

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).

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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 *dyaspora*. (Danticat 2001b: xiv)²⁶⁸

Home may thus be unstable and ever changing: In the case of the Haitian *dyaspora* (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 *Dyaspora* 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 Lables 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 Bousson 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” (Bousson 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 'lougarous' 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 *lòt bòdlo*, 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 *Lòt bòdlo* 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.

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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.