:²⁸⁴

The *Marassas* were two inseparable lovers. They were the same person, duplicated in two. [...] When one went to the stream, the other rushed under the water to get a better look. When one looked in the mirror, the other walked behind the glass to mimic her. What vain lovers they were [...]. When you love someone, you want him to be closer to you than your *Marassa*. Closer than your shadow. You want him to be your soul. [...] When you look in a stream, if you saw that man's face, wouldn't you think it was a water spirit [...] hiding under a sheet of water or behind a pane of glass to kill you? The love between a mother and daughter is deeper than the sea. You would leave me for an old man who you didn't know the year before. You and I could be like *Marassas*. You are giving up a lifetime with me. (85)

In referencing the *Marassas*, the novel reconstructs adulthood and trauma in a link to Haitian folklore and the religion of Vodou. In the twin image, mother and daughter become complementary personalities and their destinies intertwine. It shows the importance of the mother-daughter bond, a unity that Martine especially sees threatened by heteropatriarchal intrusion. Sophie starting

283 The *Marassas* are the sacred, inseparable twins in Vodou worship and powerful spirits, or *lwa*, who hold a privileged position in the pantheon. [...] They are interpreted as representing the sacredness of all children (cf. Fernández-Olmos/Paravasini-Gebert 2011: 132). They are assumed to be "jealous and vindictive" (Hurbon 1995: 82). Caroline A. Brown furthermore finds that "[f]or Martine the *Marassas*, in their hermetic hermaphroditism, have no need for an intrusive third party to further destabilize their love" (2012: 132).

284 "What is most striking in the juxtaposition of mother's words and daughter's body is the centrality of desire in the practice of parental discipline. A desire that is incapable of naming itself, it punishes the captive daughter for its own existence. Justified by Martine's fear of Sophie's potential sexual transgression, it eroticizes the daughter's body and depends on physical violation, sexual voyeurism, and an uncomfortable emotional intimacy to ensure propriety" (Brown 2012: 132).

to embrace her sexuality poses a threat not only to the mother-daughter bond but also to a body politics that demand the female body to be pure, untouched. The insertion of the finger is the punishment of the sexually maturing female body that presumably attracts the male gaze (cf. 67).

Mardorossian investigates the trope of sexual violence in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and draws attention to what she calls the “sensationalistic shift” in Caribbean women’s writing from male perpetrator to a woman raping another woman.²⁸⁵ In these novels, “the representation of rape [...] takes the blurring of the victim/perpetrator boundary to its extreme by turning rape’s most likely victims – women – into its most sadistic perpetrators” (2010: 28). And here because it is not just a woman but the own mother, naturally the one to love and be trusted, who inflicts that pain on her daughter’s body, that the boundaries between good and evil, love and pain become almost impossible to define. In Sophie’s case, this is particularly damaging to her I-development. Mardorossian confirms this by stating that “[t]he boundaries between pain and compassion, love and torture, violation and convention dissolve and render the protagonist’s journey toward self-individuation all the more complex for lacking the usual benchmarks on which characters rely to make sense of their self-development” (2010: 30). She reaches the conclusion that female rape, or “rape by proxy” (ibid.: 31), is an extension of a patriarchal system of violence and racialized gender performances enacted on the girls’ bodies. “That female rapists are manifestations of the same economy of class, race and gender domination as male rapists becomes evident when the female on female rapes in the novels are examined in relation to male-inflicted form of violence that frame them” (ibid.: 32). In the novel, testing and rape are constructed and represented as commonality interlocked in a heteropatriarchal matrix of power and sexuality that Mardorossian describes as a consolidation of “a gendered and racialized ‘rape culture’” (ibid.: 31). The social pressure on mothers to watch over their daughters’ sexually maturing bodies is commented on by Martine explicitly: “The way my mother was raised, a mother is supposed to do that to her daughter until the daughter is married. It is her responsibility to keep her pure” (60-61). For the novel’s female characters who have experienced either rape or testing or both, the differentiation seems inadequate as the results are the same. “Not surprisingly, by blurring the distinction between maternal nurture and torture, it also leaves Sophie with indelible emotional and psychological scars” (Mardorossian 2010: 29). Sophie as her mother is unable to obtain a healthy relation to her body or experience sexuality in a positive, meaningful way.

285 Mardorossian compares Danticat’s novel with Maria Elena John’s *Unburnable* (2006) and Loida Maritza Pérez’ *Geographies of Home* (1999) (cf. Mardorossian 2010).

Embedded “in the same coercive structure” (Loichot 2013: 86), rape and testing function to abuse the adolescent body for the symbolic force attached to virginity, the one to prove the virgin body is still intact and keeper of respectability and family honor, the other a deliberate destruction of the same and ultimate proof of dominance.

Danticat’s coming-of-age novel shifts attention to the development of female subjectivity under conditions of violence and bodily surveillance. In the regular testing ritual that continues every week “to make sure that [Sophie] was still *whole*” (86), the maternal body turns into the catalyst of Sophie’s own suffering. The exerted violence becomes part of a gendered socialization practice in which ownership of the body is denied – as in the case of rape. As the story continues, it is revealed to the reader that for Martine “[t]he one good thing about [...] being raped was that it made the *testing* stop. [...] I live both every day” (170). For Martine, intimate violence within the personal relationship of trust between mother and daughter is worse than even the rape is perceived as a nightmare that ‘released’ her from it. The testing may be a motherly gesture of safeguarding the daughter’s chastity, yet it equals the rape in its violent scope as both are directed against personal intimacy and integrity. Testing, similar to rape, serves as practice of social control through the female body; both are socially sanctioned to keep intact a status quo of domination and submission. Equally disturbing is a tale about a poor Black girl who is chosen by a rich man for her virginity. After the first night the newly-wed husband is supposed to display a blood-stained sheet that would prove the girl’s purity and his virility. As the girl did not bleed, the man stabs her between the legs to save his honor. He gets enough blood “to impress the neighbors” and the girl bleeds to death (cf. 154-155). Francis convincingly argues that “[t]he logic of this practice marks woman as property, and her worth is determined by an exchange value measured by her virginity [...] used to buttress male status. In this instance, a woman’s body [...] has to be literally mutilated to keep the man’s honor unsullied” (2010: 86). Virginity and sexual violence are instrumentalized to uphold masculine power. Against this background, Danticat demonstrates in her fictional representation of testing the possibility of a terrorized trauma victim becoming herself the terrorizer of her own daughter by social standards, thereby situating rape and testing in a continuum of “gendered violence in systemic terms” (Mardorossian 2010: 24) that is meant to perpetuate hierarchical relations of not only gender but also race and class.

6.3 Body Shame: The 'Cult of the Virgin' and Racist Inscriptions

The female body and sexuality play an important role in Caribbean women's writing in general; sexual initiation and awakening, in addition, take precedence in coming-of-age narratives with women as protagonists. The coming-of-age novel *Myal* (1988), by Jamaican writer Erna Brodber, for example, describes the protagonist's experience of sexuality and her corporeal transformation through the sex act. The narrator describes how "[w]ith her hymen and a couple of months of marriage gone, there was a clean, clear passage from Ella's head through her middle and right down to outside. Poisons drained out of her body. [...] Her parts were at one with each other" (80). Ella, in contrast to Sophie so it seems, 'loses' her virginity in a 'wholesome' way and at this stage experiences heterosexual partnership and desire not only as fulfilling but regards sexual penetration (in marriage) as a symbolic act of cleansing and purification. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, in one intimate moment prior to being subjected to the virginity test, Danticat's protagonist, too, relates positively to her sexually maturing body and even extracts pleasure from it. One night, Sophie hears her neighbor, Joseph, play keyboard: "[T]he notes and scales were like raindrops, teardrops, torrents. I felt the music rise and surge, tightening every muscle in my body. Then I relaxed, letting it go, feeling a rush that I knew I wasn't supposed to feel" (75). The tidal rise of the music, the arousal along with the images of fluidity indicate masturbation and female orgasm for which in the very next moment the narrator feels guilty. It is not only the sexual traumatization through testing but also the learnt guilt and shame about female sexuality that destroys a naturally positive relation to her body and the curiosity regarding her own sexuality. J. Brooks Bouson calls attention to the fact that "women have long been embodiments of shame in our culture, and, indeed, the female socialization process can be viewed as a prolonged immersion in shame" (Bouson 2009: 2). The prohibition "to feel" that Sophie expresses is telling of the shame associated with and the distrust in the pubescent female body and sexual awakening. In the preceding analysis of Espinet's novel I have argued that shame and this distrust are part of the socialization of girls, whose bodies consequently become to be experienced as unclean and sullied. Unlike Brodber in her novel, Danticat remains within the topoi of sexual trauma and (inherited) body shame, both of which are inextricably linked to the individuation process, a violent history or the historical wound of enslavement, gender roles, as well as racialized ascriptions.

Since Sophie knows that the rape has put an end to her mother being tested, she finds that the only possible way to escape this humiliation lies in a similar destructive act of bodily mutilation which she recounts in disturbing detail: “My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet. I took the pestle and the bloody sheet and stuffed them into a bag. It was gone, the veil that always held my mother’s finger back [...]. *Finally* I failed the test” (88; emphasis added). Whereas she puts an end to the tests that way, it is also a gesture directed against the own body as the hated, dirtied aspect of the self and marker of womanhood. Certainly an extreme and exceptional form of violence, this act of self-violation is nevertheless an individual act of liberation and enacted agency. The empowering moment lies in the word *finally* and her use of the active tense, which contrasts the passivity experienced during the moments of rape, testing, and the nightmares. Sophie eventually failing the test refuses to continue to be submissive to the torturing maternal presence and in extension to the patriarchal practice of body control. The mutilation of one’s own flesh (in Spiller’s phrasing) is a sign of her rebellion, first of all, against the rape-like intrusion and motherly anxiety for propriety that Sophie is explicit about: “Joseph could never understand why I had done something so horrible to myself. I could not explain to him that it was like *breaking manacles, an act of freedom*” (130; emphasis added). Freeing herself from the testing in this manner is still self-destructive but fulfils the purpose to be in control of her own body. The successful attempt to keep her mother’s finger out can indeed be regarded as a symbolic attack of an individual body against a culture’s obsession with purity embodied in the (myth of the) hymen that has become a prison from which she thus breaks free. Sophie throws away the blood-stained sheet that is meant to prove to a future husband her virginity, and thus withstands the practiced masculinity ritual. However, that her individual protest may not have further effect is indicated in Joseph and her environment’s incomprehension and her mother’s ignorance. Martine, and strangely so, does not realize the self-inflicted wound but feels herself confirmed in her premonition of Sophie’s alleged disobedience, betrayal, and sexual trespass.

The wound she inflicts on herself cries out a greater injustice of sexual restraint enforced especially on young women of Haiti’s lower class, like the Caco-women or, again, the poor girl in the tale. If they want to maintain a respectable status or achieve upward mobility, sexual surveillance is the price to pay and virginity the ‘good’ to trade in.²⁸⁶ Additionally, the internalization of

286 On this aspect, see also Giselle Anatol’s reading of the novel in *The Things That Fly in the Night* (2015).

gender-specific social behavior Atie describes, fosters the continued existence of a patriarchal order through the production of a docile body:

The men in this area, they insist that their women are virgins and have ten fingers. According to Tante Atie, each finger had a purpose. It was the way she had been taught to prepare herself to become a woman. Mothering. Boiling. Loving. Baking. Nursing. Frying. Healing. Washing. Ironing. Scrubbing. [...] Her ten fingers had been named for her even before she was born. (151)

The ideological conviction regarding virginity goes hand in hand with the domestication of the female body as it is subjected to daily practices or chores. As expectations are set by the social surroundings, the individual, who has no finger "left for herself" (ibid.), becomes alienated from her own body. Butler pointedly summarizes the lack of autonomy over the body that is always and already part of a regulatory system and inscribed with meaning: "Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own" (Butler 2004b: 21; see also chapter 3). Atie's comment in the quoted passage echoes this bodily dispossession. Her use of the possessive pronoun "*their*" marks women as property of "*the men in this area*" and indicates the subjection of women to patriarchal authority and ownership. It furthermore illustrates how the body is rendered vulnerable to social regimes and relations of power that produce and limit gendered and classed bodies within the colonial paradigm of respectability and its postcolonial reconfiguration. The re-colonization of the female body is cloaked in the normalization and standardization of an ideal femininity to guarantee the survival of the nation state. That the body which transgresses its limitations risks punishment is made clear by the novel, not least because of the deep sense of shame the protagonists have incorporated.

If we understand the body as palimpsest to be imprinted and written over by lived experiences, the pestle, the testing finger, as well as the rape leave their traces to create a "traumatic body memory" (Francis 2010: 85) that dooms mother and daughter to a painful relation to their bodies and sexuality. While the rape, like the testing, forces Martine into passivity, Sophie actively inscribes her body with a violent experience through the deliberate and harmful act with the pestle. The use of the pestle as tool for mutilation connects her to the women in rural Haiti at her grandmother's where Sophie observes how "women were pounding millet in a large mortar with a pestle" (22).²⁸⁷ It contextualizes

287 According to Loichot, the pestle connects the act of self-harm with food preparation as cultural practices; "the tool used for the self-rape is the cooking utensil used

her rage in a local practice that is re-routed to the New York apartment and thus, along with the continuing nightmares, “also complicates the narrative of the American immigrant’s perfect rebirth,” as Counihan argues (2012: 41). If read alongside the quoted passage by Tante Atie earlier the cooking utensil stands in for women’s subjection to household duty as well as to sexual chastity. Valérie Loichot explains that “the extreme pain inflicted on the body is a violent act of memorization, the embodiment of the pain of women before her” (2013: 86). As Sophie increases the intensity of the pain with which to remember the testing, she prevents herself from repeating it later on in her own daughter’s body. By acknowledging a mother’s responsibility to protect her child – it is “up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts” (203) – Sophie demonstrates that the transgenerational cycle of abusive parenting needs to be broken.

The body is site and source of shame. The female subject experiences what Bouson refers to as “embodied female shame: shame about the self and body that arises from the trauma of defective or abusive parenting or relationships and from various forms of sexual, racial, or social denigration of females in our culture” (2009: 1). Embodied shame is embedded within the cultural context and is a product of the ways the social environment perceives of and relates to the body and how the subject feels a certain rejection or may incorporate a sense of inferiority during, for instance, the coming-of-age process. Sophie’s reaction to the testing and corporeal compensation of the resulting trauma is her developing bulimia and sex phobia. That Sophie has internalized guilt and feels sexually defective becomes painfully clear in a conversation with her grandmother “Are you having trouble with any marital duties? [...] The night? [...] You cannot perform? [...] There must be some fulfillment. You have the child,” to this Sophie replies that it is very painful for her, “I have no desire. I feel like it is an evil thing to do” (122-123). The testing she discloses has caused “disgust for her sexually dirtied body” (Bouson 2009: 10). The lack of desire and perception of sex as evil is a direct outcome of the ritualized testing. In contrast to the women of her family, Sophie finds words to describe the testing of girls’ virginity not as a normalized socialization practice to “preserve their honor” (208) but as “humiliation” of which the consequence is that she hates her body and is “ashamed to show it to anybody, including [her] husband” (123). Contrary to Ifé’s advice that “[w]ith patience it goes away” (156), the tests have long-term consequences since they profoundly damaged her subjective bodily sensation

uniquely for the preparation of Haitian dishes. It consolidates the link between rape and the Haitian family tradition” (2013: 86).

and impacted negatively the lived experience – hers is a body lived in pain and shame.

During the testing, Sophie has learnt to double to distract herself from the penetrating finger and does so also when she has sex with her husband: “I closed my eyes and thought of the *Marassa*, the doubling. I was lying there on that bed and my clothes were being peeled off my body, but really I was somewhere else. [...] I kept thinking of my mother, who now wanted to be my friend” (200). Although she still identifies this body as ‘mine’/‘hers,’ Sophie’s passive voice in this quote contrasts the active engagement with her body earlier and now resembles her mother’s rape experience which makes clear her inability to develop a healthy sexual relationship. In the conflation of the sex act with rape, the phallus turns into a potential evil and ultimately disqualifies Joseph as a suitable partner. Counihan argues that the novel fails in offering positive heterosexuality; I draw a similar conclusion in the analysis of *The Heart Does Not Bend*. But in contrast to Silvera’s novel, Danticat’s text does not imagine homoerotic desire as alternative either. The reference to the *Marassa* and emotional withdrawal provide Sophie with the possibility for “psychic escape from the invasion of sexual penetration by another” (Counihan 2012: 48). The doubling, or splitting, is considered to be a psychological mechanism of self-protection in which the mind detaches temporarily from the corporeal pain.²⁸⁸ In this link to the tradition of Vodou, the practice of doubling, in addition, carries both a religious as well as a healing function.²⁸⁹

Moreover, Sophie’s troubled relation to her body and sexuality is evident in her bodily self-perception especially after she has given birth. While being a mother is fulfilling to her, it is a lived sexuality and pregnancy itself that Sophie experiences as intrusion and damaging. Feeling “extremely fat” (112), she regards her body as disfigured even after some time has passed since childbirth. The eating disorder she develops, which Martine interprets as something “very American” (179),²⁹⁰ does not relate to a desired ideal of thinness, but rather, as

288 The dissociation of the self is a bodily act of survival and self-protection. Dissociation of body and mind and a split of personality are common tropes of trauma narratives in woman’s writing. Another example is British author Fay Weldon’s novel *Splitting* (1995) in which the traumatized protagonist develops multiple personalities.

289 “There were many cases in our history where our ancestors had *doubled*”, Sophie recounts (155). The reference to doubling in this quote as well as to the *Marassas* and Vodou as protective device may suggest that dissociation as a mechanism to cope with pain and as symptomatic of trauma has long been part of Haitian culture and has an older tradition than in western psychology.

290 Martine expresses her incomprehension and ignorance of Sophie’s eating disorder which apparently is alien to Haitian culture: “I have never heard of an Haitian

some critics have pointed out, is her attempt to regain bodily control through resistance and master her incorporated guilt.²⁹¹ The question “How can you *resist* all this food” (188; emphasis added), as Martine wonders, reveals that the deliberate act of not eating or purging is an individual strategy of resistance and protest. Feminists like Susan Bordo describe how eating disorders, like bulimia or anorexia, are used as a way to punish and control the body that constitutes the object of disgust and that appears to be outside of one’s agency.²⁹² Developing an eating disorder can be a form of protest against social control and demands through the body. Bordo describes a duality “of meaning, through which [bodily] conditions that are objectively [...] constraining, enslaving, and even murderous, come to be experienced as liberating, transforming, and life-giving” (Bordo 1997: 93).²⁹³ The crux, however, lies in the protest itself, as it seems to be “reproducing rather than transforming precisely that which is being protested.” The protest often remains “pressed into the service of maintaining the established order” (ibid.: 100). Francis concludes that “[f]or Sophie, bulimia forms the outward expression of violent cultural inscriptions concealed in her body” (Francis 2010: 88). Hence, one needs to differentiate between the collective and individual level to evaluate the effectiveness of the enacted, embodied resistance. Her will to purge the food may express her agency and individual strategy of bodily control. On the other hand, her breaking the rules does not really lead to transformation of the established social order as rules remain intact.

Just like Espinet and Silvera, Danticat, too, depicts Caribbean migrant experiences in white North America. As she draws attention to the construction of

woman getting anything like that. Food, it was so rare when we were growing up. We could not waste it” (179).

291 Food and sex both make her feel guilty (cf. Loichot 2013: 82; Francis 2010: 88). “That she is bulimic and not anorexic suggests that she does not lack an appetite for food or sex. Instead she strongly desires to consume both, but guilt and negative body memories of sexual violation force her to purge the pleasure of eating, like sex, from her body” (Francis 2010: 88).

292 Loichot reads Sophie’s eating disorder along with Bordo’s *Unbearable Weight* and posits her body as alien to both cultures, the African Haitian and white Western, and overly racialized within the U.S.-American context. “Sophie rejects the food her body ingests and develops bulimia. Moreover, this disease, which her Haitian grandmother does not understand, makes her body untranslatable to the Haitian language and system of communication. Sophie’s body becomes a floating sign, which can belong neither to her native nor to her acquired language. Her illness seems to be prompted by yet another cut: the body-and-mind split” (Loichot 2013: 83).

293 The “conditions” referred to in this quote are “gender-related and historically localized disorders: Hysteria, agoraphobia, and anorexia nervosa” (Bordo 1997: 93).

Haitian Blackness by the ethnic majority, the novel discloses the complexity of social exclusion based on the intersection of racial shame and issues of class and education. Similar to Makeda Silvera's protagonist, Molly, who has been the "odd girl out" (90) at her Canadian school, Sophie, too, learns quickly the racial discrimination associated with being Haitian, when she and other children at her school "were accused of having HBO – Haitian Body Odor. Many of the American kids even accused Haitians of having AIDS because they had heard on television that only the 'Four Hs' got AIDS – Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals, and Haitians" (51).²⁹⁴ The Haitian body, in opposition to an unmarked, naturalized "American" body, according to Loichot, "has been externalized and projected into a net of images of alien, constructed bodies" (2013: 83). The corresponding stereotypes are disseminated, for instance, through the media and enacted by children at school. Clearly a racist discourse, the construction of foreignness happens through the pathologization of Blackness. The sick, contagious Black (and/or homosexual) body is positioned outside a simultaneously constructed normality of a white, healthy, and heterosexual body which feels threatened by the former.

The immigrant's status as outsider manifests itself further in language use. Kreyòl, in the diaspora as in Haiti, is perceived as stigma that marks Sophie as 'other.' "My mother said it was important that I learn English quickly. Otherwise, the American students would make fun of me or, even worse, beat me" (51), the narrator says. Language acquisition as crucial (and the narrator obviously 'masters' English perfectly) shows the necessity to assimilate and fit in as the melting pot in reality does not seem to offer space to accommodate diversity. Moreover, with Sophie recalling how "the students from the public school across the street called us 'boat people'" (66), the novel points out the tragic migrant experience of Haitians who continue to risk their lives in the dangerous passage between the island and North American mainland. As refugees, not always voluntarily but in hope for security and better living conditions, they leave their homes to arrive in a country where they are turned into illegal bodies, feeding into the dominant racialized discourse. Less a statement on Haiti's political climate and economic malaise that forces many to leave, Danticat more importantly unveils the dark side of U.S. border policy and immigration

294 Interestingly enough, Myriam Chancy in her novel *Spirit of Haiti* (2003), turns this around and describes AIDS as "tourist disease" (284) that destines one of the three protagonists, Alexis who works as prostitute in Haiti, to his death.

law, its inability or unwillingness to save human life, as well as the negative image of Haitians and Haitian-Americans in the public.²⁹⁵

Moving from the systemic back to the individual level, demarcation from U.S.-American mainstream society as well is staged on the adolescent girl's body. Martine demands that Sophie does not engage with boys, that she suppresses her desire until she is eighteen; meanwhile "[s]he is not going to be running wild like those American girls" (56). In contrast to the perceived sexual looseness of the other girls stands Sophie's sexual purity and modesty that is potentially threatened by a too liberal American upbringing. The female body one way or the other is defective and found wanting in the face of normative ideals rendering necessary her surveillance. Sexuality through chastity, in Martine's eyes – and that she herself was denied to perform as the raped teenaged woman has already excluded her from an ideal, pure femininity – offers the possibility of a morality perceived as superior to white America. In addition, the policing or even denial of active sexual desire is in stark contrast to a likewise regulatory regime of the hypersexualization of Black female bodies.

The sexual demarcation runs counter to an attempted assimilation in racialized terms through 'modification' of skin color. Caroline A. Brown reads Martine's body as "a testament of her desire to embody an assimilative normativity" (2012: 137). Martine's use of a "face cream that promised to make her skin lighter" (51) directly results, on the one hand, from a stigmatized Blackness in the U.S. she thus tries to compensate. At the reunion of Martine, her mother, and Sophie after years of separation, both note Martine's "unusually light skin," "a pale mocha, three or four shades lighter than ours" (159), and Ifé asks whether it is "*prodwè*" (160). Martine is ashamed to admit that it is and claims that the lack of sun has caused the lighter complexion her mother regards as unhealthy and unnatural. Martine's remark "the cold turns us into ghosts" (160) hints at the social perception of the migrant body's eerie presence as well as the uncomfortable, unhealthy condition that renders a thusly disembodied subject invisible. It furthermore indicates that life in the diaspora can be not only a geographical distance but also an emotional and identitarian separation from the home and may lead to alienation from the self. In her response, "Papa Shango, the sun here, will change that" (ibid.), Ifé emphasizes the comforting function of home through the healing potential of Haitian Vodou. The refer-

295 Under Ronald Reagan's presidency migration policy was enforced and boats were returned to Haiti. George H.W. Bush declared that human rights were not violated any longer in Haiti, thus denying Haitians the right for asylum in the U.S., reinstated later by Bill Clinton. In her later memoir *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), Danticat writes about her uncle's death while being locked up and questioned in a detention center in Florida.

ence to the deity is at the same time an affirmation of Afro-Haitian heritage indicating the necessity of re-connection and ancestral cultural knowledge.

Coming from Haiti, Martine's understanding of race is complex. Her bleaching her skin needs to be read not only against racial discrimination in North America, but on the other hand also against the privileges still associated with whiteness in Haiti as an attempt to better fit the beauty ideal of 'brownness' which is associated with higher social standing and also considered as more desirable.²⁹⁶ Blackness has been prioritized during the Revolution and especially the first part of the Duvalier dictatorship over the white, mulatto elite, but the superiority of whiteness nevertheless persists. The racial make-up is thus contradictory in its "symbolic white prioritization" and co-existence of "a history of African pride" (Suárez 2006: 138). Lighter or darker complexion continues to be connected to family origin and higher or lower social standing. Consciousness about class and color and the awareness of one's legitimate standing within this hierarchy remains intact in the diaspora. This is obvious not only in Martine's interest in the family background of Sophie's invented Haitian boyfriend or her "impeccable French and English, both painfully mastered" (223), but also in Martine's sense of inferiority which keeps her from marrying her partner, an upper-class Haitian who works as lawyer in New York. In Haiti, as Martine explains, it would "not be possible for someone like Marc to love someone like me. He is from a very upstanding family. His grandfather was a French man" (59), which is an explicit reference to Haiti's colonial past. Although such a connection is possible now in the diaspora, to Martine it still translates into her not being good enough. Francis attributes her "sense of unworthiness and the inability to cross the class divide" to the traumatic memory of sexual violence which contributes to "her fear of entering into a patriarchal pact of any kind" (2010: 91). As she tells Sophie about the marriage proposal and her second pregnancy, she discloses the extent of her bodily shame that actually does not stem only from class and sexuality but intersects with further perceptions of 'defection': "Of course he wants to marry me, but look at me. I am a fat woman trying to pass for thin. A dark woman trying to pass for light. And I have no breasts. I don't know when this cancer will come back. I am not an ideal mother" (189). The novel here raises important issues of race, ability, body weight, and motherhood that inform a body ideal of femininity and *light-/white-/intact-ness*. Martine identifies her body as disfigured as it departs from

296 Whiteness signifies higher social standing as Dubois's terminology "aristocracy of the skin" suggests (Dubois 2011: 279).

these socio-cultural constructions of bodily perfection.²⁹⁷ The grotesque, out-of-the norm body thus lived turns into a source of pain and self-loathing leading to an internalized sense of inferiority that she projects on her role both as mother, which she has failed, and wife, which she ultimately refuses to take on. Arguably, her rejection of the marriage proposal, which would have restored her womanhood within the socially sanctioned state of marriage, is her refusal to ‘come off clean’ as the respectable wife of a rich Haitian man. If he embodies the very same system that finds her lacking, she exercises agency in her decision to remain unmarried.

6.4 Scarlet Birds: Flying Bodies, Vodou, and Transgression

There were many cases in our history where our ancestors had doubled. Following in the vaudou tradition, most of our presidents were actually one body split in two: part flesh and part shadow.
(Danticat 1994: 155-6)

Whereas the novel returns to the cane field as site of colonial, patriarchal violence, it is Vodou and especially the Vodou spirit, goddess, or *lwa*, *Ezili* that is drawn upon in order to frame possibilities of resistance to said violence.²⁹⁸

297 The rape as teenaged woman has already excluded her from an ideal pure femininity. In her reading of the novel, Bouson describes how, because of the rape, Martine is “[c]ast out of the society of clean and proper – and virginal – female bodies into the realm of the abject, the sexually degraded and unclean” (Bouson 2009: 77).

298 The practices related to Vodou are known to provide the believers with strength and comfort. Due to its important role prior to and during the Haitian Revolution, Vodou is strongly connected to a spirit of resistance and Black liberationist movements. It is commonly believed that the *Bois-Caïman* ceremony instigated the Revolution against colonial oppression and French domination. Important figures are Boukman and Cécile Fatiman, the *oungan* (priest) and *manbo* (priestess) who led the ceremony (cf. Dayan 1995: 29; Dubois 2011: 279). Practitioners identify with one of the different, however not completely separate, ‘families’ or ‘nations’ known in Vodou, of which two of the most widely spread are the nations of *Rada* and *Petwo*. The first is “home to the wise and benevolent spirits that accompanied the slaves to the new world from ancestral Africa”; the latter embraces “the fierce and tempestuous spirits drawn from Central Africa and creolized in Haiti, whose rites, born of rage against the evil fate suffered by Africans [...] speak to the wrath against the brutality of displacement and enslavement” (Fernández Olmos/Paravisini-Gebert 2011: 121). The “sweet-tempered” *Rada lwa* find in the *Petwo lwa*, *lwa cho* (hot

Ezili, among the most powerful in the Vodou pantheon, is an incarnation of feminine perfection but also the embodiment of the two archetypal representations of women, that of the saint and whore – the opposing images of womanhood that both protagonists, Martine and Sophie, grapple with. Joan Dayan points out the spirit's contradictory character in Vodou worship:

Recognized as the most powerful and arbitrary of gods in vodou, Ezili is also the most contradictory: a spirit of love who forbids love, a woman who is the most beloved yet feels herself the most betrayed. She can be generous and loving, or implacable and cruel. [...] As spirit of vengeance, she is fiercely jealous and sometimes punishes wayward devotees. (Dayan 1995: 59)

The common portrayals of Ezili, all connected to love, desire, pleasure, rage, and resistance, take on several forms: She is represented as the "Black Venus," a "Tragic Mistress," or the "Goddess of Love" (ibid.: 58).²⁹⁹

Symbolism pertaining to Vodou guides the reader along the protagonist's journey of self-discovery.³⁰⁰ The *lwa* Ezili reappears throughout the novel in the manifestation of the light-skinned *Ezili Freda* and black-skinned *Ezili Dantó*. Likewise, the novel makes various references to Ezili as "our goddess of love" (113), "the beautiful *mulâtresse*" (52), or, in another instance, as "hot-blooded" (227). Martine embodies certain characteristic features of Ezili. She is the unmarried mother of a single child, and can be contradictory and cruel. She demands from her child obedience and devotion, which is seen in the comparison between herself and Sophie as the *Marassa* twins. When Martine asks her daughter if she is the mother Sophie has imagined, Sophie is reluctant to answer with an affirmative yes. Instead she ponders how as "a child, the mother I had imagined for myself was like Erzulie, the lavish Virgin Mother. She was the healer of all women and the desire of all men. [...] I could always count on her" (59). She compares her mother to an idealized maternal image she sees in Ezili, the perfect mother, an ideal of maternity Martine, so it seems, cannot live up to.

lwa), a fiercer and embittered counterpart "associated with fire [...] display[ing] forceful and violent behavior" (ibid. 125). Importantly, in their numerous manifestations the *lwa* usually exist in more than one nation.

299 Different to other *lwa* she is a 'daughter' of Haitian soil as she has no precedent in West African religious traditions, hence particularly stands in for the struggle of African Haitian women and their dignified existence.

300 On the representation and aesthetics of Vodou in the works of Danticat and Chancy, see also Beushausen/Brüske (2016) For a brief overview of the "aesthetics of Vodou" in Haitian literature, see Gewecke (1991, 2007); on different fictional strategies related to Vodou, the revelation of the sacred, and Vodou ceremonies in the works of Haitian writer René Depestre, see Gewecke (2013)

Also, Ezili³⁰¹ is the *lwa* of lust and passion, said to be devoted by prostitutes, which fits the image Martine has of herself, as soiled and unworthy of marriage.

Ezili is further connected to women's empowerment and transgressive behavior, expressed especially in the image of flying and the color red. One scene, for example, references Ezili as a healing entity: While hurting herself with the pestle, Sophie "doubles" as she retreats emotionally from her feeling self and the inflicted pain, and to distract herself recalls another folktale of a woman who, for some reason, could not stop bleeding. "The blood kept gushing and spouting in bubbles out of her unbroken skin [...]. It became a common occurrence, soaking her clothes a bright red on very special occasions – weddings and funerals" (87). The woman visits Ezili for help since all medical advice have failed. There she is told that she cannot remain a woman but must become an animal or plant if she wants to stop bleeding. Thinking of all the animals "that were held captive and ones that were free" (88) she wishes to be transformed into a butterfly. Her wish granted, she stops bleeding, is transformed, and becomes free eventually.

The novel places additional emphasis on the motif of flying as act of liberation and the color red as the vodouist symbol of resistance, which the French translation of the novel's title, *Le cri de l'oiseau rouge*, further underlines. The danger of women who fly is expressed by H el ene Cixous, who, in "Le rire de la M eduse" (1975), plays with the double meaning of the French verb *voler*, meaning both to fly and to steal:

Voler, c'est le geste de la femme [...], depuis des si cles que nous n'avons acc es   l'avoir qu'en volant; que nous avons v cu dans un vol, de voler, trouvant au d sir des passages  troits, d rob s, traversants. [...] Ce n'est pas un hasard: la femme tient de l'oiseau et du voleur comme le voleur tient de la femme et de l'oiseau: illes passent, illes filent, illes jouissent de brouiller l'ordre de l'espace, de le d sorienter, de changer de place les meubles, les choses, les valeurs, de faire des casses, de vider les structures, de chambouler le propre. (49)³⁰²

301 In contrast to the image of a shameful sexuality, Ezili in fact embodies a subversive eroticism and desire in her mounting both male and female devotees (cf. Dayan). Ezili Danto embodies the single mother, and Freda unfulfilled love and contradicts conventional sexuality and family structure. In their multiple incarnations they unify love and sexuality and chastity and purity. However, Sophie and Martine are denied and forbid themselves the erotic and sexual energy Ezili displays.

302 "Flying [and stealing] is woman's gesture [...]. We have all learned the art of flying[/stealing] and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired,

Birds, or in Danticat's novel also the butterfly, are a symbol of freedom; the thief, an outlaw, a criminalized but also marginalized being. Realized in these two aspects, the flying/stealing woman thus embodies disobedience to the established social order or the "discourse of man" (Cixous 1976: 887). She successfully steals away her right of self-determination and sexual autonomy, creates disorder and chaos, not just escaping but reversing hegemonic structures.

We learn that the family's name *Caco* is not only reference to the old peasantry who fought the U.S. occupation,³⁰³ but also that "it is the name of a scarlet bird. A bird so crimson, it makes the reddest hibiscus or the brightest flame trees seem white. The Caco bird, when it dies, there is always a rush of blood that rises to its neck and the wings, they look so bright, you would think them on fire" (150). In the evocation of the Caribbean folktale of the *soucouyant*, the novel makes explicit the degree to which flying, headstrong, independent women are perceived as threat (cf. Anatol 2015).³⁰⁴ After paying a visit to her ancestors at the cemetery, Sophie and her grandmother pass by a cane field where they hear workers sing about a wife who at night-time takes off her skin and flies. Finding out about her secret, her husband peppers the skin making it impossible for her to put it back on. What was intended as rebuke and punishment for overstepping gendered confinements, ends up causing the death of the woman, a daring woman whose liberationist attempts at flying threatens patri-

narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. [...] It's no accident: women take after birds and robbers just as robbers take after women and birds. They (*illes*) go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down" (Cixous 1976: 887). Cixous fuses the pronoun *ils*, here referring to the birds and thieves, with the pronoun *elles*, the women, to *illes*. I decided to include the French version in the text to illustrate the double meaning.

303 In *Eroticism, Spirituality, and Resistance*, Weir-Soley affirms that Vodou constitutes a "legitimate source of agency and transformation for the Haitian peasantry, and perhaps even a spiritual reprieve from the abjection of poverty and the oppression of political tyranny" (Weir-Soley 2009: 192). Danticat establishes this link. The fact that Sophie's family name is Caco and their devotion to Vodou spirit Ogu is a direct link to resistance and Vodou.

304 The *soucouyant*, in Trinidad and Tobago for example, is said to be a blood-sucking, terrifying creature appearing as an old woman riding a ball of fire. "The 'flying' women who are accused of being 'loularous' in Haiti or 'soul eaters' in some African societies, for example, are older women who live alone, who are extremely independent" (Alexandre/Howard/Danticat 2007: 163). Anatol investigates the link of the disobedient, flying woman with punishment in slavery and patriarchal societies (cf. Anatol 2015: 8, 155).

archal control over her body.³⁰⁵ Anatol concludes that “the prevalence of these violent folktales in the novel intimates the intense cultural presence of male aggression toward women in the name of respectability” (2015: 155-56). She furthermore notices that “stories about her [the *soucouyant*] effectively socialize women to obey patriarchal mandates and socialize men to expect them to do so” (ibid.: 23). Storytelling here serves as socialization practice and device of deterrence.

The Caco bird does not only indicate flight, escape, liberation but also evokes flame, danger, and the color red. Red has a variety of culture-related meanings, most common is love and passion, but it also means power and energy. The color red is of special significance in the novel, for example signifying “red death” in Francis’ analysis to emblemize the multiple sufferings the women have to endure (cf. Francis 2004, 2010). Anatol, in addition, notes Martine’s “passion for red as her desire for a symbolic connection to the Haitian landscape” (Anatol 2015: 157). In Vodou ceremonies, the devotees usually wear the color associated with the *lwa* they serve. Vodouists who adorn themselves with red display a willingness to fight.³⁰⁶ Martine, by wearing red clothes and decorating her apartment in red, evokes a Vodouist spirit of resistance reclaiming her African Haitian heritage which she otherwise covers by means of her skin bleaching. Moreover, she is buried in a bright red-colored suit, chosen by Sophie who is aware of that it is “too loud a color for a burial” (227). In this inappropriate gesture, arguably, lies also a resisting or liberating moment (as I argue in the final section of the sub-chapter “Healing through dying”).

Red has a specific meaning also in connection with Sophie’s coming of age. In the novel, red (as blood) is a symbol for the ending of childhood and the loss of virginity. The first instance in which the narrator alludes to the color is when as a child she is taken to the airport and leaves behind her aunt’s house. As the taxi drives off she notices how “[a] red dust rose between me and the only life that I had ever known” (31). The red dust forebodes change through migration and means a sudden farewell to childhood as she is torn from her

305 Danticat recounts a similar story in the short-story collection *Krik? Krak!* (1996). In the short story “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” women are accused of causing sickness and the death of children. Not very much unlike the crucible, one woman in particular is chaste after, imprisoned, and starved to death. Her wrinkled skin is taken as proof that she takes off her skin at night and flies (like a witch). Her corps is burnt to make sure she is really dead and, as deterrence, in order to re-establish the social order.

306 The color red is associated with the hot-tempered rebellious spirits of the Petwo family. The Cacos, the old peasantry, during the occupation, for example, tied red kerchiefs around their arms in honor of Ogu, the *lwa* of war (cf. Dubois 2012: 255). Red is also one of the colors related to Papa Legba, the guardian of the crossroads.

home. If one reads the red dust to signify menstrual blood, the red dust may be a farewell from girlhood into female adolescence. Sophie is twelve years old, her body changes, she enters the realms of adult life as sexualized being.

An equally abrupt moment of transformation happens the first morning after Sophie's arrival in New York. To comfort Martine through her nightmares she sleeps in her mother's bed, who clings to her hand. Sliding her hand out of her mother's, getting up, Sophie symbolically separates herself from the maternal body. In the bathroom

I looked at my red eyes in the mirror [...]. New eyes seemed to be looking back at me. A new face altogether. Someone who had aged in one day, as though she had been through a time machine, rather than an airplane. Welcome to New York, this face seemed to be saying. Accept your new life. I greeted the challenge, like one greets a new day. As my mother's daughter and Tante Atie's child. (49; emphasis added)

Similar to the mirror scene in *The Heart Does Not Bend*, in this scene the protagonist explicitly describes her coming of age and the changes, both in physical and psychological ways, that go with it. It is almost a classic scene of self-identification in the sense of Jacques Lacan's mirror stage. This means the first recognition of the self – or in Lacan's phrasing the “formation du je” (Lacan 1996: 67) – as a whole, not fragmented body, as the subject emerges from the imaginary to the symbolic stage (cf. *ibid.*: 64).³⁰⁷ Sophie recognizes her adult body and identifies herself as child and daughter of the Caco women, affirming her place within the generational lineage.

Noteworthy is the switch from first to third person and the ‘dialogue’ between Sophie and her mirror image, for a moment a split you and I-persona. Remarkable here, however, is the initial moment of non-recognition of or alienation from the self (indicated in the undetermined, detached “*someone*” but not herself), which also happens earlier when Sophie tries in vain to see any resemblance of herself in her mother. This hints to a possible disintegration of the individual caused by migration. Her development is disrupted as she re-enters an earlier phase of subject formation. New York not only means repeating the stage of language acquisition (Lacan's symbolic order). Also, in the North American metropolis she develops a “double consciousness”³⁰⁸ of be-

307 Lacan's approach has been criticized by feminist poststructuralists such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva for its phallogentric definition of identity and constitution of subjectivity which renders the female body lacking and mirrors patriarchal masculinity.

308 W.E.B Du Bois writes about the “double consciousness” he suggests as characteristic of African American identity Black Americans were made to see themselves on-

coming and being both Haitian and Black American. These “new eyes” refer not only to an altered subjectivity and the development of bodily traits, but also to the hostile gaze of white America, and possibly her mother, scrutinizing her alien body as other.

The red eyes Sophie notices in the mirror remind of the incarnation of Ezili as *Ezili-je-wouj* (red-eyed Ezili). Her first, not quite, recognition of herself as the evil counterpart of Ezili Freda, the “knife-wielding” red-eyed Ezili (Fernández Olmos/Paravisini-Gebert 2011: 131), provides Sophie with a strength she is yet not aware of. It is Ezili who guards over her and protects her not from being tested by her mother but from turning into the perpetrator of patriarchal violence. Arguably, the knife-wielding may be extended to the embodied act of self-liberation both Sophie and Martine enact upon themselves by a pestle and an old rusty knife respectively.

Bodily self-preservation is embodied in a statue of Ezili, which contains healing power for Sophie. She encounters “small statues of the beautiful mulattresse, the goddess and loa Erzulie” (52) in a store in Brooklyn shortly after her arrival. Ifé hands to Sophie a statue of Ezili as an apology for the testing and for her to draw strength from it, saying “My heart, it weeps like a river [...] for the pain we have caused you” (157). This reminds of her *vèvè* (flag or symbol) showing the heart pierced with a dagger, but also symbolizes the tears and immense pain of the Mater Dolorosa in Christian worship. It is also grandmother Ifé’s acknowledgment of her guilt in the genealogy of sexual violence and her uncontested participation in her daughter’s and granddaughter’s abuse.

Vodou spirituality opens a path to emotional empowerment for Sophie and provides, on an extra-textual level, access to a Haitian worldview whose healing potential reaches beyond geographical boundaries and interconnects people across the African diaspora. According to Caroline Brown, in the novel,

[i]t is Vodou as a syncretic product that both reflects the Haitian and American social systems in which it is mobilized and Danticat’s greater artistic and political project where Sophie Caco’s quest for healing becomes synonymous with cultural liberation, bodily integrity, and psychic integration. (Brown 2012: 129)

ly through the perception of others (whites) developing a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels [t]his two-ness” (Du Bois 2007: 8).

6.5 Bodily Autonomy: Liberated and Healing Bodies

The novel reconstructs individual strategies in order to regain bodily autonomy and achieve a state of personal liberation, which take on meaning when read against their specific sociocultural contexts, here Vodou spirituality and the Haitian context in particular. Danticat shows that even in contexts of extreme violence, overcoming pain and healing is possible. “[T]o be a body is to be given over to others even as a body is, emphatically, ‘one’s own,’ that over which we must claim rights of autonomy” (Butler 2004b: 20). What resonates in this quote from *Undoing Gender* on the one hand is the seemingly inevitable relational dimension of embodied subjectivity, and, on the other hand, it is assumed that the right to the ownership of the body is not necessarily a universal precondition but is volatile and needs to be claimed by the subject. Butler formulates the reclamation of autonomy over the body as necessity, yet the ways this is effected can differ immensely.

6.5.1 Healing through Dying

“Sometimes, when people have something they want to do, you cannot stop them. Even if you want to” (172). Sophie’s aunt discloses to her niece the finality of some decisions the acting subject may make. For Martine, who makes a final decision, it is necessary to erase all memories of the rape, to stop re-living it over and over again, and liberate herself by returning her body to her ancestors in Guinea. Guinea, the spiritual and imagined homeland of the African diaspora, is in the novel, in a positive sense, the “end of each of our journeys” (174).³⁰⁹ She kills her not only the unborn child but also herself. Her suicide as an effective embodied resistance makes sense when placed in relation with colonial history, enslaved women’s resistance strategies, and in dialogue with Vodou spirituality.

³⁰⁹ Enslaved Africans believed that their soul would return to the ancestral homeland upon death (cf. Dayan 1995: 258-260). Guinea was also believed to be the birthplace of the Vodou spirits (cf. Hurbon 1995: 21). The famous Haitian writer Jacques Roumain wrote a poem on “Guinée”: “It’s the long to Guinea / Where your fathers await you with impatience. / Along the way, they talk, / They wait. This is the hour when the streams rattle like beads of bone” (qt. in Dayan 1995: 258; trans. by Langston Hughes).

The extent of Martine's suffering is disclosed with her second pregnancy. Martine under no circumstance wants to keep the baby. The fetus for her does not represent love, trust, and a family bond between herself and her partner, but rather reminds her of the rape which has made motherhood impossible for her. She perceives the fetus as alien other that is attacking and "already fighting" her and "bites at the inside of [her] stomach like a leech" (190, 191). She hears it speaking to her from inside her womb until the point that the unborn child embodies the rapist himself and starts insulting her in "a man's voice [...] You *tintin, malprôp*. He calls me a filthy whore. I never want to see this child's face" (217). The act of infanticide, from her perspective, seems justified as an act of self-preservation and a way to escape her violator. "I look at every man and I see him. [...] Him. *Le violeur*, the rapist. I see him everywhere. [...] When I thought of taking it out, it got more horrifying. That's when I began seeing him. Over and over. That man who raped me" (199). Having the baby will happen only "at the expense of [Martine's] sanity" (192). Choosing death over the baby's and her life may not be an affirmation of life, it is definitely not a celebration of motherhood at all costs, it is, however, an individual's choice and for Martine a moment of resistance to patriarchal violence.

In accordance with other interpretations of suicide as an "ultimate act of resistance" (Lionnet 1993: 135), I read the suicide of Martine in more positive terms and not as a "failure of her socialized identity" (Braidotti 1994: 192) and not as a dissolution of the self. The last words she utters "*Mwin pa kapab enkô*" (224)³¹⁰ are an expression of her desperation to seek closure by ending her earthly existence in and of pain. Her self-chosen death is her escape from the physical body that has become an eternal source of pain and that she does not seem to own. However, her body is the only site on where to act and from where to exercise agency. This becomes obvious in the scene of her suicide and the determinacy with which she exercises the deed. Martine is found by her partner in the bathroom lying in her own blood. "She had a mountain of sheets on the floor. She had prepared this. [...] She stabbed her stomach with an old rusty knife. [...] Seventeen times" (224). Martine breaks out of her passivity and actively performs death on and through her body; she speaks not through words but through body action. The act of self-destruction becomes the ultimate act of self-redemption and self-determination through which she eventually counteracts the rape, during which she was being (passively) dragged, pulled, harmed. By stabbing her stomach she gets rid of the object of contempt – the fetus – as well as the object of her rejection and pain – her body. If, as stated earlier, state power is violently enacted on women's bodies, the self-

310 "I can't take it any longer" [my translation].

inflicted wounds or death is only a consequent action against the background of exceptional violence in the Haitian state. The observation that she "stabbed her stomach" indicates that this attack was first of all directed against the rapist himself and, on another level, against a violent regime and certain social order that renders acceptable and covers up violence against women (and dissident men).

Martine takes control and exercises power over her body by withdrawing this body from state control and patriarchal (even colonial) violence. If we consider Martine to be (psychologically) enslaved by the terror she has experienced and the trauma she suffers from, and if we consider this terror in its colonial continuity, her (successful) attempt at suicide can be contextualized against the history and economy of slavery. Suicide liberated from bondage and offered a means of resistance by effectively (and ultimately) withholding a person's work force as well as withholding the own body from state control and violence (infanticide, likewise, was a strategy to save the offspring from enslavement). It elucidates on a certain conceptualization of the body and flesh; the killing in Martine's case is legitimate qua the body as an absolute reclamation of the own body as property. It furthermore exposes a certain conceptualization of life and death, but also the fact that in extreme situations extreme steps become possible. Salvation is achieved in the imagination of an Afrocentric, spiritual home of Guinea. The novel in referencing Vodou imagines an alternative view of death and construction of afterlife in which "Death is journey" (195) or an escape solution to Guinea. "A place where all the women in my family hoped to eventually meet one another" (174).. The thought of returning to this safe space is spiritual and healing. "She is going to Guinea, [...] or she is going to be a star. She's going to be a butterfly or a lark in a tree. She's going to be free" (228). Again, the motif of flying is evoked as emancipatory. Movement and mobility stand in contrast to societal limitations and inhibition of women's individual freedom. Emergence and mobility are thus moments of agency in the context of physical enslavement and mental incarceration. Martine leaves the place that is not hers to claim.

Hurbon confirms the positive conceptualization of death in Vodou and the possibility of social transformation through death: "Unbearable if regarded solely as a brutal penalty exacted by nature, death instead may become source of regeneration for society when it is mediated by means of specific rites. Through them, the living furnish the dead with strength" (Hurbon 1995: 85). If Martine's suicide is an ultimate act of self-control and individual resistance, the burial ritual Sophie has for her mother is liberating and an act of transgression and empowerment. "She would look like a Jezebel, hot-blooded Erzulie who

feared no men, but rather made them her slaves, raped *them*, and killed *them*. She was the only woman with that power” (227). Here, I wish to refer to the analysis of this scene provided by Donette Francis: “In calling on Erzulie, a symbol of bodily survival and resistance and the protector of women who are suffering from abuse, [...] Sophie attempts to reclaim in death for Martine the power over her body and sexuality that she did not have while alive” (Francis 2004: 87). Martine who could not own her body when she was alive does now in death. The negative *Bildungsroman* usually ends with the tragic death of the anti-heroine or -hero, depression, or social exclusion. In this case here, the coming-of-age form envisions an alternative route of life and death or ending with Martine’s personal liberation through suicide and symbolic attack on the regime.

6.5.2 Survival through Confrontation

Different to Martine who needs to forget, it is fundamental for Sophie’s healing to seek a better understanding of her past and re-establish a wholesome, diasporic relationship to Haiti. If the first step in regaining bodily self-determination is the ‘deflowering’ with the pestle – an act she regards as liberating – the second step towards healing is her temporary return to her grandmother and confrontation with a tradition that renders the female body dysfunctional. Sophie makes explicit her want to reconnect to her Haitian identity. In a conversation with the taxi driver in Haiti, she easily slips back into *Kreyòl* (which is translated to the reader and illustrates the linguistic divide). In that conversation she is commended and acknowledged as belonging to the community. “People who have been away from Haiti fewer years than you, they return and pretend they speak no Creole.” Whereas, obviously, “some people need to forget,” Sophie desperately “need[s] to remember” (95). The driver’s comment hints at a difficult diasporic interrelation, the low status associated with *Kreyòl*, and a certain superiority attached to the social and economic capital of living in the diaspora. However, the protagonist, through the language of her family (which Martine, on the contrary, avoids to speak) establishes a basis for mutual understanding to connect to the maternal line.

During the visit, Sophie confronts her grandmother with the practice of ritualized testing. Describing how humiliating and painful this has been, she demands an explanation and learns about a mother’s responsibility for her daughters’ purity and family honor until handed over to the husband. Sophie is ena-

bled to disclose the sexual trauma and her resulting body hate to her grandmother, who then reveals the larger cultural narrative behind the testing. "I knew my hurt and hers were links in a long chain and if she hurt me, it was because she was hurt, too" (203). That way, Sophie can connect her pain to its actual origin and forgive her mother. She understands the source of the testing to be systemic of a body politic that in Francis's view "enforces misogynist patriarchal values" (2010: 90). It is symptomatic of the genealogy of violence in a postcolonial society in which the lives of its members are inextricably linked through pain and trauma. The gendered dimension is obvious, but moving beyond this observation, Counihan adds – and here I agree – that the testing serves "the novel's attempt to document Haiti's violent history" (2012: 39); it in fact obscures sexual violence against women. Danticat resorts to the "vulnerability figured in women's bodies, a product of an interlaced history of Haitian women's sexual violation under slavery and the use of rape as a tool of contemporary political terrorism" (*ibid.*).

Sophie actively chooses to face the ghosts of her and her mother's past and confront the inherited trauma by returning to the cane field. She takes her therapist's advice seriously: "Even if you can never face the man who is your father, there are things that you can say to the spot where it happened. I think you'll be free once you have your confrontation. There will be no more ghosts" (211). Loichot's interpretation is insightful here: "The necessary forgiving that leads to healing can happen only if the cause of her suffering is acknowledged, only if the mother's individual gesture is replaced in the chain of violence to which it belongs, only when the individual and the political can be articulated, jointed, joined" (2013: 93). After her mother's coffin is put in the ground, Sophie turns to the very ground that has caused her family and herself so much pain. By running through the cane field, Sophie succeeds in reclaiming a painful memory on her own terms. "I ran through the field, attacking the cane. I took off my shoes and began to beat a cane stalk. I pounded it until it began to lean over. I pushed over the cane stalk. It snapped back, striking my shoulder. I pulled at it, yanking it from the ground. My palm was bleeding" (93). Of significance is her language use emphasizing the active voice as she pushes, yanks, and pounds the cane. She claims the narrative for herself refusing the forced passivity of being victimized. She takes her protest out on the cane rather than enacting it on her own flesh. Here, too, Sophie takes another route than her mother to stage her resistance and reclaim agency. It is an act of resistance against authoritarian rule – both patriarchal and colonial symbolized by the cane. While agreeing with Francis that "she lashes out against the very site that symbolically produced three generations of violated and broken bodies" (2010:

93), I would go even further by arguing that in the symbolic appropriation of the cane, she denounces and protests against human and economic exploitation. She reclaims a colonial history that has successfully excluded subaltern agency. She takes not only revenge for the sexual violence enacted on her own and her mother's bodies but also commemorates Haiti's violent history. As a Caco-woman, she claims ownership of the land that has been taken away by the ruling elite of nineteenth century Haiti for her ancestors, herself and symbolically for the rural folk that has been further disenfranchised during U.S. occupation. The novel refers to this individual act as an anti-imperialist statement. By running over the field, Sophie re-appropriates the landscape of violence created by and sustaining plantation economy. While the female body has often served as the battleground, she now takes over the tangible ground in literally exposing her body to the cane. Through this paradigmatic reversal she claims the site for her healing.

As she attacks the cane – and reconciles her diaspora existence with her Haitian heritage as she acknowledges the maternal line and that “my mother was like me” (234) – her grandmother asks “*Ou libéré?*” (233). This is the same question market women ask themselves to know whether one is free of the heavy load of the goods, whereupon one would answer in the affirmative yes “if she had unloaded her freight without hurting herself” (96). Sophie's answer to that question, however, is silenced by her grandmother. According to Counihan's argument, the novel ultimately fails to provide healing subjectivity which apparently stems from the impossibility to reconcile past and present, “reflecting the text's ambivalent desire to formulate a Haitian identity that will both testify to Haitian history and function untraumatized in new diasporic spaces” (Counihan 2012: 37). In contrast to Counihan's interpretation that Sophie is “barred from speaking her own freedom” (2012: 46), I argue that Sophie is eventually liberated from the transgenerational burden passed on by her foremothers, although her answer to the question of whether she is free “remains unspoken” (ibid.: 37). First of all, her ‘*oui*’ would belie the fact that she indeed has been hurt. Despite the fact that after asking Sophie her question, grandmother Ifé “quickly pressed her fingers over my lips. ‘Now,’ she said, ‘you will know how to answer’” (234), Sophie never loses narrative authority over her story. Ifé may be silencing her granddaughter's immediate response but is not patronizing her: it rather underlines the power of the yet unspoken word. The answer, in fact, may be the text itself. Healing and liberation happen through the text as indeed words may heal. The text provides access to the trauma. The textual presentation of the lived experience of violence and its

memory counters its absence and can as well verbalize the pain making it accessible to a larger audience.

If for Counihan women's bodies and testing are a *lieu de mémoire*, which is not entirely different to the view of the body as palimpsest, Danticat's writing the body in pain brings to the surface the possibility that personal liberation and empowerment is possible while oppressive structures continue to exist. "One remembers in order to prevent," as Loichot concludes (2013: 86). Her awareness of her maternal responsibility leads her to "a greater need to understand so that [she] would never repeat it [her]self" (170). She may not yet be entirely free as she still needs to make sure no to repeat the same act which remains for the future. "It was up to me to avoid my turn in the fire. It was up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares" (203). Sophie's survival is necessary to protect the succeeding generation, to disrupt the legacy of violence and transmission of trauma across generations. It is not simply about forgetting and moving on, to leave the past behind and face the future. It is about a co-existence of these parameters. Healing for Sophie becomes possible because she is able to reflect on a damaging socialization practice and its sources, ultimately refusing its transmission. She is liberated; however, her silence at this point indicates that language does not necessarily suffice to express unspeakable pain. Sophie's transcendence of the social and cultural appropriation of female sexuality, her respect for the right of bodily autonomy, disrupts the transgenerational chain of violence.

6.6 The Coming-of-Age Genre and the Intimacy of Narration

Breath, Eyes, Memory, according to Braziel, is a "diasporic coming-of-age narrative" that, like the three other novels selected here, deals with the genre-defining themes of "adolescent alienation, migration, traumatic uprooting from a childhood in the Caribbean [...], and the challenges of establishing new relations in the U.S." (Braziel 2003: 110).³¹¹ Additionally, the novel is explicitly concerned with the interrelation of socialization practices and corporeal devel-

311 Whereas Braziel's analysis is interesting for the chosen terminology of the diasporic coming of age, Jo Collins' essay (2012) offers a rather simplistic reading of the novel as a postcolonial *bildungsroman*. *Bildung* in Collins' interpretation refers to formal education only. Collins rests on the body as land metaphor to equate identity formation with nation building and the creation of diaspora, "protagonist's development parallels national changes" (29).

opment as body politics. This coming-of-age novel shifts attention to a traumatizing rite of passage in which the adolescent female body becomes the battlefield for cultural identity. It furthermore shows the potential of the coming-of-age genre to deal with transgenerational trauma and violence from multiple perspectives. The relatively large time span this novel covers – and characteristically so – renders possible a nuanced description of individual attempts to come to terms with it. Due to the genre's focus on the relational structures established between individual, community, and society, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* succeeds to unveil the multi-layered social conditions that lie behind the terror and destroys simple, binary constructions of victim and perpetrator in an attempt to reach beyond a mere discourse of female victimhood.

The coming-of-age process the novel retraces is accompanied by questions of origin and the search for maternal connection which have also to do with the traumatic uprooting Brazil mentions. Danticat dedicates her novel “To the brave women of Haiti, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, cousins, daughters, and friends, on this shore and other shores. We have stumbled but we will not fall” (n.p.). In these lines, several issues are addressed that resonate with the motives and features of the coming-of-age genre. Besides being a feminist statement, addressed explicitly at women for resilience, bravery, and courage, it establishes simultaneously a women-centered ancestral lineage as well as a diasporic connection between those on the Haitian shore and those scattered across the ocean (or *lòtbòdlo*, the other side of the water).³¹² This connection to the natal land and women's bonding are reaffirmed throughout the novel, in particular when Sophie notes “All the mother-and-daughter motifs to all the stories and songs [...] something that was essentially Haitian [...] we are all daughters of this land” (230). The reassurance of belonging is at the core of the diaspora existence and experience depicted in the novel.

These lines furthermore bring into focus the relational and communal aspects I have identified earlier as a defining feature of the genre. The aspect of relationality comes to the fore most evidently in the intertwined destinies of the Caco women, especially the interlinked life stories of Sophie and Martine, a connection which is realized narratively through Sophie who in recounting her coming of age also tells her mother's. Their traumatizing experiences of violence mean a severe intrusion. “Violence can create injury to the body or mind which requires structural despair. Intense violence has the power to change one's relationship to self, to one's body, to one's community” (Morgan/Youssef

312 *Lòtbòdlo* is a Kreyòl expression for the diaspora communities and transnational connections.

2006: 209). Thus, if the coming-of-age novel is also about this interrelation of body, self, and community then violence disrupts this triadic constellation.

The community is mostly represented through the communal voice of grandmother Ifé. Her storytelling summons the children of the village and functions as means of informal education, which underlines the importance of oral history as a valid form of transmission of knowledge alternative to formal education. Opposed to that is Atie's urgent need to have their names documented in written form to "put on the archives" (128) as proof of their residency in the local area. Ifé objects to this, saying that "there is no need to have her name carved in letters [...] [i]f a woman is worth remembering" (128). The novel thus draws attention to a hierarchical relation of orality and script, here also staged as generational conflict. In addition, Ifé's voice, the "tale master" (123) of the folktales, adds a further narrative layer to and disrupt the narrative which is otherwise dominated by Sophie's (homodiegetic) voice. Another perspective is added by Atie, who shares her insights onto life in Haiti and her and Martine's childhood and youth.

Geographic boundaries and physical distance are transcended by the novel's characters sense of multiple belongings. The memories of Haiti that haunt Martine to New York and the healing process that for Sophie takes place in Haiti render a clear-cut distinction between here/there, home/abroad, Caribbean local/diasporan global impossible. If literary critics in diaspora studies, like Kezia Page, are cautious about an over-emphasis on one of the locations or perspectives that privilege the one location over the other (cf. Page 2011; see also chapter 1 and 2), Danticat introduces a protagonist who balances the intertwined relations to both sides; through narrative back and forth movement, proximity is created despite the actual distance. As Adlai Murdoch states "she may not still live in Haiti, Haiti will always live in her, and she is both product and symbol of this critical encounter between positionality and place" (2008: 145).

From an adult point of view, in a rather linear fashion, Sophie retrospectively recounts her story, beginning with her childhood and young adulthood to the point when she has a child and her mother dies. The chronology of events is disrupted mostly through Martine's painful memory and nightmares of the rape. Such flashbacks add to "the quality of 'belatedness'" (Morgan/Youssef 2006: 8), which characterizes trauma narratives and mirrors the processing of trauma. These are fragments of a life disclosed to narrator and reader bit by bit.

The novel is subdivided into four parts with alternating length that constitute of the different stages of the protagonist's individuation process on her path to womanhood – similar to Silvera's novel. The first part, for instance,

recounts Sophie's childhood in Haiti, more precisely the days prior to her departure, as well as her arrival in New York and the first months there. The flight means an abrupt end to her childhood and transition to adolescence. The diaspora movement thus coincides with a "farewell to childhood" (qt. Kaplan in Rishoi 2003: 54) and the entrance into young adult life. Twelve years of age, she leaves behind her safe home space to unknown foreign territory to a mother she does not know. This is a first rupture in her socialization and coherent development of her own self ("It was as though I had disappeared" [40]). The second and shortest part skips the first six years of Sophie's new life in New York to accelerate time but also mirrors the boredom of her daily routine ("six years doing nothing but that. School, home, and prayer" [67]). Sophie, now eighteen years of age, is isolated. It is also in this second part in which the virginity testing begins. It not only reflects Sophie's bodily development but also stages the increased sexual surveillance of Sophie through the mother. Not incidentally, the end of Sophie's adolescence coincides with the end of the book's second part. The third and longest part, which consists of 15 of the total 35 chapters slowing down the narration, is set in New York, in Providence, and Haiti about two years later. Sophie is a married woman and mother now. In this part, she visits her Haitian home where she confronts her mother and grandmother about the painful ritual practice her body was exposed to. If the coming-of-age genre reflects on inevitable bodily change and transformation, as Rishoi for instance argues (cf. 2003), Danticat's novel makes this most obvious in the remark addressed at Sophie by her grandmother: "As a woman your face has changed. You are a different person" (170). The final part stages the healing process and attempt of reclamation of bodily autonomy.³¹³

Finally, I wish to draw attention to the "Afterword," dated back to the Summer of 1999, which Danticat decided to include subsequently in the second paperback Vintage edition. It takes the form of a letter addressed from the author, Danticat, to the protagonist, Sophie. In the "Afterword," Danticat writes the following:

I felt blessed to have shared your secrets, your mother's, your aunt's your grandmother's secrets, mysteries deeply embedded in you, in them [...]. I write this to you now, Sophie, because your secrets, like you, like me, have traveled far from this place. Your experiences in the night, your grandmother's obsessions, your mother's "tests" have taken on a larger meaning, and your body is now being asked to repre-

313 Nadia Celis identifies three stages in the process of becoming subject. The embodied subject develops from body subject to body object until eventually reaching the stage – ideally successful – of reclaiming one's own body as "el cuerpo propio" (cf. 2015: 31). These stages can be discerned also in Danticat's novel.

Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory

sent a larger space than your flesh. You are being asked [...] to represent every girl child, every woman from this land [...]. Tired of protesting, I feel I must explain. [...] I have always taken for granted that this story which is yours, and only yours, would always be read as such. [...] And so I write this to you now, Sophie, as I write it to myself, praying that the singularity of your experience be allowed to exist, along with your [...] own voice. (235-6; italics in original)

Although the author has dedicated the novel to all women of Haiti, with this letter, Danticat reclaims authority over her novel, over the ways the story should be read and interpreted, and eventually over Sophie's body. Or is it rather an act of cultural translation? In *Create Dangerously*, Danticat defends this strategic move explaining how she was reproached for including the virginity testings in the novel by other Haitian Americans who demanded from her she should draw Haiti in positive terms only. "You are a liar [...] You dishonor us, making us sexual and psychological misfits.' [...] Maligned as we were in the media at the time, [...] many of us had become overly sensitive and were eager to censor anyone who did not project a 'positive image' of Haiti and Haitians" (Danticat 2010: 32). She adds that "the immigrant artist must sometimes apologize for airing, or appearing to air, dirty laundry" (ibid.: 33). The letter offered her a way out of this dilemma and to reach out to her community. It offered also the possibility to protect her community from the danger of exoticization and of being misread especially by readers unfamiliar with the Haitian context quick to misjudge Haiti because of a supposed cultural alterity. As such, she claims the privilege of interpretation in an act of self-empowerment (or appropriation?) as migrant writer and ethnic advocate. This, however, opens a rather problematic chapter of authenticity and representation in ethnic literature – Ifeona Fulani here speaks of the "politics of style" (cf. Fulani 2005; see also the conclusion in chapter 8).

The 'letter' raises several further issues. Of importance is that the letter unsettles the boundaries of the fictional and fact, first of all by assuming a 'real' addressee of the letter, and secondly by the intrusion of the author into the fictional world of the characters. Also, taking into consideration the enforced censorship which characterized and limited literary production throughout the dictatorship in Haiti, her speaking out instead of keeping quiet is a writer's choice of liberation (*libéré* eventually) from oppressive structures – an inherently political act. Furthermore, what comes into focus here is the didactic purpose of the novel, what Elena Machado Sáez describes as the "pedagogical ethics" of Caribbean diaspora literature (cf. Machado Sáez 2015: 26),³¹⁴ especial-

314 I come back to this point in more detail in the conclusion (chapter 8) when I consider the aspect of political writing.

ly of historical fiction but which might also be at the core of the diasporic coming-of-age novel as suggested here (the aspect of *bildung* directed at the readership comes back into focus here). Machado Sáez mentions the “interpretative dialogue between text and reader in terms on an (im)possible intimacy” (ibid.: 2). Novels and the stories they tell, certainly, do have an impact on the readership and their environments. In an interview, Danticat also admits her intimate relation to her characters agreeing that to create dangerously also means to create intimately (cf. Danticat/Nagy/McConnell 2014). May it then be that the single coming-of-age story of a girl growing up in Haiti and coming to the United States creates intimacy with the reader in order to humanize the migrant subject and create sympathy for the whole community on the part of the majority society?

6.7 Concluding Remarks

Cathy Caruth confirms that “trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (1996: 4). Danticat’s novel shows how individual traumata come to constitute a part of the collective memory and are inscribed in particular on women’s bodies; it, however, also shows, as Counihan holds, that a nation’s collective memory may be irreconcilable with an individual’s need to forget. If there exists a ‘corporeal historical archive’ (taking seriously Counihan’s claim of the body as *lieu de mémoire*) trauma narratives can provide access to alternative histories that have been silenced by official records in particular when intimate stories clash with cultural demands.

Danticat’s work has a political impetus. In her novels and short stories, as literary scholar Martin Munro argues, “personal lives are politicized [...] and conversely politics is personalized as characters seek to survive ideology-driven dictatorships, political violence, and the poverty and social damage wreaked by various regimes” (Munro 2010a: 4). In reflecting on the turbulences of the post-Duvalier period, reviving troubling memories of the dictatorship, and circling around the pains of migration, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is a critical evaluation both of a state’s failure to keep its citizens safe from harm as well as of the far from satisfactory conditions in the diaspora home. The novel alludes to the plantation history as well as to contemporary forms of domination in the Car-

ibbean; it implies that violence, in its every-day occurrence, continues to be an acceptable tool of political and social control in the postcolonial state.³¹⁵ That violence may not be reducible to the Haitian context but is omnipresent is indicated by the protagonist's disillusioning observation that violence "is just part of our lives" (169). The collective "our" in this quote not only includes the novel's female characters who suffer from violent intrusion into their bodily integrity, but unifies on a more global scale all those who experience violence in its multiple forms and manifestations.

Danticat expands the coming-of-age genre by incorporating a rape and trauma narrative to document the extent to which violence shapes the socialization of young women. The novel thus re-appropriates the rape narrative as a feminist issue in which bodily autonomy is reclaimed and the '(self-)brutalized' body ultimately becomes powerful. Both Sophie as well as Martine enact individualized practices of embodied resistance. The following chapter on Angie Cruz' novel continues with the discussion of feminist resistance strategies as staged on and communicated through the body which I detect in the silence and apathy of one of the novel's protagonists. Although painful and destructive, the characters deliberately turn to their bodies in their gendered, raced, classed, and sexualized implications to enact their protest against societal strictures and a misogynist value system thereby revealing that political agency and citizenship are indeed volatile concepts.

Writing about and fictionalizing rape can indeed become a feminist act in order to transcend hegemonic social structures. Literary scholars Brigley Thompson and Gunne argue that the challenging task of "creating a subversive rape narrative" (2010: 7) lies in re-focusing the attention to the victim and writing her back into life. Subversion is further created by the dissolution of the binaries of victim/perpetrator or agency/passivity as well as the application of alternative narrative strategies such as narrative silence on the rape or suggesting suicide as legitimate possibility to overcome sexual trauma. Danticat's novel accomplishes this by re-adjusting the focus on and privileging the voices of those women who have fallen victim to sexual violence and whose voices are often overheard. The narrative shifts away from or blanks out the incidents of abuse and the act of rape and neither questions the victims' credibility nor the truth of what had happened. Furthermore, the editors pinpoint the inherent danger that arises when the female body becomes a metaphor for land and

315 Donna Aza Weir-Soley comes to the same conclusion in her explanation that the women characters in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* are "traumatized under totalitarian regimes that systematically impose state-sanctioned violence upon their bodies and total abjection of their personhood" (Weir-Soley 2009: 184).

nation and her constructed purity the main conveyor of culture. The body, polluted by rape and deprived of its own agency, is located outside of this cultural realm it originally defined. Nevertheless, the interconnectedness of the women characters in the novel and their role in perpetuating patriarchal violence blurs too simplistic distinction of victim and perpetrator. She leaves the women characters with dignity and restores them to agency to come to terms on their own accord, to reclaim the bodily self.

7. Incarcerated Bodies: Angie Cruz' *Soledad*

*[H]ow much goes on inside of walls. All these walls.
We live behind walls, even our own bodies are walls.
(Cruz 2001: 108)*

7.1 Introduction

The debut novel of Angie Cruz, a Dominican-U.S. American writer, community activist, and the editor of the literature and arts journal *Aster(ix)*,³¹⁶ is subject of this final analytical chapter. She belongs to the younger generation of Latino/a writers and is often cited along with more acclaimed authors like Junot Díaz or Julia Alvarez. Of the four writers selected for this study, Cruz is the youngest and different to the others in that she herself did not migrate from the Caribbean but was born to Dominican parents in New York City in 1972. She grew up bilingually and biculturally in a poor working class environment in Washington Heights, a predominantly Dominican neighborhood in Manhattan's Upper West Side. Storytelling, the memories of the life in the Dominican Republic shared by her family, community life, and frequent travels to the Caribbean constitute parts of her identification as Dominican American. She studied English at the State University of New York (SUNY), Binghamton, where she received a BA in 1997, and obtained a MFA in Creative Writing from New York University in 1999.³¹⁷

In an interview with Silvio Torres-Saillant, Cruz talks about the influence of her teachers Earl Lovelace and Carol Boyce Davies as well as of writers like Cristina García, Sandra Cisneros, or Toni Morrison, to whom she felt connected due to their shared status as minority writers (cf. Torres-Saillant 2003: 113-114).

316 *Aster(ix): A Journal of Literature, Art, Criticism* can be accessed via <http://asterixjournal.com/>.

317 Prior to her career as an author of fiction, Cruz worked in a fashion store in downtown Manhattan and finished a degree in design.

She also recounts how she became conscious of racist ideologies, not only in every-day life but also in the art scene, and her own marginalization as “a Latina” and “mulata” (ibid.: 112-113). What motivated her to become a writer was her wish to develop her own language through which to express the experiences both of discrimination as well as economic hardship, which resonates with the criticism of consumerism and dependency capitalism in her two novels *Soledad* (2001) and *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005). Her literary work tackles the complex dimensions of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in the Dominican Republic as well as in the U.S.-migrant society and within the diaspora community. It is further concerned with the quotidian, love interests, emotional involvements, and survival. Literary scholar Juanita Heredia describes Cruz as belonging to “a generation of authors in the twenty-first century who are concerned about the transnational representation of people of color in literature and society” (Heredia 2009: 107).

While Cruz' first novel circles around mother-daughter relations, the immigrant condition in “the urban ghetto” (Dalleo/Machadao Sáez 2007: 73) of Washington Heights, illness, and domestic violence, her second book, a family saga and migration story, is concerned in much more detail with Dominican history, the U.S. occupation, resistance to Trujillo's dictatorship, and the economic exploitation of the Caribbean through multinational corporations. In addition, the novel acknowledges through the diversity of its characters the traces of the African and Asian diaspora in Dominican society and culture. The affirmation of this particular aspect of Dominican identity is unusual given the fact that Blackness is openly rejected in the Dominican public discourse, which has to do, amongst other reasons, with the antagonistic relation to its neighbor Haiti (see 7.2), and to a lesser degree with diaspora identity politics that emphasize the distinction from African-American culture. Cruz says: “I never think of us as disconnected from the African experience. I mean we are African diaspora and it is just that we have suffered different geographic displacements. Someone told me the Dominican Republic was just one big plantation. [...] That's our history” (Torres-Saillant 2003: 113). Whatever she means by *the* African experience, the statement is important as it suggests a shared history of displacement, enslavement, and movement that unifies the Caribbean on the levels of the cultural, social, artistic, and literary. It establishes points of connection and frames for comparative analysis crucial for a diaspora poetics.

In this analysis, I focus on the novel's two protagonists, Soledad and her mother Olivia. In my reading, I foreground the topics of sexual labor, which I understand as a re-colonization of the Caribbean female body, and individual experiences of domestic violence. The analysis further elaborates on how the

novel develops a body politics in which nudity and apathy function as a rebellious act against gender inequality and too-strict social demands placed especially on women. That we need to understand body politics also in ethnic and racialized terms will be made clear by looking at Soledad's coming of age and her negotiating her identity between conflicting positionalities within the U.S.-American mainstream and the Dominican community. Different to the other three novels, Cruz develops the male characters in more detail. For this reason, I also pay attention to the representations of masculinity and stereotypes associated with Latino machismo that influence the socialization of girls and boys, men and women alike. The final sections take issue with the features of the coming-of-age genre especially its representation of subject development through body metaphors and corporeal change. Before moving on to the close reading of the novel, the following sections briefly introduce the historical background and socio-economic conditions of the Dominican Republic and the formation of the Dominican diaspora in the United States. Secondly, as in the previous chapters, I sketch out the emergence of Dominican-American literature and its relation to the tradition of the field of Latina/o literatures in the U.S.

7.1.1 The Dominican Republic and Diaspora Formation

For about 3,000 years before the *conquistadores* invaded the island in 1492 and renamed it Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic (as the eastern part is known nowadays) had been populated by the indigenous population of Ciboneys, Igneri, and later mostly Arawaks followed by Taínos and Caribes (cf. Moya Pons 1995: 18). The size of the population is estimated at about 400,000 by the time of the contact with the Spaniards, however nearly extinguished only decades later through diseases imported by the colonizers, mistreatment, and overwork. Hispaniola, meaning little Spain, then, indicates at least two things: European colonialism in the Caribbean and almost erasure of indigenous culture on the one hand, and, on the other, dominance of Spanish rule on the whole island, which is the second largest in the Caribbean, until the occupation by France and eventual independence of Haiti. Notably, Hispaniola plays a significant role in the African diaspora consciousness. Henry Louis Gates, jr., speaks of the island as the “birthplace of the Black experience in the Americas” (Gates 2011:

n.p.),³¹⁸ because it was the first location where a colonial outpost had been installed and to where enslaved African people were taken. Slave trade there started as early as in the 1520s.

Especially Dominican Republic's relation to Haiti as well as to notions of Blackness are noteworthy. Ceded to France in 1795, from 1805 onwards, Santo Domingo remained under Haitian domination until 1844 when independence was achieved.³¹⁹ Despite their geographical proximity and several attempts of (enforced) unification, the two neighboring countries could not be more different. While Haiti successfully fought for independence from French domination comparably early, re-building the nation based on a strong identification with their African roots, the Dominican Republic's emerging national identity was centered around the ruling white elite and proximity to *European-ness* and whiteness, based to a large degree on the antagonism to Haiti, rather than on anticolonial separatism from Spain (cf. Whitney 2011: 362). The Dominican Republic became the only Caribbean state to gain independence not from the colonizing 'motherland' but from another Caribbean state. Haitian rule of the island fed into sentiments of anti-Blackness and anti-Haitianism to such an extent that recolonization by Spain or U.S. annexation was preferred over the rule by the neighbor.³²⁰ The remaining decades of the 19th century were characterized by *caudillo* politics, economic crises and political instability and fragmentation, a revolution in 1857, the first dictatorship under Ulises Heureaux, U.S. protectorate, and the collapse of sovereignty.³²¹

318 This quote is taken from Henry Louis Gates' documentary on "Haiti and the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided" as part of the series "Black in Latin America," 51:25 min, (00:00:46-00:00:49). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU3TWRKfTA>

319 Ever since their settlements on Hispaniola, both the French and Spanish fought over territory and land use, while at the same time fostering intercolonial trade. Especially the borderland between the two was a constant source and ground of conflict. As Moya Pons notes, "the border between the French and the Spanish colonies was never a simple line drawn up in official cabinets, but a living element in the social fabric of Española" (1995: 77). This is important to note, as this shows that reasons for later conflicts between independent Haiti and Dominican Republic can be traced back to the competitive constellation of the colonial opponents.

320 As a result of the constant fear of repossession by the so-called Black Republic, the Dominicans signed a degree with Spain in 1861.

321 Moya Pons argues that "Dominican politics had always been based on personalism and *caudillismo* because the population was primarily rural and illiterate, and their loyalty was only possible through a system of personal connections" (1995: 220; see also 165-183, 219-234). The *caudillo* is an authoritarian and charismatic leader figure and embodies a certain ideal of masculinity which is influential to a certain degree on contemporary machismo ideology.

The 20th century saw the beginning of U.S.-imperial interventions in the Caribbean. The occupation and military rule by the U.S. in the Dominican Republic lasted from 1916 until 1924 (about at the same time as in Haiti). The installation of the Dominican National Police and simultaneous disarming of the population facilitated the rise and power of the National Army during the dictatorship later. Nearly the entire trade and commerce was now realized with the U.S. and the sugar industry was dominated by foreign investors, which for the local economy meant dependency on imports and the demands of the global market and U.S. foreign policy.³²² As a result, “[t]he growing Americanization of the urban elite meant the adoption of new lifestyles and consumption habits completely alien to traditional Dominican modes of behavior” (Moya Pons 1995: 346).

The atmosphere of growth and progress, nevertheless, was accompanied by the revival of *caudillo* politics, leading to the rise of one of the cruelest dictatorships in the history of the post-emancipation Caribbean: the dictatorship of General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, the *generalissimo* and self-proclaimed ‘Padre de la Patria Nueva.’ He came to power with force in 1930 to reign for three decades until his assassination in 1961. The historian B. W. Higman refers to Trujillo, who was also known for his *machismo*, as the most notorious, manipulative totalitarian dictator in the Caribbean and Latin America, “seizing control of the minds as well as the resources of the people” (Higman 2011: 259). He monopolized the business sectors and industry and tactically silenced or liquidated opponents with torture and terror.³²³ Although a prospering urban middle class could emerge, the majority of the rural population lived in extreme poverty and only a small elite was able to accumulate wealth if they complied with Trujillo.³²⁴

322 This of course has left its marks on the population, the local culture, and practices of consumption oriented towards the trends in the United States.

323 Moya Pons confirms that “[f]rom the beginning, Trujillo’s government was a regime of plunder organized to furnish him with total control of every economic enterprise existing in the country. As he achieved control of those enterprises Trujillo used the full power of the state to eliminate competition and establish monopolies” (1995: 359). The government of the United States continued to support Trujillo, because they regarded him “as a guarantor of political stability and as a better alternative to revolution” (ibid.: 357). Throughout Trujillo’s rule, many opponents and intellectuals went underground or in exile, if they could.

324 Especially the sugar industry, where mostly Haitian workers worked under miserable conditions, was a source of capital accumulation. It was also under Trujillo in 1937 that the brutal murder of Haitians, especially of those living in the border region, took place.

The decades following the dictatorship were dominated by instability and conflicts. In 1965, another intervention by the U.S. led to civil war with some 40,000 U.S. soldiers entering the country to prevent the rise of another communist regime in the Caribbean.³²⁵ Ever since the re-establishment of democratic rule, the two parties, *Partido de la Liberación Dominicana* and *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano*, have dominated political life. However, the return of president Joaquín Balaguer and his rule from 1966-78 has become known under the label of *neo-trujillismo*, likewise characterized by violence and terrorist acts. Equally, under Antonio Gúzman, a social democrat who was in office throughout the 1980s-90s, corruption, devalued currency, and a high inflation rate – at 60% in 1988 and up to 100% in 1990 (cf. Moya Pons 1995: 433, 443) – dominated a deteriorated Dominican economy and society. The consequences have been the country's subjection to the IMF-adjustment program, increased foreign aid, and large foreign investment, resulting in dependency capitalism. The economic situation and living conditions worsened to such an extent that by the early 1990s the majority of Dominicans were unable to bear the high prizes. For several months the population was left without basic food supply, electricity, water, and fuel, living, as Moya Pons writes, "the most depressing crisis in modern history" (Moya Pons 1995: 443). Many have been forced to migrate, mostly to the United States, but also to Venezuela, to Puerto Rico, or Europe. Whereas under Trujillo the majority of the exiled migrants belonged to the educated elite and intellectuals and were opponents of the regime, the post-sixties generation of migrants from the Dominican Republic comprised largely of the poor and working-class population. The succeeding governments have invested more in infrastructure and technological development, financial stability, and the creation of social programs, but have also been criticized for neoliberal economic policy, corruption, or paramilitary operations (the PRD especially).

Today, the Dominican Republic has a population of more than 10.5 million people. The Dominican population is heterogeneous in terms of ethnic, cultural, and religious identification and affiliation, comprising of a majority of persons of mixed European and African ancestry, of those who identify as Black and African or white and European, indigenous American, Asian (e.g. Syrian,

325 The operation of the "Inter-American Peace Force" is subject of controversial debate, since some regard the intervention as a violation of the charter of the UN. Another example of U.S. interventionism in the Caribbean with the aim to thwart the rise of communism is the invasion of Grenada in 1983 after the execution of Maurice Bishop.

Lebanese, Chinese), and a small minority of Sephardic Jews.³²⁶ The question of ethnicity and ethnic identity (or ancestry) in the Dominican Republic is a difficult and contested one. Different to, for instance, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic does not celebrate officially the multi-ethnic composition. Prejudice and stratification based on race are still prevalent in Dominican society. The idea of a national identity of *Dominicanidad* focuses to a large extent on the Spanish or European heritage, celebrating as well *whiteness* as an important marker of class and status and determinant of social relation (cf. Howard 2001). Although of African descent the great majority of Dominicans would not self-identify as Black or being of African descent,³²⁷ but rather self-identify as *indio/a*.³²⁸ The classification of *indio/a* in the Dominican Republic encompasses a complex set of racial identifications, ranging from *indio claro* to *indio oscuro* with “intermediate categories [...] such as *mulato*, *jabao*, *triqueño*, and others” (Itzigsohn/Dore-Cabral 2001: 323). In order to understand Dominican cultural identity, nationalism, and the society’s obsession with skin color, the antagonistic history of the Dominican Republic and Haiti as well as the attachment to Spain, European culture, and Catholicism is important.³²⁹

326 “Social scientists generally accept the following percentages for classification of race in the Dominican Republic: 65% mulatto, 15% white, 15% black, 5% other” (Suriel 2005: 20). The Dominican Republic has decided not to include the category of ethnic and racial identification in the 2002-2010 census (cf. “La variable étnico racial en los censos nacionales”: 22).

327 For a more in-depth discussion of how race is defined as well as of national identity and anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic, see, e.g., David Howard’s *Coloring the Nation* (2001), in which he argues that Dominican racial identity “represents whiteness, Catholicism and a Hispanic heritage. It clashes dramatically with the popular Dominican image of Haiti – one of *negritud* or blackness, *vodú* and African ancestry” (2001: 17). The contemporary discourse of ‘*la raza dominicana*’ builds on colonial dichotomies.

328 This renders inclusion within U.S. ethnic and racial categories based historically on a Black/white distinction more complicated. As Jo-Anne Suriel notes, with reference to Joseph Roach’s concept of “surrogation” or the interrelation of memory and the performance of cultural identity as put forward by him in *Cities of Dead: Circum-Atlantic Black Performance* (1996), the problem attached to the racial construct of *indio/india* is one of forgetting the “genealogy of enslavement” on part of African descendants and erasure of the “history of violence” on part of the white population (cf. Suriel 2005: 29). She concludes “that the myth of the *indio* is a racist concept that materialized into the Dominican consciousness, *dominicanidad* is a racialized and exclusionary ethos as well” (ibid.: 32).

329 For decades Haitians have come to the Dominican Republic in search for employment. Many of these labor migrants have been exploited working on the sugar plantations or as domestic servants, however constantly threatened with forced re-

Migration in particular to the United States increased rapidly after Trujillo's death in 1961.³³⁰ Between 1990 and 2000 the population of Dominicans in the U.S. grew by almost 90 percent to over 1.1 million, with a higher proportion of female immigrants than males (cf. Grieco 2004). The transnational ties between island Dominicans and diaspora Dominicans are relatively strong – considering, for instance, the circulation of capital and financial support. Remittances sent from the diaspora community in the United States is a major source of income for the Dominican economy, next to tourism, amounting to about 3.5 billion U.S.-Dollars in 2014 and 4.1 billion in 2016 (cf. “Migration and Remittances Data” 2017). In contrast, nevertheless, Dominicans living in the United States are more likely to live in poverty, have a higher unemployment rate, and a lower level of income and education than other minority groups.

In 2010, the Dominican population in the U.S. had a size of 1.4 million.³³¹ More than half of the Dominican immigrants live in the metropolitan area of

patriation. A recent case in point constitutes a court ruling in 2013 that retroactively revoked citizenship for children born to foreign (Haitian) parents as early as 1929, thus stripping off citizenship rights of all Dominican persons of Haitian descent born after 1929, making them stateless people. The massacre of thousands of Haitians in 1937 was not only meant to clear the country of the Haitian presence, starting the “Dominicanization of the frontier” (Moya Pons 1995: 369), but was also part of Trujillo's racist ideology and cruel attempt at whitening the body of the nation, to ‘protect’ white *dominicanidad*, Hispanic and Catholic tradition, in short to dissociate from Blackness and things associated with Haiti and Africa. This is also crucial when considering the abominable condition of Haitian workers in the Dominican sugar industry, the so-called *bateyes*, and the recent juridical decision of the Dominican government. On the meaning, limitations, as well as contradictions of *Dominicanidad* with regards to, amongst other things, the racialization of the body and ‘protection’ of the national border, see the publication by Lorgia García-Peña (2016).

330 Torres-Saillant confirms the rise in numbers of migrants from the island to the United States: “The death of the dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, whose government had limited the population's mobility to foreign destinations, the passage by the US Congress of the 1965 Immigration Act, which increased immigrant quotas from the Caribbean and other parts of the Third World, and the US military invasion of 1965 to ‘prevent another Cuba’ all figure as the principal causes of the ‘great exodus.’ With the cities of New York; Providence, Rhode Island; and Lawrence, Massachusetts, serving initially as their principal destinations, Dominicans soon formed neighborhoods mostly in the Northeast. By the late 1970s the New York City neighborhood of Washington Heights had become the mecca of Dominican life in the country and a hub of writers” (2013c: n.p.).

331 Table 6 in the report, *2010 Census Briefs*, provides details on the origin and racial identity of the Hispanic or Latino/a population in the U.S. in 2010. Interestingly, among the three Caribbean Hispanic groups of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans, the smallest proportion of those who self-identify as white is among those of

New York, mostly in the neighborhood of Washington Heights. Thus, the city has the largest community of Dominicans outside of the country. The report on “The Hispanic Population: 2010” uses the specifications Hispanic or Latino origin as ethnic label to refer to “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (Ennis/Ríos-Vargas/Albert 2011: 2). Dominicans are counted among the Hispanic population, the country’s fastest growing and largest ethnic minority group, counting 54 million people in 2013 (cf. Grosfoguel/Maldonado-Torres/Saldívar 2005: 5). Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans comprise the largest group among the Hispanic population (cf. Ennis/Ríos-Vargas/Albert 2011). Persons who identify as being of Dominican origin are usually counted among “Other Hispanic or Latino” (ibid.: 3, Table 1). The classification of *Hispanic* came into use for the first time in the “Census of Population” of 1970 under Nixon after it had gained currency in the course of affirmative action policies throughout the 1960s. In addition, the term *Latino* became increasingly significant in political activism and as self-nomination especially and primarily within the Nuyorican (referring to the Puerto Rican diaspora in New York, here especially by the anti-fascist and anti-capitalist *Young Lords*) and Chicano movements, exclusive of e.g. Dominican immigrants, and as substitute for *Hispanic* (cf. Laó-Montes 2001: 4).³³²

A qualitative sociological study has found out that Dominicans in the United States tend to “reproduce their life on the island in the streets of New York City” (Itzigsohn/Dore-Cabral 2001: 324), thus contributing to the visibility and vibrancy of Latino/a culture in North America. New York is seen by some as a “global factory of latinidad” (Laó-Montes 2001: 1).³³³ Taking U.S. census and

Dominican origin (29.6 % as compared to 85.4 % and 53.1 % among Cubans and Puerto Ricans respectively), whereas “some other race” is ranked the highest (46 % among Dominicans, 5.8 % and 27.8 among Cubans and Puerto Ricans). One explanation for the latter number may very well be the fact that in the Dominican Republic, the large majority of the population self-identifies as *indio*, rather than as Black or being of African ancestry (cf. Ennis/Ríos-Vargas/Albert 2011: 14).

332 On the genealogy of the terms ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latino,’ see, for instance, Laó-Montes (2001: 4-5) and Immanuel Wallerstein who claims that “Latin@ identity is at the heart of a crucial geopolitical battle” (Wallerstein 2005: 36). Wallerstein uses the nonsexist, queer spelling *Latin@* to include persons of all genders and trans-persons from Latin America, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, of Latin American descent, or who self-identify as such living in the United States.

333 Laó-Montes and Dávila, editors of *Mambo Montage*, define the discursive construction of *Latinidad* thusly: Based on “particular historical foundations, hemispheric linkages, and global projections” of and among Latin American and Caribbean people, it denotes a subject position or positionality characterized by “a multiplicity of intersecting discourses enabling different types of subjects and identities and de-

social construction of racialized ethnic identity aside, the process of *Latinization* and production and performance of *Latinidad* can be attributed as much to popular culture, literature, and art, as to the people, communities, social movements, and activism (cf. Dávila 2001a, 2001b). The following section sheds light on the emergence of *Latinidad* through Dominican literature in the U.S. and its labelling as Latino fiction.

7.1.2 Dominican Literature of the Diaspora and the Latino/a Label

The growing importance of the Latino/a label in the 1980s and 1990s has contributed to the increasing visibility of and the marketing of the literary output of a new generation of Hispanic writers in the United States, including successful authors like Sandra Cisneros, Junot Díaz, and Oscar Hijuelos. Following the boom of Latin American literature with its magical realism in the 1960s and 1970s, literary critics have started to talk about the “mini-boom” of U.S. Latino/a writing (cf. Christie/Gonzalez 2006: xiii-xiv). In her essay, with the significant title “On Finding a Latino Voice” (1995), Julia Alvarez writes that the publication of Moraga’s and Anzaldúa’s important collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, published in 1981 which includes several pieces by Latina writers, has paved the way for the emergence of Latino/a literature. Then, in the mid-1990s, more than a decade after the publication, she observes that “there was a whole group of us, a tradition forming, a dialogue going on. And why not [...], why couldn’t we Latinos and Latinas have our own made-in-the-USA boom?” (n.p.). The 1990s were also an important ‘feminist decade’ for Latina women’s writing: not only the creative voices of Alvarez or Cisneros, but Latina writers especially of the Hispano-Caribbean like Achy Objeas, Cristina García, or Esmeralda Santiago received wide recognition (cf. Heredia/Kevane 2000; Brähler 2013: 64).

The literature by Dominican authors in the United States has been in existence since at least the early twentieth century, with writers like Pedro Henríquez Ureña (1884-1946), Andrés Francisco Requena (1908-1952), who was forced into exile and killed for his open criticism of Trujillo, essayist Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña (1894-1973), or novelist Virginia de Peña de Bordas

ploying specific kinds of knowledge and power relations” (Laó-Montes 2001: 3-4). Rather than seeing *Latinidad* as a fixed identity category, according to the editors, the term *Latinization* refers to a discursive formation and identification as a process that also involves transculturation.

(1904-1948).³³⁴ This earlier generation has not received the same amount of critical attention as contemporary voices, mostly because they wrote in Spanish, similar to the ‘post-sixties’ poets like Marianela Medrano (*1964) and Yrene Santos López (*1963) who also publish in Spanish. The work of award-winning poet Rhina Espaillat (*1932), also exiled with her family, is important for many things not the least for its bilingual register. Interestingly, it has been predominantly women authors who first made a career writing in English (cf. Torres-Saillant 2013b: 429),³³⁵ among them most prominently Julia Alvarez (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* [1991], *In the Time of the Butterflies* [1994], *Saving the World* [2006]), Nelly Rosario (*Song of the Water Saints* [2002]), and Loida Maritza Pérez (*Geographies of Home* 1999), or performance artist Josefina Báez. What distinguishes Dominican-American women’s writing, according to Torres-Saillant, are the protagonists’ “awareness of their racialization, social impediments, and cultural otherness with respect to a distant and indifferent mainstream” as well as “the memory of the Dominican past as a source of clarity and potential strength [...]. Reconnecting with Dominican history seems to be a strategy whereby their characters enhance their ability to cope with the ethnic, racial, sexual, and cultural antipathies they face in the United States” (Torres-Saillant 2013b: 432).³³⁶ All these are clearly issues of major concern in migrant fiction as well as in Caribbean diaspora literature in general.

Angie Cruz’ novel *Soledad* is subject of only a few scholarly publications.³³⁷ This may be due to the great success of Alvarez or Pulitzer Prize winner Díaz, who draw attention away from less popular Dominican diaspora authors, but also due to the still marginal status of Dominican literature in more general terms. At the end of the twentieth century and despite the boom of Latino/a literature, Torres-Saillant and Hernández, for example, observe that “Domini-

334 On the early development and important figures of Dominican American literature, see *Literatura Dominicana en los Estados Unidos: Presencia Temprana 1900-1950* edited by Daisy Cocco de Filippis and Franklin Gutiérrez (2001). For an overview of Dominican-American literature, see Torres-Saillant (2013b).

335 Cf. Vanessa Pérez Rosario (2010). Juanita Heredia’s *Transnational Latina Narratives* (2009) includes one chapter on Angie Cruz. Alvina E. Quintana’s *Reading U.S. Latina Writers* (2003) features Julia Alvarez and Loida Maritza Pérez. A concise study devoted to women poets from the Spanish Caribbean, including the Dominican Republic, in the United States is Carlota Caulfield’s “US Latina Caribbean Women Poets: An Overview” in Caulfield/Davis (2007).

336 *The Tears Of Hispaniola*, by Lucía M. Suárez (2006), is a comprehensive study of Haitian and Dominican diaspora literature and the role memory, home, and history play in these fictional texts.

337 See for instance Brüske (2013); Sandlin (2013); Francis (2010); Dalleo/Machado Sáez (2007); and Lago Graña (2004).

can literature in the United States continues to be a marginal cultural expression" (1998: 120). While this has certainly changed during the first decade of the 21st century, it should not go unmentioned that a significant number of edited volumes on *Hispanic* or *Latino* literature and culture have overlooked the literary achievements by writers from the *Hispano-Caribbean* and do not include *Dominican-American* authors at all.³³⁸ The different terms mentioned in this last sentence already hint at the difficulties of categorizing literature, especially when based on ethnic ascriptions, and often confusing labels that cannibalize diverse cultural expressions and heterogeneous literary output. While I wish to stress the belonging of U.S.-Dominican literature to the field of Caribbean diaspora literatures (which as 'label' puts less emphasis on ethnic identity but rather emphasizes migration and the transnational connection to and routes of this literary tradition), it is important to point out its relation to the already established field of Latina/o literature in the U.S., also in terms of the symbolic and cultural capital associated with it.

Among literary scholars, there hardly exists agreement on the use of a common terminology. Whereas some studies use the denotation *Latino* and *Hispanic American* literature interchangeably, others argue against using the Hispanic label as it overly stresses the colonial heritage of Spain, a relation which in many cases is irrelevant. Yet others add a regional and linguistic specificity such as *Hispanic Caribbean* or *Latino Caribbean* to differentiate on the one hand from Anglo- or Francophone Caribbean and on the other from other Spanish speaking groups in the U.S.³³⁹ All of these labels have the tendency to

338 See, for example, Torres-Saillant/Hernández (1998: 111) on the exclusion of Dominican writers from anthologies of Latina/o literature. Juan Flores, on the other side, notes the same form of exclusion for Puerto Rican literature when it gets subsumed under the umbrella term of Latina/o literature: "But along with the opportunities, for both recognition and potential creative sharing, there is for the Puerto Rican especially the pitfall of renewed marginalization and, on the other end, dilution of the collective experience" (Flores 2001: 203).

339 Examples are, among others, *The Hispanic Literary Companion* by Kanellos (1997), *The Latino Reader* by Augenbraum/Fernández Olmos (1997), or Marc Zimmermann's *US Latino Literature* (1992). The majority of contributions in the volume *U.S. Latino Literatures and Cultures: Transnational Perspectives* (2000), edited by Lomelí and Ikas, focuses mainly on the literary and artistic production by Chicanos/as. The volume features only one interview with Cuban American writer Uva de Aragón and one essay on the writings by Puerto Rican and Cuban American authors (the contribution by Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez). The collection *Imagined Transnationalism: U.S. Latino/a Literature, Culture, and Identity* (2009), features writers who have roots in Haiti, Cuba, and Puerto Rico but not in the Dominican Republic. The contribution by Nicolás Kanellos in that collection is noteworthy for its schematic overview of Hispanic literature in the United States and categorization into native,

commodify ethnicity, homogenize cultural diversity and diasporic experiences, as well as gloss over privileges and structural dis-/advantages linked to race, class, language, citizenship and migrant status, and access to institutional support. In his discussion of Latino/a culture, art, and literature, Juan Flores elaborates on the initially challenging relations among the heterogeneous U.S.-Hispanic population with regards to differences in the access to (cultural) capital, institutional representation, and funding. He differentiates between resident, *lowercase latinos/as*, such as Chicano/as and Puerto Ricans, who were there earlier and more involved in the Civil Rights movement, and, on the other side, the immigrant (upper case) *Latinos/as*, such as Dominicans or Cubans, whose writing he blames as assimilationist and apolitical, who enjoy certain privileges associated with class and ethnic identity and receive more support by cultural institutions and through affirmative policies (cf. Flores 2001: 191-196).

The different labels are as much an academic, institutional decision and a marketing issue of the publishing industry and they constitute a political choice marking the belonging to and solidarity within ethnic minorities.³⁴⁰ Latino/a literature usually subsumes the works by Chicano/a, Cuban American, Dominican American, Mexican, and Puerto Rican writers and artists.³⁴¹ The political dimension of the label is pointed out by Alvina Quintana who argues that the designation of *Latina/o* – a “panethnic category” (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 11) – is a

immigrant, and exile fiction (Kanellos 2009: 34). He analyses the text-immanent features and moves away from a strictly biographical reading of the novels.

340 Christie and Gonzalez, for instance, stress the insufficiency of labels, adding that “their meanings are dependent upon personal perspectives and cultural or political attitudes. We have to recognize that no label for any group of people is all-inclusive or entirely accurate and that many, in fact, can be demeaning and derogatory” (Christie/Gonzalez 2006: xiv).

341 Both categories, Hispanic and Latino/a, for a long time have predominantly referred to U.S.-Puerto Ricans and Chicanos/as. This has changed in the course of the “Latinization” not only of certain areas of New York but also of the art scene itself, according to Arlene Dávila. It now subsumes or is constructed around a variety of ethnic and cultural identities and set in relation to the Latin American background, simultaneously transforming the modes of representation and mechanisms of recognition. “A direct consequence of this continued identification between particularized groups and the forms and elements used to represent ‘Latin’ culture was that the role of Latin America, rather than the experiences of U.S. Latinos, was strengthened as the reference for authentic [sic] definitions of ‘Latinness’” (Dávila 1999: 186). Similarly, the fiction produced by writers with a Spanish Caribbean background has often been compared to Latin American literature, especially its expression of magical realism since the boom and evaluated accordingly.

strategic intervention aimed at highlighting some of the cultural and political similarities that emerge when individuals living in the United States are identified by the mainstream press under a 'Hispanic' label, signifying a European language rather than an ethnic or national point of origin. [...] Although the terms 'Hispanic' and 'Latino' both make reference to categories of difference, it is only the latter that allows for a recognition of the cultural hybridization created by the European fusion with Indigenous, Asian, or African peoples. (Quintana 2003: 4)

The diverse experiences and ethno-cultural affiliations subsumed under the Latino label in fact defy any notions of an essential *Latinidad*. It is a useful category in a unified resistance to assimilationist tendencies by the U.S.-mainstream and can be used strategically based on a shared marginality for common claims for recognition.³⁴² Be it as it may, what is clear is that it establishes a sense of belonging and creates symbolic capital in the area of creative writing and ethnic literature. This Angie Cruz affirms by stating "that as a Dominican writer in the US" in her formation and success as creative writer she feels a "belong[ing] to a community" (Torres-Saillant 2003: 118). Dalleo and Machado Sáez note that Cruz' novel *Soledad* deals with issues of identity and ethnic belonging thereby negotiating street and mainstream culture:

Amidst [...] shifting literary alliances, lowercase Latino/a literature must negotiate several binaries: the street versus the market, the resident versus the immigrant, oral versus written, resistance versus mobility. *Soledad* references these divergent literary trajectories and places them in conversation to interrogate their points of harmony and dissonance. (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 90)

Cruz' writing oscillates between migrant and politically engaged fiction, Caribbean and African diaspora literature, as well as the demands of the mainstream market, thereby, however, never losing sight of individual and shared lived experiences that relate to migration as well as the body politics of gender, sexuality, and race.

342 Marta Caminero-Santangelo ascribes to the concept a certain flexibility and adaptability when thought of as multiple *latinidades* that is open for alliances and connections (cf. 2007: 28, 215).

7.2 *Soledad*: Sex Work and the Recolonization of the Body

Cruz' literary debut is not just an account of every-day life in the Dominican migrant community in New York. It is a novel that is as much about life in the Dominican Republic as is about being Dominican living in Washington Heights and the longing for social mobility. At issue are identity formations at the intersections of gender, age, heterosexuality, class, and ethnicity, and how they shape and often determine the characters' lived experiences of economic hardship, abuse, lost hopes, and unfulfilled love and desire. In an unchronological narration, that is permeated by several time lapses, the novel interweaves multiple coming-of-age, or 'coming-to-consciousness' stories, circling around mother-daughter relationships and home-comings. It depicts a young woman's internal struggles between two cultures, between family obligations and individual freedom, and between her aspirations to become an independent, bohemian artist, devoted daughter, and lover. It depicts another woman's suffering from a trauma that stems first from her sexual exploitation and loss of bodily autonomy, and second from territorial displacement and quasi disenfranchisement as wife and immigrant resident. The title of the novel not only places one of the two main characters in the center of attention, but also brings into focus another major theme in the novel: solitude. One way or another, all characters who are granted a voice are lonely despite the, sometimes overbearing, omnipresence of the family.

The narrative opens with the eponymous character Soledad's revelation of her dislike for her background and upbringing, but also her "guilt trip" (3) for having moved away from the "clutter" (8) of her family. Two years earlier, at the age of eighteen, much to the disapproval of her family, Soledad has fled from the confinements of Washington Heights to down town East Village, where she works at an art gallery. She shares a run-down flat with Caramel, a young woman from Texas, who in many respects is the opposite of her. When her mother, Olivia, falls ill she returns home being summoned by her aunt Gorda. Believing that this "prison sentence" (3) is only temporary she reluctantly begins to unravel the complicated relation to her mother. She thereby discovers the hidden secret of Olivia's past as sex worker in the Dominican Republic, linked directly to the sudden death of Soledad's father, Manolo. Eventually, Soledad makes peace with her family and her own self, which implies not only her need to negotiate her belonging to the community, but also to find comfort in her own body which she does during a temporary return to the Caribbean.

At issue are not only the spatial confinements of parental homes and the *barrio* but also the consumption of the female body in the context of sexual labor in the Dominican Republic of the 1970s and 1980s. At the age of fifteen, Olivia is forced into prostitution and unprotected sexual intercourse. There, she meets her future husband Manolo, who has bought her from her Swedish pimp, of which she is unaware and believes in them having a romantic liaison. When she discovers her pregnancy, she leaves with Manolo to New York City, knowing quite well that she cannot return to her parental home. Once there, Olivia is left mostly to herself and soon realizes that her partner is an alcoholic and abusive. The narrative then draws attention to domestic violence *vis-à-vis* a patriarchal body politics and Latino *machismo* that is supported within the family. Her sister Gorda, who has come to live in the city already earlier, and her parents, who are now residents of Washington Heights as well, turn a blind eye to her bruised body. Years later, when Manolo is already dead and Soledad moves out, Olivia keeps to herself and shuts everyone out; her memories overwhelming, she falls into a drowsy state similar to wake coma or apathy in which she moves about her apartment, but her spirits seem to be trapped.

The Caribbean is a prime example of a 'body economy.' We see how neoliberal policies foster a commodification of the body in the Caribbean and global capital becomes intertwined with sexual and economic desire. This has been the case during colonialism, staged on the enslaved body, and can now be observed in the rapidly growing industries of tourism and sexual labor. The novel, too, evokes the image of corporeal punishment of the enslaved, dispossessed body. "*I remember getting whipped with tree branches because the refrescos were for the guests who came by. I was only supposed to fetch them. I remember back to a time when I could walk on the beach without a pass from a hotel*" (221; italics in original). This quote belongs to Olivia who remembers when, as a child, she received a beating for drinking the refreshments reserved for tourists. Back then, the island had not been compartmentalized into restricted areas, the beaches belonged to everyone, access was not denied. With the development of tourism, the policing of the population intensifies, as Olivia notices and is made to feel. The country directs its resources to accommodate foreign visitors, while parts of the Dominican poor are socialized into serving their needs without intruding in the zones reserved for the tourists. Olivia, too, becomes part of this industry. At the age of fifteen, she leaves her parental home "to do *tourismo*" (49) in Puerto Plata, a town known for its large sex tourism industry.

The novel offers a critical perspective on the economic development and the emergence of the organized sex trade in the country and its effects on the indi-

vidual, in particular women.³⁴³ The development of the tourism industry in the Dominican Republic was pushed in the second half of the 1960s. Against the backdrop of economic crises and austerity programs, the sex trade quickly emerged as lucrative sector in the tourist industry (cf. Cabezas 2009). It turned out that an exotic eroticism is a profitable produce made in the Caribbean complementing the marketed promise of sun, sand, and sea with sex, and attracting in particular white male tourists from Europe and North America. Sex work in itself needs to be seen as a legitimate occupation in which the body is employed as source of income. Under certain circumstances it involves agency on the part of the person who provides that service and is not necessarily exploitative, contrary to the arguments in particular by white, elite second wave feminists. Sexuality as currency provides women with socioeconomic security and upward mobility.³⁴⁴ In “My Body is My Piece of Land,” Sandra Duvivier argues for Black women’s sexuality as “marketplace” (2008: 1105). She explains how sex in exchange for money can be an individual strategy of survival as the body is made productive as economic capital. The decision to use the body as capital is certainly a means to enact agency over the very same, it is, however, not completely detached from an economic imbalance and unequal power dynamics between the consuming and consumed body.³⁴⁵

While prostitution as sexual-economic relation and transaction can indeed be a liberating practice, as Kamala Kempadoo convincingly argues (cf. Kempadoo 1999, 2004),³⁴⁶ Olivia’s story is more complicated. The questions that need

343 See also Donette Francis’ chapter on “Love in the Age of Globalized Sex Work, Secrets, and Depression” in *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship* (2010). Reading the sex worker’s body in Cruz’ novel, Francis asks if the sex trade is “best understood as the modern-day extension of slavery and bondage and is therefore a persistent narrative of coercion and domination? Or is sex work a space where laborers can sell their service for meaningful financial gain and thereby exercise empowerment in the global marketplace?” (116).

344 The focus on women’s provision of sexual labor is not meant to imply that men do not engage in prostitution. While this needs further investigation, the novel takes issue with women’s sex work only and so does this chapter.

345 Duvivier’s analysis shows “the desperately drastic measures poverty-stricken people take to transcend their socioeconomic situation when no other alternative appears viable” (Duvivier 2008: 1107). And this is my point of critique and ambivalence: If sex work is the only alternative poor women and men have, I question its emancipatory value; on the other hand, a choice is really a privilege not everyone can afford, which makes sex work by choice a luxury, thus placing poor working women or men in an ever victimized position.

346 In the introductory chapter to *Sun, Sex, and Gold*, Kempadoo argues that prostitution under slavery was a means of survival and resistance to racialized power relations and subjugation (cf. Kempadoo 1999: 9).

to be asked are whether we can read her decision to engage in prostitution as empowering act of self-determination. What kind of social structures motivate (or force) her to sell her body and what are alternatives? Does she own her body in this transaction? Olivia's decision to leave for Puerto Plata is mainly motivated by the economic pressure and hardship the family suffers from. For better living conditions, her parents are willing to consider marrying their daughter off to one of her father's friends who lives in New York and has an eye on the girl: "Olivia could tell by the way Pelao would leer at her, and pat his big clumsy hands on her behind when she brought him a cold cerveza from the freezer, that Olivia's father was just waiting until she was old enough to marry her off. Things were becoming very hard for them" (47). Just like her sister, Gorda, and her husband earlier, "Olivia knew her parents were looking for ways to move to the States [as well]" (47). One way out of the misery is, as for many others at the time, a visa to the United States. Olivia's body is made to account for the economically suffering family, turned into a commodity in exchange for papers. At the same time, the friend from afar exploits the family's social status and financial situation, which demonstrates the perceived higher status of diaspora Dominicans over those 'at home.' Obviously to Olivia, "if she hadn't escaped she would have had to marry that man [...]. For Olivia, leaving home seemed like the better option" (47). Hence, it is patriarchal domination, and gendered forms of economic oppression, but also the man's desire for her adolescent body, that make her leave home in the first place.

Moreover, the novel takes issue with economic exploitation, foreigners' fantasies of an exotic sexuality, and colonial desire of discovery and possession. This is staged in the 'body economies' of prostitution and the model business. In the following quote, Olivia reveals how she gets tricked into prostitution believing she were to work as a fashion model. The resemblance between the stranger who lures her and her father's friend Pelao, the bald one, implies already that a better alternative may not be awaiting her.

The Swedish man, balding head, rosy cheeks, who came through el campo one afternoon said he managed models around the world. He promised Olivia she would make enough money so she could buy a house. A house with a roof that wouldn't tear off every time a hurricane came through. [...] He said all she needed to do was look beautiful. With her green eyes, she would have no problem at all. (47)

Olivia embodies the ideal of the dark-skinned, green-eyed exotic beauty which the Swedish man makes her believe is desirable in the global fashion industry. Olivia sees an idealized image of a Western femininity, modernity, and success

realized in the image of the top-model. Yet, the model job, not unlike prostitution, needs to be seen within certain relations of dominance of selling and consuming the body. The body is exposed to the gaze and voyeurism of others, which, according to hooks, is racialized and exploitative (see chapter 3). To put it differently, in either case the practice of bodily consumption at the core of sex work and modelling is “another form of colonization of the female body” that ranks modelling and beauty pageants in relation to prostitution as “higher forms of physical objectification” (Mergeai 2014: 70), all of which are constitutive of a national body politics that relies on the productivity and desirability of its women.

She learns quickly that it is not a model career but the sex trade that awaits her, a false promise which according to Olivia’s new colleague is in fact “not so far from the truth” (47). Luz tells her that “sometimes the men are really nice. They buy you pretty things and stuff” (48). She describes the occupation as economic gain, sexuality is a marketable good within the global marketplace and source of income that provides the women with consumer goods – “monetary gifts for her troubles” (48) – they are not able to afford otherwise. For Olivia, the prospect seems attractive, because it seemingly provides her with financial independence. With this in mind, Olivia bears the “licking, kissing, scratching” (48), imagines the intercourse “like eating a bad dinner” (47). In the same instance, she emphasizes her disgust and shame, hoping “that once it was over she never had to see them again; that they were going away to Europe, far far away” (48). Ironically, not only are her ‘customers’ mostly white European men but also the pimp, a Swede, who later sells Olivia to Manolo by fooling him to believe she is a virgin. On the one hand, this shows the value of the virginal body even within an industry that is built on actively engaging in sexual intercourse. On the other hand, it is an imperial twist in which foreign men sell local women’s bodies to local men. This discloses the workings of the tourist industry in more general terms: Profit is generated within the country but enriches multinational companies outside of the Caribbean that profit from the exoticization of Caribbean bodies and the desirability of women who are labelled as Latina by ethnic discourses in the West. Tourism, meaning here the commodification, marketability, and sexual consumption of the sex worker’s body, then, benefits neither the individual woman nor the country but serves neo-imperial claims of the global North. The female body enters a transnational exchange of goods but does not obtain full autonomy within this trading process. Not owning her sexuality, Olivia is never free to choose in the sense of the feminist statement ‘this body is mine.’ She and her *compañera* are forced into this trade – as teenaged girls, unprotected.

Sexual transaction takes place within the realms of the “coloniality of gender” (cf. Lugones 2010), which refers to the persistence of gender inequalities linked to colonial racist structures in the Caribbean. Kempadoo confirms this by stating that “[p]rostitution in the Caribbean is inextricably tied to the power and control exerted by European colonizers over black women since the sixteenth century” (Kempadoo 1999: 5).³⁴⁷ In this continuity of difference and uneven power distribution, Olivia’s body is made to appease “transnational consumers’ desires” (Saborío 2012: 143) but is not granted the profit of it.

Latinas are cleverly packaged as exotic beings easily consumed by foreign customers who are looking to experience a sense of otherness. This transnational market of consumers is exposed as a male-dominated system wherein those with economic means can condition the terms for sustainable profit. For Latinas, this purports that their bodies become representative of a mere resource for exploiting otherness, exoticism, and female sexuality. (Saborío 2015: 143)

Within the division of labor of the North-South divide, access to the body as commodity and the profit of it is granted only to those with purchase power. That these conditions may be damaging to the individual and her emotional well-being lies just under the surface of the narrative. Olivia is warned: “- Mujer, remember you’re not here on vacation. No te dejes enamorar. She warned her that these men aren’t looking for love but a short escape. - No, Luz, he’s not one of them, he’s one of us. He loves me for me” (50). Her differentiation of *us* versus *them* ties in with the colonial condition of ‘otherness’ which Olivia interestingly turns around. Sex trade within this tourist setting, then, takes place in racialized dimensions not devoid of (neo)colonial asymmetries of power in which the Latina, Black, or *mulata* body turns into the object of desire of white men. Sex tourism can thus be interpreted as neo-imperial attempt of “recolonization” (Alexander 2005: 25) of the lost territories via the female body.

When Olivia meets Manolo, she wishes she could “erase the eighteen men who had already traveled through her body in Puerto Plata” (49). The metaphorical journeys through her body commodifies it into a tourist site as part of a temporary all-inclusive package. In this transaction, Olivia lacks agency, she is forced into a submissive position in a sex trade that to her is damaging. Arguably, Olivia obtains a certain degree of autonomy and regains power over the

347 The objectification and simultaneous exploitation, which is officially promoted by the regional tourism board, is indicated in this quote: “The manufactured fantasy of the tropics intersects with racial/ethnic and sexual images to inform the understanding of European men about women and the experiences they encounter” (Cabezas 1999: 111).

men, her clients, through keeping a diary-like list in which she enumerates each client, his physical appearance, and date of encounter. The entries document the sexual encounters and mock her clients, granting her moral superiority and integrity. This written document, arguably, functions as a means of textual healing for the experiencing subject. The list materializes lived experiences and untold stories in a redemptive act of writing.

It is, however, not only the U.S. or Europe but also the Caribbean postcolonial state that is complicit in this enterprise of an exploitative body politics. Alexander notes that the “state actively socialized loyal heterosexual citizens into tourism, its primary strategy of economic modernization, by sexualizing them and by positioning them as commodities” (Alexander 2005: 29). Olivia’s forcefully entering the sex trade then takes place within the context not only of neocolonial but also postcolonial patriarchal power structures which eventually excludes her from morality and respectability on which the ideology of the postcolonial state is built. Kempadoo describes the prostitute’s body as “the sexually available, socially despised, yet economically profitable body” (Kempadoo 1999: 6). The time as prostitute leaves Olivia shamed and ultimately traumatized. She describes her work to her daughter, who asks how her parents have met, as “the kind of work I hope you never have to do” (19).

Despite providing income, sex work means for many women shame, contempt, and marginalization. Women working in the sex trade “routinely fuse the traditional dichotomy of public and private spaces. Consequently, they are suspect and are stigmatized [...]. [They] are the opposite of the *Dominicanas de su casa* (Dominican women of their homes)” (Cabezas 1999: 110). The body of the prostitute and her active sexuality disrupt hegemonic discourses on sexuality that demand women remain virginal and ascribe to them a certain passivity. The prostitute is feared to unsettle state-sanctioned matrimony and the nuclear household. She poses a threat to middle-class respectability, femininity, and citizenship, because she is poised with “potential disease [HIV], imagined as working class” (Alexander 2005: 53). This threat adds to the discursive construction of the prostitute body as criminal, dangerous, and undeserving of legal protection. Numerous studies show how sex workers are over-proportionately subjected to police violence and vulnerable to the abuse by clients (cf. Cabezas 1999). This constant threat of being harmed is a means to control and regulate the prostitutes’ bodies and the sex trade – laws that criminalize prostitution in some countries add to this.³⁴⁸ While certain bodies are protected under citizenship laws, other bodies are criminalized and produced as

348 In the Dominican Republic, prostitution is legalized, which may not be that surprising when taking into account its economic importance for tourism.

noncitizens (the same regulation that is at work for homosexual (non)citizens, as I have argued in chapter four). Olivia's marginalized status and her threatening the respectable society is confirmed by Manolo who calls her "a witch, a vagabunda [...], una tremenda sucia" (135). Women who appear as too independent, like Baboonie in *The Swinging Bridge* or as revealed in the figure of the *lougarou* or the old hag (cf. Anatol 2015),³⁴⁹ are ascribed an outlaw status.

7.3 Sleeping Beauty: The Incarcerated Body and Embodied Resistance

When I close my eyes I become invisible [...]. I can do anything I want. (Cruz 2001: 165)

Repeatedly, I have argued that woman's sexuality is a minefield and her body a potential site of shame. *Soledad* further proves this point in several instances. Olivia, for example, remembers how her cousin, Lolita, was raped when she was fourteen years old. Naming the girl Lolita is telling already: It points to a well-known narrative of erotic fantasies about adolescence sexuality and the seductive and seducing, guilty female body, a body for which some men apparently fall easily and become victim of their own desire. The young woman, who is violently ripped off of her virginity, brings shame over herself and her family for having sex out of wedlock. Different to Nabokov's *Lolita*, however, the girl here is married off to her rapist, thus sacrificed for the sake of propriety which allows her family "to save her virtue" (221; italics in original). The rapist prevents incarceration and gets away unpunished. Taking into consideration that individual subjects have the right of protection from sexual violence and bodily self-control – which sociologists refer to as "sexual citizenship" including amongst others the legal right of "bodily autonomy and integrity" (Richardson 2000: 114; see also chapter 4) – then Lolita's family but also the state fail in their duty to protect daughter and citizen from harm and sexual violence. Obviously, the right of protection does not pertain to all women. Being deprived of these rights, women like Lolita, who are victims of rape, or the prostitute, like Olivia, are degraded to minor subjects in a society that punishes the victim rather than the perpetrator of violence to maintain a respectable order.

349 See also Danticat's short story "Nineteenthirtyseven" in which a woman is persecuted and stigmatized as "*lougarou*, witch, criminal" (1996: 39).

Similar to Lolita, Olivia's body is positioned outside the realm of respectability and is forced into a partnership in her teenage years with a man she thinks she loves but barely knows. She is explicit about her shame – like Martine she does not fit the conventional models of femininity – and feels soiled and unworthy due to her engagement in sex work. Every time Manolo leaves her, she prays for him to return “and asked for forgiveness for being the kind of woman who doesn't deserve God's mercy” (65). She is a ‘fallen woman,’ which the story further underlines by her unwanted pregnancy and the uncertainty with regards to the biological father – it could be Manolo or any other client. Olivia's relation to Manolo discloses the double standards associated with sexuality. The pregnancy and prostitution would prove her loss of virtue to her family and the neighbors. In this condition she cannot return to her parents. While Olivia wonders whether she is still good enough for marriage, Manolo's moral integrity is never questioned. Societal strictures turn Olivia's body into the abject, improper, and unclean that threatens the meaning of purity attached to adolescent female bodies. Manolo, on the other hand, who actively engages in the sex trade, is still respectable, remaining suitable as husband and has his sexual virility proven.

Manolo, who lives in the United States, not only occupies the position of the patriarch and breadwinner but also embodies the promise for a better life in the diaspora. Pregnant with Soledad, Olivia, apparently without a valid visa, leaves with Manolo for New York. Manolo, in the belief that the child is his, obtains an American passport from another woman who resembles Olivia. Admittedly, he takes her away from the place, or the site of the traumatizing sexual encounters, she has wanted to escape from. At the same time, however, she is now completely reliant on him to marry her, because she is underage, does not yet speak the English language, and, above all, is now an illegal immigrant without a visa. The novel's plot, and strangely so, does not elaborate this fact further. Francis, too, confirms this point in her analysis of the novel by stating that “as an undocumented immigrant woman, Olivia's mobility is bound to Manolo, and she lives with the realization that she could be discovered and deported at any time” (2010: 128). Her illegal status makes her vulnerable not only to state authorities but also dependent on Manolo's benevolence. The novel here points out not only the vulnerability of migrant bodies inhabiting a liminal space but also the impossibility of return.

When Olivia gives birth to the baby and Soledad is not his “spitting image” (79), Manolo senses he has been betrayed both by the Swedish pimp and Olivia who made him believe he was buying ‘into’ a virgin body. The honeymoon is over soon, and the past embodied in Soledad continues to haunt them:

He knew everything about her and hated her for it. For Olivia, Manolo was just a reminder of a past she wanted to forget. It was hard enough looking at Soledad every day. Since the day she was born, he watched her, waited to find a trace of himself in her and the paler she became, her nose, the shape of her eyes, her fine straight hair, neither Olivia's or his, Manolo lost faith in her. Olivia knew he felt humiliated. (140)

Manolo holds Olivia responsible for his humiliation. He drinks, is physically and verbally abusive, molests Gorda, Olivia's sister, and abuses Soledad to take his revenge. In this respect, the novel draws attention to domestic violence in one immigrant family and the cloak of silence that covers it. Olivia's family (by now the whole family lives in New York's Washington Heights) ignores the bruises. In another fight, when Olivia is unable to take any more, she pushes him out of the window. Soledad observes this and to protect her mother does not call the ambulance – that is when the silence between mother and daughter starts. The text never questions nor judges Olivia's action; she is not held responsible in a juridical sense. She is portrayed as the victim of her husband's blows and her family's ignorance (which she undoubtedly is). Her revenge is the expression of her feeling helpless and powerless, but makes her daughter complicit in the murder (of which she is certainly guilty). She addresses the reader as a way of confession and plea for forgiveness and compassion, which she also begs from her daughter (cf. 7). In this manner, Olivia transfers (symbolically) part of her societal shame, her original sin of being the 'fallen' woman, to Manolo who is now literally falling.

Guilt and constant pressure push her over the edge to the point that she retreats into herself and into complete silence, unable to leave her bed and interact with her surroundings.³⁵⁰ The novel describes in several instances both her mental disposition as well as her bodily constitution providing different diagnoses for her state. Soledad assumes she might be "in a coma" (12). Another observation of Olivia's condition is provided by her sister's perspective who sees her "[s]leeping for four full days only getting up to go to the bathroom. [...] She looks exhausted, as if the life was beaten out of her. She's not bruised

350 Arguably, her condition and the symptoms can also be connected to a trauma that the novel thus stages, see for instance Brüske (2013). This observation may further be supported by the image of haunting that is evoked, amongst other things, in this quote by Olivia: "I start to run until I realize no one's running after me, only the memories" (221). Persons suffering from trauma often have the feeling of being haunted by the memories of the painful event that they are unable to process consciously (Caruth 1996: 3). Moreover, the silence is Olivia's language of sexual trauma when considering that trauma escapes any linguistic pronunciation and coherent verbal formulation (cf. *ibid.*).

up the way Manolo would leave her after one of his fits, it's more like her spirit has taken a beating" (15). Obviously, Gorda has noted her sister's maltreatment at the hands of her husband but has remained silent. Interestingly, she differentiates between body and spirit or mind as she recognizes her current state as psychological malaise rather than as a bodily ailment. Gorda has seen a talk show on "women who sleep through depression. They want to die, they said, but they don't have the courage to go that far. They said depression is anger turned inward" (109). Clearly without a clue as with regards to Olivia's condition, a 'beaten mind' causes more confusion and outrage than the beaten body. The unity of the body and spirit seems to be disrupted which is symptomatic for a subject's alienation from the self and on a further level may be read as the enforced social isolation of the diaspora subject body.³⁵¹

Whereas Gorda describes actual symptoms, Olivia's mother, Doña Sosa, is searching for the reasons behind the illness and finds them primarily in Olivia's loneliness and Soledad's moving out, which she discloses in a conversation with her niece:

I'm not blaming you for leaving, but your mother has been very lonely and we think it pushed her to live in her dreams. [...] She's heavy with so many thoughts. My poor daughter, every day, filled with hours with no one to look after, not a man, not a child. I truly think that algo pasa las mujeres cuando le dan demasiado tiempo para pensar. (12)

Although she says differently, she indeed does blame Soledad and her pursuit of independence for Olivia's condition but makes not a single reference to the abusive husband or his sudden death, nor everyone's faked ignorance of the domestic violence both Olivia and Soledad have experienced. Doña Sosa, who is represented as the strong matriarch (cf. 5), evokes a stereotypical image of feminine behavior, a character that materializes woman's only duty as mother and wife. Women, who have too much time to think, so it is suggested in the quote, are potentially dangerous for their own well-being in the first place but also to the status quo of obedience and allocated gender roles. That Olivia does not conform to a perceived norm is confirmed further by her mother's fear of her daughter becoming "a freak show in the neighborhood" (32). To keep the

351 Brinda Mehta describes how dislocation or psychic disorientation caused by exile or diasporic journeys may manifest themselves on the female body. According to her, "[t]he physicality of exile, as reflected in Indi-Caribbean women's writing, can be compared to a graphic inscription on the female body that reveals a particular cartography of dislocation in the form of actual symptoms of physical illness" (Mehta 2004: 159).

neighbors' prying eyes outside, Doña Sosa closes the shutters, that way closing in or rather incarcerating Olivia in the room and inside the ideological demands associated with the domestic space. Josefa Lago Graña writes on the confrontation of social systems of inequality in contemporary Dominican women's writing and concludes that "la imagen de la mujer tendida en la cama responde a la imagen de silencio y pasividad, identificables con la imagen tradicional de mujer en sociedades patriarcales" (Lago Graña 2004: 566).³⁵²

The incomprehensiveness surrounding Olivia's illness is further filtered through the perception of the teenaged Flaca, Olivia's niece and Soledad's cousin who is in constant dispute with her mother Gorda. Flaca, who seems to be the closest to Olivia, experiences her aunt's state as personal abandonment and reproaches her for it: "why you have to go zombie on me" (15). At the same time, she is afraid of her aunt's obvious irresponsiveness: "I don't like when her eyes are open. She looks like a walking dead person" (30). Both quotes illustrate the perceived degeneration of Olivia's body. Broadly speaking, the "zombie" embodies a deviation from the norm which in Olivia's case happens with regard to conceptions of gender, as pointed out above, and class or productivity – I refer to the non-working, non-productive body later on. The figure of the *zombi* (the original Haitian spelling)³⁵³ here serves as trope for the demonization of the sick, psychological distressed body which is likewise feared and incomprehensible. Laënnec Hurbon describes the zombie as an already dead body, forcefully re-awakened, now semiconsciously living without free will (cf. 1995: 61). Olivia, in a state where she is not fully awake either, has been lacking autonomy since the day her parents decided to marry her off and she thereupon entered the sex trade where she met Manolo who took full control over her, "like he already *possessed* her" (50; emphasis added). If the process of *zombification* describes the robbery of a person's soul and appropriation of one's will, then Flaca rightly notes her aunt's condition as a result of her disenfranchisement as subject through the bodies and sexual whims of her former clients. In addition, the zombie is sometimes read in connection with slavery to portray 'labor slaves' and represent the social death of those enslaved (cf. Rath 2014: 13).³⁵⁴ This is further emphasized by Olivia's ghostly appearance and the

352 "the image of the woman held in bed responds to the image of silence and passivity corresponding to the traditional image of the woman in patriarchal societies" (my translation).

353 In the misspelling of *zombi* as 'zombie,' the novel makes reference to Vodou and a possibly pop-cultural misrepresentation of the Haitian and African diaspora religion which is however not in the focus here.

354 Gudrun Rath notes the subversive potential and diversity of the figure of the *zombi*, because it can be inscribed with multiple meanings. This is due to the *zombi*'s am-

symbolic chains of enslavement, mentioned by Olivia's sister: "[S]he's the family's living ghost," Gorda says. "Except she doesn't rattle chains" (177). Olivia's somewhat spectral body, while it may indicate the solitude the title of the novel unmistakably points out, evokes the marginal social figure of the migrant we have already encountered embodied in Martine in Danticat's novel ("the cold turns us into ghosts" is instructive here) and in Mona's father in Espinet's novel ("I look invisible to you?"). While Olivia's condition is source of worry and met mostly with misunderstanding, Gorda adds a certain degree of humor to cover up the family's helplessness. Olivia came to the U.S. by assuming another woman's identity, hence she is not only illegal but according to official record not even there. The (assumed) missing status as legal citizen would exclude her from full civic and social participation, meaning a kind of social death that in the novel is staged through Olivia's retreat to her bed. Her condition is subjected to the influence of social processes and cultural norms that reproduce her corporeality and temporary mental dysfunction as sick and ghostly, meaning abnormal and degenerated, or *zombified*.

Soledad, on the other hand, comments on her family's intolerance towards her mother's health and Olivia's attempts to conceal her condition: "My mother always has one ailment of another. But she always tried to hide it, especially around Gorda and my grandmother. They don't tolerate sickness. To them it equates weakness" (18). Health and fitness are part of a capitalist body politics that defines the worth of the body through productivity and economic contribution. If the body is evaluated according to its work force/, the unhealthy body becomes useless for the cycle of production and consumption. It does not fit a capitalist work ethos and stands in the way of the economic regulation of the working body and its productivity. Olivia, who takes the "luxury to lie in bed" (18), which she actually cannot afford, transgresses the demarcation of immigrant working class from the wealthy that happens through hard labor in opposition to idleness.³⁵⁵ On the other hand, the novel reveals here the pressure on the immigrant to pursue and achieve the 'American dream.' The novel is

biguity and resistance to clear-cut categories floating in-between the conditions of life and death, subject and object, or human and non-human. She argues "er stößt auch ab, erregt Ekel, verkörpert das Abjekte ebenso wie das Unheimliche. Aufgrund seiner (Neo-)Kolonialgeschichte [...] stellt er kulturelle Imaginarien von Gender und Race, Exotismus und hegemonialem othering ebenso zur Schau wie bioethische Debatten" (Rath 2014: 11).

355 The family misinterprets Olivia's condition as an active refusal to participate in the capitalist system of labor, efficiency, merit, and profit. This, in turn, proves their inability or unwillingness to read her condition – a result of the experience of violence – as something personal and psychological, as something of which they as silent family are also responsible of.

explicit about the hard work and the kinds of jobs Olivia and also Gorda as immigrant women are forced to do to make a living. Olivia's staying in bed gives her the opportunity to escape this and do something for herself: "*I don't have to go [...] back to work to pick anyone's garbage, scrub anyone's toilet, dust anyone's shelves* (page). It may be that what she has is a depression in response to her aversion to the can be interpreted as a labor slave with no free choice.

Indeed, for the longest time in the novel, Olivia is found either asleep or deeply immersed in her thoughts and dreaming. This is connected to her past experiences as sex worker and of domestic abuse, which she relives and ultimately successfully processes in her sleep.³⁵⁶ The 'intrusion' of traumatic memories increases dramatically as Soledad moves out, leaving the *barrio* Washington Height for downtown Manhattan, which in Olivia's perception equals a symbolic death.³⁵⁷ While for Soledad the separation from the family is an important step in her own individuation, Olivia reacts with complete social disintegration.

In addition to each character's diagnosis of her condition, I suggest that Olivia is in a state of apathy. She displays symptoms of sleepiness, irresponsiveness, and mental hyperactivity. In medical definitions, apathy is described as a lack of passion and participation accompanied by impulse disorder and affect disorder (cf. Pschyrembl 2014: 137).³⁵⁸ The latter in particular refers to the impediment of affect-expression and addressability (cf. *ibid.*: 34). This is confirmed by Soledad's description of her mother's behavior as she takes note of how "her [Olivia's] body is doing what it needs to survive [...], takes itself to the bathroom, but her spirit is somewhere else all together [...]. She's living in this sleep state. She's nonresponsive. It's all very weird" (57). Olivia's constitution and reaction to her environment apparently departs from the normative or normalized perception of corporeal behavior. Also, the ways she engages with

356 Sexual trauma is a psychological distress caused by enforced sexual intrusion or unwanted sexual behavior (cf. Pschyrembl 2014: 2151). One may also want to refer back to Sigmund Freud's early theory of trauma. He considered a trauma to be a "Erlebnis, welches dem Seelenleben innerhalb kurzer Zeit einen so starken Reizzuwachs bringt, daß die Erledigung oder Aufarbeitung desselben in normalgewohnter Weise mißglückt, woraus dauernde Störungen im Energiebetrieb resultieren müssen" (Freud 1916-17); see also chapter 6.

357 Kuehner refers to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of the North American Psychiatric Society in her explanation that post-traumatic stress disorder is interconnected with one's own or another beloved person's actual or possible death or severe injury (cf. Kuehner 2008: 39).

358 Affectivity describes the totality of emotional life and the state of mind including sentiments and drives. It regulates the personal perception of experience (cf. Pschyrembl 2014: 33-34).

her surrounding, or more accurately, how she refuses to interact with her environment differ from that what is expected of her.

When the narrative switches to Olivia's perspective, the reader learns how her mental distress manifests itself through her body rendering her immobile and inhibiting her speech. "*There are times my body feels hard and stiff like an old fruit rind. [...] I can't move my body at all [...]. When I'm touched I want to scream, but my lips can't move, not even to breath. [...] I feel as if I might lose them completely*" (25). She seems to have lost all control over her body and its functions. As if her body was punishing her, she has lost the ability to speak and express her will and thoughts. This paralysis and loss of voice not only stands in for the relationship with Manolo and her family, which was characterized by silence and silencing. It also symbolizes the voicelessness of the migrant subject confronted with a foreign language – of which "[s]he couldn't understand a word" (80) – and silenced in a cultural-political as well as civic sense. This quote, furthermore, when compared to the lines of the epigraph highlights the contrast between the migrant space of New York, on the one side, where she feels incarcerated in her apartment, and, on the other, her "*home in Dominican Republic*" (n.p.) to which she escapes in her memories that provides her with comfort and safety, evoked in the epigraph with "*bloody orange,*" "*tangerine,*" and "*seeds.*" Quite contrary to the juicy fertility and vitality of the Dominican childhood home stands the image of the "old fruit rind" as a symbolic incarceration but also as reference to maturity and the aging body.

However, in her apathy Olivia's body is able to transcend spatial confinements and distance – this refers both to the room she lies in as well as the spatial separation of the Dominican 'home' and diaspora location. Moreover, only at a first glance it impedes interaction of the human body with her environment. Far from it, the state she is in provides her with a space in which she can let herself "die and live" (n.p.); hence, it functions as a corporeal and mental strategy of self-preservation turning sickness into a specific feminine space of becoming. Olivia's beautiful, sleeping body is positioned at the center of the narrative which is emphasized by the italic script that marks her thoughts and speech throughout the novel as well as the epigraph reflecting on her thoughts of home. The dream world she retreats to offers Olivia the possibility to imagine her life differently, especially her family's reaction to her abused body: "*In my dreams, me and my mother have long conversations. [...] And when we talk she's not looking away from my bruises*" (120). Here, in her dream-world, she has found a way to communicate and obtain recognition from her mother. The omnipresence of Olivia's body and the power she excerpts through her silence are remarkable. She not only calls her daughter back to the *barrio* to make

peace, she also summons the family and neighbors to her sickbed, who ask for remedies of all kinds and “*think [she has] powers*” (165). What she silently voices is a critique of domestic violence and the ignorance of said violence by the family and community who rather look away than interfere in domestic privacy and marital affairs. Far from remaining a passive, immobile body that is “*resolving some things in her sleep*” (9), as is revealed early on in the novel, she achieves autonomy and gains an authoritative voice despite or rather through her silence. As a matter of fact, it is Olivia herself who actively chooses sleep for herself as kind of haven; she shares with the reader that she “*force[s] [her]self into sleep, concentrate[s] on not feeling anything*” (25).

An obvious transformation from the moment she has been unable to move her lips to her active refusal to talk does indeed take place: “*When I close my eyes I don't have to speak or pretend I'm fine. [...] I become invisible and I can do anything with my time. [...] I can do anything I want*” (165). The earlier image of the loss of lips, symbolizing passivity and silencing, is contrasted with the active act of self-imposed silence and her refusal to speak.³⁵⁹ In her apathy, she seems unresponsive to her surrounding, but quite to the contrary: Her choice to remain silent provides her with the power to do as she pleases and escape the confinements; she becomes not only invisible but invincible. When the neighbors pay a visit at her sick bed, the narration again is focalized through Olivia, lending her narrative agency, and offers the reader another glance into her mind to understand that she actively chooses to remain silent: “*They get angry because I won't speak or look at them when they talk to me*” (165). In a familial context in which children are raised with the knowledge not to “*disrespect the elders*” (12) but to do as they are told, the refusal to speak when being asked is a breach of etiquette. The punishment for disobedience, Soledad explains, is to kneel on sandpaper (cf. *ibid*). Precisely because of this disciplining measure and in defiance of the conventionally accepted meaning of silent women, her silence is outside of communal and societal control and turns into a form of passive resistance. Debra Castillo differentiates, and this is crucial, between silencing as “*a condition imposed from the outside*” and “*silence freely chosen*” (1992: 37). She bases this differentiation on Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of silence “*as a will not to say or a will to unsay, a language of its own*” (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1991: 151). The silent voice can be resisting and subversive when women are “*using the mask of silence to slip away. Silence, once freed of the oppressive masculinist-defined context of aestheticized distance and truth and confinement and lack can be reinscribed as a subversive feminine realm.*” (Cas-

359 On silence as a narrative strategy of resistance in women's writing, see Chancy (1997) or NourbeSe Philip (1997).

tillo 1992: 40). So, if visible marks like a woman's bruises are not seen or 'unseen,' audible voices and screams go 'unheard,' then in turn the silent language of the body becomes noticeable and just loud enough. Then silence is resistance.

Betsy Sandlin concludes that "Olivia has retreated from society and her family and withdrawn to her room and into her own world" (Sandlin 2013: 93). Lago Graña draws attention to the resignification³⁶⁰ of the image of the sleeping beauty in Cruz' novel:

El sueño no representa una imposición, una maldición que se cumple inexorablemente hasta el momento del rescate, sino que significa aislamiento, alejamiento del mundo enemigo, que coloca a la mujer en una posición de poder frente al hombre ya que la hace inalcanzable. El sueño transforma a la mujer de víctima del mundo masculino en dueña de un mundo propio, imposible de invadir por el hombre. (2004: 561)³⁶¹

Far from being the sleeping "freak" of the neighborhood, she is a resisting subject, reclaiming agency to be in control of her own life on her own terms. She claims the right "*to retreat back into a world where I have control of what happens to me*" (120). She conquers "*a land I can call mine, made especially for me*" (226) – a room of her own, to speak with Virginia Woolf.

360 Michael R. Drescher (2017) defines "mythological resignification" as the literary practice of foregrounding silenced aspects in dominant civic myths, "a politically informed method of writing characterized by the appropriation, transformation, and reinstallation of a mythology" (8) – or, in the case of *Soledad*, the fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty. "Narrative Emancipation" occurs by "returning to lost or distorted meaning" so that "old meanings can be refuted and new meanings can be installed" (12). Here, narratives are molded so as to include voices, identities, and histories which were theretofore silenced and marginalized. The work on such silenced aspects can thus offer the silenced historical subject a legitimized and legitimizing voice in the over-all structures of value-transmitting and identity-producing narratives (cf. especially the introduction and, for the intentions of the analysis at hand, chapter 4 in the study). A contemporary example for a resignification of the sleeping beauty myth can be found in Neil Gaiman's *The Sleeper and the Spindel* (2014).

361 "Sleep does not mean an imposition, a curse that inexorably holds until the moment of rescue, but signifies isolation, estrangement from the enemy world, placing her in a position of power against man now that she is unreachable. Sleep transforms the woman from a victim of the masculine world into the owner of her own world which for the man is impossible to invade" [my translation].

7.4 Que viva la Naturaleza: The Naked Body as Weapon

Olivia's body is wrongly perceived as dysfunctional and sick. In contrast to the non-sleeping woman's body which in Olivia's case is "beat up" with "broken bones" and heavy with "burden" (14), the sleeping Olivia is finally recovering from her dreadful past. She finds solace and tranquility in her apathetic state, a process noticed also by Soledad who observes her mother "breathing softly and peaceful" (14). Whereas formerly her body was rendered impure, constantly available, and guilty, Olivia is now distant and oblivious to the "drama that filled the house" (187). Lago Graña notes that in her sleep "Olivia permanece pura, distante, inalcanzable" (2004: 565).³⁶² Her withdrawal into apathy opens up a space for personal reinvention in order to clear off the soiled image of the whore and alleged murderer. In fact, she appears angelic to those around her: she recounts that her neighbors "*call me an angel*" (165); Victor finds that she "looks angelic in the light, the way it shines over her" (187); and Soledad, too, thinks that her mother "looks like an angel [...] and her skin, the color of tamarindo, glows in the candlelight" (14). The glow that frames her body like a halo underlines her appearance as angel or saint. Now the sleeping beauty, she transcends the image of the 'fallen woman' with her 'tainted' sexuality and approximates the image of "la Virgen María" (193).³⁶³ Whereas in Danticat's novel, vodou spirit Ezili represents empowered womanhood, here, the Virgin Mary is a significant reference for Olivia as embodiment of a seemingly ideal femininity which in the end, as will become clear shortly, rather inhibits wholesome subject development than being a guiding force. The importance is reflected in the postcard of *la santa madre* that Olivia keeps for years in a tin box together with a few other personal belongings from her time in Puerto Plata. Among these things is also a list with the names and the physical descriptions of her former clients –the postcard and the list together symbolize the coexistence of the virgin and prostitute in one body. Although the image of the whore stands in seeming opposition to that of the Virgin Mother, both images conflate in Olivia. And, similar to Danticat's Martine, Olivia in uniting two apparently different sides of femininity renders this differentiation indeed obsolete.

362 "Olivia remains pure, distant, unreachable" [my translation].

363 Here, a comparison of Olivia to Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) suggests itself, especially in terms of their representation as 'branded woman' and saint, their angelic appearance, as well as their social exclusion and withdrawal as acts of dissent (cf. Drescher 2017: 65-80).

The extent to which Olivia's body blurs fixed images of femininity is further accentuated by her spectral, mysterious appearances. One night, she appears naked on the fire escape of her apartment building. "The sun has set, the full moon is out, it hits her face, her breast and thighs. Olivia is smiling, glowing in the moonlight like a firefly" (45). The moonlight functions like a spotlight that center-stages her nude body ready to break out. She leaves her retreat after dark and like the *soucouyant* (more than like an angel) she seems ablaze and about to fly away, which is emphasized especially by the reference to the 'fire-fly.' The following quote adds to the perception of a glowing body or body-in-flame: "Her skin is flawless, the color of amber with an inner light that shines through her skin. Her hair reminds [...] of black flames, falling down her back, twisting and turning around her head" (178). Whereas Olivia is mainly looked at as an angel, here the glow emanating from within her along with the flames can be associated with the figure of the *soucouyant* that Cruz here makes reference to. Particularly in the folktales of the Anglo- and Francophone Caribbean, she is known as old woman who sheds her skin, sucks blood from her victims, and flies through the night glowing like a fireball. Anatol notes a tendency in Caribbean diaspora fiction to use the *soucouyant* as a figure of female empowerment and resistance, which "can be interpreted as an image of cultural resistance to colonial ideology, but she can also be read as shoring up colonial notions of propriety and respectability" (2015: 14). In addition, she "occupies a space completely outside of the phallic order" escaping the "domestication of women's bodies" (ibid.: 23). While Olivia may not be completely outside of that space, she nevertheless appropriates or at least challenges it through her nudity and poses a threat to the respectable, proper order. She furthermore steps outside of the domestic realm in her attempt to escape over the fire exit. If Olivia's black, untamed mane reminds us of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1847) – Rochester's first wife, the 'madwoman in the attic' who is described as a 'goblin' and 'vampire' and who sets fire to the mason and flees her imprisonment in the attic of Thornfield Hall – or if we find parallels to the same character when she was still named Antoinette Cosway in Jean Rhys' rewriting of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) – in which she is referred to as 'souciant' – then Olivia's nudity and appearance as *soucouyant* can be placed in a tradition of women's resistance. Also, the two quotes above, which emphasize Olivia's beautiful, flawless skin glowing in the colors of "amber" and "tamarindo," constitute a celebration of the female body of color in distinction to whiteness. The manifestation of racial difference is explicit when read against Flaca's observation of the white female body. In her account, white women, or "las blanquitas," are

pejoratively judged as “[f]ugly white bitches” (44) or “freaking white girl[s]” (16).

Olivia obviously refuses the womanly ideal embodied in the angel and chooses to trespass norms of chastity and propriety when she presents her naked body publicly on the fire escape. “Her nipples like chocolate kisses. Naked [...], with her arms spread open as if she’s about to fly. Her eyes are closed” (45). There is an explicit eroticism emanating from her in her somnambulist state. Olivia’s mother is outraged about her daughter’s permissiveness already in an earlier scene: “[Y]ou should’ve seen your mother with *las tetas afuera*, wearing a tiger-print nightgown, her left nipple exposed. My grandmother, whispers when she says *tetas*” (10). Also at home, her nudity causes outrage and unease (cf. 187). Clearly, the naked woman’s body is loaded with shame, is uncomfortable, should not be talked about, and needs surveillance. Olivia’s presence in front of the apartment attracts the attention of the neighborhood. “A group of people are already gathering around below her” (45) and gaze at her nude, guilty femininity; the observant eye is always watching and judging. The outrage her nudity causes seems to contradict the otherwise oversexualization and perceived availability of the female body of color. Her exposed body is a social disruption which Olivia, however, achieves purposely. Their voyeurism and her nakedness enter in a dialectic of dis- and re-possession. After the time when her body and sex work had been ‘elected’ by clients, she now offers herself actively to the viewer and returns the gaze without shame. Of importance is the exclamation of one man who yells “Que viva la naturaleza!” (45), as it, and arguably so, evokes the revolutionary slogan ‘Viva la revolución.’

The revolutionary potential that lies in the female body is apparently what makes it a source of fear. The display of the naked woman’s body, a transgression in and of itself, functions as a sign of her anger and as an active mode of women’s rebellion against the policing and disciplining of body and sexuality. The comparison of Olivia with a ghost made earlier further underlies this point. Female ghosts are perceived to be

all the more terrifying because they have every bit of anger that makes living women sources of fear, but none of the societal restrictions. In this way, ghost stories are often protofeminist tales of women who, if only in death, subvert the assumptions and traditions of women as dutiful wives and mothers [...] by unleashing a lifetime’s worth of rage and retribution. (Zeisler 2013: n.p.)

Contrary to Olivia’s seeming passivity are not only her vivid thoughts, her actual mobility, and especially her naked rebellion but also the recurring dreams of flying. Similar to the novels by Danticat and Espinet, the motive of

flying is associated here with boundless liberty as well as with the wish to break out of restrictive conventions. Olivia communicates that her “*body wants to fly, pop into the atmosphere*” (220). The wish to fly in conjunction with Olivia’s public display of her naked body is a signifier for her self-possession and her owning her intimacy. In one of her dreams, this is intertwined with the aspect of motherhood when a faceless child appears from between her legs. The child is naked, moves around like a bird, and encourages Olivia to break free: “*Mami, flying is not so hard. You just need to find the space for your wings*” (46). Olivia then starts to undress, “*to be naked like her. I like the feeling of wearing my own skin, to walk around like a new born and not to be afraid of what people think about me*” (46). It offers the possibility to come of age anew, to feel comfortable in her own skin. Her undressing and nudity are symbolic for a reversed process of becoming which eventually culminates in a symbolic renaissance when mother and daughter visit the Dominican Republic toward the novel’s ending. It suggests a spiritual recovery enabling the subject to leave the past behind and opening a path to pursue one’s own desire: “*There is so much I want. I want to erase all those years I lived with Manolo. I want my ears to catch the wind and carry my dreams into the clouds and let them rain over me so I can cleanse my spirit and start again*” (219).

However, that individual desire is often in opposition to collective demands inhibiting women from flying is made clear. As Olivia stands naked on the fire escape, she is just a nude public spectacle when seen from the outside; but when switching to Olivia’s perspective, the narrative reveals that it is actually her attempt at flying, an attempt which is prevented. Just when she thinks she has found the space for her wings, she is held back: “*I [...] open my arms and I try and lift myself into the sky and before I can fly away Victor grabs me and takes me inside*” (46). The younger brother surely saves her from falling and covers her nakedness. Nonetheless based on a strictly binary gender hierarchy and patriarchal structures (which the novel in fact suggests) and taking into account his role in the family as the only man (conserving the paternal lineage), he embodies exactly those social restrictions women seek to overcome. The novel here takes on a feminist standpoint which corresponds to “an attempt to critique women’s prescribed roles and the ways that these can bind and restrict one’s ‘flight’” (Anatol 2015: 28). That this point of criticism, which Anatol actually finds in the flying *soucouyant*, is applicable here, too, is stressed by Olivia’s remark directed at her mother, Doña Sosa, “*I want to tell Mamá [...] that it’s the golden Virgen María around her neck that keeps her from flying*” (220). If the Virgen María chained around her neck embodies respectable womanhood and status, it is this kind of judgmental categorization and social prac-

tice which binds women to the 'ground' and that Olivia grapples with (cf. Francis 2010: 126). "*I'm tired of hiding inside an apartment with gates so the burglars won't come in. I'm tired of running, I'm tired of letting what other people think of me, or will discover about me, control my life*" (221). Flying, or Olivia's refusal to accept boundaries and wish to break out, is subversive and liberates her from incarceration and her own angst.

7.5 In Solitude? Between Assimilation and Ethnic 'Dissociation'

Whereas, as Francis suggests, "Olivia's process throughout the novel is to *undo* her identity as sex worker," thereby disclosing "the difficulty of such a process of unbecoming" (2010: 128), Soledad finds herself in a process of becoming and self-discovery in which she is trying to construct her identity from those fragments that she has difficulties to fully relate to. The confusion Soledad feels about her own self stems from the uncertainties of belonging and unresolved fatherhood, but also from the pressure of the migrant community which is at odds with her wish of assimilation and integration into a white bohemian, down-town lifestyle; it may also relate to the rather ambivalent position of the Latina body within U.S.-American society. This conflict is particularly staged between mother and daughter, whose mutual estrangement inhibits their respective wishes for becoming and unbecoming. Their conflict is solved at the end of the novel when Soledad takes her still apathetic mother to the Dominican Republic, where in the cathartic moment of a cleansing ritual in a lake both women emerge from the waters to start anew. "And when I surrender to the warmth of the water, I feel the past, present and future become one" (226), Soledad recounts. What takes place during this bath is a corporeal transcendence of time and space; but in this magical-real moment we also find a spiritual superelevation along with a glorification of the Caribbean home space realized in its potential for healing. The temporary physical return is a characteristic feature of the diasporic novel to imagine movement in order to transcend distance and common also for coming-of-age novels as a necessary stage in the maturation process. In addition, in the final resolution of the conflict between mother and daughter, the novel envisions a successful coming-of-age story and the possibility of a completed subject formation that however needs to be nego-

tiated between island locale and diaspora territory as well as between shifting lines of affiliation.

Two years earlier, prior to Olivia's sickness (or rebellion), Soledad, eighteen years of age, moves out to Manhattan's East Village, "on the corner of 6th and A" (1). Similar to Olivia's feeling of being incarcerated (both by limited freedom of movement as well as by those norms that determine her body as unworthy and soiled), Soledad perceives the *barrio* of the Dominican community as too narrow and the family as too demanding and overbearing. When her mother falls ill, she is called back home but compares the stay with her family in Washington Heights to a "prison sentence" (3). This illustrates the restrictive setting and spatial confinement of Washington Heights, the "urban ghetto" (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 73) that Soledad desperately seeks to leave behind; this also resonates with Olivia's own weariness of hiding inside the barred apartment (cf. 221). Soledad's escape – "I was going to a place far away from my mother, from Washington Heights" (8) – is motivated both by the need to separate from her mother as well as by the desire to bring as much distance between her and the 'ethnic community' as possible. She further enacts the separation from maternal influence by taking off the earrings she received from her mother at birth, thus symbolically cutting off the umbilical cord (cf. 8). This rather typical coming-of-age motif – leaving behind parental control – signifies a necessary step in her development, seemingly bringing her closer to personal liberation and providing her with more freedom.

The constant surveillance inside the *barrio* is contrasted with the anonymity of downtown Manhattan. Whereas in the Washington Heights community everyone was prying, watching every move and judging, the new neighborhood now offers the chance to come and go as she pleases, "without fretting about a curfew or someone waiting up for me" (30). However, Soledad's move is met with reproach by her grandmother and aunt who implicitly blame her for her mother's condition (cf. 5, 12). Their reproach for turning her back on her family can further be interpreted as an accusation of betraying her own 'roots' and the ethnic community – which would explain the sense of guilt Soledad feels for moving out (cf. 3).

From a sociological perspective, Nancy Foner and Joanna Dreby investigate intergenerational relationships in immigrant families along with related tensions between parent and adolescent child. They point out that what often causes these tensions are the "cultural differences between parents' home-country values, norms, and behavioral patterns and the mainstream American culture to which their U.S.-born and -raised children are exposed and drawn"

(Foner/Dreby 2011: 547).³⁶⁴ The assimilationist tendencies Soledad displays stand in stark contrast to “the importance of la familia” (4) that her aunt Gorda vehemently upholds, thus causing an intergenerational conflict. Against the alleged duty of ‘ethnic loyalty’ stands her attempted outgrowing of the community and wish foassimilation or integration into the mainstream. In this respect, the novel questions through a second generation migrant’s perspective the very idea of origin and dismisses (in Soledad’s farewell) the concept of a closed community and the necessity of being part of it.

The novel further reveals a conflicting relation between the first and second immigrant generation in connection to problems of belonging, assimilation, and identification. That it is not only the wish to separate from maternal influence but also profound confusion with regards to her identity and even embarrassment with regards to her place of residence (meaning ‘ethnic background’) that prompts her to leave is expressed in her “embroidering the truth about [her] living on the Upper Upper Upper West Side” (2). When being asked where she was from, she elusively replies ‘from the Upper West Side’ – as if “liv[ing] in the hood [...] make[s] you some substandard human being” (76) – to which her friend Caramel reacts with disgust, not understanding how she can even stand this area she calls “gringolandia” (2). This was Soledad’s “way of keeping nasty stereotypes of Washington Heights out of people’s minds” (ibid.), which in reality is located at the fringes of the Bronx.

In Washington Heights, the Dominican community populates an in-between-space located not yet in the Bronx (with a majority African American population) but not down-town Manhattan either. This is emblematic for the positionality of Hispanics or Latino/as within the ethno-racial make-up of the city and the U.S. Her ‘ethnic dissociation’ is further strengthened by her ignorance of the fact that the hip down-town area where she now lives used to be home predominantly to the Puerto Rican community. Here the novel alludes to the gentrification of this urban area, a process which marginalizes certain groups and obscures their cultural history. In their reading of the novel, Dalleo and Machado Sáez observe in Soledad the wish not only for *upward* but also *outward* mobility. They argue that “Soledad even decontextualizes the Lower East Side, absenting its Latino/a history as a Nuyorican neighborhood just a generation earlier. The desire to dissociate herself from the lowercase Latino/a ghetto moves Soledad to also fudge the details of her background” (91).³⁶⁵ If

364 On family structures, intergenerational conflict, and so-called countercultures in immigrant families, see also Portes/Rumbaut 2001.

365 Dalleo and Machado Sáez refer to Juan Flores in the application of the concept of lowercase Latino/a identity.

gringolandia and the Lower East Side serve as manifestations of the cultural difference of mainstream America, Soledad in becoming an artist and delving into the apparently white-dominated Manhattan art scene finds herself seemingly in denial of her Latina identity which is at odds with her family's *Dominicanidad*. Sitting in overpriced cafés, sipping a fashionable cinnamon-flavored latté, and finding herself "among other university students, I feel like I've arrived" (67). Moving up while moving out or outward in terms of the mainstream culture of *gringolandia* versus the ghetto distances her further from an immigrant, working class identity found in the Washington Heights community.³⁶⁶

The counterpart to Soledad is her friend and roommate Caramel, a Chicana from Texas who "loves saying she's a lesbian" (89). Indeed, Soledad's ethnic 'dissociation,' which is emphasized by her whiteness, is contrasted to her friend's affirmation of a U.S.-Latina subjectivity. "Caramel thinks she has a certain *right* to the caramel-flavored things. She insists it helps her to get in touch with her inner *self*" (67; emphasis added). Her claim for autonomy of the self and the right to ownership she grounds in the myth of an essential or a 'true' kernel of identity which apparently lies within one's self. The assurance (access to that identity) prompts her to criticize Soledad for her shortcoming, which she finds confirmed in Soledad's preference for white men, her consumption habit of expensive products, but also in her work in the art gallery. It is also Caramel who points out the necessity of community and inter-ethnic solidarity to Soledad. Despite her emphasizing her distance to the Latino/a migrant community, Soledad admires Caramel's self-confidence, pride, and independence and wishes to "grow up to be like her. With so much strength, comfortable in her own skin, not caring what anyone thinks" (91). In expressing a positive relation to her body, Caramel, as Dalleo and Machado Sáez argue, "functions as a throwback to the Sixties political vision, voicing its ideological perspective to critique Soledad's assimilationist tendencies" (91). Here, the two authors refer to the political resistance inherent in the identity and standpoint politics of the queer Chicana feminist and Civil Rights movements, which they see embodied in the character Caramel.³⁶⁷ She confronts Soledad with her lie about her background and urges her to embrace her origins, up-bringing, and be 'truthful' to her Latina identity prompting her to "say it like it is, *mujer*" (3). As a result

³⁶⁶ Arguably, associated with this identity position is exactly that kind of symbolic capital that guarantees entry into the contemporary art scene of Manhattan.

³⁶⁷ Caramel is the one character to really disrupt the novel's rather static performance of gender and sexuality and otherwise very strict heterosexual matrix.

Soledad [...] guiltily shifts her identification from the upper-class locale of the Upper West Side to that of the Washington Heights barrio. This guilt is evoked by Caramel's signifying home in terms of community solidarity as opposed to class mobility, the barrio versus *gringolandia*. In addition, the guilt is also associated with a betrayal of one's cultural roots [...] naming the ghetto as *the* authentic home-place. (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 92)

Soledad's attempt at making a home down-town, however, is not just for the sake of upward mobility but also corresponds to her want to blend in, an endeavor which clashes with Caramel's explicit aversion of *gringolandia* (cf. 2). Although Soledad does not completely understand her best friend's remark and dislike, she "just knew it was bad. It felt worse than being called a *blanquita* back home: a sellout, a wannabe white girl" (2-3). As these differences are clearly inscribed on her body, what resonates here as well is Soledad's self-alienation and apparent 'un-belonging' both to the Washington Heights area and to down-town Manhattan. Her estrangement is best illustrated by her saying: "Living uptown, and coming downtown to work every day, it's like being on two different planets" (57). Thinking with Bourdieu, we may detect a *habitus* conflict that stems from her being socialized in one place and moving about in a space characterized by a completely different set of behavioral rules; similarly, we may discern a cultural collision in Anzaldúa's sense, if we understand the barrio as a space of Dominican culture and *machismo*, and down-town as a space of high culture of art galleries and urban *chique*. The question that remains unanswered is whether Soledad will be able to bring the two together, to perform an act of transculturation.

Where Dalleo and Machado Sáez find in Soledad's guilt a cultural betrayal, her behavior may thus be further attributed to an identity crisis that only at a first glance relates to adolescent individuation. Soledad, ever since her father's death, is obsessed with the idea of having been 'switched' at birth, and holds "on to the fact that I don't look like my mother. Maybe our lips are the same, full and pink. But my hair falls pin straight, my eyes are smaller, shaped like almonds, and my skin is fairer" (6). The perception of her physical difference in comparison to the rest of the family and her whiteness is affirmed as well by her grandmother's observation: "Soledad, you and that gringo blood" (220). Resonating in Soledad's reflection on the missing similarity to her kin is indeed her own uncertainty about her origin and parenthood. However, at a second glance, it is also a reflection on the implications of a racialized, ethnic identity. Both statements in themselves do not indicate a preference for fair skin (as for example in the case of Martine and her skin bleaching in Danticat's novel); still, for Latinas in the U.S., the novel explicitly ascribes to whiteness a higher possi-

bility of a career and upward mobility. Caramel, for instance, is very critical when it comes to the recruiting and hiring practice of the art gallery where Soledad works, finding that “[t]hey hired you because you’re not brown like me” (58). Here she hints at the structural discrimination on the job market where race functions as social marker and positioning putting People of Color at a disadvantage. Soledad’s whiteness, Caramel claims, grants her entry into the white-dominated art world of downtown Manhattan. Within the community, though, the meaning of whiteness undergoes transformation in its demarcation from *Latinidad* and eventual exclusion. When Soledad returns to the *barrio* to look after her mother, she is hit by a water balloon her cousin Flaca and a friend throw from the roof of a house mistaking her for a “freaking [...] hippy white girl chick” (16). In this prank the girls define the limits of community membership and belonging on the basis of skin color and assumed social status. In what can be described as a body politics of ethnicity, race, class, and identification, the perception and ascription as “white chick” and her “gringo blood” mark her difference within her ‘own’ community and position/construct her as other vis-à-vis the Latina body and the ‘brownness’ of Caramel.

As a matter of fact, Caramel makes her aware of the whiteness of the art gallery and invisibility of the Latina body therein. “Everything is white, the walls, the ceilings” (56), as well as the owner of the gallery and artists promoted there. She is aware of the exclusion of the art work and the marginalization of Latina artist that Soledad does not see. Hence, she challenges her asking “When was the last time you saw a Latina artist in a gallery? [...] It’s so far from our imagination. We [...] will end up like Frida Kahlo, paralyzed in some bed in perpetual pain waiting for our deaths to sell our paintings” (56). For Caramel, who criticizes the absence of Latina/o art, “it comes down to the politics of representation [...] see[ing] through the whitewashed artistic economy of the gallery” (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 92). In fact, Soledad has been hired as a receptionist but her wish to show her painting at the gallery so far remains unfulfilled because of the owner’s concern that Soledad may “have some agenda on her ass” (89), hinting at the agenda of identity politics and representation. Suddenly, Soledad is not white enough. In this respect, Caramels comment, “God forbid they see two spics [sic] in here” (58), a remark that was intended to provoke Soledad; the explicit use of the racist “spic,” pejorative for Dominicans, reveals not just a whitewashing but the discriminatory practice of the institution which is as much a problem of race as it is one of class. This corresponds to the incompatibility of the “two planets” Soledad has trouble to bring together. Caramel’s question, “can you really see your abuelita or Gorda walk into this uptight gallery without feeling completely out of place” (56), hits the nail

on the head. "These places are traps. Don't you see there is no place for us to go from here? Soledad, we need to start our own thing, make our own rules, where the sky is the limit. A place where our mamis can come and visit and not feel like they don't belong" (57). Hers is then a plea for coalition building and an affirmation of a pan-*Latinidad*.

According to Caramel, Soledad does not fit into the white space of the gallery or upscale Manhattan society. According to Flaca, she is a white chick who does not belong to Washington Heights. Among the extended family in the Dominican Republic, additionally, she is again an outsider, though in a dominant, privileged position, primarily because of her passport and status, which constitutes yet another identity shift: in the Caribbean she is perceived as U.S.-American although her ethnic identity there officially marks her as not one of the mainstream. Dalleo and Machado Sáez elucidate the conflict Soledad has:

Traveling to the Dominican Republic necessitates the recognition that Soledad will be viewed as an outsider, as a gringa who embodies the privilege and economic power of the United States. Soledad cannot escape her identification as a U.S. resident or the lens through which her island family will view her. (97)

She does not understand local ways to prepare food, perceives this as a state of underdevelopment as she is used to ready-made and processed food. The novel reflects on the status and prestige associated with the diaspora. It is obvious that the transnational connection is not void of asymmetries, resentment, and incomprehension. There is the pressure on those living in the North, perceived 'back home' as paradise, to provide for relatives. There is also a certain degree of superiority attached to the purchasing power which puts the apparently economically successful migrant in the position in which she is able to grant those at home a favor. The reality of the hardship lived through in the northern metropolitan centers and exorbitant costs to sustain a living usually remain hidden from those on the islands.

That Cruz is concerned also with the issues of anti-Haitianism and the racism within the Latino/a community against Blacks and African Americans can be seen, for instance, in Gorda's reservation towards Flaca's friend Caty who is *Haitiana* and Gorda "doesn't know about those people" (41). The novel contextualizes the attitude of anti-Blackness in the antagonistic relation of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Soledad's grandmother explains that "[i]t was rare to have a man like your father pick a woman like me as a wife. I mean, we were the kind that had a few too many feet in a Haitian kitchen" (186). What is hinted at here is the threat of 'racial contamination' of the *white* Dominican society through the Black Haitian body.

7.6 Muy Macho: Hegemonic Masculinities and Gender Trouble

The novels in this study have in common a predominately negative depiction of heterosexual masculinity and unreliable, violent men. *Soledad* adds to this through its representation of a mostly stereotypical Dominican manhood as well as its contrasting juxtaposition of the good and bad Latino man. Men are measured by their abilities to care for their women economically and sexually; the women define themselves mainly through their relationships with men and heterosexual desire. Similar to *The Heart Does Not Bend*, this narrative strategy brings with it a privileging of women's perspectives and subjectivity. The novel's ethical principal of gender justice is clear, since the good men are rewarded and the bad are punished, like Manolo who is pushed out of the window; Don Fernando, Olivia's father, who is bound to the wheelchair and dies; and Raful, Gorda's ex-partner, who is narratively death and never appears in person. Francis argues that through the novel's "internal critique of Dominican men exploiting Dominican women" as well as the attempt to relocate "violence as an everyday experience to which Dominican women are subjected," Cruz wishes to "pursue[...] the national and diasporic implications of 'machismo' in heterosexual relationships" (Francis 2010: 121).

The concept of hegemonic masculinities, according to Raewyn Connell (2005),³⁶⁸ refers to the plurality of male gendered positions within a gender order or heterosexual matrix, to use Butler's terminology. This matrix prescribes certain practices and strategies of manly behavior to sustain not only authority and power within a peer group and in relation to other (subordinate) masculinities but also to attain and sustain domination over women.³⁶⁹ The hegemonic ideal of masculinity among Latino men and women is referred to as *machismo*, an unstable performance of heterosexuality and virility shaped by a complex set of such interrelating factors as race, class, economic pressure, national belonging, and power.³⁷⁰ Contemporary conceptualizations of manhood among Dominicans have emerged against the backdrop of coloniality, U.S. occupation, the Trujillato, and more recent transnational circulations. *Machis-*

368 See also Bourdieu (2001).

369 Studies on masculinity in the Caribbean are provided, for example, by Reddock (2004); Lewis (2007, 2003); Bucknor (2013).

370 Latino adult manhood, its production and representation, is subject of numerous fictional texts which either reaffirm or interrupt hegemonic interpretations of masculinity, as several scholars convincingly argue, cf. González (1996); Domino Rudolph (2012); Horn (2014); Cortés (2015).

mo is defined through norms, social practices, and perceptions that go along with tradition, Catholicism, as well as a rejection of non-normative sexualities and feminine behavior (cf. Horn 2014; Domino Rudolph 2013).³⁷¹ In her novel, Cruz does not take issue with homosexual desire among men, thus reproducing the silence surrounding homosexuality prevalent in hegemonic discourses on Latino masculinity.

7.6.1 Socialization in the Streets

The 'street' is the most important space for the formation of masculine subjectivity and the verification of manhood among Latino men (cf. Chevannes 2003; de Moya 2004b). The novel depicts the street as a highly dangerous and contested terrain where young men are supposed to stand their ground and prove themselves and their toughness in relation to other men. One important aspect of this street culture is the public performance of potent urban masculinity and 'badness' behavior that Soledad observes in Richie and his friends: "[l]ike tough men they inflate their chests and bounce them off each other" (77). The negotiation and reconfirmation of masculinity happens within the peer group. "The guys are probably gathering themselves in the alley so they can emerge in a pack, spit their way up the street as if they had to mark their territory everywhere they go, like dogs" (74). While this is a gendered ritual to demarcate the masculine space, it is also a drawing of ethnic boundaries and establishing belonging to a certain community distant from other Latino or minority communities and measured against white masculinity. The toughness attitude as virility is inseparable from machismo and demarcates this hegemonic form from a marginalized effeminate masculinity. The group and *barrio* here resemble a panopticon, a Foucauldian disciplinary microcosm in which the subject is

371 Dominican masculinity, obviously, cannot be broken down to singular stereotypes nor solely associated with aggressiveness and violence, while simultaneously depicting women as mere victims. Prevalent concepts of virile manliness have emerged during the *Trujillato*. A totalitarian notion comprehends masculinity as being monopolized by state authority, regulated by state power, and negotiated among men themselves. One of the dominant images is that of the *tiguere*, closely associated with Trujillo's perceived manliness and sexual prowess, the "*Ubermacho*" (Cortés 2015: 120). On the meaning and ambiguity of the *tiguere* and its association with politics as well as everyday life, see Krohn-Hansen (1996) and de Moya (2004a, 2004b).

under constant observation and has to adjust its own behavior according to the rules of the street.

The novel confirms the importance of the street on gendered socialization practices and a family's reputation in several instances. On the street, young men like Victor learn from elders how to behave like a man, to respect women, and listen when elders speak. Ciego, the blind, wise old man, is the patriarch who still rules the street. He is the heterosexual complementary to Doña Sosa: Whereas she is the matriarch who is in control of the kitchen (cf. 64), he is omnipresent in the neighborhood: "Ciego's making a butt print on the building steps. He's been sitting there so long the steps will stay warm all through winter" (170). He is also the counterpart to the abusive, alcoholic husband, and substitute father to Victor. Similar to the figure of Tiresias, he is in possession of a certain clairvoyance which further emphasizes his authority as mentor figure. His blindness provides him with sensitivity for his surroundings, especially women (cf. 38-39). Through him, the street is associated with the production and sharing of knowledge, a school of life, but also respect and dignity. In addition, it is through Ciego that the novel establishes an explicit link to Dominican history and Trujillo, because he has lived under the Trujillato and recalls the chaos that followed the dictator's assassination (cf. 167).

Both on the street and within the family the regulatory regimes of the gaze and respectability are intact. For girls and women, however, the street is not a sanctioned space. Gorda is worried for her daughter Flaca to get involved in the "shit around the block" (147) and warns her: "[D]on't let me catch you en la calle when it's dark" (43). At night, the urban ghetto transforms into a danger zone potentially affecting the safety of the daughter, in particular her sexual integrity. Flaca's "tramping around on the streets" (43) – the figure of the tramp being a social outcast – is a rebellious act against her mother and in more general terms against women's confinement to the domestic realms. The highly gendered territory of the streets are "culturalmente satanizado para la mujer, porque se considera un espacio masculino si la mujer sale a 'la calle' se considera que está 'compitiendo' con el hombre y se le descalifica 'moralmente' (entra a ser 'puta' o 'cuero') para así crear un muro a su inserción" (Vargas García 2010).³⁷² Thus, Flaca's presence on the streets, patrolling up and down as if she owns the block (cf. 125), is a transgression of strictly defined spaces and gender boundaries. That Flaca can be read as a transgressive character is con-

372 "The space of the street for women is culturally demonized. Being considered a masculine space, if a woman enters 'the street,' she supposedly competes with the male who then disqualifies her morally (as being a slut or a lady) so as to create a defensive wall to her insurrection" [my translation].

firmed by other teenaged girls who observe her street performance and “think she’s in a gang” (44). Admittedly, the novel at this point does not unfold a narrative of Latino/a gang life and membership such as literary scholar Monica Brown elaborates on in *Gang Nation* (2002).³⁷³ However, Flaca’s alleged gang membership, when read alongside Brown, who posits gangs as an alternative or counter-environment for intervention and participation in culture and politics, is a sign for her longing for an alternative space of belonging – meaning outside of the home – but also her rebellion and an act of defending her site of self-actualization.

Flaca posits her body in relation to the urban street territory thereby declaring the space as her own. By “showing off [her] flat-chested, skinny-ass self on the block” (32), she not only enters into competition with *macho* men, she also proudly parades her pubescent body in the sexualized and racialized arena of the street, reclaiming it as her space for self-actualization. Soledad observes her cousin’s slackness with envy, which translates into a judgment of Flaca’s adolescent body as already sexually inappropriate: “Her spaghetti-strap tank doesn’t hide her small nipples. Her breasts, too small to wear a bra, seem indecent without one” (125). Flaca’s seeming indecency results from the strict rules of propriety Soledad has incorporated. Yet, Flaca does take pride in her body and feels comfortable in her skin. Carolyn Cooper coins the term “slackness” for working-class women’s body politics and explicitly erotic gender performance enacted in the Jamaican dancehall culture in particular. In her definition, “a radical, underground confrontation with the patriarchal gender ideology [...], Slackness is potentially a politics of subversion” (Cooper 1994: 141). The confident, public display of the sexualized female body that can be observed in Flaca’s case can be interpreted as a performative act of slackness. If we understand slackness to be part of what Deborah Thomas calls “ghetto feminism,” meaning the emancipation of (especially lower class) women’s sexuality from the private sphere along with the notions of respectability and decency (cf. Thomas 2004: 251), Flaca’s performance, her empowering counter discourse of ghetto feminism, poses a challenge to hegemonic masculinity or “ghetto masculinity,” a term used by Dalleo and Machado Sáez to describe homosocial male

373 Brown analyzes Latino/a novels and memoirs, such as Piri Thomas’ *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), Monica Ruiz’ *Two Badges: The Lives of Mona Ruiz* (1997), and Yxta Maya Murray’s *Locas* (1998), thereby focusing on the phenomenon of street gangs and community building, emphasizing, amongst others, how loyalty, honor and a sense of belonging creates empowerment and an alternative space of oppositional politics against exclusionary models of citizenship and nationality – but also as a tragic space of violence, brutal rituals of bonding, or misogyny (cf. Brown 2002: 16).

bonding and hypermasculine practices of resistance among adolescent men in Latino communities in the face of economic disenfranchisement and migrant culture (cf. 85). Flaca is affirmative both of her Dominican identity and her femininity, which her printed shirt publicly demonstrates reading “DOMINICANS GO ALL OUT”, and, unlike Soledad, self-conscious about her sexuality and the assumption that Dominican women are “the most beautiful women on the planet” (32).

Sexuality, beauty ideals, class, and race, nevertheless, complicate adolescent girls’ socialization in the community and the urban space of New York City, where they need to compete especially with white girls in the fight for the sexual attention of “homeboys.” Flaca, complaining about the arrogance displayed by white girls who enter ‘her’ territory, observes how bodily ownership and desirability are inextricably linked to whiteness leading to the denigration of the Latina body. “Fugly white bitches walking around here like they own the block ‘cause homeboys treat them like they beauty queens just ‘cause they blanquitas [...] looking at her like she’s a piece of shit” (44). Beauty ideals are established through a positive evaluation of women’s bodies through the attraction of the heterosexual male gaze on which women apparently depend. The power of the gaze of the “homeboy” reconfirms the status of the *macho* but interestingly also brings with it a revaluation or heightened appreciation of Latino working-class identity in the relation with white women who are apparently not from the *barrio* but seek the men’s companion nevertheless. At the same time, affirmation and validation of manhood occur through the contact with women, whereas women are supposed to display a passive, receptive sexuality in order to meet moral standards. The streets offer a space for secret sexual experiences. The alleys provide Flaca with privacy to discover her sexuality with Pito, something that is impossible in her mother’s small apartment. Although she is in control of how far they go in their sexual discovery, he openly takes pride in his conquest, wearing “a grin that screams success” (124), while Flaca is supposed to hide her arousal, anxious to “never get caught feeling all sexed up” (124).

7.6.2 Provider and Sexual Prowess

Time and again the novel makes explicit references to male sexuality. Phrases such as “men’s dicks are always looking for a home” (210), here a somewhat nebulous depiction of what may be called a ‘nomadic manhood,’ comically at best, refer to men’s supposedly innate bodily urges and prowess. The “home,”

metaphorical for vagina, implies compulsory heterosexuality, and, in its literal sense of the domestic space, a man's alleged need for a warm nest, which recalls the well-known stereotype of essential femininity in the 'Angel of the House' (which Olivia, for example, despite her angelic features cannot live up to, but Isabel, Victor's girlfriend provides with her warm, inviting sheets). Although there is much to be criticized about Cruz' employment of gender stereotypes, as the irony necessary to deconstruct the very same is often missing, a closer look reveals how men are caught between the pressure to testify their sexual prowess and the expectations to provide for women economically and emotionally. *Machismo* as the dominant cultural codex of manly behavior, honor, and virility obliges men to reconfirm their status through the sexual conquest of women.

Manolo is the embodiment of that aggressive *machismo*, revealing, in addition, the double standard associated with sexual autonomy leaving women at a disadvantage when it comes to the free expression of erotic desire. Manolo obtains the ownership of Olivia's body by literally buying constant access to her intimacy. Throughout the early phases of their engagement he forbids her to speak in public, decides for her what to eat, to drink, to wear, and when to have sex (cf. 50). Upon arrival in New York, the novel alludes to his criminal activities, which adds to his badness factor; this is also when the physical abuse of Olivia intensifies. The reasons for Olivia to stay with Manolo are her family's expectations, the need for a provider, and the pressure to remain in the realms of the respectable. Since Manolo is not the biological parent of Soledad and has not fathered another child, he is presumably infertile, which in a culture that values virility is regarded as unmanly. Soledad is the living proof of his wife's unfaithfulness, meaning his emasculation, so that he eventually takes revenge also by abusing Soledad when she is still a child. I am reluctant to read the aggressiveness, abuse, as well as his cheating as a coping strategy with regard to his lacking masculinity and the crippling effects of socio-sexual demands. However, Manolo compensates the loss of authority with hyper-masculine behavior and violence to reestablish power. While women are valued for their sexual purity, men are defined as valuable providers through the size and action of their genitals, a measure, too, of male prowess. Gorda, in trying to pursue Soledad to let the ghosts of the past rest and forget about her father, shares with Soledad that the men Olivia had sex with "are stupid men. Men who need to take advantage of little girls because they have penises the size of my pinkie" (200). The equation of a 'small sized' penis with the inability to satisfy a woman (which supposedly proves a man's unsuitability as husband or

father) reveals what seemingly makes a man *muy macho*: What matters is the size of the penis to satisfy a woman.

A further performance of masculinity is expressed in the image of the tiger.³⁷⁴ The Dominican *tíguere*, too, hunts in the urban “gender jungle” of Cruz’ Washington Heights.³⁷⁵ Richie, who counters Manolo’s troublesome masculinity, is the good *macho* made flesh in his embodiment of the positive side of the *tíguere*, namely as a protector, provider, and comforter. This, however, escapes Gorda’s attention who continues to dislike Richie for making her teenaged daughter, Flaca, fall in love with him. In her eyes, Richie is a “maldito tigre” (73), a predator, who according to de Moya is also known for his “chasing behaviour” and display of “male potency” (2004b: 79). Gorda, indeed, sees his potency or prowess as potentially dangerous, but contradicts herself by saying: “Ese tigre, can’t even wipe his own ass, maldito mocoso” (106). She diminishes his adult manhood by calling him a *maldito mocoso*, a ‘bloody brat,’ unable to see the kindness of Richie’s character due to her one-dimensional picture of what masculinity is supposed to mean. Gorda’s comment, “men are hunters by nature, it’s unnatural for them to want a woman who’s easy prey” (101), is enlightening for the essential binary behind heterosexual coupling it conveys, which she obviously does not question. Her imagination of the tiger is very much formed by a Trujillo discourse of masculinity.³⁷⁶ Men (or tigers) are ascribed the active part; for women it is unnatural to take the lead; hence Gorda’s advice to her daughter to ‘play hard to get,’ that way ever remaining the passive object (the prey) of a man’s desire (or his hunt). While the tiger hunts his prey in the urban jungle, the woman is the lioness in the den. The novel goes on with double entendre: She is in charge to prepare the ‘meals’ and keep the ‘fire burning’; she decides when “to put the meat in” and makes sure to not “let him peek in your pots” (64). She is the seductress and lures men with her cooking skills.

Nevertheless, looking at the kind of masculinity the novel privileges, it becomes clear that it suggests the tamed, cuddly *tíguere* as valid part of Dominican American masculinity. The protagonist’s desire for Richie (“Every part of

374 This perceived ideal type of masculinity emerged in the urban areas of the Dominican capital in the 1940s and 1950s. The ‘typical’ character traits of *el tíguere* are defined in detail by Lipe Collado in *El tíguere dominicano: Hacia una aproximación de cómo es el dominicano* (2002), see also Horn (2014: 45).

375 The term “gender jungle” is de Moya’s (2004b: 79).

376 Trujillo was infamously known for his *machismo* and promiscuity. The masculinity discourse is furthermore intertwined with Dominican *caudillo* politics. Junot Díaz’ *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) takes issue with this kind of body politics.

my body wants him to hold me right then”) and her emotional need for the tiger’s comforting embrace (“as if his arms can make me feel less scattered and lonely” [209]) responds to her hinting at a changing ideal of Dominican gender relations in the diaspora. The good *macho* knows how to nurture women emotionally, provide safety and comfort. Richie’s adoration of the female is literally engraved on his body. His arm is decorated by a tattoo of his mother’s portrait and he might actually “be the kind of guy who disproves [Soledad’s] mother’s theory about men” (125). If, as Maja Horn contends, the image of the *tíguere* departs from “a typical modern form of individualism but remains deeply embedded in kin and communal relationships” (2014: 45), then Manolo departs from this image and is bound to fail. Olivia earlier compares him to Hollywood’s “Lone Ranger” and she “never trusted the Lone Ranger because his lips and words never met” (51). He rather embodies a Western, or rather the Hollywood-promoted ideal of individualism and manhood, “the loner/quiet type” that seems distant from that of the Caribbean, where “melancholic gravity of solitude is not hugely prized” as Jason Cortés argues (2015: 99). Hence, the tiger is the one who in the end dominates in the urban jungle; the tiger is keen enough to “outsmart the dominant system and its rules” (Horn 2014: 45). Richie is more likely to survive.³⁷⁷

The ambivalences in the formation of the masculine subject, arising from the regulatory regime of *machismo* along with the multiple expectations reinforced by men and women alike, put men under pressure. This becomes most visible in Victor. He is the only man left in the household after his father’s death, enjoying his status of the spoilt son “about to hit thirty and won’t leave my grandmother’s pampering ways unless someone marries him and takes her place” (3). The first time his girlfriend Isabel visits, he is embarrassed by the way his mother and sister easily dominate their get-togethers, relegating him to the position of a child, thus emasculating him in front of his partner (cf. 177-179). He compensates this lack of masculine authority in the home through his performance of ‘street badness’ and verbal threats – “I’m gonna have to fuck you up” (35) – and the conquest of women – “I got myself enough pussy” (39). Several times, the narrative focus shifts to his perspective to reveal the pressure on him to perform sexually. He even wonders whether it is natural for men to repress sexual desire for other women and have intercourse with only one, thus

377 Horn concludes: “The *tíguere* is thus a transgressive answer from men ‘below’ to the constraints of the Trujillato, but also an echo of the new hegemonic masculine scripts enacted from ‘above’ by the dictator himself. Indeed, I argue that the *tíguere* is best understood as a response to the profound ‘crisis of the subject’ brought on by the Trujillato’s reconfiguration of social relations in the country” (2014: 46).

questioning the nature of monogamy but also fostering a sexual double standard (cf. 176).

The proof of masculinity thus depends on the number of women men have intercourse with. Soledad, however, is disgusted by how he juggles women “around like a piece of meat” (61) but would not betray her uncle to his girlfriends. It is “part of a family code to protect each other, even if it feels wrong” (62), she says. The family, like the streets, is a further space for socialization and apparently a sanctuary of hegemonic masculinity in which a certain kind of manhood is reproduced; the family actively contributes to the transmission of culturally sanctioned gender roles and the preservation of the heteropatriarchal system. Although Soledad wishes for solidarity among women, a “kind of sisterhood” against male domination, the family provides safe ground for the deceit of apparently naïve women “who believe what they want to believe” (62) when it comes to men. The negative role models like his father or Manolo make Victor insecure about the kind of man he wants to become. He transforms from *mujeriego*, a womanizer, into a loving man, eager to get married and settle down. At the same time, however, that he is not eager to obtain the role of patriarch may hint at an alternative model of manhood among the younger generation of Dominicans in diaspora and the desire for breaking out of a tradition that is damaging both to men and women.

On the other hand, Victor in his active sexuality and desire for women demonstrates that the womanizer is not insignificant with regards to women’s emergence as sexual subject and their developing a positive attitude towards their bodies. Victor is important for his celebration of women’s bodies and sexuality, something the women in the novel are unable to do or do only secretly. Soledad, for instance, is uncomfortable in her body and Gorda only whispers shamefully “*down there* [...] as if just mentioning it is something that will send her right to Hell” (107). In contrast to the awkwardness surrounding the vagina and female body, references to male genitals are made outright as the text proudly spells out “penis,” “sacks,” or “pubic hair” (159); whereas the text describes in detail Soledad’s caressing of Richie, there is a striking discomfort to do so the other way around and the text gets lost in awkward descriptions by Soledad of Richie “searching for the places that make me hold my breath” (ibid.). Victor, of all characters in the novel, is the only one to actually name women’s body parts and is infatuated by “Ramona’s pussy,” her “smell” and “her taste” (103). Like Ciego, he makes women feel desirable. He resists the text’s obvious inability to spell out vagina or other female body parts.

7.6.3 Disenfranchised Masculinity

The *barrio* – “a war zone filled with cop killers, killer cops, crack dealers, gang members and lazy welfare mothers” (2) – is commonly associated with crime, unemployment, and bad housing, which is why Soledad usually refrains from telling downtowners her whereabouts.³⁷⁸ In fact, unemployment and crime, seemingly predetermined, are part of the characters' reality in the *barrio*. The characters' employment in the low-wage sector hints at the precarious economic situations within ethnic communities and the often difficult access to white collar jobs. In the U.S. the promise of the good life in the North is proven false – this is seen also in the three previous novels, for instance in *Espinete*, where Da-Da is only a shadow of his former self. The diaspora for many turns into a place of lost hopes, as Ciego's migrant story reveals: “I wanted to do so many things. I wanted to come to the U.S. and be transformed, and when I got here and realized that men like me, like us, are treated like dogs in this country, that they got us, all medicating our lost dreams with mierda like Johnny Walker Black” (167). The experience of disenfranchisement makes life for many Caribbean migrants unbearably difficult as they face the realities of poverty and racism, and a remedy and compensation is found in alcohol and violence. The “burden of masculinity,” according to Rudolph, is intertwined with racialized body politics and ethnic identity in the U.S., where an excessive Latino masculinity is placed in opposition to white, Anglo American passivity which translates into “a conflict between virile Latino bodies and Anglo-American social and economic capital” (74). This politics of segregation is visible in the ‘body order’ of an urban space divided in the bohemian, diverse downtown, the white middle class Jersey, and the criminalized Washington Heights dominated by Hispanics. The *barrio* is the site for drug trafficking, but where white people come to purchase drugs (“blanquitos from Jersey [...] are up here for one reason” (87)), and police violence is common (“cops, who are looking for trouble” (146)). The street renders the male body of color vulnerable, engendering and exposing him to violence.

Similarly, interpersonal relations and the choice of a partner, too, are restricted by this order. The extent to which gender, racialized, ethnic identities intersecting with class and capital complicate the status (and define the positionality) of Latino masculinity is disclosed in a conversation between Soledad

378 Doña Sosa spreads the news of another killing down the streets (60), which brings to mind the assassination of Malcolm X in the Audubon Ballroom that happened just around the corner of the *barrio* on 165th Street. In this context, Soledad's comment on how staying in Washington Heights for her is like a prison sentence, in addition, refers to the criminality in the area.

and Caramel. They discuss Soledad's taste in men, her alleged preference for whiteness, and her disapproval of men from the *barrio* influenced by the prevalent stereotypes of Hispanics as well as her own experiences living in Washington Heights. "You won't give Richie a chance 'cause he ain't white. She's wrong. It's because he's not my type, he lives in the hood. I want something better for myself" (76). Her initial rejection of Richie ("He's like some loser" (96)) results from her prejudice and her desire for upward mobility. She assumes that due to his origin he cannot fulfill this desire but is proven false in the end.

7.6.4 A Quest for Fatherhood?

While the novel for the most part is concerned with the estrangement of mother and daughter and their ultimate reconciliation, Soledad's unresolved quest for the biological father is another plot-driving element and raises further questions of masculinity. She remembers the many times Manolo "would say to [her] mother, Your daughter. Not *my* daughter" (195). The mystery regarding the fatherhood is met with Olivia's assurance of her own motherhood. Olivia's secret past, which involves her uncertainty with Soledad's parentage, is hidden until the moment Soledad finds a box with her mother's name on it containing photographs, a notebook, and a list with descriptions of men and dates – from May 17 until June 14: "[...] *Mayo 20 alemán gordo con olor de cigarillo* [...] *Mayo 21 el francés lindo* [...] *Mayo 25 el Americano, rubio* [...] *Junio 14 Manolo*" (194-5). Soledad reads the list out loud wondering who these men are and "Why would my mother describe them this way? [...] I picture each man. El francés, el griego, el Americano ... otra vez. Otra vez. Why again? What again?" (194). What follows develops into a rather absurd and comical scene, but is intended to mark a serious moment in which the daughter relives her mother's traumatizing experience. In disbelief, she reads out the list and while doing so it not only dawns on her that her mother worked as prostitute; what also happens is that the men materialize in front of her:

One by one, at a very slow pace, men with big fat stomachs, nasty teeth, hairy chests, balding heads, pigeon toes, smelly armpits, long beards, appear. And as if they have visited this apartment in the past, they sit down [...] all naked, penises exposed con mucha confianza [...]; there's a sepia cast to them all. An ancient photograph, an old memory. [...] The men keep appearing. Naked, tall, short,

lumpy, old and young men. And my father is also there. [...] We find him making the kind of face that reads revenge. [...] Maybe this is not real ... (195)

The apparition of the ghosts, according to Anne Brüske, constitutes an element of magical realism which marks “el momento en el cual los acontecimientos de Olivia se convierten en una experiencia compartida también por la artista Soledad, así que, por ende, la suerte de los dos personajes, el pasado y presente, se entrelazan definitivamente por este trauma transgeneracional” (2013: 95).³⁷⁹ The ghosts painfully link mother and daughter to the Dominican home as well as to a shared experience of sexual violation – Olivia by her ‘clients’ and Soledad as child by Manolo.³⁸⁰ The spectral appearances of the past still haunt the mother and apparently the daughter as well. Indeed, “the ghost is often an indicator that there are aspects of the past that are not quite finished,” as Lisa Kröger and Melanie Anderson confirm (2013: x).³⁸¹ And although Olivia has tried to manipulate her memories by scratching out Manolo from family photos (cf. 19), he, as the other men, continues to impose his (naked) presence comfortably on them. Different to the function of Olivia’s naked body as sign of rebellion and liberation (also of threat to propriety and respectability) the men’s nudity stands in for an invasive *machismo* particularly in Manolo’s case. Their exhibitionist confidence accentuates sexual virility and ultimately the hetero-patriarchal control exerted over women’s bodies.

In her reading of the novel, Sandlin suggests that Olivia’s own spectral appearance and her communication strategy, referring to her sickness and apathy through which she summons Soledad, as well as the appearance and eventual exorcism of the ghosts function as sign of warning about patriarchal domination (cf. Sandlin 2013: 92). At a later point, Soledad discloses that Olivia’s warning, “*I need to see Soledad [...] She doesn’t have much time before Manolo gets her too*” (153-4), comes too late; she remembers the sexual abuse when her father “became a drunk” and “took a nap with me and Flaca” (191). Also, Olivia cannot

379 “the moment in which Olivia’s experiences become an experience shared also by the artist Soledad, so, therefore, the fate of the two characters, the past and present, are intertwined by this transgenerational trauma” [my translation].

380 In *Breath Eyes Memory* it is the trauma of rape and nightmares that function as transnational connection and link the diasporic space, here it is the ghost of sex work that is revived in the metropole. Her being haunted by a yet unprocessed past indicates that Olivia may indeed be traumatized. A further indicator is that the details of Olivia’s past are recounted by Soledad as Olivia may still be unable to access the memories in a coherent manner. Whether the appearance of the ghosts to Soledad means a transgenerational traumatization is debatable.

381 The authors further argue that “ghosts reveal pain that emerges when a society attempts to bury traumatic events” (Kröger/Anderson 2013: xiii).

save her daughter from the uncanny vision of the past that Soledad conjures up. By means of her strong imagination she thus discloses her mother's well-kept secret.

The appearance of the ghostly men, however, provides Soledad with a chance for action and revenge. Similar to her mother who 'archived' all these men in her tin box, who secretly engaged in the sex trade, in her tin box, and who kept evidence for the succeeding generation, Soledad documents their existence on canvas.³⁸² She does this, however, primarily to detect the paternal lineage. "I study the men and try to find a resemblance. With my sketch pad I try to capture their features" (205). While drawing she realizes a resemblance in each of the men, such as their eyes, ears, or cheekbones. In this strange semblance lies an uncanny experience for Soledad; here, she encounters something *unheimlich*, which means she encounters the familiar while at the same time she is confronted with the threatening unknown within the realm of the intimate. What follows is a metaphorical castration scene, which may be read as a comment on her own sexuality but also as a projection of her rage against the men and against the threatening presence of the phallus. As she continues to draw the men and phalli, "[e]very line on paper that captures their physical essence makes that part of them disappear. It's so amusing to see them dismembered [...] that I can't help but be completely evil and draw their penises" (205). In an attempt to torture them she "rip[s] the drawings into tiny pieces" (205). Although this act of destruction does not obliterate neither men nor their ghosts, it certainly is a performative act of punishment and emasculation. Considering the ghosts as symbols not just of the past but as continuity of heteropatriarchal influence and gendered forms of oppression, the scene, despite its symbolic brutality, marks a moment of resistance and self-empowerment.

Soledad's desperate search for her father, which is also a fundamental quest of origin and belonging – two concepts that are volatile in hundreds of years of Caribbean history of displacement –, is ultimately dismissed by Gorda: "What is a father anyway? A role. That's all. A parent is someone who makes sure you're fed, and have a place to live, who loves you until the day you die. You have that and more. You have all of us, mi'jita. You don't need any of these men to be your fathers" (200). Her plea to Soledad is to cherish the emotional richness her family already provides and the nurturing aspect of the community (which resonates with the generic feature of the coming-of-age novel). In the issue of unresolved fatherhood, the symbolic castration, and ultimately in Gorda's statement, the novel implicitly questions not the importance of the father

382 That way, she transfers imagined, symbolically charged bodies into a material dimension.

but rather traditional family constellations and allocated roles. The novel in this instance functions as womanist intervention to readjust the focus on a family model that departs from the nuclear family and ceases to be supportive of a destructive masculinity.

Hence, on the surface, *Soledad* not only reproduces but also reifies gendered binaries and stereotypes. Olivia and Gorda eventually break out of this binary to realize they are better off without men. Despite its generally heteronormative notions of gender, the novel remains skeptical of the traditional Western concept of the nuclear family and eventually foregrounds women-centered familial constellations which is not uncommon for ethnic, minority literatures with a feminist or womanist impetus. If we consider Dominican history and gender roles to be of ongoing relevance in the diaspora, then, I argue, at this point, Angie Cruz questions the valence of dictatorial discourses of masculinity. Trujillo's self-fashioning as the *Padre de la Patria Nueva* continues to influence political discourses of the succeeding generations in the Dominican Republic and the diaspora communities as more recently demonstrated by Rafael Hipólito Mejía Domínguez, the country's president from 2000 to 2004, whose electoral slogan for presidency in 2012 "Llegó Papá" ties in with the paternalistic semantics of the *Trujillato*. The novel's questioning of the role of a father figure in the family is also implicitly challenging to the patriarchal authority of the nation. The reconsideration of the role of the father as suggested by Cruz urges to overcome this kind of machismo as formative of both male and female subjectivity and identity in the diaspora.³⁸³ Soledad, in symbolically castrating the men who could be her father, and Olivia, in burning the list of these men, both extinguish the paternal lineage. In this denial of the 'Law of the Father' we can read a symbolic eradication of the patriarchal discourse of machismo and masculine oppression. Interestingly enough, the Taíno name for the Dominican Republic, still in use today, is *Quisqueya*, the Mother of all Lands (cf. Higman 2011: 33), to which Soledad and Olivia turn to in their recovery.

383 For an in-depth discussion of how the U.S.-occupation and Trujillo have shaped masculinist ideology and gender politics in the postcolonial and post-dictatorship Dominican Republic and how these are challenged by the literature of the twenty- and twenty-first century, see Maja Horn's insightful book *Masculinity After Trujillo* (2014).

7.7 Coming of Age and the Un-/becoming of the Subject

So far, the analysis has focused on practices and politics of the body as well as gender performances and relations which inform subject development and the construction of Dominican diaspora identity. As in the three preceding analytical chapters, the final section, too, is concerned with genre matters. In the following, I pay attention not only to the novel's communal or relational form, the incorporation of various generic elements, or to how the diaspora is evoked through a fragmented narrative of multiple perspectives and back-and-forth movement. I also consider the ways the novel reconstruct the coming-of-age process via the body through the narration of physical change and symbolic corporeal dissolution.

If the body is permeable, the coming-of-age genre, too, is characterized by an openness to incorporate aesthetic elements of other genres, blurring strictly defined genre boundaries. Cruz interweaves aspects of the *Künstlerroman* in the depiction of Soledad's coming of age and attempt at becoming an artist as well as her confrontation with her family in her paintings. Moreover, associated with the boom of Latin American fiction is the emergence of magical realism. Likewise, fiction under the *latino* label is associated, too, with magical realism. The title Cruz has chosen for her novel makes explicit intertextual reference to the novel *Cien años de Soledad* by Gabriel García Márquez, the prime example of magical realism. The parallel to García Márquez is established already in the blurb and on the book cover where it says the novel is "teeming with raw beauty, danger, and magic;" it is a "real yet often magical novel" full of "myth and mysticism" and "tinted with the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez." The magical elements are usually included to describe that what cannot be grasped and put adequately in words and provides alternative forms of knowledge. "U.S. Latino writers [...] embrace this narrative technique as a way to distort and confuse the readers' understanding of what is true and what is magical and to cause them to question their sense of reality [and] to shake up certain ideological beliefs, stereotypes, and misconceptions" (Christie/Gonzalez 2006: 11).

With *Soledad*, Angie Cruz has written a story of adolescent female development and subject formation. For this reason, literary scholars label the novel as *Bildungsroman* – without however engaging in a more detailed analysis of the implications and features of the genre itself – and emphasize the diasporic element in the text which manifests itself on the level of content as well as aesthetically. Brüske, for example, analyzes the politics of space, trauma, and

memory in the novel; she reads the text as a *Bildungsroman* which, according to her, deals with cultural conflicts and the search for identity between two worlds: the United States and the Dominican Republic (cf. Brüske 2013: 89). In *The Tears of Hispaniola*, Lucía M. Suárez considers whether we could talk about the emergence of “a new genre of Dominican diaspora women’s bildungsromans” (2006: 163). The novels of this “new genre,” among which she also counts *Soledad*, deal with “women’s struggles for self-affirmation – social, sexual, political – against a backdrop of illiteracy, machismo, and racism. Thus they stress women’s possible paths to personhood: self-acceptance, self-esteem, education, financial independence” (ibid.). But when we speak of a new genre, as Suárez does, should we still retreat to an old-fashioned term and genre? While I depart from their use of terminology, this genre is unmistakably diasporic. Cruz, too, contrasts her portrayal of New York inner-city life and (Latina) ethnic experiences with snapshots of a coming of age in the Caribbean: The novel deals with the immigrant experiences of Dominicans in the U.S. and with diaspora community belonging with a focus on the effects that the migration experience, economic marginalization, and attempts of integration and assimilation may have on the subject, while also being concerned with the affiliations to the island. This is explicitly expressed in Doña Sosa’s ‘two-placed attachment’: Her “head is in the campo and [... her] heart is in love with Americanisms [...]. My grandmother is split between ideas, countries, her dreams and what’s real” (11). In addition, whereas Soledad’s observation of the surroundings of the Washington Heights neighborhood conveys a sense of Dominican diaspora life,³⁸⁴ the dream sequences of Olivia provide insights into their life in the Dominican Republic.

Of the four novels considered in this study, *Soledad* may offer the most ‘conventional’ form similar to the *Bildungsroman* plot in terms of movement, adolescent search for independence, and a seemingly linear development of the subject.³⁸⁵ For instance, the main characters both leave or rather escape from the family home, moving either from the Dominican countryside to a more

384 Dominican flags and newspapers mark the neighborhood as Dominican. The reader is made to feel the thick humidity of the 164th Street, smells onions and cilantro, and hears the merengue blaring through the streets (cf. 3).

385 Rishoi describes the motif of movement and development in the traditional *Bildungsroman* thusly: “The boy’s search for his true vocation is the outward manifestation of his simultaneous search for selfhood, usually requiring him to leave his family and home at a young age to find his own path as an individual. Moving from a rural, protected home to a dangerous urban setting brings about the most significant educational experiences of his life, leading first to self-doubt, but ultimately to a reconciliation with the world” (Rishoi 2003: 59). What is important to note is that the home space in Cruz’ novel does not provide Soledad and Olivia with safety.

urban, touristy area and then to metropolitan New York or from up-town to down-town in their attempts to break up parental connections and seek education and better living conditions. However, the textual structure and the novel's narrative strategy – the use of multiple embedded story lines, memory fragments, and flashbacks that integrate the past as relevant part of the present – defy any linear logic breaking up a teleological quest plot. In addition, Soledad's return to the maternal home in Washington Heights as well as the journey to the Dominican Republic that mother and daughter undergo at the end of the novel with the aim of re- and self-discovery – and here the novel imagines a kind of rebirth – create a circular movement. The expression "It's all one big cycle of events" (90), uttered by Gorda, who is addressing Soledad in order to soothe her niece's anger towards her mother Olivia emphasizing the intergenerational relationship between mothers and daughters, hinting, as well, at the journey to selfhood, may be understood as emblematic for the construction of identity and subject development that is not straightforward but a circuitous route.

As the narration shifts from one perspective to another, from past to present, from New York to Puerto Plata, a sense of diasporic fragmentation and dispersal is created. In departing from the portrayal of a linear process of *Bildung*, the novel transcends space and merges different temporal levels as it intermingles the plot lines of multiple coming-of-age or coming-to-consciousness stories. Whereas Olivia's episodic flashbacks are in a chronological order starting with the painful memories of her young adulthood in the Dominican Republic progressing towards the present, Soledad's reluctant process of remembering runs not only antipodal but also in a disorderly manner. The initial narrative distance reflects the emotional distance between mother and daughter, best illustrated in the image of two "repelling magnets" (7), as Soledad describes their relationship. From its beginning, the narrative present – Olivia's breakdown, Soledad's return, and their trip to the Dominican Republic – is interrupted by the memories of the two protagonists – sex work, migration, Soledad's birth, domestic violence, Manolo's death, and Soledad's moving out (cf. Brüske 2013: 94).³⁸⁶ These two levels are eventually intermingled when Soledad invokes the ghosts of the past which initiates first Soledad's break-down and then Olivia's and Soledad's parallel re-awakening. The frequency of the occur-

386 The motif of return is one aspect of the diasporic genre. Return is never permanent for the protagonists but nevertheless often a necessary process in order to obtain peace of mind and closure of unresolved issues. In the case of Soledad, indeed, "to complete her cycle, she needs to recover some kind of ancestral home by coming going [sic] back to the Dominican Republic" (Cruz/Torres-Saillant 2003: 126).

rences of the flashbacks increases towards the end of the novel alternating with Soledad's point of view up to the point where they are synchronized.

Moreover, the choice of the title might suggest that the novel moves away from the communal and collective character of Caribbean coming-of-age fiction, seemingly placing the individual story of one young Dominican-American woman in the center of attention. The title and the eponymous heroine hint at social isolation, loneliness, and withdrawal rather than an overt celebration of community belonging and (interethnic) solidarity typical for migrant fiction. This is undermined, however, by the two major intertwined plot lines pertaining to Soledad and Olivia as well as multiple sub-plots which, taken together, form a community. The strong presence and significance of the community, despite the title, are reflected also in the narrative situation by means of the plurality, even cacophony, of voices and different entangled perspectives. The different characters who inhabit the *barrio* are granted a voice to tell their stories. Neither Olivia nor Soledad are 'characters of dissent,' because they distance themselves only temporary from the community, the socialization therein, and their family. This is the most obvious in Soledad's return to Washington Heights. As a matter of fact, all characters rely on the supportive structure of the family maintained mainly by women. Not surprisingly, hence, the triadic constellation of grandmother, mother (and sister), and granddaughter is of substantial importance just like in the three novels discussed previously.

Christy Rishoi's work on women-authored coming-of-age narratives notes that in this genre, a preoccupation with the body and affirmation of "the embodiedness of identity" is of crucial importance (2003: 12). *Soledad*, too, is obvious in its juxtaposition of the coming-of-age genre with the body. Correspondingly, what stands out is the concern with body matters and use of body metaphors to illustrate development and to display the un-/becoming of the subject. The naming of the characters is telling in itself, referencing either body parts or physical appearance such as Gorda (fat), Flaca (skinny), Pito (tiny), Toe-Knee, Ciego (blind), or Pelao (bald). This also serves the purpose to include Spanish speech and describe the characters as belonging to the Hispanic minority, as embodiments, or rather personification of an ethnic identity. Noteworthy, too, is the naming of persons in correspondence to their skin color especially in the case of Olivia and Caramel. By means of such description, Cruz explicitly marks the Latina body as non-white, different to Soledad, nor black or *morena* like Flaca's Haitian friend Caty or Victor's girlfriend Isabel.

The pivotal moments in the protagonists' coming-of-age processes are staged on their bodies and thus made comprehensible for the reader. This refers to the adolescent 'discovery' of sexuality as well as to the spiritual baptism and

renaissance of mother and daughter, which means both the liberation of the body and the unification of body and spirit in a magical moment of renewal. In the final scene, for example, in a rather reductive equation of the female body with nature, the nurturing safety of the life-giving womb is evoked, symbolized by the mysterious lake in the Dominican Republic from which mother and daughter emerge healed and with new found strength (cf. 223-227).

Furthermore, Cruz uses the images of fruits and plants in order to illustrate the transformation and transience of the female body. The teenaged Flaca, for instance, “*believes in love and passion [...] her life as a garden about to bloom*” (102). In this quote, youth and the adolescent female body in particular are associated with the fertility of flowers and the unspoiled nature of the bud. Coming of age and the awakening of adolescent sexuality is projected on the imagery of the garden obtaining a sensual, luscious note with a spark of curiosity (a similar image is applied in Silvera’s novel in the characters Petal and Rose, who are emblematic for sexual emergence, as well as Molly’s affinity for gardening). In stark contrast to a pure and blooming adolescence, one may assume, stands the aging, maternal body that apparently has passed its prime. It is especially Olivia’s social and psychological withdrawal that translates into bodily decay, which is likewise described in botanical terms. In fact, in her apathy Olivia experiences her body as “*hard and stiff like an old fruit rind*” (25); and Soledad takes note of her mother’s “*fingers open like flowers ready to die*” (9). This image of the withering flower, different to the lush fertile garden, is, however, not meant to dissociate maternity and adult womanhood from an active sexuality; it rather describes a sick, unhealthy body that is fading away.

The bodily decay of Olivia is made even more explicit in Gorda’s observation: “*Olivia hides behind the beautiful face but is rotting inside, smelling like stale water*” (108). The ‘decomposing’ state of the female body defines it as close to nature and simultaneously lays open its dysfunctional materiality (or flesh). In this naturalization of the body and abjection, the subject is reduced to a rotten corporeality and marginalized from social interaction. It is an imperfect body perceived by the self as a source of disgust: “*My own sweat repulses me. When I’m touched I want to scream*” (25). Having learnt that the body fluids emanating from the female body are socially coded as unclean, the subject experiences its own body as repulsive and painful.

Corporeal feminists investigate the cultural signification and representation of body liquids and point out how “*women’s corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage*” (Grosz 1994: 203). Grosz furthermore argues that “[b]ody fluids attest to the permeability of the body [...]”. They affront a subject’s aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity. They attest to a certain irreducible ‘dirt’ or

disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable [...]. In our culture, they are enduring; they are necessary but embarrassing" (1994: 193-4).³⁸⁷ Not only does the improper, soiled body signify contamination, which leads to the de-subjectivization of "fragile Olivia" (155), but the leaking body also implies its own uncontrollability.³⁸⁸ This underlines the fragility of the apathetic body, the apparent weakness of the female body, and its subsequent self-alienation. An ultimate stage in the dissolution (or unbecoming) of the subject is indicated when Olivia is found "asleep like a corpse" (134).³⁸⁹ In her symbolic death comes forth not just an incompleteness but a split of the subject in which the deathlike body is separated from a hyper-active mind and wandering spirit. The split of the subject is also indicated by the circumstance that Olivia's "body is doing what it needs to survive [...], but her spirit is somewhere else all together [sic]" (57). The dualism indicated here is thus unhealthy because the interaction of body and mind is inhibited and the unity of the two disrupted. She moves (or 'de-emerges') from having and being a body to losing that body.

Whereas Molly, Mona, and Sophie encounter their selves either through a look in the mirror or photographs (seeing either themselves or their mothers), the mirror stage in this novel, implying at the same time both the recognition of the subject *and* an alienation from the self, is evoked narratively through a doubling or mirroring of mother and daughter: Soledad experiences a similar coming-of-age process as her mother, which in the novel is first a process of bodily 'unbecoming' followed by emotional healing and rebirth.

The novel opens with an epigraph reflecting Olivia's thoughts. Therein she imagines a blood-red orange and that she wishes "*to squish [her]self inside a tangerine and sleep among the seeds. [...] I want to let myself die and live in dreams*" (n.p.). This should not be mistaken as a death-wish, but rather as an expression of the need to rest and be free from societal pressure. The fruit imagery and the retreat into sleep are mirrored on to Soledad: "I dropped and cracked just like a ripe pomegranate. My skin broke and my soul spilled out like pomegranate juice onto the floor" (205). Soledad's own disposition throughout the novel, the sentiment of loss of consciousness, passivity, and bodily dissolution, increasingly resembles Olivia's. Apparently, the longer she stays at her mother's home and the more time she spends investigating and

387 Her argument is based on the works of Julia Kristeva on the abject in *Powers of Horror* (1982) and Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966) (cf. Grosz 1994: 192-197).

388 In this uncontrollability lies the danger of the female body which is perceived both as an impure entity and as threat to patriarchal rule.

389 Kristeva distinguishes between different categories of the abject. One of these categories is abjection towards bodily waste and the horror of the corpse (cf. Grosz 2014: 193).

confronting her past, the more she retreats into sleep and dreams; she does so up to the point when she “can’t tell whether [she is] dreaming or awake” (188). Soledad, too, seems apathetic: “I’m tired and I finally give into the weight of my body that sinks deep into the mattress” (186). Heavy with the burden of her body she, like her mother, “want[s] to fall asleep forever” (191). Olivia and Soledad both need to resolve existential issues and they use their bodies to do so. Mother and daughter are connected in their pain and bodily reaction to it: “I feel a burning hole inside my belly” (188). The hole stands in for an absence or defect: They are trapped inside their own bodies, which they have come to experience as defective and defined by limiting ascriptions.

Despite Olivia’s performance of corporeal decay and Soledad’s fall into numbness, the narrative reverses these processes by staging the awakening of both women. In the scene in which Victor takes his sister inside from the open window and puts her to bed, Olivia returns to a quasi-embryonic stage as she “folds over into a fetal position covering her head” (45). Also, the epigraph quoted above indicates Olivia’s longing for the safety of the womb symbolized by the tangerine and its seeds among which she would like to rest. Her “scream” (226), when Soledad is about to drown in the lake in the attempt to save her photograph from the water, then, marks not only the moment of her awakening but also the pain of labor and partum. One may argue that her finding and using language again is a return to the symbolic order or the law of the father (Lacan). Soledad’s rebirth as well as the strong bond between mother and daughter are illustrated in the following quote:

And when I surrender to the warmth of the water, I feel the past, present and future become one. My mother becomes the ocean and the sky, wrapping herself around me. [...] I can hear the high pitch of my mother’s scream. It makes the water lift itself into a wave. [...] See the world [...]. And when I find myself washed up on the rocks, I lie down to catch my breath. When I open my eyes, my mother is holding me. (227)

In this final scene, in Soledad’s return to the maternal womb, the novel not only imagines a cyclic process of becoming woman. It also fuses the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future which constitute at the same time in its synthesis the unity of identity, the biography of the subject. With all that one is, with everything one was, one is all that what one will be in the future. The subject in various facets is – at the same time – always the same and ever changing.

7.8 Concluding Remarks

Angie Cruz' novel integrates a somewhat philosophical subtext in its negotiation of identity formation and a mind-body-dualism, which is especially hinted at in Olivia's apathetic state, her immobile body, and wandering spirit. The quest for a wholesome subjectivity, women's emancipation, and self-love, indicated, for instance, by Olivia's wish for her daughter to "find[...] comfort in her own skin" (68), is accommodated in the coming-of age plot of the novel. Olivia's resistance in her sleep and refusal to speak is her self-imposed choice of voicelessness in contrast to the one imposed by colonial domination, patriarchy, or American mainstream culture.³⁹⁰ Also, we can read this state as her refusal to act as the representative of the family or even her ethnic community. Although she remains silent throughout almost the entire novel, meaning she refuses to verbally interact with her surrounding, her 'voice' is privileged through italicized script and the epigraph dedicated to her thoughts. The reader is granted access to her thoughts. Olivia's interior monologue provides insights into a troubled mind that is far from being incarcerated in an inactive body.

In spite of the allegation that immigrant Latina/o literature displays an apolitical tendency, voiced in particular by Juan Flores (cf. 2001: 174; see 7.3), *Soledad*, which I count among a Caribbean diaspora literary tradition, takes a critical oftentimes political stand. The novel makes reference, although superficially, to the political void after Trujillo and the economic situation that forced many Dominicans to leave the country (cf. 167), as well as the local dependency on remittances sent from abroad (cf. 97). Cruz takes issue with sexual labor and tourism in the Caribbean along with the colonial continuity of bodily (s)exploitation and persisting power structures of neo-colonialism which makes obvious the vulnerability of postcolonial citizenship, especially for working class women. Olivia's story emblemizes the sexual exploitation of Caribbean working-class women by wealthier men from Europe, North and South America – but also from within the Caribbean – who travel to the Caribbean for sex tourism. The novel deciphers the psychological consequences on part of the sex worker and different forms of bodily violations along with the position of the Black and Latina body in a power matrix of the global and the local.

390 Read in the context of the dictatorship and its aftermath, Olivia's silence could be interpreted as being symbolic for both the politics of concealment fostered by the Trujillo regime as well as the silence of and non-interference by the West. Her silence, however, can also be read as emancipatory insofar as it is her own will to remain silent. Olivia's silence further evokes the missing voice of Latina writers, Dominican in particular, from the literary scene at the beginning of the millennium.

Sheller points out the embodied dimension inherent in tourism. She describes the encounter between local people and foreigners as “corporeal relations of unequal power” (Sheller 2012: 210). Here, the sex worker’s body functions as projection of racialized desire and domination; at the same time, it may also be regarded as locus of social status, a hope for upward mobility, and ultimately access to civic participation. Inscribed in Olivia’s body, however, are hegemonic gender and racial relations that inhibit her exchanging her sexuality for material benefits or a better living. The transaction happens on unequal terms resulting in a recolonization of the body. Being forced into prostitution is connected on the one side with patriarchal domination, and on the other side capitalist interests. The women do not benefit from tourism, although the national economy relies on the productive body of the prostitute, its availability, and serviceability, or as Alexander points out on “women’s sexual labor, and the economic productivity of women’s service work” (2005: 51). The novel shows that this productivity generated by women’s sexuality ultimately benefits foreign interests.

Additionally, Cruz fictionalizes damaging gender roles, patriarchal structures, and machismo as embedded in the everyday life of a Dominican community. The novel negotiates lived experiences while problematizing restrictive body politics on several levels. Reading for the body, race and gender politics discloses the marginalization of subjectivities, frequently in tandem with an implicit or explicit criticism of underlying social values and moral principles. As is the case in *Soledad*, it lays bare the boundaries of gender and desirable patterns of masculinity and femininity.

The novel takes further issue with belonging, thereby raising questions of ethnic identity, community membership, and assimilation. Different to the postcolonial impetus embodied by the character Caramel along with her affirmation of a pan-Latina identity and solidarity – which Cruz deliberately establishes by intertextually referencing Sandra Cisneros’s *Caramelo* (2002) – Soledad, by leaving the *barrio* of Washington Heights, refuses for a moment to take on the role as cultural translator and to act as representative of the ethnic community.

Indeed, moving beyond the fictional level of the novel to the socio-cultural level, migrant experiences and the diaspora position may lead to the creation and occupation of in-between spaces. Angie Cruz confirms this by her own experience admitting that she “was never American enough in this country or [...] never Dominican enough over there” (Torres-Saillant 2003: 126). In this context of uncertainty, of partial belonging and sometimes silence, what gains importance are writing and memories. One sentence in the novel, Gorda, hints

Angie Cruz' Soledad

exactly at this: "There is a certain power to words, memories, ideas when one writes them down" (196). In conclusion, and here I build on the arguments of Ifeona Fulani (2005) and Elena Machado Sáez (2015), one may read this as a plea to the diaspora writer to raise her voice; one may also read this as acknowledgement of Caribbean literature in the reading market and its political functioning in the literary field of the mainstream.

8. Conclusion:

Body Politics and Political Writing

[T]o create dangerously is also to create fearlessly, boldly embracing the public and private terrors that would silence us, then bravely moving forward even when it feels as though we are chasing or being chased by ghosts.

(Danticat 2010: 148)

8.1 Unruly Bodies, Disobedient Subjects

Women writers of the Caribbean diaspora, especially those residing in the United States and Canada, have made a major contribution to the global emergence and wider public and scholarly recognition of Caribbean literature since at least the 1990s. Recurring themes that Caribbean diaspora, or diasporic literatures deal with are, for instance, migration, belonging, and often conflicting relations between the Caribbean and diaspora home spaces, or ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity and difference. The persistence of colonial structures of domination in social, political, and economic terms as well as gender and racial prejudices are discussed increasingly along issues relating to the body, sexuality, eroticism, or deviance. Women writers like Makeda Silvera, Ramabai Espinet, Edwidge Danticat, and Angie Cruz often return to a distinct coming-of-age genre to retrace subject formation or to navigate postmodern, postcolonial approaches of identities as multiple, decentered, anti-essentialist. The four authors reimagine Caribbean women's sense of their being in the world, while being "connected by their representation of Caribbean experiences in metropolitan locations in North America" (Page 2011: 226). They offer a kaleidoscopic portray of migrant experiences by means of their diverse backgrounds showing that Caribbean diaspora identities are heterogeneous, made up of multiple origins, destinations, and visions (cf. Torres-Saillant 2013: 328).

For a comparative approach of their fictional writings, I have suggested a pan-Caribbean diaspora framework: A Caribbean diaspora poetics acknowledges diverse Caribbean backgrounds, such as the Jamaican, Trinidadian, Haitian,

and Dominican, multiple diaspora experiences and routes both across the *Black Atlantic* or crossing the *Kala Pani*, and the different diaspora locations in Canada and the United States. The increasing public recognition of diaspora writers, however, often happens at the expense of the visibility of regional writers which is to say that what is recognized and labelled as Caribbean fiction is in many cases the produce of diaspora authors and the publishing industry in the North (cf. chapter 1). To avoid such confusion, building on the studies, for example, by Ferly (2012), Torres-Saillant (2013), and Machado Sáez (2015), I have suggested considering literary production of the Caribbean diaspora and the diasporic coming-of-age novel in particular as a literary tradition in itself and of its own.³⁹¹ This study's preference for the term Caribbean diaspora literature, on the one hand, sets it apart of a strictly-defined and outdated notion of a national literature and underlines the deterritorialized character of that particular literature and the unique feature of the Caribbean diaspora as being twice-diasporized.³⁹² And, on the other hand, proposes an alternative genre to the more controversial labels of ethnic or minority or migrant literature with which nevertheless must be engaged with in the context of a globalized literary market. I have tried to avoid such labels as metropolitan minority *Bildungsroman* (cf. Slaughter 2007: 286) or immigrant coming-of-age literature (cf. Künstler 2012) that fix these texts into a category of 'exceptional' ethnic writing as compared to a non-marked Canadian and U.S.-American mainstream literature.

The selection of the four novels, while not representative, has certainly been exemplary for the diversity of Caribbean diasporic fiction, the existence of a distinct coming-of-age genre intertwined with a likewise manifoldness of embodiment, body regimes, or body politics in the Caribbean and its diaspora that especially a feminist-engaged reading discloses.³⁹³ The fictional represen-

391 In turn, the writers who receive attention by the mainstream, e.g. prize-winning authors like Marlon James or probably even Danticat, are hardly considered in their countries of origin, in the case of James this may well be due to his openly lived homosexuality; in the case of Danticat, lower reception may be due to the language barrier and the rate of illiteracy among the Haitian population.

392 The unique feature of the Caribbean diaspora is its condition of being double diasporized. As Hall explains, the Caribbean itself constitutes a space of encounter and creolization of diverse ethnicities and cultures, such as African and Indian. Large-scale migration to the metropolitan regions mainly in North America and Europe then has created a deterritorialized Caribbean diaspora (cf. Cohen 2008; Hall 1990, 1995).

393 Agard-Jones confirms that "Caribbean feminists have been formidable advocates for attention to individual bodies, as they have shown how gendered and sexualized forms of exclusion operate in and through bodily difference. For example, M. Jacqui Alexander's seminal work on law, citizenship, and same-sex desire in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas demonstrates how the postcolonial state has used and

tation of the body and embodiment show the extent to which these are marked by colonial or postcolonial conditions and configurations of race, ethnicity, gender, and respectable sexuality. As it has turned out, the *coming-of-age novel* is among the preferred genres to elaborate on bodily development and experiences that human beings make with, through, and because of their bodies. I have argued that this genre is a concrete form and specific decolonial expression of the *novel of development* that in some respects takes up common, known generic structures but transforms certain features in other instances and departs from a more traditional *Bildungsroman* that is argued to be outdated (cf. Moretti 2000). The reading of the four novels has shown, first of all, that normative conventions of the genre may be transgressed by non-normative bodies and marginalized subjectivities and, secondly, that subject formation, necessarily so, also happens via the body.

This study is located at the intersection of literary studies, body studies, and Caribbean diaspora studies. It contributes to contemporary research on the *Bildungsroman* bringing together literary studies, gender and feminist narratology, as well as postcolonial and decolonial approaches. The four authors – with Danticat perhaps being the exception – constitute a group of writers rarely noticed in German literary studies and in the western research landscape. The selection of writers with a postcolonial and originally Anglo-, Franco-, and Hispanophone background along with the multiple diaspora approach suggested in this study is rather still unusual for the local English and American Studies departments, but it certainly proves the linguistic, cultural, and literary or artistic diversity that characterizes the field of trans-lingual, transnational Caribbean studies that are gaining increasing recognition in German research departments. This development may transcend institutional and departmental boundaries and build bridges between, for instance, English and Romance philology. It is furthermore argued for a transnational ‘extension’ and approach in literary studies that moves beyond confining categories of national literatures.

While much criticism in Caribbean literary studies has focused for a long time *either* on the African *or* Indian diaspora, the U.S. American *or* Canadian location along with *either* the Hispano-, Franco-, or Anglophone Caribbean,

continues to use marginalized bodies to shore up its own legitimacy. Deborah A. Thomas has shown how national discourses about crisis in Jamaica have been mapped onto black women’s bodies. Patricia Mohammed’s reflections on indigenous feminist theorizing in the region has highlighted how the gendered body emerges as a key point of contention in Caribbean theorizing about postcolonial forms of equality and freedom” (186). Thomas Glave writes about the Caribbean body politics and humanity focusing on colonized black queer bodies, thus he writes against the devaluation of certain bodies.

this study has sought to unify these diverse, separate diasporic and linguistic spaces. It goes beyond a single-focused diaspora approach by including both the African-Caribbean (or Black diaspora) *and* the Indo-Caribbean diaspora. This study thus contributes to existing scholarship on fictional writing of the Caribbean and the diaspora, for example Brähler's (2013) supranational and comparative approach, Japtok's (2005) Black Atlantic sensibility, or Journey's (2009) comparative, cross-linguistically engaged reading. It has been suggested throughout a diaspora reading that does not privilege one location over the other but is aware of the specificities of both the Caribbean and the metropolitan locations in the North. Also, situating this study within the field of Caribbean diaspora studies, I propose reading the coming-of-age novel as a manifestation of a political writing.

Presupposing an inextricable link of body and literary genre, the purpose of this study has been to investigate the extent to which the coming-of-age novel constitutes a writing of the body. Since the genre's prime focus is on subject formation in distinct social contexts, we can move on from the central premise that there is a fundamental relationship between the body and society or the collective, and body and the self (cf. Howson 2013: 11). The Caribbean diasporic coming-of-age novels I have analyzed in the preceding chapters discuss individual lived experience, communal development, as well as mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion that either support or inhibit personal development within seemingly predetermined power structures.³⁹⁴ Each writer places under scrutiny normative models of citizenship while also reflecting on the status as immigrant as well as on questions of belonging to foreground issues of class, race, and gender. Some of the formal and content-related features that I have identified in the second chapter are fluid genre boundaries, the productive use of non-standard language, a preoccupation with the past and remembrance, a trigger moment, retrospection and fragmentation, circularity and diasporic routes, as well as corporeal development and embodied subjectification.

The body has not succumbed to a mere object of investigation. The politics of body and genre is pointedly summarized by Rishoi: "By focusing on adolescence, by definition a time of rebellion and resistance, and by foregrounding contradictory desires and discourses, the coming-of-age narrative provides a

394 The counter-discourses the novels re-construct, and to a certain degree encourage to build, are directed against hegemonic discourses of white supremacy, Black nationalism, Creole elitism, economic and sexual exploitation, and patriarchal control of the female body. They criticize the dominance of white middle-class feminism that is often ignorant of its own race and class biases and privilege.

congenial form for women writers to successfully question the power of dominant ideologies to construct their lives” (Rishoi 2003: 9). Caribbean diasporic women writers offer a critical evaluation of as well the political conditions in the Caribbean and the situation of migrants. Their creative, literary investigations of women-centered, multi-generational histories, as especially Espinet suggests, add these hidden stories to the collective knowledge.

The analytical chapters have dealt with Makeda Silvera’s *The Heart Does Not Bend*, Ramabai Espinet’s *The Swinging Bridge*, Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and Angie Cruz’ *Soledad*. These diasporic coming-of-age novels share not only the generic aspect, how they develop a coming of age narrative but also the respective foci on the body and embodied identity. In their own particular ways, they imagine and conceptualize the body as site of resistance and oppression while elaborating on questions of subjectivity and agency. On her way to self-actualization each of the young women alternates between a deep sense of confusion, denial, and even self-hatred to acceptance and embracing her perceived difference.

In yet diverse ways, the novels juxtapose the genre with the body. All four novels reconstruct the coming-of-age process via the body which is accomplished by the narration and often explicit description of physical changes and representation of bodily transformation. Angie Cruz, for instance articulates in her fruit metaphors a symbolic corporeal dissolution and aging of the body, her comatose state and re-awakening. The protagonist Mona of Espinet’s novel notices her own reluctance and shyness by the loss of hair on her once tough arms that for her have signified determination. The transgressive sexualized body in Silvera’s text can be interpreted as allegory of the transgression of the genre: the queer body queers the genre convention of the normative *Bildungsroman*. Danticat’s protagonist moves through various stages of bodily pain in her way to self-actualization and healing.

In terms of colonized and colonizing bodies, the coming-of-age genre is productively used in a writing of marginalized bodies, it is a visualization and a recuperation of these bodies. Moreover, my analysis of the four novels proves the argument made by Mehta who contends that Caribbean fiction “focus[es] on the body as a dialectical site of traumatic experience and knowledge [...] to demonstrate how diasporic bodies are complex entities in-formation” (2009: 2). These diasporic bodies, at times, challenge hegemonic body politics and ethnic concepts, such as middle-class respectability in Silvera’s novel (chapter 4) or Canadian multiculturalism and Trinidadian creolization that are unaccommodating of Indian-Caribbean identity in Espinet’s novel (chapter 5). The novels, as I have shown, depict women characters whose bodies are ‘discursive-

ly unmade' and need to be put together in their attempts to 'come off clean' of the constraints imposed on the women's body (leading to body shame). Cruz's and Danticat's novels (chapter 6 and 7), in particular, introduce two mother figures who relive a traumatizing past of sexual violence that their bodies are unable to forget – in both cases their experience of motherhood is inextricably linked to this inability. Both women carry out drastic measures to overcome terrifying memories – in order to relieve themselves from the terror that haunts them, ultimately reclaiming their bodies. Thus the authors' writing of the body documents healing as life-long, life-giving, sometimes even life-ending process in which the body matter figures as palimpsest on and in which lived experience is stored, never erased entirely. This 'bodily knowledge' comes to constitute an essential part of our being.

8.2 Writing is Political

With respect to the literary production in the Caribbean and the diaspora and its reflection of the persisting structures of colonial inequality that define not only the Caribbean region itself but are a global phenomenon, one of the leading Caribbean critics and philosophers, Sylvia Wynter, claims, "[t]o write at all was and is [...] a revolutionary act. Any criticism that does not start from this very real recognition is invalid" (1996: 31). At the core of this statement lies the presumption that literary criticism needs to be aware of the historical context from which Caribbean literature has emerged as well as the political, activist, socio-critical purpose of such literature; that the creative writing that emerges from a (post-)colonial condition and diasporic, deterritorialized situation is if not revolutionary then at least political. Despite the cautionary advice by Machado Sáez that "a concurrent danger lies in being perceived as telling these stories in an overtly political fashion" (2015: 3),³⁹⁵ in what remains, I would like to ponder on the aspect of the political in Caribbean diasporic women's writing. The question to ask is not whether it is political at all. The answer to that would repeat but the obvious. The more interesting questions to address are rather *what* is political about it, what makes Caribbean diasporic women's writing *essentially* (and strategically so?) political? What is the specific context

395 "Academic readers privilege texts that they see uncovering lost and/or marginal cultural histories, while also expecting that this act of recovery is political" (Machado Sáez 2015: 26).

out of which this form of a political or politically engaged writing has emerged and what has the genre form of the coming of age to do with this?

The political already starts with the selection of the texts. The creation of the corpus brings with it conscious decisions – and it happens based on certain, sometimes even preconceived criteria regarding the text form and style, its content, and/or its context or even the author's biography which make some novels more suitable for analysis than others. We can speak of a politic of selection and exclusion (or inclusion in more positive terms) that comes with canon formation and the labelling or categorization of fictional writing, and that is just as well behind this doctoral thesis. The selected novels themselves are political because of the social, cultural work they perform and the didactic function they fulfil. When discussing the political, I mean that author and novel are concerned with marginalized postcolonial histories and marginalized identities (as in ethnic or sexual), it has to do with a criticism of social power relations and the persistence of structures of inequality.

Considering literary writing as political brings with it a certain understanding of a dialogical relation between *fiction* and *reality*. Clearly, this is not supposed to mean that what we have here and what we find in the four novels I have selected is a mimetic reproduction and representation of the aforementioned reality in the novels. Rather, it is a form of literary world making – in the sense of Aristotelian *poiesis* – that follows certain genre criteria and realist conventions but has its own rules. A cultural studies approach to literature, suggesting a context-oriented close reading, implies that fiction forms not in isolation, in a vacuum detached from its surrounding but is very much influenced by and in interaction with its context; it is world informing. From a reader's perspective, this opens alternative ways of seeing, constructing, and understanding the world (and/or world politics) or even a supposed reality. It expands subjective world view and has the potential to raise awareness. In this respect, the coming-of-age novel narrated retrospectively from an adult's point-of-view works particularly well. In addition to the adult perspective, it includes the worldview of the child, creating distance, adding an external view on the adult world, and different modes of judging the grown-up world. The naïve and partial perception of the world through the eyes of the child may also be a narrative strategy to speak uncomfortable truths without being subjected to cultural forces and social conventions. In doing so lies the possibility of semantic shifts and widening. Yet the narration of the socialization at least depicts precisely those societal limitations on adolescent and adult women and politics of body control – thereby locating them in their social frame and constantly commenting on their significance.

What resonates with the assumption of a political impetus of Caribbean diasporic literature or a politically engaged writing is a kind of *littérature engagée*, which however departs from the moral, ideological sense that one would find in Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, but still also rejecting the credo of an *art for art's sake*. Rather, this literature is emphasizing, taking seriously, and aesthetically engaging with the intersection of literature, politics, social movements, and the body. The writers, in some way or another, display a commitment to a feminist activist agenda and identity politics. Espinet writes against the absence of indentured women from India from the official archival record; Cruz writes to create space where Dominican American identity can exist. Silvera's politically-engaged fiction in line with her non-fictional work has generated important stimuli for Black Canadian feminism as well as anti-racism in Canada.³⁹⁶

Danticat most explicitly engages with a politically engaged writing in *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010). Borrowing the title from Albert Camus's lecture "Create Dangerously" (1957), she expands the idea of a *littérature engagée* to Caribbean migrant literature, including as well its reading practice. Danticat refers to Camus in her interpretation of the term suggesting "that it is creating as a revolt against silence, creating when both the creation and the reception, the writing and the reading, are dangerous undertakings, disobedience to a directive" (Danticat 2010: 11). She develops this idea against a very precise context of the Haitian dictatorship and censorship when both writing and reading was life threatening, for a society in desperate need of art that would sustain them. "They needed art that could convince them that they would not die [...]. They needed to be convinced that words could still be spoken, that stories could still be told and passed on" (ibid.: 8). For Danticat, in accordance with Camus, and I would argue for the other three writers selected here just as well, the political lies in literature's function of necessary resistance to totalitarian structures or structures of oppression as well as in its potential to provide readers with hope. As the contexts have shifted from post-colonial dictatorships to the vulnerability of the migrant body, her writing does not lose its critical engagement. The "immigrant artist [...]" inevitably ponders the deaths that brought her here, along with the deaths that keep her here, the

396 Amy Kebe, too, is cautious to read Silvera's work (and Black Canadian women's writing in general) only in aesthetic terms, while pointing out that the personal indeed is political and that Silvera indeed fuses "politics and poetics in her work" (Kebe 2008: 278). She argues that "Silvera exposes interlinked factors of patriarchy, racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and ethnocentrism [and homophobia] that collide with Black women's lives often negatively defining who they are and their place in society" (ibid.: 273).

deaths from hunger and executions and cataclysmic devastation at home, the deaths from paralyzing chagrin in exile, and the other small, daily deaths in between” (ibid.: 17).

Literary scholar and author of fiction Ifeona Fulani, too, describes the literature by Caribbean women writers located in the diaspora in North America as inherently political. She attributes their political agenda first of all to the context of voicelessness and non-representation out of which Caribbean women writers have emerged and emancipated themselves. By this she means the silencing of their voices by the “master discourse” (2015: 64): the Western literary canon and tradition, by the literary critic, the publishing industry, as well as the lack of publishing opportunities. The commodification of literature and commercialized market demands for multicultural literature apparently do not consider the literary output by Black authors or an existing market for their writing as relevant (cf. ibid.: 64-66).³⁹⁷ Publishers and editors then usually squeeze in literary works in recognizable, reductive multicultural categories.³⁹⁸ Because Caribbean literature is pushed to the margins by and of the North American publishing industry, according to Fulani, this “necessitates a *politics of engagement* on the part of the Caribbean writer who seeks publication” (ibid.: 70; emphasis added). Against this context, “the question of identity, often posed by editors in terms of marketing and market niche, will come to haunt the exiled Caribbean woman writer” and “once she enters the U.S. publishing arena, [she] will inevitably have to contend with ideas and responses shaped by prevailing discourses on gender, race, writing, and difference, in addition to historical race-based prejudices and assumptions about black people and writing” (Fulani 2015: 70). Consequently, the Caribbean women writer “must negotiate textually with her audience as well as politically, within the industry” (ibid.: 78); her response to the market conditions is a distinct *politics of style* and strategic *literary anancyism*.³⁹⁹ Writers of the diaspora like Danticat or Jamaica

397 Black writing is often considered as too autobiographical, too limited on individual lived experience. It is “too frequently judged to be lacking in the ‘universality’ that, allegedly, would make our fiction appealing to a nonblack audience and therefore profitable to publishers” (Fulani 2005: 71).

398 In the course of the ‘multiculturalization’ of the literary field, the recognition of new market segments defined along ethnic categories “has resulted in a demand from publishers for texts, and therefore writers, bearing hyphenated American identities, which in turn has resulted in the demand for texts that are ‘representative’ and ‘authentic’” (Fulani 2005: 71-72).

399 She uses style “to denote the collective characteristics of writing and written presentation including language, diction and linguistic pattern, cadence, and thought structure. In English literary studies, style is usually distinguished from content; however, this separation is not typical in Caribbean writing, in which con-

Kindcaid, who neither establishes belonging to the U.S. nor confesses attachment to her Antiguan nationality, have developed different strategies to gain literary success. Danticat easily shifts between identities, being accommodated easily in the U.S.-American mainstream, multiculturally as Haitian-American, or 'simply' Haitian. With her writing, that usually engages with the politics and histories of Haiti and her adopted home the United States, she reaches across cultures and creates intimacy by provoking sadness, empathy, and compassion (cf. *ibid.*: 76-77).

The question that remains is – and this still needs further research to be answered adequately – what is the relation of the political impetus of Caribbean diasporic women's writing on the one side and multicultural politics, the consumer, and market demands on the other side? Both Machado Sáez (2015) and McGurl (2009) detect an intimate relation constructed between text and reader as consumer. McGurl speaks about "an intensely personal relation to literary value" (16), while Machado Sáez contends that intimacy functions "as an accessible commodity that is part and parcel of the reading experience" (5). Here, I would argue that the coming-of-age genre works particularly well especially in the ways it directs, maybe even manipulates readers' sympathy (see chapter 6).

Ethnic minority literatures, like Caribbean writing in Canada and the United States, are politicized, also in economic terms, in a way other, non-ethnic or ethnically 'unmarked' (white), U.S. American or Canadian literature is usually not. These literatures are more often than not read and measured against the ways ethnicity, identity, and multicultural politics are represented, 'applied,' and eventually categorizable and marketable. Authors, like Zadie Smith and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie point out the pressure of representation and being looked at as cultural translator of their respective communities – or even continent (as is the case for Adichie) – which limits the range of topics to engage with as well as the aesthetic choices made by the writer (cf. chapter 1). "The high cultural pluralist writer is additionally called upon to speak from the point of view of one or another hyphenated population, synthesizing the particularity of the ethnic – or analogously marked – voice with the elevated idiom of literary modernism" (McGurl 2009: 57). When talking about the political of the literature of Caribbean diasporic fiction, we need to address the politics of the

tent – Caribbean subjectivity and experience – is communicated in a style that is the product of that subjectivity and that experience" (Fulani 2005: 69-70). Anancy the spider is a trickster figure in African diaspora folk tradition, characterized by its wit, intelligence, and transgression. By employing this shape-shifting figure, Fulani refers to the African diaspora but also the Caribbean context of colonial history and domination that Caribbean writing maybe out of necessity needs to engage with and has thus developed a resistant attitude.

literary field, the publishing industry but also the (academic) background and demands of the readership. This influences the choices writers make in terms of content and style.

What is the function of Caribbean diasporic writing at the intersection of multiculturalism and globalization? How do the publishing market, reading public, and writer engage with each other? Machado Sáez' *Market Aesthetics* is illuminating on the political dimension of the specificities of Caribbean diaspora literature with regard to the specific conditions and marketing mechanisms of the literary field it is situated in. Genre choices, too, intersect with the demands of the literary market. Machado Sáez finds that "the global English book market and its commodification of ethnicity produce writerly anxieties about reader reception, and these concerns are encoded in the novel's form and content" (2015: 1).⁴⁰⁰ Fulani's *politics of style* resonates with a *market aesthetics* suggested by Machado Sáez for whom Caribbean historical fiction functions as a "form of capital circulating in a global market" (ibid.). From this standpoint, she investigates the role of the diaspora writer and the responsibility attached to a global position(ality) which goes hand in hand with a pedagogical agenda the writer has and her assumed role as ethnic or cultural informant or representative.

The pedagogical impulse and ethical imperative of diasporic fiction, in part, are a response to the demands of a literary market that is influenced by the academic sphere (to which the writer often belongs) and readership as well as university curricula (by, for instance, gender, queer, or postcolonial studies) and, according to McGurl, university creative writing programs. Perceiving of literary fiction as consumer good that circulates globally, as Machado Sáez does (drawing as well from the works by Simon Gikandi and Arjun Appadurai), the danger lies in the delocalization and decontextualization of that good. At this point, the political task of the writer and political value of the work intersect with the pedagogical strategies to "convey historical context to the reader" (Machado Sáez 2015: 20) executed by the writer and implemented in her work: "Caribbean diasporic writers see the dehistoricized condition of the contemporary public sphere as providing a gap of context that they are positioned to fill in. [...] The pedagogical tool of historical fiction aims to teach readers to see evidence of the Caribbean's centrality to the formation of American, Canadian, and European politics and culture" (ibid.). The coming-of-age novel achieves a similar goal. And the political lies exactly in this "postcolonial ethical impera-

400 Machado Sáez suggests a similar sociological approach to literature as does McGurl in *The Program Era* (2009). Her specific focus on Caribbean diasporic historical fiction, however, is better suited for my study and the selected corpus.

tive as encouraging the reader to think critically about the intersections of empire, migration, and globalization” (ibid.: 27-28). And here I wish to add that a focus on body politics as suggested by the Caribbean diasporic coming-of-age novel, likewise, critically brings into view the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship.⁴⁰¹

The label of *Caribbean diasporic* describes, takes into consideration, and acknowledges the historical context of migration and deterritorialization as well as the material history and colonial continuity of inequality, of discrimination and racism. Urgent political questions that will continue to be addressed by women writers of the Caribbean diaspora are those that pertain to gender, racial, and sexual issues; these are also those political issues that, following Machado Sáez, relate to the “workings of globalization, addressing the fragmentation of identity, the decentering of nationalist discourses, the hybridization of culture, and the interconnectedness of global economies” (2015: 14).

We may thus contend that transnational movements and transcultural exchange in our globalized world have engendered transgressions and transformations of the intersectional patterns of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and so forth. These are aestheticized, negotiated, and ultimately redefined in particular in literature, arts, and popular culture. The body as a multidimensional site for the construction of society as well as bodily norms and beauty ideals which are basically socio-culturally constructed are taken up by artists who make use of the body as resisting matter and as medium of resistance. They thereby disclose how certain bodies have been made sites of oppression through heteropatriarchal and neocolonial hegemonies. The bodies written in these texts function as social, cultural, as well as historical document of these mechanisms of power, exclusion, and denial, offering simultaneously a powerful imaginary on political discourses of our time.

401 Mimi Sheller introduces the term erotic agency in reference to the intersection of body, sexuality, and citizenship in the postcolonial contexts of Jamaica and Haiti. Erotic agency describes how “freedom is exercised and enacted as a complex set of embodied relations in diverse contexts of activation – bodies not simply marked by race, sex, and class [...], but active inter-embodiments that bring different bodies to the social (and political) surface through their intimate relations to each other in both private and public encounters” (2012: 17).

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The coming-of-age novel continues to be an important genre for depicting the interrelation of body, subject, and society. Women writers of the Caribbean diaspora return to this genre to describe lived experience and both social inclusion and exclusion, that either support or inhibit personal development within seemingly predetermined power structures. This study investigates and defines the Caribbean-diasporic coming-of-age novels which aim to decolonize the genre of the Bildungsroman. It offers a comparative perspective on the novels written by Angie Cruz, Edwidge Danticat, Ramabai Espinet, and Makeda Silvera, who write about adolescent, maternal, homoerotic, unruly, violated, and rebellious bodies. Close reading focuses on the fictional representations and discourses of hegemonic and subversive body politics under postcolonial and migrant conditions. The book shows how feminist, political writing makes marginalized bodies, identities, and histories visible.

ISBN 978-3-948083-06-9

