

KENBE FEM:
HAITIAN WOMEN'S MIGRATION NARRATIVES AND SPACES OF FREEDOM IN AN
ANTI-IMMIGRANT AMERICA

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 2019

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“Kenbe Fem: Haitian Women’s Migration Narratives and Spaces of Freedom in an Anti-Immigrant America” is a study of the impact of forced exodus from Haiti and experiences of anti-Black racism in migration for Haitian women and girls as expressed in narratives of Haitian women writers. This study demonstrates that writing about coming of age during migratory processes is a genre of literature that captures the diaspora experience and offers a significant way of understanding the nature of women’s migration experiences.

Throughout this work, I use trends, experiences, and themes explored in the texts written by Edwidge Danticat, Roxane Gay, Elsie Augustave, and Ibi Zoboi to deliberate on both the politics of travel for black women and the generative spaces that provide for identity formation, political consciousness-raising, and reimagining of one’s place in the world. I introduce a concept of *dyaspora saudade*—combining the Brazilian notion of “*saudade*” with the Haitian conceptualization of “*dyaspora*.” *Dyaspora saudade* is that which also nurtures and provides similarly generative spaces where home is lost, found, contested, and restructured and healing is as much a journey as it is the goal. Lastly, I uncover the politics in these works, conceptualize

Black feminist citizenship, and offer foundations on which to imagine better experiences for both marginalized migrants and citizens.

This dissertation is an understanding of the revolutionary potential of these texts that involves a foundational shift in conceptions of race, womanhood, class, cosmology, and nationhood that immigration due to forced exodus catalyzes. It is an exploration of the science of this literary revolution—a revolution that interpolates Black women authors publishing in diaspora speaking for, against, and through their kindred. The goal of this literary revolution is to affect change. If struggle brings forth the best of human existence, then the stories of Black immigrant women are masterpieces in their exploration of human social issues that are prominent in contemporary societies worldwide. In my work, I endeavor to comprehend, complicate, catalog, and translate their genius.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Marsha Bianca Jean-Charles is a Haitian-American junior scholar interested in transnational literary studies of black women's bildungsroman and immigration novels. She endeavors to research the cosmologies and revolutionary politics aroused from forced migration and statelessness.

A Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow, her undergraduate thesis, titled "Of Griottes & Pantomimes," is a work elucidating the place of Black feminisms in the novels of Edwidge Danticat. In her Master's thesis, titled "Embodying Goddesses: Edwidge Danticat's Literary Revolution," she mixes historical narratives and two of Edwidge Danticat's short stories to include the voices of revolutionary women in Haiti's war for independence.

An organizer at her core, she fuses her academic work with her activist work and expands understandings of the uses of literary and performance art as tools for activism.

B.A., Wesleyan University (2011)

M.A., Columbia University (2014)

Dedicated to all the warrior women I know, both in and out of words

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In writing this, I realize how truly blessed I am to have a village that sees both me and in me what the world tried to bury time and again. From the very nascency of my scholarly career, I have been nurtured and supported as both thinker and dreamer by varied people—most especially Black women. Thank you to all along the way who cared to inspire, invest, and push me to go further than I ever before imagined.

In truth, the seeds of this dissertation began when I picked up *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) in high school. The idea grew roots, however, in my undergraduate thesis written under the tutelage and socio-emotional guidance of Dr. Gina Athena Ulysse. Drowning in a sea of anti-Haitian media coverage of the 2010 earthquake, Dr. Ulysse reminded me of why I became an African-American Studies major and shared with me the world of the Haitian Studies Association—one of the first academic places where I felt seen and cared for by scholars like Dr. Régine Michelle Jean-Charles. Thank you to the both of you, sincerely, for the examples you set and the paths you dared me to pave. Thank you too to Dr. Krishna Winston and Dr. Renée Johnson-Thornton who curated and guided my Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship experience.

The pursuit of this field of inquiry gained traction and vigor during my time at Columbia University while pursuing my Master's degree at what was then the Institute for Research in African American Studies (IRAAS) and is now the African American and African Diaspora Studies Department. I am immensely grateful and forever indebted to Dr. Farah Jasmine Griffin, the late Dr. Marcellus Blount, Shawn D.

Mendoza, and Sharon Harris for *all* you helped me overcome and the ways you showed me how to thrive in spite of facing difficulties—without you I most certainly would not have continued to pursue a doctoral degree. Thank you, Dr. Griffin, for your guidance, mentorship, and for all the ways you have bettered my work, even before you ever met me. *“Who Set You Flowin’?”: The African-American Migration Narrative* lit a spark in my mind and catalyzed my work in theorizing Haitian diasporic migration narratives. Thank you for also being a guiding light and showing me another life was possible if I willed and worked at it.

Doctoral programs are, by nature, life-changing. Without Dr. Carole Boyce Davies, the change would have most certainly been to my detriment. Thank you for the opportunities you created for me, the edits and recommendations you crafted, and the ways you reminded me that I could be all of who I am, unapologetically. The example you set, the fire in me that you stoked even on my worst of days, are both what compelled me to continue past many trials and tribulations. *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* grounded my work with its brilliance and made me better understand theorization of migratory subjectivities within, and resistance evinced in Black women’s writings. Dr. N’Dri Assié-Lumumba’s work on women, gender, and education clarified my endeavor to comprehend the dialogic and didactic potential of Black women’s literature. Dr. Margo Crawford’s and Dr. Naminata Diabate’s courses offered me space to begin conceptualizing the beginnings of my dissertation. Dr. Boyce Davies, alongside Dr. Assié-Lumumba, Dr. Crawford, Dr. Diabate, and Dr. Riché Richardson continued the legacy that IRAAS set and buoyed me through some terribly tumultuous seas.

Thank you too to all of the women, writers, activists, and scholars who were all pieces of the puzzle that became Black feminist citizenship. Thank you preeminently to the varied people who used their courses to shape and evolve my thinking. I have named a number of you already and wish to also include Dr. Patricia G. Lespinasse and Dr. Danielle Terrazas Williams—you along with other educators opened up for me *worlds* of thinking and scholarship that genuinely made my heart smile and my soul weep with the realization that there was a world out there worth fighting alongside.

Lastly, I wish to express extreme gratitude to my family—blood and chosen. From all the beloved beings I met along the way and who intermittently jumped in with words of encouragement or hope, to the very ones I share most of my days with, I am because we are and without you, I would have long given up. To my crew: Gelihsa Arjoon, Arnoldys Stengel, Njeri Parker, Sara Haile, and Jaynice del Rosario, only the moon and the sun can speak of all the ways you have aided me in continuing to pursue this Ph.D. dream for over a decade now. From helping me find time to write and still live to sending messages here and there to encourage me to push past obstacles, you have all helped me stay motivated in innumerable ways. To the staff and members of The Brotherhood/Sister Sol, especially Cidra M. Sebastien, Khary Lazarre-White, Jason Warwin, Simone Gamble, and Joshua Leach, thank you for always being there to listen, line-edit, center, support, love, and guide me. Principally to my mom and sister Lia Jean-Charles and Norly Jean-Charles, and to many in my family: Everton Lamarre, Ardeyne Delva, Saradya Jolivert, Emmanuelle Vielot, Beatrice Saintil, Borelle Saint-Aubain, Ersilia Rejouis, Zyir Delva-Allen, Isabelle Harmon, Rosemary

López, Steven López, and Steve López—words cannot begin to express how much you have done to make sure I stayed earthside, remembered my magic, and find strength in a love so big it moved mountains. To my husband Michael Velarde and our family, thank you for loving me atomically, inspiring me molecularly, and reminding me regularly of my power exponentially—especially when I needed it most, which was seemingly every day toward the end. To all of you, your wisdom, exemplary perseverance, brilliance, grace, fortitude, and love make me better with every second you are in my life. Thank you for being and, in so doing, showing me this world is also unimaginably beautiful and revolution the only way to make it so forever.

Seeds we are, they say; together we sow, nurture, and grow the world we all deserve.

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A HAITIAN AMERICAN PREAMBLE:

LITERARY REVOLUTIONS, LAWS, AND LIBERATION

There is revolution brewing in the diasporic Black literary world—one that affirms and reconfigures women’s agency and power; problematizes hegemonic social structures; and politicizes love. I aspire to configure a dialogue regarding the fictional literary representations and radical grassroots politics of Black migrant women so as to account for this revolution.

In reviewing contemporary coming of age novels about migration, the main question I answer is: in which ways do protagonists’ understandings of self in relation to the world authored within these texts politicize the protagonists and help them both imagine and form new counterhegemonic ways of being?

To address this main research question, I negotiate the processes of conscientization, autopoiesis, self-fashioning, and freedom-making with which the protagonists engage so as to counter historical erasure and systemic oppression while also offering different understandings of the future. I develop this idea and cognize the ways fiction that employs the gendered and racialized experiences of Black migrant women and coming of age in metropolises and empires also engages with what I am calling Black feminist citizenship.

I examine the works of women fiction writers with ties to Haiti who incorporate literary representations of the radical tendencies of Black migrant women and the ways they contest statelessness and promote transnational Black unity. I put Haitian¹ women writers Elsie Augustave, Edwidge Danticat, Roxane Gay, and Ibi Zoboi in conversation. Significantly, this is predominantly a study of their works

¹ Throughout this work I use the word Haitian to signify women of Haitian descent. It is not meant to deny their American-ness, nor to belie their living away from the country. It is done because many of the women identify as either Haitian and/or Haitian-American. There is always friction in using such a term, but I aim to represent from where they hail.

published between 2010 and 2017—after the catastrophic Haitian earthquake and amidst the mass deportation of immigrants from the United States. Using a transnational, multilingual literary study of Black women’s bildungsroman and immigration novels and short stories, I analyze the writers’ use of corporeal memory, the epigenetics of trauma and metaphor; political critique and cosmological grounding; metafiction, ethnography, and the noir genre. Additionally, I discuss the writer’s exploration of *dyaspora*—Haitian diaspora—migrant history, and lessons learned in migration to catalog the experience of Haitian girls and women in diaspora.

To discuss this diaspora, I will use both “diaspora” and “*dyaspora*.” According to Nadège Clitandre, “Haitians born or raised outside of the geographical boundaries of the Haitian nation would embrace and creolize this term as *Dyaspora* or *djaspora* to invoke a collective identity that is neither here or there, this or that, but an identity that disrupts nationality fixed in time and space” (“Haiti Re-membered” 85). *Dyaspora* means Haitians living abroad, again, in diaspora. “But in both Haiti and in the U.S.,” Clitandre continues, “where the term is widely used, *Dyaspora* is a marker of difference between Haitians living in Haiti (*moun peyi*) and those living abroad (*moun andeyo*). In Haiti, it can be used as a pejorative expression to alienate Haitians no longer living in their native land” (“Haiti Re-membered” 85)². *Dyaspora*, though, is more dynamic on this side of the water. Clitandre writes:

² See, for example, François Pierre-Louis’ *Haitians in New York City: Transnationalism and Hometown Associations* published in 2002 by the University Press of Florida.

In the United States, Dyaspora is a productive space to assert a syncretic identity formed out of the experience of physical displacement and distance from Haiti. Dyaspora is also the liberatory space that questions traditional perceptions of Haitian identity that marginalizes Haitians along class lines and challenges certain cultural traditions that are used as tools of oppression. Haitians in the United States claim this position also to articulate the many issues they face collectively as a marginalized group in the United States. (“Haiti Remembered” 85)

Dyaspora is the creolized term for diaspora used interchangeably herein. Used both in Haiti and in her *dyaspora*, I reclaim it as indicated and use it to discuss the radical possibilities of the texts I study.

The revolutionary potential of these texts involves a foundational shift in conceptions of race, womanhood, class, cosmology, and nationhood that immigration due to forced exodus catalyzes. I author a means of comprehending the science of this literary revolution that interpolates Black women authors publishing in diaspora speaking for, against, and through their kindred and toward the goal of affecting change.

Haiti, America, and Immigration

Haiti is as essential to understanding the United States of America as the United States of America is to understanding Haiti. As the first Black republic in the Western

Hemisphere, Blackness, as defined in the United States, has always had as its backdrop the Blackness that is Haiti. In fact, most countries in the Western Hemisphere have defined their democracy, and subsequently the freedoms it disallowed their enslaved populations, in hopes of creating something that would never allow itself to become yet another Haiti. Historian David Geggus states:

For slave owners, the Haitian Revolution must have seemed like the realization of their worst nightmare...As the revolution went from strength to strength, planters across the Americas worried how their slaves would react. On occasion, they feared direct intervention from Haiti, or voiced concern that their own society might become 'another St. Domingo'. (*The Impact of the Haitian Revolution* xi)

Haiti and her revolution struck fear in the hearts of wealthy slaveowners. The two also catalyzed change throughout the region. Geggus continues:

From Philadelphia to Rio de Janeiro, from the imagination of poets to the world commodity markets, the violent birth of Haiti caused a variety of repercussions. Accounts of apocalyptic destruction and of a new world in the making were a source of alarm and inspiration for slaves, slaveowners, and many others. Great power politics, slave resistance, movements of migration, and attitudes to race and the future of slavery were all affected. (*The Impact of the Haitian Revolution* xvi)

Haiti in actuality and in imaginary was and is a force to be reckoned with, and therefore, an entity to be restricted, oppressed, and denigrated—both then and now.

To understand Blackness in a time of highly publicized anti-Blackness is vital. Furthermore, to understand the xenophobia that dominates immigration policy in the United States, one must look at the narratives of a people whose very being provokes fear and who, as a result of that fear, are further subjugated. It is equally essential to understand immigration as also necessarily a Black issue.

American immigration policy criminalizes immigrants. One of the main criminalized immigrant groups is Haitian people. In *Diaspora: An Introduction*, Jana Evans Braziel notes that racist attitudes towards Haitians shaped US policies directed at Haitian refugees under the Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations. Citing Braziel and expanding on the point, Clitandre offers that the status of Haitian peoples

as “liminal citizens” raised questions about Haitian citizenship and the Haitian nation-state as well as immigration laws and border control policies in the U.S. At the same time, Haitians in the diaspora were defined by the Haitian government in the late 1980s under General Henri Namphy as external to the nation. The Haitian diaspora became an inclusionary exclusion by the Haitian government, while the US developed policies that turned the Haitian diaspora into an exclusionary inclusion in the US body politic. (“Haiti Re-membered” 64)

Liminal citizens in both contexts, Haitians were further jeopardized by the American crimmigration system. A concept that defines this policy of criminalization and immigration, crimmigration is a term coined by César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández.

In “Creating Crimmigration,” César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández brings

together the intersections of criminal and immigration law. Given the changes in the 1996 immigration and terrorism laws in the United States, the policing and criminalization of immigrants have since skyrocketed. In 1996, under President Clinton (1993-2001), two laws came into being: the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA). As per the graphic produced by the Immigrant Justice Network, and included in Appendix 1 of this study, both now result in the mass incarceration and deportation of immigrants because they redefined aggravated felony to include a *long* list of low-level offenses for which immigrants may be detained and deported; eliminated many legal defenses against deportation; set up mandatory and prolonged detention stipulations; created new fast-track deportation procedures; and further involved local law enforcement in deportation processes.

Ironically, it is President Obama (2009-2017)—son of a white American mother and a Black Kenyan father who emigrated to the United States to further his studies—who was the president who deported the most immigrants under the 1996 laws. He is second to George W. Bush (2001-2009) who implemented these laws similarly. According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) “Barack Obama was famously labeled ‘deporter in chief’ by critics in the immigrant-rights community, even as enforcement-first advocates accused his administration of being soft on unauthorized immigrants” (Chishti). Moreover, according to the MPI,

[c]arefully calibrated revisions to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) immigration enforcement priorities and practices achieved two goals: Increasing penalties against unauthorized border crossers by

putting far larger shares into formal removal proceedings rather than voluntarily returning them across the border, as had been longstanding practice; and making noncitizens with criminal records the top enforcement target. While there were fewer removals and returns under the Obama administration than each of the two prior administrations, those declines must be understood against the backdrop of a significant reduction in border apprehensions that resulted from a sharp decrease in unauthorized inflows, in particular of Mexicans. Analysts have attributed this trend, which began under the Bush administration, to improved economic conditions in Mexico, reduced postrecession job demand in the United States, ramped-up enforcement, and the increased use of different enforcement tactics at the border.

The enforcement priorities and policies, which evolved over the years, represented a significant departure from those of the Bush and Clinton administrations...the Obama-era policies represented the culmination of a gradual but consistent effort to narrow its enforcement focus to two key groups: the deportation of criminals and recent unauthorized border crossers. (Chishti)

The American immigration policy criminalizes immigrants—most especially immigrants of color. While these policies appear targeted, paired with over-policing in low-income communities, they led to the deportation of many immigrants of color.

After the 2016 elections, the immigrant justice organizing community expected that these laws would only be fortified with new executive orders and legislation.

When the 45th president, Donald Trump, assumed office, various Executive Orders (EO) made it clear that his intentions were detrimental to immigrant communities and, more broadly, marginalized communities. Trump, elected into office in 2016, has since signed mandates that further militarizes the southern border (EO 13767); bans people from predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States (EO 13769); separates adults and minors in the same families before detaining them at length in deplorable conditions (EO 13841); and more. These paired with his advancement of a “zero-tolerance” policy regarding people of differing legal statuses primes marginalized immigrants for detention and deportation by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). His refusal to renew Temporary Protected Status reliefs for people of predominantly Black and Latinx countries; his purported attempts to eliminate birthright citizenship; and his regularized denigration of immigrants along the campaign trail *all* make it clear that Black and Latinx immigrants are not welcomed by the American government. Said intentions were further clarified when the 45th president refused to pass legislation that did not include appropriations for a border wall; this action that led to the longest government shutdown in the history of the United States of America.

The legislation authored over two decades ago, now matched with contemporary, divisive, and inhumane executive orders makes the lives of all non-citizens and their families more difficult and anxiety-ridden. These combined also result in the further criminalization of immigrants in the United States. While the 45th president’s language indicates that Mexicans are the primary target, there is continued criminalization of Haitian peoples who, along with Mexicans, are seen in the United

States as problem immigrants for which detention and deportation is imperative. A continuing anti-Haitian climate looms in the shadows of heightening crimmigration³ with threatened deportation as a constant.

Haitian peoples have experienced much xenophobia that results in anti-Haitianism. Though anti-Haitianism is a term particular to the conflicts between both countries on Hispaniola—a term popularized given anti-Haitian sentiment and policies in the Dominican Republic—it is an expression that appropriately describes generalizable, state-sponsored sentiment about Haiti since 1804. Since the era of the revolution and beyond, countries in fear of becoming another Haiti—a country run by Black *and* economically marginalized peoples—have sought to use Haiti and Haitian peoples as examples of why colonial rule, white supremacy—and later imperialism—are the only *correct* ways to statehood and global power (“Between Anti-Haitianism and Anti-Imperialism” 56).

From 1804-2017—as a result of anti-Haitianism, white supremacy, imperialism, capitalism, and more—Haiti has never truly been free. Debt, occupation, dictatorship, and imperialism have been Haiti’s primary prisoners. Since the successful Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), European powers and principally the United States have sought to tear at the seams holding Haiti together. From 1825-1910, Haiti struggled to pay France for her revolution. Owing 150 million dollars, a staggering amount of money at the time, Haiti was forced to borrow from banks in France, other European countries, and the United States of America in order to pay the indemnity and therefore be recognized as a free nation (Obregón 614). This

³ It is important to note that there is not a lot of literature to date on these issues; much of what exists comes out of grassroots organizing, immigrant justice/rights legal work, and journalism.

systematized racial capitalism and coerced debt payment were of France and United States' first betrayals of Haiti. Second was occupying Haiti on various occasions and in so doing creating further instability. The United States Military Intervention from 1915-1934 occurred very quickly after the indemnity payments were complete and lasted for the duration of the Banana Wars (Charles 145). A "thirty-year dictatorship" followed the occupation, which was then followed by long-term United Nations missions. The dictatorships were the last coup of the betrayal. Two dictatorships occupied Haiti beginning soon after the United States military occupation; Haiti was therefore not only subjugated to imperial militaristic intervention but also to violent, devastating governance and rule. Haiti's most notorious dictators held power from 1939-1986, and the names of the father—son duo were President François Duvalier (1939-1971) and then President Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971-1986)—both financially, militaristically, and politically supported by the United States Government (Girard 435). Eight years later, in 1994, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 940: "Operation Uphold Democracy" occurred until 1995 (Benton and Ware 13; "Security Council Resolution 2147") and was offered as an attempt to support President Jean-Bertrand Aristide who was later ousted in 2004 when UNSCR 1529 authorized occupation again in an intervention that became known as "Operation Secure Tomorrow" ("Security Council authorizes deployment"; Crain 34). This operation then led to UNSCR 1542: the long-lasting United Nations Stabilizing Mission in Haiti otherwise known as MINUSTAH that only ended in 2017 (Crain 36; "UNSCR Search Engine"). With this MINUSTAH operation came numerous viral outbreaks, many human rights violations, and further destabilization of the heretofore

ill-expressed democracy. The United States has physically been an imperial force in Haiti for decades if not centuries. Haitians liberated Haiti in 1804, but as a result of indemnity payments, occupations, dictatorships, and imperialism Haiti has never actually been free.

Haitian migrants, however, are rarely welcomed elsewhere. In the United States as well as in other countries throughout the Caribbean and Latin America, Haitian migrants often encounter anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and anti-Vodou sentiment that often furthers rampant anti-Haitianism.

In the context of the Dominican Republic, where the term was popularized, nationalist, state, and socio-political entities convey the varied levels of anti-Haitian sentiment. According to Human Rights Watch, “[r]acial prejudice in the Dominican Republic runs deep. With independence, Dominican nationalists began constructing a separate Dominican identity, one that was defined in large part in solidarity against the perceived Haitian threat. Labeling themselves ‘Hispanic’ and Haitians ‘Black,’ a distinction motivated by and rooted in racial prejudice that ignores their country’s racial diversity, Dominican nationalists tried to emphasize their racial and cultural distance from Haiti” (“Illegal People”; Sagas 36). Dominican nationalists, then, encouraged white European immigrants in an effort to “improve” the Dominican bloodline (Sagas 38) while also drafting white supremacist, anti-Haitian immigration legislation by way of Law 5002 of July 18, 1911, which stated that “[a]gricultural companies are forbidden from importing for their labor needs immigrants who do not belong to the white race” (“Illegal People”).

Genocide, denial of citizenship, and deportation came to match the nationalist

and legal sentiment. The historical antagonism that had waned by the dawn of the new century was soon replaced by an anti-Haitianism fabricated for political purposes by General Rafael Trujillo, the Dominican dictator who assumed power in 1930. Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic with an iron hand until his assassination in 1961. The large Haitian population in the border area, brought into the country to work on the Dominican sugar plantations during the American occupations of Haiti (1914-34) and the Dominican Republic (1915-25), was both the instrument and victim of Trujillo's politics (Gavigan).

Wishing to remove the Haitians living within the Dominican Republic's borders General Rafael Trujillo was unable to do so because the United States was in Haiti until 1934 and they opposed the loss of cheap labor for the American sugar plantations. Trujillo, instead, later “carried out that policy in a horribly brutal fashion after the American exodus, ordering the massacre of all Haitians found outside the sugar plantations in October 1937. The number of Haitians killed has always been in dispute, but estimates range from 5,000 to 37,000” (Gavigan). Both during the genocidal massacre and thereafter, Trujillo

fed the Dominican population a steady diet of anti-Haitian propaganda, relying on the schools and the media to disseminate these ideas. Proclaiming himself the defender of the country's identity, he planted the seeds for stereotypes about Haitians that persist today in everyday Dominican discourse. Even now, expressions of anti-Haitian sentiment are common at all levels of society. The influx of Haitian migrants, a popular target of resentment, is frequently characterized as a threat to

national sovereignty. (“Illegal People”)

The criminalization of Haitian migrants is framed as protection of the Dominican nation. Anti-Haitianism and anti-Blackness, however, further collide.

Anti-Blackness in the Dominican Republic is cloaked as anti-Haitianism. Besides discriminating against Haitian citizens,

many Dominicans assume that all black people are Haitian, or have Haitian blood, which is regarded with equal resentment. It is also frequently believed that all workers on sugar cane plantations and all residents of bateyes are Haitian, although the labor pool in the sugar industry and the population in the bateyes is ethnically diverse, including second- and third- generation Dominico-Haitians [Dominicans of Haitian descent] and even Dominicans without Haitian ancestors...Despite the country’s glaring legacy of racism, the Dominican government has stubbornly refused to acknowledge the problem. (“Illegal People”)

Contemporaneously, we see the 2013 revocation of citizenship of Dominicans of Haitian descent during which time the realities of Dominico-Haitians became markedly worse after the “Dominican Constitutional Court Judgement TC/0168/13 that retroactively stripped thousands of people of their Dominican nationality. As a result, the 2013 ruling rendered this population stateless...leaving them unable to access higher education, health care, formal employment or justice” (“Dominico-Haitians”). Since then and most recently, and unfortunately, we now also witness the Haitian Migrant Crisis as a result of the issues Haitian migrants face.

In the United States specifically, the anti-immigrant tactics are virtually the same: exploit, denigrate, criminalize, deny citizenship, deport. Regarding anti-Haitianism specifically, the retorts about the woes of Haiti when an environmental disaster hits the country are endless (Brodwin 45). Equally matched is the refrain of Haiti being “the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere” in a majority of journalistic reports whenever American reporters discuss Haiti (*Why Haiti Needs New Narratives* 55). The migration climate for many Haitians, as a result, is difficult at best. Furthermore, the stories are numerous of people in the Haitian diaspora being lost at sea and drowning, summarily detained and criminalized, and/or separated for decades from loved ones.

In 2019, when the political left attempts to address the needs of Black and Latinx peoples, immigrants, women, and more, the voices of Haitian migrants become all the more critical. Also crucial to the contemporary moment are the facts that: the “wet foot/dry foot policy” that separated Cuban migrants from Haitian and other Caribbean migrants had been disbanded⁴ given the opening of relations between the United States and Cuba; the Haitian “boat people” crisis of the 1990s has now evolved into the Haitian “migrant crisis” in the American Southwest; and the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) of Haitian people—a status given to them *because* of the massive earthquake in 2010—is set to expire in July 2019 along with the expiration of

⁴ Given efforts to normalize relations with Cuba, President Obama ended the expedited process to regularizing legal status in the United States that Cuban nationals had *if* they arrived on American soil as opposed to being found in international waters (Perez 5). This policy was itself a shift during President Clinton’s terms from an “open door policy” given historic attempts of the United States government to quell Communism in the region. This same reasoning is what supported the United States government to itself support right-wing governments and dictatorships throughout the Americas, like that of the Duvalier regime.

TPS for various other countries in Central America, Asia, and Africa (Dubuisson and Schuller 2017; Brantuo 2017).

Crimmigration matched with anti-Haitianism stemming from fears of becoming another Haiti after the revolution in 1804 to generalized fears of Black people now allows fertile ground for understanding the many issues migrants face in general. Still, we must look through an intersectional lens, as legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw argues, so as not to erase “Black women in the conceptualization, identification, and remediation of race and sex discrimination by limiting inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group” (“Demarginalizing” 140). In this way, we can better comprehend how to radically shift the world to adhere to the needs of the marginalized in hopes of bettering the lives of all. This is my goal in centering the words, voices, and experiences of Black and Haitian migrant women and girls.

On Theory, Law, and Literature

Toward this aim, my research questions also include: in what ways do the protagonists’ understandings of the ways of the world affect their beings within this world? What are the stories of Black women’s transnational migration in and from Haiti? What do these women carry with them on the journey and what do they leave behind? What do their fictional representations offer to the larger stories of contemporary Black migration that are not being discussed? What do the texts offer to women themselves? How does this support a politic of change and what does this change involve? What kinds of communities do these women build to counter-

hegemony? What can this ethos of change and these various community structures teach the world?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of forced exodus, migration, anti-Black racism, male supremacy and misogynoir,⁵ American imperialism, and crimmigration on Haitian women and girls as expressed in migration narratives of Haitian women writers. I also examine the ways that literature about coming of age in migration is also a genre of literature that captures the *dyaspora* experience. In the end, I want to explain the use of literary art as a tool for activism as I sincerely believe that the socio-political epistemologies and the ways the protagonists come to understand themselves in these novels may help shed light on innovative social justice activist/organizing strategies.

The scope of my work involves explicitly studying the novels, short stories, and essays of four Haitian women authors written predominantly between 2010 and 2017. I focus on the works of Elsie Augustave, Edwidge Danticat, Roxane Gay, and Ibi Zoboi to analyze works published in this time frame—a moment that was after the catastrophic Haitian earthquake and amidst the mass deportation of immigrants from the United States. I counterbalance the texts with socio-political histories and critiques, author interviews, book reviews, and select socio-cultural ethnography. While predominantly a textual analysis, this is also a socio-political and cultural analysis. Moreover, I interpret the texts and interrogate the tenets of the women-

⁵ A term coined by queer Black feminist Moya Bailey of the Crunk Feminist Collective, refers to that which occurs when white supremacy, male supremacy, anti-Black violence, and misogyny collide

centered spaces within them in order to theorize about principles formulated within Black feminist citizenship and *dyaspora saudade*.

My study significantly surveys and names the genre of migration narratives in Haitian women's novels and also expands the framework set to study this very genre of migration in African-American and Caribbean contexts. Many theorists have used literary and visual culture so as to theorize both diaspora and migration. My study is in conversation with their works as well as the works of these artists themselves. Using the logic of migratory flow in literature set up in Carole Boyce Davies' *Black Women Writing and Identity: Migrations on the Subject* (1994) and Farah Griffin's *Who Set You Flowin'?: African American Migration Narratives* (1996), I revisit and revise these frames and negotiate how they pertain to contemporary Black women's coming of age transnational migration novels.

Three groups of theoretical work inform my study. My project exists at the intersection of Black Feminist Theory, African Diaspora Theory, Haitian Migration Studies, and Crimmigration work. It necessarily exists in relation to prior scholarship on studies of women writing about migration. These include *Migrations on the Subject* (1994), "*Who Set You Flowin'?*" (1996), and *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (1997). *Migrations on the Subject* lays the foundation for understanding Black women's identity, location, and representation as mobile. "*Who Set You Flowin'?*" sets a framework for understanding contemporary texts of global and gendered migration. Furthermore, I expand the study to reflect Haitian experiences in an age of mass deportation.

Framing Black women's writing as boundary crossing, Boyce Davies'

Migrations of the Subject: Black Women Writing and Identity offers a place to theorize migratory subjectivity. Through it, I gained vision and vocabulary for articulating the reasons for my study. The interspersed anecdotes labeled “Migration Horror Stories” clarified how one could counterbalance literature with theory and intermingled narratives from one’s community. Boyce Davies articulates that the purpose for the horror story series within the introduction is to deliberately attempt to “break through the tiredness, fake linearity and posturing of academic discourse” (*Migrations of the Subject* 3). In my study, I have included the quotes of various women of color regarding the importance of Black women's writings. I offer as equally important to my own words and the words of other scholars evidence from youth with whom I work, as well as the words of mentors and family members in each chapter’s epigraph. I contend that the works of Black women writers, and other works of marginalized people, both hold value to academia and the literary world *and* to readers who are “simply” looking to see themselves in what they read and have their experiences written and rendered valuable. This idea is in line with Patricia Hill Collins’ criterion of meaning discussed later in this study.

Boyce Davies offers a substantive foundation on which to theorize literature. Writing of the inability to capture and understand identities fully, Boyce Davies states

Cultural theorizing is often done by those with the power to disseminate, generally male scholars (more recently white women and Black men). Because of heterosexism and male dominance, the language and concepts of male scholars gain easy currency. The ways in which Black women/women of color theorize themselves often

remains outside of the boundaries of academic context, or elsewhere.

(Migrations of the Subject 18)

Doing a literary study is my way of balancing the archive. Women are theorizing in diverse spaces, including the literary arts. Their works, then, offer generative socio-political narratives with which to envision new worlds and radical possibilities.

One such profound and innovative possibility includes migratory subjectivities. Re-connecting and re-membering are central to this study and the works herein. Boyce Davies' *Migrations of the Subject* illuminates the importance of the re-connecting and re-membering when she writes

Black women's writing...should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing. In cross-cultural, trans-national, translocal, diasporic perspectives, this reworking of the grounds of 'Black Women's Writing' redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality. Black women's writing/existence, marginalized in terms of majority-minority discourses, within the Euro-American male or female canon or Black male canon...redefines its identity as it re-connects and re-members, brings together black women dis-located by space and time. *(Migrations of the Subject 4)*

The authors whose works I study have varied identities—Caribbean identities—after all, are “products of numerous processes of migration” *(Migrations of the Subject 13)*. Their works are offered as both sites of re-connecting and re-membering *and* opportunities for readers to discursively connect and remember across diaspora and

time.

Most concretely, *Migrations of the Subject* offers language with which to discuss home, belonging, and rebellion. Identity, in this study, is such that is fashioned through autopoiesis. This process of self-creation begins with critiquing the empire/colonizer because

Black women themselves have to redefine the contours of what identity, location, writing, theory, and time mean, and thus redefine themselves against Empire constructs. (*Migrations of the Subject* 96)

In so doing, Black women writers, including the ones in this study, “articulate temporalities and locations outside the paradigms set by men, white society, [and] literary establishments” (*Migrations of the Subject* 112). Migrations between home, exile, and other locales, produce a sense of unbelonging, that triggers memories, pain, and more (*Migrations of the Subject* 102). Navigating this is of particular importance in migration narratives. Equally important is articulating rebellion. Relatedly, Farah Griffin’s study on African-American migration narratives pronounces a correlated insurrection.

In the African-American literary corpus, Farah Griffin’s “*Who Set You Flowin’?*”: *The African American Migration Narrative* engages the politics of migration internal to the United States. Griffin offers American context and history to the genre of migration narratives. When reading the study, it seemed that for every sentence of the opening argumental articulation, I had a complementary question. When Griffin states “[m]ost often, migration narratives portray the movement of a major character or the text itself from a provincial (not necessarily rural) Southern or

Midwestern site (home of the ancestor) to a more cosmopolitan, metropolitan area” (3), I thought both “Is this the same when the migration is transnational?” and “What of this dynamic when it is between metropolises especially when one is in the ‘global south’?” When Griffin argues “[w]ithin the migration narrative the protagonist or a central figure who most influences the protagonist is a migrant” (3), I thought “in what ways does this hold true in coming of age in migration narratives?”. Evidently, while reading this text, I was regularly asking questions and thinking about the various ways many of the assertions Griffin makes about the African American experience are also true of the transnational Black migration experience.

Migration, like all things, is marked and shaped by its context. “The representation of the migrant experience,” then, “depends on the genre and form of the narrative as well as the historical and political moment of production. Also, each artist's conception of power is directly related to the construction of his or her text” (Griffin 3). A profound and humble point, these words and the questions they sparked begin to unravel into what started my dissertation. The migration narrative, Griffin states

is marked by four pivotal moments: (1) an event that propels the action northward, (2) a detailed representation of the initial confrontation with the urban landscape, (3) and illustration of the migrant’s attempt to negotiate that landscape and his or her resistance to the negative effects of urbanization, and (4) a vision of the possibilities or limitations of the Northern, Western, or Midwestern city and the South. (3)

Who Set You Flowin’ is an exemplary work on the ways this is true for the African-

American migration narratives studied in her work. Thinking through this framework, I devised my own. Haitian women's coming of age in migration narratives are also marked by four pivotal moments (1) politicized travel, (2) reinforced cultural cosmology and/or epistemology (3) hegemonic critique, and (4) balanced intersectional living and radical autopoiesis. These pivotal moments gleaned from Griffin's study paired with concepts in *Migrations of the Subject* formed the founding ideation of what became Black feminist citizenship, which I will later discuss.

Published in 1997, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (1997) is a study of Haitian women's literature, history, and storytelling that beautifully articulates the uses of novels as revolutionary tools. Writing specifically about narratology and the novel as a revolutionary tool, Myriam Chancy proclaims

[t]he underlying assumption in this critical undertaking is that the study of narrative implies an awareness of the cultural modes of production, that it delineates the ways in which we both understand ourselves within culture and transmit our knowledge of codes of (self) representation. (Chancy 5)

Chancy's assumption is in line with my own. I believe that these authors craft texts and create art as a means of engendering rebellion, sharing stories of struggle, and exchanging information. This information serves as a foundational shift as it centers Black women as subjects and therefore rejects white supremacist, male supremacist, heteropatriarchal and jingoist proclamations of Black women's and migrant inferiority. The evidence provided by way of their artistry shares of the trials and tribulations of Black women and girls *and* their multiplicitous rebellions and strategies

of survival also as a means of offering corrective to an unjust world.

Believing that “much of Haitian women’s literature should be read as a literature of revolution” (Chancy 6), Myriam Chancy’s study is revelatory, and my study exists in conversation with Chancy’s. Her categorization of speech and language are indeed influential. Chancy writes that “witness to her own oppression, [the Haitian woman writer] boldly affirms her humanity by *embodying the power of speech*” (Chancy 37). Speech, here, refers to artistic production often in the form of literary protest. Discussed in varying ways throughout the works of marginalized women, speech becomes a method with which to articulate and affirm one’s humanity in the process of creating oneself. Furthering Chancy’s idea, I believe that Haitian woman writers create a framework for revolt in critiquing the status quo, creating new ways of defining oneself, and crafting for oneself new realities—we see this too in the literature. In arguing that, “because of the ability to communicate (and let me here underscore that communication need not be limited to the act of speaking, of making ‘sound’), very few human beings are completely powerless” (Chancy 37), Chancy grounds her belief in the revolutionary potential of Haitian women in a study of their texts, their words.

Language, according to Chancy, “is the vehicle through which power is enunciated as transformative or as destructive. It can be used to forge alliances or prevent them; it can be used to enlighten or to blind” (Chancy 37). The Haitian women writers within this study use their words to forge alliances and enlighten readers about rebellion and liberatory potential. Communication and language, then, are key to self-definition, to identity formation and to revolutionizing how one structures and thinks

about society. As Chancy shows, Haitian women

who are themselves oppressed...are never as disempowered as their oppressors would have them believe. The oppressed can use tools of communication to transform their own perceptions of self as well as those of their captors. (Chancy 37)

Using various techniques, the authors studied herein communicate to transform minds, hearts, and the world at large.

As the name indicates, *Framing Silence* cites different novels written by Haitian women as revolutionary texts. Literature of revolution, as identified in Chancy's study as well as my own, critiques cultural norms that are oppressive and co-creates a counter-hegemonic discourse. In writing such literature, Haitian women writers studied herein work to articulate the oppression of Black, Haitian, and migrant women and girls and communicate alternative ways of living. In this process of telling and speaking of their struggles, the protagonists within their texts engage "in a process of learning to un-learn marginalization, racism, prejudice, elitism, [and] silence" (Chancy 36). I contend that, from their oppressed positions, the authors of literature of revolution write to help people think critically about systems of power and to inspire change.

Many of the studies regarding Haitian migration are understandably socio-historical studies primarily regarding migratory patterns, language, and cultural retention strategies of Haitian peoples in *dyaspora*. One book-length study, *Migrant Revolutions: Haitian Literature, Globalization, and U.S. Imperialism* exists in which Haitian literature is the mechanism employed to comprehend slavery, labor migration,

diaspora, and revolution within an anti-colonial and anti-globalization lens. Published in 2008, Valerie Kaussen's study, *Migrant Revolutions*, exists prior to the 2010 earthquake and, as a result, takes into account neither recent *dyaspora* expansions nor contemporary works in this iteration of anti-immigrant America.

In 1996, the year that Farah Griffin's text was published, the United States effectively criminalized immigrants and undocumented immigration. This criminalization laid the groundwork for a surge in deportations just as United States imperialism's resulting degradation of neighboring countries' economies was in full force. I bring together these works in order to provide a unique angle of seeing what happens in Haitian and African-American cultural/literary formations.

Recent studies of Haitian migration conveys that "cultural values and strengths [are] key factors in [Haitian] women's perseverance" (Lacet 2016). Haitian migrants, like other migrant groups, employ family solidarity practices and migrant networks (Taylor et al. 2015); migration is a language of its own and Haitian "migrant capital" allows travelers to extend concepts of transit migration and complicate the legal-illegal nexus while crafting strategies to resist state-formed obstacles and their own demise (Busse and Vásquez Luque 2016). Haitian migrants also challenge state structures and understandings of citizenship (Moulin and Thomaz 2016). These studies and others affirm much of what the fictional literature shows. Much of it, however, is specific to Haitian south-to-south migration. After the earthquake of 2010, many Haitian migrants fled south, a large portion ending up in Brazil. More recently, however, small percentages of those migrants have ventured back north. In time, there will be more studies of the post-earthquake Haitian migrants who end up tangled in the American

Crimmigration system. For now, though, it is mainly the fiction that addresses this subject.

In this study, I develop the concept of Black feminist citizenship as a means of understanding the politics of both these texts and this moment in immigration history in the United States. I also close the work by advancing a theory of *dyaspora saudade* as an effort to further theorize diaspora and name the various experiences of being “in between” that these authors, their protagonists, and my community both work through and discuss.

This project is the only study to put into conversation the migration narratives of Edwidge Danticat, Roxane Gay, Elsie Augustave, and Ibi Zoboi, therefore centering Haitian women’s stories of migration. There exist a number of studies on Haitian women writers, and typically the authors studied include Edwidge Danticat and Marie Vieux-Chauvet. Of recently published book-length research, one exists about Francophone women writers: *Exiles, Travellers and Vagabonds: Rethinking Mobility in Francophone Women’s Writing* (2016), and in it the works of Edwidge Danticat, Kettly Mars, and Yanick Lahens are studied in two chapters. There is much more to be studied of Haitian women’s texts and writings of women throughout the African diaspora. In this study, I aim to center, interrogate, and share the revolutionary strategies of *dyaspora* women coming of age in migration as experienced in Haitian women’s literature.

Coming of age novels are bildungsromane that engage travel and relationships as means of maturation and identity formation for young protagonists. Haitian women’s coming of age novels examined herein incorporate self-creation and self-

realization in addition to counter-hegemonic rebellion. The leitmotif of rising up, Kevin Meehan argues

has been central in the Caribbean coming-of-age novel, from *Jane's Career* by H.G. DeLisser to canonical mid-century novels by George Lamming, Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul, and Jacques-Stephen Alexis to more-recent-but-now-classic offerings from women writers such as Merle Hodge, Jamaica Kincaid, Merle Collins, Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, and others. Caribbean writers have repeatedly turned to the *bildungsroman* to explore the promises and pitfalls of regional decolonization, the uneven participation of women in currents of social change, and the contemporary struggle to survive and thrive in the latest dispensations of globalization. (Meehan 11)

As such, Caribbean coming of age literature is a critical site with which to qualify literature of revolution and to amplify and interrogate the politics within them. Haitian women writers' transnational bildungsromane, like other Caribbean women writers of the genre, feminize and radicalize the genre for the purposes of articulating rebellion.

In this study of novels about coming of age in migration, I wish to use Black feminist citizenship to deliberate on both the politics of travel for Black women and the generative spaces migration provides for identity formation, political consciousness-raising, and reimagining of one's place in the world. I wish to then extrapolate from these analyses of diaspora and diaspora theory, grounded in an understanding of *dyaspora saudade* as that which also nurtures and provides similarly generative spaces where home is lost, found, contested, restructured, and healing is as

much a journey as it is the goal. Lastly, I wish to uncover the politics in these works and use those as a foundation on which to imagine a better experience for both marginalized migrants and citizens. I do this through a study of the relevant works of these authors.

I endeavor to use the trends experienced and themes explored in the migration narratives to deliberate on both the politics of travel for Black women and the generative spaces traveling provides for Black Feminist identity formation, African diaspora citizenship, and decolonization. All of these factors, I contend, assist the protagonists of the studied works in reimagining their place in the world; they structure autopoiesis, conscientization, and anti-colonial counterhegemony.

A few more questions specific to Black women's migration experience I hope to ask and answer include: (1) What is particular to Black women's forced, induced, and voluntary migration that promotes Black feminist conscientization? (2) What is it about transnational migration that both complicates and enforces global Black Citizenship? (3) What is the decolonial potential in Black women-centered spaces created as refuge and in honor of "home"⁶? (4) Is there a way to synthesize the ethos that lies at the intersection of Black Feminist consciousness, African Diaspora Citizenship, and Decoloniality that provides ground for understanding Black feminist citizenship?

Through musical, visual, and literary migration narratives, Black artists and intellectuals worldwide endeavor to grapple with forced, induced, and voluntary

⁶ Farah Griffin defines "home" as the "repository of the ancestor" (Griffin 189).

migration across time and space. In discussing and amplifying the literature we interpolate voices of those dispossessed and less rooted as a result of migration in conversations about global citizenship and power. Portraying the movement of texts or major characters across provinces and often oceans, Black women writers work to nurture and provide generative spaces to understand the negotiation of various entities that shape identities. Marked by four (often entropic) pivotal moments: (1) politicized travel, (2) reinforced cultural cosmology and/or epistemology (3) critique of hegemony, and (4) balanced intersectional living and radical autopoiesis, the narratives of the traveling marked bodies also work to politicize their audience who identify with central migrating characters and conjure an understanding of Black feminist citizenship.

On Movement, Diaspora, and Theory

Concepts of transnational movement, diaspora and passage, memory, and more are critical to my work. Regarding transnational movement, Aimé Césaire states that

it is a good thing to place different civilizations in contact with each other ...it is an excellent thing to blend different worlds; that whatever its own particular genius may be, a civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies; that for civilizations, exchange is oxygen; that the great good fortune of Europe is to have been a crossroads, and that because it was the locus of all ideas, the receptacle of all philosophies, the meeting place of all sentiments, it was the best center for the

redistribution of energy. (Césaire 33)

Culture as oxygen reminds me that all societies engage in exchange. They transmute (metamorphose), transfix (hypnotize/pierce); they transpire (arise/materialize) (Sakai 7). Transnationalism, then, must be seen as both the movements of bodies, peoples, cultures as well as “the transformative dissemination and living-on of Euro-American ideas in non-Euro-American sites, as well as the legacies and political futures of non-European theories in Northern locations” (Sakai 7). Transnationalism is the fluid (even if often fixed and uni-directional) movement of fixed entities sometimes made fluid upon arrival. Meaning, people and entities often move to the West and often white supremacy travels from the West to change nations and take on other names (supremacy of Christianity, rationality, and civility). I contend that there is also a third layer of transnationalism about which Amilcar Cabral theorizes.

Culture, as Cabral states, is another layer of transnationalism. In *Return to the Source*, he intercedes on behalf of the masses and dictates that “culture took refuge in the villages, in the forests, and in the spirit of the victims of domination. Culture survives all these challenges and through the struggle for liberation blossoms forth again” (61). Culture is both maintained in the recesses and exchanged among and between civilizations. This radical politic perpetuated in cultures of counter-hegemony also travels; it also shapes movements internationally. We see this throughout the diaspora, and I explore this throughout this study.

Ideas of diaspora and migration are also critical to the works I interrogate. Diaspora, in this project, is also experienced as passage and this defines diaspora as movement between locales, temporal spaces, ideologies, hegemonies, cultures,

cosmologies, and more. Diaspora as passage allows for a conjoining of Middle Passage epistemologies, theories of what lay in, on, and beneath waters flowing along trade routes, and the work of many in relation to double, triple and other kinds of consciousness. In *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*, theorist Michelle M. Wright states

The Middle Passage epistemology is a compelling narrative used by millions to tell themselves how they “know” they are Black because they can locate their ancestry within this history. It is also, it should be stressed, at least a little bit different every time it is enunciated (like all dominant narratives) but *always* operates on the assumption that the “natural” flow of time is supposed to be progressive. Unlike dominant collective epistemologies that, for example, narrate the history of a nation, the Middle Passage epistemology is often more deeply grounded in historical fact than in wishful myth... rendering it one of the most compelling narratives in the West, told and retold in literature, film, documentaries, and high school and college courses, as well as popular music. Its central historical events, arranged on a linear timeline, move from slavery to rebellions to civil disobedience and some form of social, political, or even economic gains in the present moment, in which reactive, racist state, corporate, or even military interests seek to deprive Blacks in the West of what few sociopolitical and economic gains they have secured. (48)

Though purposeful and strategic, the choice to *only* define Blackness (and therefore

diaspora) in this way is limiting. In *Physics of Blackness*, Wright argues that “Blackness operates as a construct (implicitly or explicitly defined as a shared set of physical and behavioral characteristics) and as phenomenological (imagined through individual perceptions in various ways depending on the context)” (9). Consequently, Wright continues “we can best locate and define Blackness across the African Diaspora by incorporating both of these aspects into our analyses within and without the academy” (9). Wright, therefore, proposes “[b]ringing together Blackness as constructed and Blackness as phenomenological” and conceptualizes “epiphenomenal time” as a construct that “enables a wholly inclusive definition” of Blackness (9). This inclusive definition of Blackness as both constructed and phenomenological is at the core of diaspora as passage and *dyaspora saudade*, later explained in this study.

Journeying from the history and temporal/spatial movement implied within oceanic theorizations of diaspora (e.g., Derek Walcott’s “The Sea is History”) diaspora as passage and *dyaspora saudade* are about movement, in, among, and between. They incorporate anthropologist Kale Fajardo’s idea of crosscurrents. Fajardo states

Oceans and seas (and other crosscurrents border zones and trajectories) are critical sites for a variety of people. Given the dynamic social geographies or oceanographies and because identities and understandings of culture are forged through coconstitutive axes of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and/or immigration status, attending to the contradictory or affirming dynamics of encounters and cultural contact in crosscurrents border zones and trajectories is

methodologically critical. (Fajardo 32)

As critical methodological sites, oceans, oceanic theorizations, crosscurrents, *and* the movement inspired by them informed the motions suggested in *dyaspora saudade*. The complication of both positive and negative aspects of being in diaspora motivated also by varied Caribbean conceptualizations of the water as migrant memory and secret keeper (e.g., Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return*), is also at play in *dyaspora saudade* and diaspora as passage. The two account for passage transnationally, temporally, socially/culturally, physically, cosmologically, epistemologically, and more. As Blackness, and race overall, is socially constructed and yet has real implications, it is fluid and fixed, over-determined and liberating, fiction and fact. Thinking then of passage helps account for all of this because diaspora can be liberating and limiting depending on the entities with which one engages. Memory too can elicit either freedom or imprisonment.

In this context, memory is remembering; a repository of ancestors; corporeal and visual; as well as epigenetic and mediated by time and place. To further this meaning, I work with the standard definition of memory as well as those in the works of Farah Griffin, Toni Morrison, and Edwidge Danticat. Memory here is both the act and conclusion of remembering; it is also as an evocation of home and therefore a "repository of the ancestors" (6) as Farah Griffin offers in "*Who Set You Flowin'?*". Memory, throughout this work, is also the "emotional memory" of which Toni Morrison speaks in her essay "The Site of Memory." Here Morrison offers that emotional memory is "what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appears" (99). For Morrison, though, memory is also a tool of truth, an action that

involves taking an image and imagining its story and then using that to offer other truths. Memory, then, is about facts and truths. When Morrison, in this same essay, states that writing is literary archaeology, she writes of seeing the remains and “reconstructing the world that these remains imply” (92). The memory of the remains offers both the facts of the remains and that which they evoke and imply. Quoting Zora Neale Hurston, Morrison cites that Hurston had “memories within that came out of the material that went to make [her]” (92).

Memory is remembering as well as re-membering the facts and truths possible in that time; it is a sensory flooding to convey truths. In Danticat’s *Breath, Eye, Memory*, locations mediate memory, and the trauma of memories is passed from mothers to daughters. Memory here is epigenetic and passed through blood—a blood flooding. More explicitly, the daughter experiences this memorial saturation because she sees herself as a “living memory from the past” (*Breath, Eye, Memory* 56).

Black Feminist Citizenship

When discussing access and subjugation, an intersectional approach requires understanding the impact of race, gender, and class in the outcome of subjugation. In “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” Kimberlé Crenshaw argues

that many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of

racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately. (1244)

Crenshaw furthers this assessment in this study by then “exploring the various ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political, and representational aspects of violence against women of color” (1244). I argue similarly throughout this study and overtly include within my assessment the importance of nationality. Many authors and theorists offer other identity factors to their assessments of intersectional subjugation, as each addition presents renewed clarity as to the system of oppression operating in the United States. I offer that ethnicity, citizenship, and nationality are also oppression clarifiers. Criminalization and incarceration account for the two primary mechanisms that the United States government uses to subjugate and dehumanize. Citizenship, then, becomes an essential marker for access and power as the denial of citizenship and disenfranchisement of citizens also exist as indicators of whom the state wishes to keep out.

I bring together the concept of Black feminist citizenship to offer space to discuss the politics of Blackness and woman-ness, and diaspora/transnationalism. The concept provides generative space for thinking about decolonial love, radical Black liberation, and global Black citizenship—theories that themselves ground the broader concept of Black feminist citizenship. As these factors assist the protagonists in reimagining their place in the world, they also structure autopoiesis, Black feminist conscientization, and decolonial counterhegemony. I explain the ways this occurs in subsequent chapters.

Black feminist citizenship, then, is derived from socio-political and cultural ethics in women-centered spaces. It is the social responsibility derived from doing anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-imperialist work in hopes of dismantling the matrices of power and domination. It is a birthright of Black women aiming to change the world and therefore *jus soli* redefined—citizenship born within someone belonging to the transnational land of liberatory activism. Thus, the concepts of my imagining of Black feminist citizenship are again (1) decolonial love, (2) radical Black liberation, and (3) global Black citizenship.

Decolonial love is a way of nurturing and caring that is freeing. In a 2012 interview for the *Boston Review* with Paula M. L. Moya, Junot Díaz ⁷ states: decolonial love is “[t]he kind of love that I was interested in, that my characters long for intuitively, is the only kind of love that could liberate them from that horrible legacy of colonial violence.” I find this a useful entry point to discussing the embodiment of radical understandings and practices of love. Decolonial love, in this definition, refers to a number of key concepts that each need clarification. To define “decolonial,” we must first understand colonial. Here, moving away from the need to have a temporal (e.g. “neo” or “post”) or categorical (e.g. “anti” or “de”) prefix, Anibal Quijano’s concept of “coloniality” offers another approach. Quijano states that “[t]he racial axis has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established. Therefore, the model of power that is globally hegemonic today presupposes an element of

⁷ It should be noted that Junot Diaz has expressed a misogynistic, patriarchal, abusive, and colonial love in actuality. In truth, the phrase predates the Diaz interview as well and appears in Chela Sandoval’s *Methodology of the Oppressed*.

coloniality” (Quijano 533). Coloniality, then, is both the imposition of “[e]pistemic and ontological colonization [that] did not happen in isolation or...merely [as] contingent results of the search for objectivity through methodic science” (Maldonado-Torres 433) *and* the genealogy of white supremacy and white supremacist ideals spread throughout the world by way of colonization, imperialism, and their aftermath neoliberalism.

Decoloniality, accordingly, is that which exists in cognizance and contestation of white supremacy. To be decolonial, here, merits an epistemological de-centering of coloniality and employs Frantz Fanon’s conceptualization of “attitude” as described by literary scholar Nelson Maldonado-Torres. Accordingly, this understanding of decolonial also “reflects a view of the subject as dynamic inter-relationality and therefore as always-already part of a larger field of social and cultural arrangements” (Maldonado-Torres 433). The social and cultural arrangements centered in decoloniality, however, are deliberately not counter to the systems centered in the hegemonic norm. Moreover, as Walter Mignolo argues, to “de-link from the colonial matrix of power and the logic of coloniality embedded in *la pensée unique*,⁸ it is necessary to engage in border epistemology and in alternatives [to] modernity or in the global and diverse project of transmodernity” (Mignolo 456). To be decolonial, one must be global and diverse.

As this pertains to love, it means one has to understand the matrices of colonial

⁸ Walter Mignolo argues in “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality,” that “*La pensée unique* is the totality of the three major macro-narratives of Western civilization with its imperial languages (English, German, French, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese) and their Greco and Roman foundations” (455-456).

power and domination—the former facilitates understanding the existence, dynamics, and fallacy of white supremacy; the latter promotes comprehension of the complexities, realities, and impact of interlocking oppressions. The two systems need be abolished internally and externally. In brief, to be decolonial as it pertains to love is to understand power and oppression and to work to liberate yourself and loved ones from it—whether that be just in relationships or more broadly—guided too by a radical love. According to Chela Sandoval, decolonial love is a “love that can access and guide our theoretical and political ‘movidas’—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being” (Sandoval 139). “Love” too is a term worthy of complication.

As bell hooks defines it, “Love,” is a verb that categorizes the will to nurture the growth of one’s own and/or another’s core—the site at which the mind, body, and spirit are one (*All About Love* 6, 13). This understanding is juxtaposed with Chela Sandoval’s understanding of love as a “hermeneutic, as a set of practices and procedures that can transit all citizen-subjects, regardless of social class, toward a differential mode of consciousness and its accompanying technologies of method and social movement” (Sandoval 139). “Decolonial love,”⁹ succinctly, is the act of cultivating one’s or another’s mental, emotional, and spiritual evolution and liberating one’s (or another’s) consciousness and self from coloniality and the matrix of domination by any means necessary. It is a radical way of being and loving; it is a breaking through, a revolutionary practice. Decolonial love is also intrinsically tied to the knowledge production of radical Black liberation.

Radical Black liberation is generated from a Black feminist lineage which

pertains to those engaged in dismantling the matrices of power and domination. Using “Black” here to signify people of African descent globally, I also wish to use it to define the ultimate subaltern subject in a white supremacist world. Moreover, I contend that modernity also marks the creation of white supremacy as a means toward Black and Brown subjugation for European (and later Eurocentric) financial profit. As Cedric Robinson conveys, through use of the term “racial capitalism,” modernity marks the development of capitalism that is intrinsically tied to maintaining white supremacy. “Racism,” Robinson authors “was not simply a convention for ordering the relations of European to non-European peoples but has its genesis in the “internal” relations of European peoples...The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism” (Robinson 2). Our contemporary economic systems are indeed marked and grounded in the perpetuation of the very systems of power that maintain the supremacy of those most akin to the founding fathers of the United States of America.

The same “modernity” that created white supremacy also created a detailed spectrum of whiteness for all races—with those farther from the ideal, normative, landowning man in power being low-income, Black women.¹⁰ This same population has been and continues to be at the forefront of many struggles within the larger Black liberation movement. I also posit that if one were to look at the historical trajectory of Black movements since colonization, one could argue that from the inception of

¹⁰ This does not, of course, take sexuality, sexual orientation, ability, and gender presentation into account.

modernity up until the contemporary moment there has existed a more extensive, transnational, Black liberation movement that includes the various social justice movements around the globe—all of which sought and seek to fundamentally alter systems of oppression that denied and deny Black people their humanity (and rights). These movements, again, continue to this day. Consequently, viewing the statements proposed by those saddled with alterity—low-income, Black women—gives rise to understanding the various principles of radical Black liberation. Those who endeavor to speak for, with, through, and alongside this demographic often includes Black feminists. It is from Black feminists and other people of color scholars and activists—especially women—that the third tenet of global Black citizenship is formed.

Global Black citizenship is in direct conversation with African Diaspora citizenship. Pertaining to both continental Africans and people of African descent throughout the global diaspora, the goal of those pursuant of this citizenship, according to Carole Boyce Davies, is to “transform their own situated geographies—the limited geographies of their nation-states—not only to achieve more integrated benefits in their homes but also to navigate the larger global reaches of the African diaspora” (“Towards African Diaspora Citizenship” 41). It is to “achieve greater unity and solidarity between the African countries and the peoples of Africa” and also to “promote and defend [their] common positions on issues of interest to the [African] continent and its peoples” (“Towards African Diaspora Citizenship” 41). Global Black citizenship is part of a conversation about Blackness that is as rooted as it is transnational. It addresses both the movements of Black bodies, peoples, cultures between and betwixt borders as well as the transformative diffusion and survival of

Black ideas in the world and the heritages and political futures of Black philosophies in the world.¹¹ The small distinction between global Black citizenship and African Diaspora citizenship is in the method of citizenship; in the former, citizenship is less about national or transnational belonging, though this factor is indeed important. Global Black citizenship addresses, more so, the practice of democracy, demosprudence, and dissent.

Aspects of global Black citizenship involve being a part of the global Black diaspora and practicing both democracy and demosprudence. “Democracy,” here, is expressing the practice of social equality. “Demosprudence” on the other hand, is democratic accountability. Moreover, it describes “lawmaking or legal practices that inform and are informed by the wisdom of the people” (Guinier 15).

Furthermore, demosprudence

...unlike traditional jurisprudence is not concerned primarily with the logical reasoning or legal principles that animate and justify a judicial opinion. Demosprudence is instead focused on enhancing the democratic potential of the work of lawyers, judges, and other legal elites. Demosprudence through dissent attempts to understand the democracy-enhancing potential implicit and explicit in the practice of dissent. (Guinier 16)

¹¹ In his article, “Theory and the West: On the Question of Humanitas and Anthropos,” Naoki Sakai argues for “the transformative dissemination and living-on of Euro-American ideas in non-Euro-American sites, as well as the legacies and political futures of non-European theories in Northern locations” (7). I used this as inspiration for thinking about transnationalism in the African Diaspora.

Legal scholar Lani Guinier creates the term *demosprudence* primarily to convey the ways social actors affect the law. She states that “democracies, at their best, make and interpret law by expanding, informing, inspiring, and interacting with the community of consent, a community in constitutional terms better known as ‘we the people’” (Guinier 48). Movement builders, accordingly, use their dissenting opinions to shape law/lawmakers and public understandings of legal decrees. People involved in the creation and sustaining of social movements, according to Guinier, “can, should, and often do play a range of roles in influencing the meaning of constitutional doctrine and the interpretation of statutes” (Guinier 48). While global Black citizenship certainly encompasses the acting on *demosprudential* intuition, it is used here in a way similar to Theresa Rocha Beardall’s construction.¹² Rocha Beardall maintains that *demosprudence* pertains to people power and the ability of social justice activists to effect *de facto* law while offering counterhegemonic ways of knowing and being in the world. Accordingly, it characterizes the ability of activists and organizers to influence the creation of norms that uphold the best interests of their constituents and constituencies by maintaining structures of accountability; mandating radical infusions of social justice into the law; questioning the state’s legal authority to create laws; and

¹² In a graduate paper presentation for the American Indian Program at Cornell University, titled “More Than a Hashtag: Reading *Demosprudence* in the Voices of #BlackLivesMatter and #IdleNoMore,” scholar Theresa Rocha Beardall articulates the movements of *demosprudence* as seen in #BlackLivesMatter and #IdleNoMore. Ms. Rocha Beardall kindly agreed that I could cite this in my work. In her construction, there are four measures of their law-making. As articulated on pages 13-14 of this paper. Said measures are: (1) “both have established a movement representing a constituency of accountability rather than one particular, localized community or representative”; (2) “each movement pursues law change that is focused on fundamental values of justice as articulated by the movement. Both refuse piecemeal deals for temporary change”; (3) “#BlackLivesMatter and #IdleNoMore challenge and expand what qualifies as formal legal authority by inserting the voice of mobilized constituencies”; and (4) both movements set the stage for successful rule change with legal partnerships (Rocha Beardall 13-14).

laying the foundation for holistic change. Global Black citizenship exists as recognition of the need for demosprudence and the actualization of it. Taken a bit further, the demosprudence of global Black citizenship is a refutation of consent. Given their dissent as experienced in their activism and protest, this form of citizenship is born in the crucible of discord precisely because the protesters deny the state the foundational crux of American political philosophy: the consent of the governed. As such, and without the assent of these rebelling people, the government and legal structure in err do not represent them, and they must, together, create new axioms, new coda, and new modalities. Global Black citizenship is, therefore, an inclusive social responsibility upheld by people of the African Diaspora among people who practice social equity and uphold social justice dictates popularly defined.

This study is located alongside the works of Black feminist literary theorists and in the field of African diaspora theory. Within the contexts of Black women's transnational literature, music, and socio-political organizations, there exists a revolution within the texts and sites that necessitate a foundational shift in conceptions of race, womanhood, class, cosmology, sexuality, gender expression, and nationhood—a move contoured by migration and forced exodus. In brief, I endeavor to propose new lenses to view diaspora (as passage, *dyaspora saudade*) and Black feminist citizenship by way of women's fictional literature.

Conceptualizing Revolution and Dissertation Organization

This study is a literary, textual, and cultural analysis informed by socio-political and historical commentary. In 2015, I began a short research project reading the works of Black diasporic women writers with young women at The Brotherhood/Sister Sol. I continue to do youth development work beginning in 2016 and include as framing concepts before each chapter the words of youth with whom I worked or advocates with whom I conversed—each quote explicating the importance of reading texts of Black women writers for young Black and Latinx youth. It is the purpose of my dissertation to not only discuss the texts interrogated within but to contemplate the ways these works inspire personal revolutions within readers as well. As such, I provide an analysis of both throughout this work. I offer this study and this method of counterbalancing theory, literature, and community voices as one way of doing engaged and community-facing research.

This study is organized in six chapters beginning with the above review of the project and operational definitions that I engage to characterize the socio-political realities of our current moment. Titled “A Haitian-American Preamble: Literary Revolution, Laws, and Liberation,” this chapter is a framing of key contexts and operational terminology that lay the foundation on which to build understanding throughout this study. “Fanm Se Poto Mitan: Corporeal Memory and the Epigenetics of Trauma for Edwidge Danticat’s Women,” Chapter One, is about Edwidge Danticat’s works. Understanding Danticat’s novels, the ways her protagonists embody memory and trauma, and Danticat’s exposition of the impacts of white and male supremacy is critical to understanding this aforementioned literary revolution. Chapter Two, “Conflicting Lougawou: Roxane Gay’s Contestation with Returning and

Diaspora,” is an interrogation of Gay’s novel *Untamed State*, her essays, memoir, and short stories in an effort to comprehend Gay’s contentions with returning to Haiti, critique of rape and rape cultures, and documentation of misogynoir. “The Politics of Being Lòt Bò Dlo: Elsie Augustave’s Global Migrations, the Haitian Migrant Crisis, and the Violences of Empire” is Chapter Three. In this chapter, I examine Augustave’s novel *The Roving Tree* and the intersectional issues of Haitian migrants historically and contemporaneously so as to catalog the experience of Haitian women in migration. Chapter Four, “Crimmigration and Living the American Nightmare in Dreams: Ibi Zoboi’s Spirit Worlds,” is a contemplation on Zoboi’s work, the interpolation of Spirit Worlds, and confrontations with the horrors of immigration and Crimmigration. Lastly, I close with “*Diaspora Saudade*.” In this chapter, I bring together two diasporic concepts—one Haitian, one Brazilian—in order to capture the sense of loss, longing, and mourning that accompanies migration as well as the new ways people in *dyaspora* expand understandings of self, home, culture, and more. While Haiti and Brazil are different in varied ways, there are several points of intersection.

This study is my effort to affirm and reconfigure women’s agency and power; problematize hegemonic social structures that create dangerous conditions for migrants and other marginalized peoples; and politicize love, identity formation, women-centered spaces. In it, I endeavor to catalog and expand the revolution brewing in the Diasporic Black literary world so as to replicate the impact of reading these texts as micro-activations of revolt.

CHAPTER EN/UN (1):

FANM SE POTO MITAN:

CORPOREAL MEMORY AND THE EPIGENETICS OF TRAUMA

FOR EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S WOMEN

Insecure. Issa Rae. Black-ish. Tracee Ellis Ross. Black Panthers. Lupita Nyong'o. 2018 was the year of #blackgirlmagic—especially on the silver screen. While it is important that Black women see themselves represented on the small and big screen, it is also vital for us to see ourselves in the academic sphere. Black women continue to be the most educated sector of American society. They are graduating colleges and post-graduate institutions in droves. It is essential that our presence is felt not only through matriculation but in the written academic sphere so we may leave our imprint on crucial educational ideologies that will continue to shape the American societal sphere for generations to come.

A sense of pride fills me when I walk into Barnes and Noble and I am able to purchase a book for my goddaughter where I can show her she matters and that her thoughts and words are appearing on a printed page.

N.J.
Lawyer
Former Teacher
Advocate

When the speaker discusses being represented on the big screen and feeling pride in her ability to show her goddaughter that she and her thoughts matter given publications of and about Black women and girls in Barnes and Nobles, she is discussing the value of visibility and representation.

In an age of #blacklivesmatter, #blackgirlmagic, and #blackboyjoy, one has to wonder about the impact of both heightened visibility of multi-dimensional Blackness and its correlation to increased awareness, activism, achievement, and attainment of higher levels of quality of life. It is a commonly held belief that “representation matters,” and as such, this speaker in the epigraph offers that representation has the potential to not only catalog the lives of the Black people mentioned but to also inspire new generations to go beyond the levels of achievement of their predecessors. It is therefore not merely depiction that matters, but also the ways their lives may be interpreted as catalyzing forces in the realities of viewers and readers.

When we read books about revolution, then, how much are we inspired to revolt? When we identify patterns of revolt in our histories, do we embody those patterns in the present and future?

In Haiti, it is said that “Pou w konprann sak pase jodi an, fòk ou konnen sak pase anvan.” Translated, this means “To understand what happens today, you must know what happened before.” This Haitian proverb speaks to the issues of knowledge of self and history as well as the issues of visibility mentioned in the introductory epigraph. If we not only see ourselves in aspirational positions but also know of the trials and tribulations our people overcame, will we not be better equipped to strive and reach higher heights? Marred by intersectional oppression written into our genes that have various health outcomes, it would appear that we need varied tools to continue to not only survive but to thrive in the world as is, until revolution. Edwidge Danticat employs a diasporic consciousness that lays the groundwork for social, political, and cultural transformations for the reader and the world. In so doing, she exemplifies the kinds of knowing needed to thrive hinted at previously.

Writing for Edwidge Danticat has been both resistance and reclamation. In her 1996 essay “We are Ugly but We are Here,” Danticat shares the importance of women’s words. Trying to find her place in the politically tumultuous Haiti of her youth, she writes

Where was really my place in all of this? What was my grandmother’s place? What is the legacy of the daughters of Anacaona? What do we all have left to remember, the daughters of Haiti? Watching the news reports, it is often hard to tell whether there are real living and breathing women in conflict-stricken places like Haiti. The evening news broadcasts only allow us a brief glimpse of presidential coups,

rejected boat people, and sabotaged elections. The women's stories never manage to make the front page. However they do exist. (137)

In her works, women's stories are not only the front page but the whole subject. Danticat writes to refuse being silenced. For example, in the Epilogue of *Krik? Krak!*, Danticat describes the meaning of writing for her:

And writing? Writing was as forbidden as dark rouge on the cheeks or a first date before eighteen. It was an act of indolence, something to be done in a corner when you could have been learning to cook. Are there women who both cook and write? Kitchen poets, they call them. They slip phrases into their stew and wrap meaning around their pork before frying it. They make narrative dumplings and stuff their daughters' mouths so they say nothing more. (219-220)

This defiant act has made of Edwidge Danticat an emblematic contemporary Haitian women writer. "Since her entrance onto the American literary scene of immigrant writers in the mid-1990s, Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat has consistently oscillated unapologetically between real, imagined, and spiritual places in her understanding of diaspora" (*Edwidge Danticat: The Haitian Diasporic Imaginary* 1). Danticat has always been "invested in exposing the lived experiences of people who make up the Haitian diaspora, in particular, by foregrounding not only how experiences of displacement are lived and affectively perceived but also how they are textually constructed, imagined, and reimagined by diasporic subjects" (*Edwidge Danticat: The Haitian Diasporic Imaginary* 1). As such, as a study of Haitian women writers in the

United States, I must begin with Edwidge Danticat. Throughout this chapter, I explore and interrogate her works and themes of trauma, evolution, revolt, and agency.

Edwidge Danticat's Articulation of Trauma

Like many of Danticat's protagonists, Black women carry love, history, resistance, and trauma in our genes. In their article, "Intergenerational Transmission of Stress in Humans," Dr. Mallory Bowers and Dr. Rachel Yehuda find that "[s]evere stress exposure in a parent—the kind that can result in mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—is a risk factor for a number of adverse outcomes, including psychopathology, in offspring" (Bowers 232). Dr. Mallory Bowers and Dr. Rachel Yehuda, professors of psychiatry at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City, indicate, therefore, that epigenetics¹³ can explain the transmission of trauma genetically. More specifically, while our medical and scientific communities are still deducing the mechanism through which this risk is conferred, they are clear "that offspring of severely stress-exposed parents are at risk for adverse outcomes because of enduring epigenetic changes in parental biological systems that have arisen in response to stress exposure and are transmitted"

¹³ In 2016 *Teen Vogue* article "Trauma From Slavery Can Actually Be Passed Down Through Your Genes," Dr. Yehuda is cited for her research on "how serious incidents of trauma (i.e. slavery, holocaust, etc.) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be passed down through generations in shared family genes. Her research has revealed that when people experience trauma, it changes their genes in a particular and noticeable way, so when those people have children and their genes are passed down to their children, the children also inherit the genes affected by trauma." That article may be found here: www.teenvogue.com/story/slavery-trauma-inherited-genetics.

(Bowers 232). Put simply, if trauma changes gene expression, and these changed gene expressions are inherited by offspring, then trauma literally changes people and the generations to come. Dr. Arline Geronimus explains a similar kind of response to stress that impacts the physio-biology of Black women and literally alters their health outcomes.

When discussing Black infant and maternal mortality, an April 2018 *New York Times* article, cites Geronimus' work. A professor in the Department of Health Behavior and Health Education at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, Geronimus "first linked stress and Black infant mortality with her theory of 'weathering'" (Villarosa). Weathering, accordingly, "is constructed as being a physical consequence of social inequality" (Geronimus 589). Geronimus believes that "toxic stress triggered the premature deterioration of the bodies of African-American women as a consequence of repeated exposure to a climate of discrimination and insults. The weathering of the mother's body, she theorized, could lead to poor pregnancy outcomes, including the death of her infant" (Villarosa). In her research, Geronimus concluded that "persistent racial differences in health may be influenced by the stress of living in a race-conscious society. These effects may be felt particularly by Black women because of [the] double jeopardy of gender and racial discrimination" (Villarosa). Consequently, not only is trauma passed down through gene expression *but* living under systems of multivariate oppression also negatively impacts the body and health outcomes for marginalized peoples, Black women in particular.

Black women writers and diaspora theorists have long written about corporeal memory. Regarding literary theory and psychoanalysis specifically, Cathy Caruth authors *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) and in the study offers a structure for reading narratives of traumatic experience. Exemplifying Caruth's work, the writers in my study convey the implications of writing stories of wounds that cry out "...in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth 4). These wounds are often genetic and historical; "history" as Caruth argues "is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (25). Black women writers make vivid and articulate the reality that "traumatic experience can never with certainty be reduced to, or framed within, the boundaries of an individual life" (Caruth 121), but rather the lives of families across space and time. In varied ways, literature has understood the possibility of trauma being passed down, and this understanding predates the research cited above. Trauma, as a literary topic, and the epigenetics of trauma expressed in literature are both regularly occurring. Most research on the two as they relate to Black women's literature understandably focuses on Toni Morrison. Citing numerous novels, namely *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987), and recently *Home* (2012), scholars including but not limited to Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, K. Zauditu-Selassie, and Rebecca Hope Ferguson, address collective trauma, intergenerational trauma, trauma from slavery, corporeal memory and trauma, and more in Morrison's work. Edwidge Danticat's work similarly engages issues of trauma.

In the entirety of the corpus of Edwidge Danticat, trauma, death, diaspora and migration, relationships, and identity are central themes. Tamika Carey proclaims that

“Black women’s attempts at self-healing [are] a rhetorical situation” (Carey 35) and as such producing art, literature, and theory from the experiences of Black women while also conveying the many ways Black women survive and dismantle aspects of their oppression, helps to mobilize other Black women. Beatriz Rodríguez when discussing gender and trauma also evokes this “reading cure.” Rodríguez offers that:

Literature plays a pivotal role in helping us to get a fuller understanding of traumatic memory. Through the use of narration as a therapeutic tool, trauma sufferers may find their experiences echoed in the text, hence overcoming a shared sense of isolation. The acts of writing and reading become a powerful healing tool. Through the power of stories, the ones we construct and tell ourselves and others as well as the ones we read, we create and shape our identity and, crucially, we also create meaning. (Rodríguez 1)

Black women reading the works of Black women writers find ample space to engage in discussions of the epigenetics of trauma, corporeal memory, and more. The authors thereby employ literature as a critical avenue by which young readers of color, namely Black women coming of age in diaspora, become politicized. In comprehending and employing this reality as well as articulating and understanding this multi-pronged knowing as seen in literature and now in scientific communities, we can continue to positively change the future with these texts and the politics therein.

Edwidge Danticat is one of the preeminent Black, Haitian, women writers of our time. Influenced by a “rich literary history, and the themes of birth, separation, and death,” Danticat’s work is exemplary (“Mapping the Echo Chamber” 175). Her work

is also emblematic of contemporary Haitian coming of age narratives and she a key author in this genre that is one of this study's foci. There are two texts dedicated fully to the study of her work, both published in the last decade: *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide* (2010) and *Edwidge Danticat: The Haitian Diasporic Imaginary* (2018). *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide* includes essays by varied scholars and creative artists. Haitian author Dany Laferrière crafts a foreword titled "A Heart of Serenity in the Storm." In it, Laferrière writes:

"[w]hat characterizes Danticat's style are human preoccupations fed by a myriad of everyday truths and presented in a style so natural that it may appear simple. It is the art of the night-time storyteller of the country of her childhood. And this very particular style (a simplicity that erases all traces of toil) is making her nothing less than a contemporary classic." (Munro viii)

A Haitian immigrant woman who has lived in the famous Haitian metropolises within the United States—Brooklyn and Miami—Danticat crafts diverse Haitian experiences so as to explore the lives of Haitian women and offer spaces of critique, contemplation, and freedom.

Many have written about her and her work at length. In the aforementioned *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader's Guide* alone exists the works mentioned in this paragraph. J. Michael Dash pens "Danticat and Her Haitian Precursors," a discussion of Danticat's work in relationship to Haitian writers before her. Carine Mardorossian writes "Danticat and Caribbean Women Writers," placing Danticat's work in conversation with authors and artists throughout the Caribbean. Régine Jean-Charles

argues the importance of Danticat's work in the Black American women's literary tradition in "Danticat and the African American Women's Literary Tradition." Additionally, Nick Nesbitt expounds on the diasporic politics of her short stories in "Diasporic Politics: Danticat's Short Works" while Kiera Vaclivik and Charles Forsdick artfully convey the politics of Danticat's travel writing and young adult literature in "Writing Young: Danticat's Young Adult Fiction" and "Traveling, Writing: Danticat's *After the Dance*." Furthermore, scholars and authors, including Myriam Chancy, Maryse Condé, and Évelyne Trouillot, articulate the importance of Edwidge Danticat's work in the Francophone and Haitian literary traditions in "Violence, Nation, and Memory: Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*," "Finally Edwidge Arrived," and "The Right Side of History" respectively. This guide aptly situates the works of Edwidge Danticat in the varied rhizomes and traditions in which she herself exists by way of *dyaspora*.

In the 2018 publication *Edwidge Danticat: The Haitian Diasporic Imaginary*, Nadège Clitandre calls Danticat "one of the most recognized writers in North America and around the world today;" "one of the most celebrated contemporary Caribbean writers in the diaspora;" and "among the foremost Haitian writers writing in English [who] has been dubbed 'the voice' of the Haitian diaspora" (xi). Clitandre authors the text to "explore the breadth and depth of Danticat's oeuvre through an examination of the relationship among nation, diaspora, and the imaginary in the contemporary moment" (xiii) and to focus on "Danticat's inscription of the diasporic subjects and articulation of diasporic imaginary [to] show that the diasporic component of Danticat's writings is a central component that cannot be ignored and indeed

engenders Danticat's universal appeal well into the twenty-first century" (xiii). Clitandre locates Danticat as a "postcolonial" writer necessarily engaged in a study of globalization and diaspora who is constitutively an activist. Clitandre's text is an influential study of Danticat's works. Other scholars also study Danticat and varied themes in their publications.

In addition to the two texts, many scholars like Gwen Bergner (2017), Marouan Maha (2013), Marie-José N'Zengou-Tayo (1998, 2000), and Mireille Rosello (2010), also discuss Vodou cosmological groundings in Danticat's works. Other researchers like Jo Collins (2011), Mary Gallagher (2010), Jana Evans Braziel (2003, 2004, 2005, 2010), Sharon Eve Sarthou (2016) study displacement, *dyaspora*, and identity in Danticat's work. However, others like anthropologist Gina Athena Ulysse have also critiqued Danticat for offering a very middle-class, good-girl representation of Haiti. There is no complete study of Haitian literature published in the United States within the last two decades that does not include the work of Edwidge Danticat.

A number of dynamic books, chapters, articles, dissertations, and more have been written about her work as it relates to topics above and specifically to diaspora literary theory (Braziel 2003, N'Zengou-Tayo 1998) and corporeal and collective memory (Clitandre 2001, Braziel 2000, Johnson 2005, Loichot 2004, N'Zengou-Tayo 2000). Danticat has also received a number of awards and commendations, including a 2009 MacArthur fellowship. All in all, it is clear that Edwidge Danticat is a distinguished contemporary Haitian woman writer authoring socio-political critique through stories about Haitian women, *dyaspora*, coming of age, and more.

In her work, Danticat addresses questions of “power, resistance, history, and women’s roles therein” (Bell 2) while employing themes of “suffering, survival, transcendence,” and more (Bell 4). More specifically, Danticat writes about Haitian people in order to illuminate the paths along which identity is formed and understood and also the processes by which the politics of identity are shaped. These very politics incorporate corporal memory and the epigenetics of trauma.

For Danticat, memory is a fecund political space. Refuting the silences of both the archive and media, Danticat crafts literary spaces for Haitian people and women in particular in which her protagonists revolt, reclaim, and seek to repair. They share particularities of history formerly obscured and voices of people often ignored in both the past and present. They articulate the lessons of the past that help ground freedom in the present and future.

This chapter addresses the ways trauma, like weathering, can be both passed down and healed. I explore the manifestation of this in Danticat’s texts. Women’s narratives, as spaces to genuinely critique the world as is, offer her room to share both the passing down and the healing. In her protagonists, we see fierce love, struggle, and resolution; conflict and contestation; beauty in hideous realities; and *dyaspora* as strength and not dilution.

When Danticat writes about Haiti through the eyes of her women, then, we see in operation what I define as Black feminist citizenship. In this chapter, I also introduce the concept of *dyaspora as passage* to navigate the literary movements and analyze the politics of varied fiction novels with women protagonists in Edwidge Danticat’s corpus, paying particular attention to coming of age novels.

Breath, Eyes, Memory and *Sophie Caco's Evolution*

Breath, Eyes, Memory is a novel about corporeal memory, permeable trauma, and empowering love. In this work ancestral figures speak through their progeny and convey the ways psychosexual trauma experienced through sexual violence can be passed down. Love, in this text, can help heal (formerly long-lasting) wounds. As a novel about memory, love, and the world of ancestors, in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* Danticat shows how these are embodied in the life of Black, Haitian women. In this novel, memory, cultural knowledge, and the realities of mother-daughter love help resist oppression while also relating to the world of interconnected reality and dreams. Danticat stands on the shoulders of Haitian women authors like Marie Chauvet (*Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Trilogy*, 1968), Paulette Poujol-Oriol (*Vale of Tears*, 1996) because she writes *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in an effort to combat an incomplete telling of the history of sexual violence as a tool of political repression in Haiti.

Breath, Eyes, Memory (1994), is a “fictional counter-narrative that chronicles how [the United States and French] empires, the [Haitian] postcolonial state, and the patriarchal family have abused, exposed, and compromised the sexed bodies of Caribbean women and girls” (“Silences too Horrific” 75). In this text, Sophie, the daughter, and Martine, the mother, come to love each other despite the abuses they experience. Sophie returns to Haiti to confront her mother’s abuse and come to terms with her genesis and the root of her mother’s trauma while experiencing profound love principally in women-centered spaces of healing.

Sophie Caco, the protagonist, has a story that is similar to that of many transnational peoples, only her complex relation to nationhood, identity, and power is bordered by sexual violence. This complexity arises out of the fact that she and her mother are sexually violated: Martine, her mother, raped by a paramilitary official and Sophie by her mother's tests to verify Sophie's virginity. After Sophie's birth, her mother leaves her in the hands of her Tante Atie and grandmother and attempts to flee the rape and start anew in Brooklyn, New York. Later Martine sends for Sophie and is faced with the ever-present past she left behind and the frightening present of raising a child in a dangerously different society. Throughout the novel, Sophie tries to understand her place in the world and help her many mothers—Martine, Tante Atie and her grandmother. When she falls in love and is consequently forced to go through a virginity test from her mother, Sophie refuses to participate in the humiliating tradition. She then forces a pestle to rip her hymen and elopes with her lover. Later when she is married and gives birth to her daughter, Sophie goes home to Haiti to reconcile her life choices with her matriarchic family *and* to try to better understand her matrilineal family and her role as both a mother and wife. She evolves and reunites with her mother only in time to realize that her mother Martine's pain and past is still present and leads to Martine killing herself.

A novel riddled with varied forms of abuse, this is also a coming of age narrative in which Sophie evolves and her evolution is experienced as a healing for the women in her family. In writing this fictional novel, Danticat gives voice to the stories of numerous women who were victimized by the military and paramilitary structures of both the United States of America and Haiti. Danticat also gives credence to the

possibility of not only autopoiesis but also community transformation. Sophie's self-generated revolution addresses generational trauma and, in effect, creates new possibilities for the future of her family.

Sophie evolves when she experiences and embodies decolonial love. Her name alone, Sophie Caco, binds her to an anti-imperialist history and love for Haiti unchained because the word "Caco" has anti-imperialist connotations and also plays a role in the recovery of the history of sexual violence in Haiti. The Cacos were a guerilla group of peasant men who opposed the American occupation from 1915 to 1934 (*Fictions of Feminine Citizenship* 79). Their name is also inspired by the name Dominicans gave to northern Dominican rebel peasants (Kaussen xii). According to Donette Francis, this name "symbolically links these women to the Cacos...[who] maintained armed resistance against the US Marines" ("Silences too Horrific" 77).

"Caco" binds Sophie and her family to a powerful history of resistance. It also, however, ties them to the struggle of many Haitian women and girls fighting against a history of "sexual violations by state, empire or even of daughters by mothers in the socialization process" ("Silences too Horrific" 78). Sophie's self-inflicted violence occurred with the temporally pervasive nature of the virginity tests as evidenced in the novel itself. The earlier sexual violations, however, occurred at the hands of the US military and Haitian paramilitary. The Cacos who guarded the nation against American imperialist aims also "raped women of the very nation they were assembled to protect" ("Silences too Horrific" 77). The lineage this name has to a history of violent sexual crime is further revealed in relation to the United States Marines and the Duvalier regime.

Thus, in using the word “Caco,” Danticat exposes the history of American sexual exploitation of Haitian women. During the military occupation, the US Marines dismantled the Haitian army and remade it in their own image. This military force also replaced the Haitian legislature with a puppet Council of State after previously dismantling that legislative body. The Council of State [then] had the power to override local civil courts (“Silences too Horrific” 78). In doing all of this, the United States “ushered in a significant shift in Haitian political culture by installing a military state that ruled against the nation as the state now followed the dictates of the US government rather than Haitian citizens” (“Silences too Horrific” 78). Under this symbiotic governmental leadership, American servicemen and officers systematically raped and sexually violated Haitian women. These acts of violence went unrecognized, undisclosed, and unpunished by the US government. When state officials *did* comment on this behavior, they simply “justified [it] by designating these servicemen as drunk or mentally unbalanced as a result of their tenure in the tropics” (“Silences too Horrific” 78). This structural deflection of numerous instances of rape deemed rape socially customary behavior given the degenerative nature of the tropical Caribbean for metropolitan subjects. This history of sexual violation at the hands of the armed forces was replicated and reformed in the Duvalier regime.

The violent period in which rape was used as a tool of political repression under the Duvalier regime is exposed through the use of the word Caco as the use of it illuminates the legacy of sexual violence that the Duvalier paramilitary troops followed once the Duvaliers were in power. According to Haitian sociologist Carolle Charles, with nullification of who was defined as politically innocent, and thus unable

to be deemed terrorists or politically oppositional, François “Papa Doc” Duvalier set the stage for politically justifiable rape. Before the initiation of the Duvalier regime, in 1957, the government saw

women, children, and old people...as political innocents. Because women, in particular, were viewed by the state as being dependents, they had the “privilege” of not being subjected to state violence.

(Charles 139)

After Papa Doc came to power, the minute women voiced their political opinions or were aligned—as blood relative or as partners—to people deemed politically oppositional, they were seen as “subversive, unpatriotic and unnatural” (Charles 140). In being so, they were “deserving” of punishment, the primary source of which was sexual torture. After the 1959 creation of the militia group the *Tonton Macoutes*, Duvalier took control of Haiti. In the span of two years “Duvalier’s rural militia wielded more power than the Haitian Army, and their own brand of *politically motivated rape* was a notorious method of maintaining their power” (“Silences too Horrific” 178). This arm of the regime—trained by the US-sponsored National Guard—created a “hyper-machismo, [and] enacted [it] upon women’s bodies” (“Silences too Horrific” 178). Moreover, according to historian David Nicholls,

[t]he civilian militia, known as *tonton macoutes* (from the figure in folklore who carries off wicked children in the night)...had been the instrument which the regime had used to suppress political opponents and to effect changes in the leadership of the armed forces. No successful attempt to depoliticize the army could have hoped to

succeed without support from such a paramilitary organization...[and as such] Duvalier had taken steps to bring the *macoutes* under his full personal control. (217)

This paramilitary force brutalized many Haitian peoples in varied ways and Haitian women especially by way of sexual assault (“Silence too Horrific to Disturb” 81; *Breath, Eyes, Memory* 138). *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is appropriately set years after the US invasion and implicates both United States imperialism *and* the Haitian dictatorship in the abuse of Haitian women.

Sophie experiences decolonial love with her husband and daughter, while expressing it to her mother. While it is enormously important that her last name “Caco” speaks to a history of sexual violence that her mother experienced as a rape survivor, Sophie encounters sexual violation as a result of virginity tests her mother inflicts. It is dually essential, then, that Sophie resists the epigenetics of trauma and tries to break the cycle of violence because of this decolonial love. Having found romantic and parental love, Sophie resurrects her mother’s past and finds resolution with her genesis.

In each step of her politicized travel, Sophie learns anew—first of the true nature of her mother’s pain and second of the way to liberate them all from it. She moves to change her matrilineal tales from one of sorrow and heartache to stories of love and triumph. Upon Martines death and burial, Sophie vows to protect her mother’s memory fiercely and, in living decolonial love in her very being, Sophie also repairs the harm caused by sexual violence. In a healing circle, Sophie names her mother as her abuser burns her mother’s name in a cleansing ritual, forgives her

mother, and plans to break the cycle of abuse:

I felt broken at the end of the meeting, but a little closer to being free. I didn't feel guilty about burning my mother's name anymore. I knew my hurt and hers were links in a long chain and if she hurt me, it was because she was hurt, too.

It was up to me to avoid my turn in the fire. It was up to me to make sure my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares, and never had *her* name burnt in the flames. (*Breath, Eyes, Memory* 203)

Sophie pledges never to violate her daughter and to protect her from the very makings of the world that drove her mother insane.

Freedom, for Sophie, is both personal and interpersonal. Sophie's understanding of global Black citizenship allows her to speak to the realities of Black women across the diaspora while the novel also incorporates the stories of varied women around the world. According to Francis, "the novel provides moments of counterpoint by incorporating the multiple voices of Martine [her mother], Atie [her aunt], the grandmother, the Haitian community of women, Sophie's [Black woman] therapist, and her sex therapy group" ("Silence too Horrific to Disturb" 76). Throughout the novel, these varied women come to terms with the violences happened upon their bodies and duly name their oppressors.

Finally, Sophie's experiences in the therapy group a form of radical Black liberation that aims to address the freedom of *all* marginalized people, particularly women of color. Rena, the therapist, is described as "a gorgeous Black woman," an

“initiated Santeria priestess...[who] had done two years in the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic” (*Breath, Eyes, Memory* 206). She is very Afrocentric—with a Diasporic and Pan-African sensibility. Rena introduces Sophie to a sex therapy support group that consists of “Buki, an Ethiopian student who had her clitoris cut and her labia sewn up when she was a girl” (*Breath, Eyes, Memory* 201) and Davina, “a middle-aged Chicana, [who] had been raped by her grandfather for ten years” (*Breath, Eyes, Memory* 201). In including these characters in the narrative, Danticat offers an examination of other forms of trauma and the ways women throughout various diasporas need emancipation from them all; healing, Danticat posits, has the potential to free ancestors too. It, therefore, becomes evident that this story has its focus in not only the Haitian community of female-bodied women but in other communities of the Black diaspora and the world of women broadly defined throughout the global south. Danticat does this in an effort to clarify that sexual traumas are shared in the collective genetic of all women affected by slavery, colonization, imperialism, and globalization—necessarily because of the nature of colonial relationships. She also shows that a therapy containing Indigenous spirituality, love, talking about sexual violence, reclaiming one’s true history and facing one’s oppressor may be the only ways to work through such traumas. In this therapeutic setting, joined and grounded in radical Black liberation aimed at addressing the liberation of all, the marginalized can indeed be free.

Sophie, at the end of the novel, is grounded in her understanding of herself as a Haitian woman in diaspora *and* as a Black woman who understands Haitian cosmology and benefits from said understanding alongside those of her therapy group.

This reinforced cultural cosmology and epistemology and her experiences of violence help her foster a critique of hegemonic patriarchy and misogyny and misogynoir that, upon understanding them, support a radical self-transformation. This is the foundation upon which Sophie repairs the harm of weathering and the epigenetics of trauma.

Amabelle's Revolt in The Farming of Bones

The Farming of Bones (1996), Danticat's second novel, is a text about emboldening love, living dreams, and the corporeal pain of absence. It captures the life of Haitian migrant workers, called *viejos*,¹⁴ who fall victim to ethno-racial genocide, statelessness, and poverty. Love, the guidance of the ancestors and spirits, and powerful understandings of self—grounded in a positive Haitian identity—help the protagonist, Amabelle, survive despite countless attacks on her life.

Blackness, in an anti-Black world, is denigrated and therefore purported as a qualifier of inferiority. This is not the case in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*. Named after the Haitian phrase for sugarcane farming, this novel delves into the world of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic during the years of General Trujillo, before, during, and after the state-sponsored massacre of thousands of Haitians. This is a story of a young housemaid, Amabelle, who, after losing her

¹⁴ Valerie Kaussen writes the “*viejos* [migrant sugarcane farmers] appear in Haitian literature in the mid-thirties on as working-class cosmopolitans whose movements map a Caribbean/American space that is an alternative to the colonial designs of US imperialism” (Kaussen 2008, xi). Literature, she continues, “represents the *viejos* as worldly, culturally hybrid individuals whose identities signified the new pan-Caribbean contacts created out of US empire...Twentieth-century Haitian writers depict this cultural syncretism as inseparable from the *viejos*' political militancy” (Kaussen 2008, xi).

parents at the transnational river crossing, is taken into the home of a Spanish general and his daughter—both whom she imagines to be her new family. Her journey cements her identity as Haitian and positions her in *dyaspora*. Her voyage across the border between the two countries, the river, also creates for her a situation in which to survive but from which to flee as the crisis develops. What begins as little rumors about violence enacted on Haitians turns out to be true. After years of growing up with this Dominican family, she not only becomes their beloved maid but she also falls in love with another laborer, Sebastien Onius. Reminiscing about her love for him is how the novel begins.

In this novel, readers experience an example of decolonial love that frees Amabelle and Sebastien and thrusts them from their anti-Black surroundings to a Black-centered, woman-honoring, Haitian-loving space. With a name that may literally translate to “s/he/it loves” and “beautiful” in Spanish and French respectively, Amabelle is a beautiful woman centered in a tale about a gruesome genocide grounded in hating Blackness read as Haitianess. In fact, when Sebastien looks upon Amabelle, he declares

[I]look at your perfect little face...your perfect little shape, your perfect little body, a woman child with deep Black skin, all the shades of Black in you, what we see and what we don't see, the good and the bad. (*The Farming of Bones* 3)

In calling her perfect and acknowledging the wholeness, the completeness of her Blackness, he is diminishing the “bad” that Blackness connotes and replacing it with good. He too is Black.

South African activist Steve Biko writes that “[m]erely by describing yourself as Black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your Blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being” (Biko 48). This understanding attempts to build an alliance between all people of African descent in opposition to the many ways in which white supremacy is realized. Though specifically racial, it is also decolonial because it challenges white supremacy, the foundation on which colonialism was formed and expanded worldwide.

Sebastien endeavors to liberate Amabelle from her mental chains of feeling inferior because of her orphanhood, her Blackness, and her womanhood. He helps her learn to love her whole self by helping her to love her Blackness, her Haitian-ness. He also attempts to physically emancipate himself, Amabelle, and his sister Mimi from the massacre. He does not succeed in physical liberation, but he is successful in mental, emotional freedom. Amabelle survives grounded in a similar worldview. She too goes on to formulate this loving space that is also bound by reinforced knowledge of Haitian cultural cosmology and epistemology. Sebastien helps rekindle in her a reverence for the past, and both natural and spirit worlds. This becomes useful during the massacre as it helps Amabelle travel to safety.

The juxtaposition of beauty and nature as a means of conveying strength is part of the Haitian literary tradition. In “Fanm Se Poto Mitan,” Marie-José N’Zengou-Tayo describes Haitian women from the nineteenth-century, post-Haitian Revolutionary moment to the 1990s. N’Zengou-Tayo writes that:

novelists of [the American Occupational] period, and even later,

systematically developed a paradigm of strength and resilience to represent (and we would add, to idealize) peasant and working-class women. Strength equated to beauty in most fictions. Physical descriptions borrow from the tropical fauna and flora and landscapes are described using female attributes. The imagery is not specific to male writers: similar ones appear in the work of Marie (Vieux) Chauvet and Marie-Thérèse Colimon, two leading Haitian female writers. (135)

Inspired by the work of Haitian critic Régine Latortue, Marie-José N’Zengou-Tayo’s assessment of strength being equated to beauty in many Haitian fictions rings true for Danticat as well. Nature, in *the Farming of Bones*, is also a character, often made female. For example, en route to the border, Amabelle sees the mountains as women. She proclaims:

During the journey back to the border, I was struck by the size and beauty of the mountains, their hiplike shapes becoming clearer as we drove alongside them. (*The Farming of Bones*, 257)

Haiti, named Ayti by the Arawak indigenous people because of its mountainous lands,¹⁵ is envisioned here as though her mountains were hips—likely a woman’s. There is a popular phrase in Haiti, "*Deye mon gen mon*,"¹⁶ which translates to “behind the mountains are more mountains” (Accilien xxi). The statement is used to give

¹⁵ According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, the “generally rugged topography of central and western Hispaniola is reflected in Haiti’s name, which derives from the indigenous Arawak place-name Ayti (‘Mountainous Land’); about two-thirds of the total land area is above 1,600 feet (490 metres) in elevation.”

¹⁶ Edwidge Danticat also published a young adult novel inspired by this phrase titled *Behind the Mountains* in 2002. The novel is about a girl named Celiane Esperance and her family as they escape a politically tumultuous Haiti and join their father in Brooklyn, NY.

imagery to the duress of life and living in Haiti—as in, once you overcome a mountain, there will simply be others. Alluding to the mountains for which Haiti, called Ayiti in Haitian Kreyol, is known as hips centers people who are known in a heteronormative and cis-gendered¹⁷ world for their hips—child-bearing, dancing, baby-balancing, and all—as women. As we see, for Danticat, strength and beauty are aligned. Following the lead of her predecessors, Danticat portrays Amabelle’s magnificence as tied to an intense, resilient, and brilliant blackness. In the opening scene, Sebastien, applauding her beauty, proclaims, “Look at you...You are glowing like a Christmas Lantern, even with skin the color of driftwood ashes in the rain” (*The Farming of Bones* 3). Alluding to her border and river crossing past, during which time she lost her parents, Amabelle’s blackness in Sebastien’s eyes is profoundly beautiful. Again, the later phrase “all the shades of black in you” (*The Farming of Bones* 3) both categorizes the depth of color *and* the denigrated ways Blackness is perceived in a tale of anti-Haitian, anti-Black genocide paired with the affirming ways Sebastien sees her. Danticat’s choice to begin a harrowing tale in this way centers this love of Blackness even though it is this very Blackness that Dominicans try to erase in this socio-political moment during the massacre. Towards the end of the text, Black skin also is envisioned as a healing fruit balm and burning again appears as a cleansing ritual. When attempting to restore her health after being wounded during her escape, Amabelle is told:

You warm this orange on an open fire... Let it burn until the skin turns
black... When the skin turns all black, you know it’s ready. Then you

¹⁷ A word popularly used to denote a person whose gender identity matches their sexual identity assigned at birth.

cut it open while the juice is still hot, slap the insides against your flesh,
then you take a warm bath and wash the orange flesh away. All your
cuts will heal. Your bone aching will stop. (*The Farming of Bones* 221)

Blackness in this text is as much a marker for death and a healing salve as it is emblematic of both strength and beauty. Amabelle's beauty is not only in her being Black but also in her being courageous and resilient. This courage allows her to continue to survive despite numerous obstacles, threats to her life and losing loved ones. This ability to survive is used as an example of the strength of Haitian women.

The identification of beauty in Blackness also refers to the power to self-define and reform identity, an autopoiesis. Amabelle's ability to understand her own Blackness and define it as beautiful, with the help of others, is a new form of knowing and constructing herself and worldview. It is in experiencing her oppression and finding the terminology for it—in her dialogues with Sebastien and personal trials—that Amabelle begins to see the beauty in her own Blackness and Haitian-ness, despite the overwhelming hatred endured by the two within the Dominican Republic.

Literary scholar Valerie Smith declares that writers who are “self-conscious and self-reflexive, [in their] examining [of the] ways in which literary study” help to portray the changes that occur once “questions of race, class, and gender become central to the process of literary analysis” (Smith 375). As such these writers—and their critics—are said to “challenge the conceptualization of literary study” (ibid). Haitian women writers and other women of color authors contend similarly and “argue that the meaning of Blackness in this county [America] shapes the experience of gender profoundly, just as the conditions of womanhood affect ineluctably the

expression of race” (Smith 376). Deputized by the state, by way of the Trujillo regime, the majority of the committers of genocide were effectively police policing Blackness disguised as malignant xenophobia.

As activist Mariama Kaba writes in the foreword for *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color*, “police violence against Black women remains underexamined and too often invisible in public discourse” (15). Danticat articulates a version of this regarding the Haitian experience in the Dominican Republic during this genocide. That Danticat focuses on Amabelle for this novel is critically important to this tale and her overall critique of the system that deputized these abusers and murderers.

Danticat articulates a critique of intersectional oppression in relation to Haitian women through her representation of Amabelle and Haiti. Amabelle is assaulted, and her life put in danger just because she is a Black, Haitian, poor woman. Quoting Joy James, Kaba writes “the death of women in police custody by means of law enforcement’s measures to discipline and punish is an issue rarely raised in feminist explorations of women and violence or masculinist explorations of racism and policing” (xiv). State deputized killers also fall into this category as committers of misogynoir. Kaba continues “[b]y centering the experiences of girls and young women of color, *Invisible No More* extends and enlarges the carceral landscape, insisting that we consider the streets, the schools, and the home as sites of oppressive policing” (18). *The Farming of Bones* endeavors to center the lives of Black women and people to humanize them in a world where anti-Black brutality and massacring is the norm. At the end of the novel, it is clear that the problems Amabelle faces would quite literally

not exist if her world were less anti-black and anti-Haitian. In such a world her life and the lives of others who experienced the genocide of 1937 would be valued and safe.

The criteria most notably used during the genocide was the pronunciation of the Spanish word *perejil* used to determine who was or was not Haitian; it is for this reason that this socio-political and historical moment is often colloquially referred to as the Parsley Massacre (Langley; Paulino and García; Vargas). However, Danticat asserts that there was also the presumption that all things Black were associated with Haitian-ness and thus Black¹⁸ people with dark skin were also under attack. Amabelle and others, as a result of persecution, form a critique of the racial hegemony that positions them as inferior. In this novel, Danticat openly critiques the ways internalized white supremacy can be so prevalent that, when added to feelings of economic injustice and loss of control, a people can turn on one another and cause a fissure in both societies. She pairs this with an excellent and poignant depiction of decolonial love. Written to show all of this through the eyes of Amabelle, her pride, love, and capacity to not only survive, but also re-imagine, a new life based in healing and radical Black liberation is something from which to learn.

Throughout the novel, Trujillo supporters threaten Amabelle's life and the lives of numerous Haitians are taken. Thousands die. Amabelle goes from somewhat naively believing that her Dominican family's appreciation for her is founded in something more than love, to finding out that she can trust very few people who are

¹⁸ In his seminal work on race politics in the Dominican Republic, Ernesto Sagas shows that in the Dominican Republic, "Blackness" is synonymous with Haitian (Sagas 2002). While this is the case, I use "Black" to connote being of African descent. As the Dominican Republic has had a longer history of slavery than has Haiti, and Valencia's daughter is brown-skinned, using Black seems to suffice.

not Haitian because all allies are also attacked, alongside Haitians. She loses her lover, and many of her Haitian friends, but does make it back to Haiti where she starts a new life for herself and begins learning what it actually means to be a survivor of trauma. She experiences radical autopoiesis in the process.

Amabelle's experience also tackles the negation of global Black citizenship in the Dominican Republic in 1937. Quite literally, the attempt to annihilate Haitians, Dominico-Haitians, dark-skinned Dominicans and Blackness as a whole would not exist if there were more legal and social principles and practices of global Black citizenship. Shreerekha Subramanian, in her essay "Blood, Memory, and Nation: Massacre and Mourning in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*," argues that the unified community of the living and dead is exhibited in Amabelle's dream states (2005). This community speaks to a Vodou cosmology experienced through Amabelle that refutes worldly boundaries and borders. Valerie Kaussen furthers Subramanian's argument by arguing, "that in this novel the other world of death, ghosts, and shadows symbolizes the effacement and erasure of Black lives from the global community of citizenship" (Kaussen 195). This symbolism speaks to a physical and real elimination of Black people by way of state-sponsored, state-sanctioned, or otherwise state-supported violence. In the end, Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* is a novel about the complexities of race and the underlying need for love and solidarity. As such, it sheds light on the need for radical Black liberation.

The Farming of Bones is a lesson about global Black citizenship and the precarity and violence of borders. Danticat, therefore, uses the interactions between Haitian and the Dominican characters in *The Farming of Bones* to portray how a

country with a similar history of slavery as the country it opposes can project and try to murder its own Blackness. A Haitian-identified young woman living and loving in an anti-Haitian Dominican Republic is forced to return to Haiti for her own safety. She travels through the very waters that killed her parents when they all migrated from danger and poverty in Haiti to the Dominican Republic. Much of the violence that she and her loved ones encounter would not exist as they do without white supremacy and colonially created borders.

In *The Farming of Bones*, Haiti is feminized in order to challenge the accepted understanding of citizenship. From its inception, “Haitian literature was politically motivated...and the literary representation of women immediately took in a symbolic value” (“Fanm Se Poto Mitan” 133). During the 1915 American Occupation, “Haitian women again became literary political symbols...and Haiti was once more feminized with an interesting paradigm of the Black peasant woman as the symbol of the country’s exploitation and resilience” (“Fanm Se Poto Mitan” 134). Danticat uses the character Amabelle to the same effect.

Amabelle’s existence as an orphan represents the state of the Haitian nation. Not a new image in Danticat’s work, the imagery of the orphan girl—in this case, Amabelle—shows stunted personal development as well as a halted connection with her motherland. As she did not have the time to build a stronger connection to her parents, she did not have a chance to build a stronger sense of her Haitian self—before she met Sebastien. Braziel, in her study titled “Re-membering Défilée: Dédée Bazile as Revolutionary Lieu de Mémoire,” argues that the images of “stillbirths and orphans are so pervasive in Danticat’s texts that is difficult *not* to see these images as

symbolic for the arrested state of development of the Haitian Republic itself” (82). After the massacre, Amabelle moves back to her mother’s land and creates a life for herself by re-tracing her lineage and re-creating her family by way of connecting with Sebastien’s mother. In this process, Amabelle also connects with the neighborhood Sebastien’s mother inhabits and creates a new community. By these means, she expresses radical Black liberation.

In creating Amabelle, Danticat also posits liberation in the hands of the women. Women are the keepers of culture and story, and as such, are dealt the task of maintaining the history of the massacre and those lost in it. During the period of American occupation, novelists “systematically developed a paradigm of strength and resilience to represent... [and idealize] peasant and working-class women” (N’Zengou-Tayo 134). This paradigm continues and is exemplified in *The Farming of Bones*, but the idealization is tempered with the realities of the violence they face and the need for resilience in order to move past the trauma of it and to the healing thereafter. This is how they will mitigate the epigenetics of trauma—a life-changing, groundbreaking trauma indeed. Danticat, in so crafting the novel, uses aspects of Haitian culture—cosmology and connections between the living and dead specifically—and community overall as remedies and poultices for trauma. The women who survive trauma then become instrumental in Haitian nation-building efforts. Accordingly, in my view, these very efforts must be grounded in an understanding of radical Black liberation. Given the migrant labor, misogyny, and anti-Blackness Amabelle faces, freedom is the only choice. In *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*, activist Charlene Carruthers calls for a freedom that will come with the

“dismantling of capitalism, patriarchy, and anti-Blackness in new ways” (34).

Freedom will first come in liberating survivors and the ancestors of their traumas. Naming and witnessing this trauma in literature is a means of freeing these narratives. Editor Kristen West Savali writes in *Invisible No More* of the book’s author, Andrea Ritchie. Savali states that for Ritchie “writing is resistance and that if liberation is our true goal, then Black women and girls can be invisible no more” (7). *The Farming of Bones* is Danticat’s effort at refuting this very invisibility and, steeped in different evocations of the need for decolonial love, global Black citizenship, and radical Black liberation, the novel itself supports an overall comprehension of Black feminist citizenship.

Sisterhood and Women-Centered Spaces in Untwine and Untwining Freedom

Untwine is another more recent novel by Edwidge Danticat that supports an understanding of Black feminist citizenship. This text is about the Boyer family—a middle-class Haitian/Haitian-American family consisting of a mother, a father, twin daughters, and a larger diasporic family as well. The novel centers on the death of one of the twins. As the narrative advances, we recognize that one is physically alive and the other alive in memory. As such, this text is also about navigating the world as a young, Black girl after a traumatic, life-changing event.

In *Untwine*, Edwidge Danticat crafts women-centered spaces and sister-circles, the characteristics of which help theorize both Black feminist citizenship and diaspora. Centering on the fictional Boyer twins, Giselle and Isabelle, Danticat authors a

situation in which the sister who passes away helps to save the one living. Danticat creates too a world in which women, memory, cosmology, and love reign. Early in the novel, the Boyer family is falling apart—the parents are separating, the sisters are fighting, and the family is fragmented. On the way to Isabelle’s recital, however, a car crashes into theirs, and one twin dies. The majority of the novel is spent decoding the past, negotiating the present, and reforming the future.

The love between the sisters resists boundaries, borders, and more, to express care and nurturing of each other’s souls. In the end, Giselle is all the better for her sister, whether she is in the tangible world or not. Through flashbacks to memories with Isabelle and by recounting stories of her parent’s love, Giselle relives and revives her love for her sister—a love that forces her to choose life. While negotiating the present, Giselle accesses truths, realities, and possibilities formerly denied to her. With new skills, fuller dreams, and her sister-memories, Giselle reforms her future. At its core, the text is about Giselle’s own coming into herself—as untwinned, as forever changed, as a more intentional and loving being. She learns from her sister’s life and moves through the pain of losing her to create her own path. Her mother and aunt do the same.

Hit by a victimized and kidnapped teen trying to escape her captors, Isabelle’s death was as much an unfortunate accident as it was a result of a misfortune. Her death, however, brings together and saves her family. Her travel from this world to the next catalyzes dramatic shifts in the lives of her loved ones. Her journeys between worlds via the memory of others and in her sister’s life reflect ideas of life and death in Vodou cosmology. Once aware that Isabelle is dead, Giselle proclaims: “I will

never see Isabelle again, except maybe when I look in the mirror and pretend, just as everyone is saying that I am her, and she is me. Who would I be? Who *could* I be without her?” (*Untwine* 36). This proclamation is an exaltation of the complexities of being twins and an homage to Vodou.

In Vodou, “the living, the dead, and the unborn play equally significant roles in an unbroken historical chain” (Michel 29). The three are ever-present and always shaping the present. Furthermore, according to Vodou cosmology once “death touches a family it is said to ‘balance their house’” (McCarthy Brown 24). The balance, in this instance, pertains to a resetting for the Boyer family.

Isabelle is crafted as a musical, outspoken, savvy young woman. Raised to value Haitian history and under the tutelage of dynamic women, Isabelle is an embodiment of various epistemological understandings of Blackness and womanhood. Quite unlike her sister, she articulates these whenever necessary. Upset with a dinner guest’s assertion that naming the family cat “Dessalines” was a dishonor to the Haitian revolutionary, Isabelle proclaims:

Isn’t it great to honor the things and people we love in whatever way we can, to keep them as close to us as possible, in both body and mind?
Isn’t it better to call a cat Dessalines than to forget Dessalines? At least here, we call out Dessaline’s name several times a day. Aren’t there people who call their children Dessalines? (*Untwine* 133)

In several assessments of domestic life, home is often portrayed as a place of domestication and displacement for young Black women and “[t]he family is sometimes situated as a site of oppression for women” (*Migrations of the Subject* 15).

In this novel, notions of home are complicated and, for the protagonist, the world expands.

The Boyer home and family refute “the silence that is demanded of the young girl child” in patriarchal contexts (*Migrations of the Subject* 15). After this rousing oration, Giselle states that she “couldn’t tell whether [her] parents were mortified or proud when Isabelle took it upon herself to offer a monologue as rebuttal” (*Untwine* 132). They continue, though, to share the story after Isabelle’s death as a means of holding her in esteem. Furthermore, Isabelle’s death; her travel between worlds of life and death; her earlier counterhegemonic views of Haiti and unabashed being; and the balance that memories of her provide for her family make Isabelle’s death both an unfortunate accident and a liberation for her family. After her death, Giselle inherits her courage and refusal of silence; Giselle is inspired to remake herself due to the loss of her dynamic sister.

A novel about love, trauma, and memory in a co-educational but women-centered Haitian family, *Untwine* offers space too to think through the meaning of radical Black liberation. If it is truly meant to be free, radical Black liberation has to be experienced everywhere. If resistance has to be “collective and organized...principled and selfless...have a revolutionary impact...[and] negate the basis of domination” (Bell 5), then liberation as well must be this and more. Giselle’s holding onto her love for her sister and self while maintaining her life amidst the pain and trauma—a trauma now genetically encoded and a weathering now ever present given her being without her sister and confidant—is a form of this resistance. As author Beverly Bell suggests, “[g]iven the forces arrayed against a Haitian woman,

simply to *kenbe la*, hold the line—even without making any advance—is a victory” (Bell 5). Giselle holds the line; she lives through the accident and physical attack on her body, and she continues through the aftermath and its assault on her spirit. She embodies the lessons of revolution in surviving her present.

Giselle also constructs a citizenship identity that is diasporic and spiritual. She is a citizen of the United States even if she is not old enough to vote and as a citizen, she mandates repair for her sister’s death only to find that the other person was also a victim of abuse. She is also a citizen of the Haitian diaspora and retreats to Haiti with her family in search of safety in her grandparents’ home. She, therefore, is a citizen of the global Black diaspora in her understanding of herself in relationship to the world. A citizen of both the tangible and spiritual world, Giselle communes in the two. Understanding her story forces readers to employ alternative ways of experiencing “subjectivity, personal transformation, affect” (Caldwell et al. 5) and more, and to expand the ways citizenship is defined both within forced and created borders. In cataloging Isabelle’s trajectory, four pivotal moments in the text come into view: her death; travel between worlds of life and death; earlier counterhegemonic views of Haiti and unabashed being; and the balance that memories of her provide for her family. Isabelle’s death is both an accident and liberation.

Regarding the epigenetics of trauma, it is clear that Isabelle’s death has radically transformed the two sisters and their family. They have all been transformed. While it is clear that everyone who experiences trauma does not experience the same resulting mental/physical health impact, it is also clear that all living family members, Giselle especially, are aiming to mitigate the harm caused by the trauma by seeking

therapeutic recourses. They all have varying levels of successes. Giselle's growing success, by the end of the novel, is due in large part to decolonial love, radical Black liberation, and global Black citizenship. The catalyst for much of her growth in these ways is the loss of her twin sister.

In *The Art of Death*, Edwidge Danticat offers a discussion of the difficulty of losing loved ones and the importance of the words of dying peoples and their loved ones. She centers the importance of narrating their realities unapologetically. Having recently lost her mother, she writes of losing parents:

When you're young, your parents can seem immortal, then they get terminally ill, and they remove the possibility of either you or them being immortal. When they die, you realize what it's like to suddenly occupy an ambiguous space in the world. If both your parents, who are the people who created you, can die, then you too can die. With this in mind, you become acutely aware that we are all 'living dyingly.' (20)

One would imagine the same is true when your twin dies suddenly. During the beginning of the novel when Giselle is maneuvering the loss of her sister, this ambiguity of space and place is ever more apparent. The work, though, with which she engages, the work of processing and managing her trauma—be it with swimming, or talking, or negotiating it in varied moments as seen textually—this is the work of healing. In this, there is a future in which the change, genetic and realistic, does not have to be steeped in negation and worsened health outcomes. According to the same Bowers and Yehuda investigation:

Studies suggest that healthy relationships are protective against generational perpetuation of stress. Supportive and trusting relationships with intimate partners, high levels of maternal warmth toward children, and low levels of IPV [Intimate Partner Violence] break the cycle of abuse, where children of women who were maltreated during childhood were themselves protected from maltreatment (Jaffee et al., 2013). A recent meta-analysis indicates that safe, stable, nurturing relationships buffer intergenerational continuity of child maltreatment. (Schofield et al., 2013; Bowers 241)

Giselle's experiences and her socio-political and cultural grounding help her build "healthy relationships [which] are protective against generational perpetuation of stress" (Bowers 11). She is able to mitigate the epigenetics of trauma *and* the outright trauma of living in this world multiply oppressed because of both her nurturing and affirmative community *and* her self-transformation.

Through migration narratives—musical, visual, literary—Black artists and intellectuals worldwide grapple with forced, induced, and voluntary migration across time and space. In creative textual form, Danticat demonstrates that Black women writers interpolate voices of the dispossessed and less rooted in conversations about global citizenship and power. Seen in the narratives of the traveling marked bodies, these moments work to convey that physical and spiritual transnational travel have the potential to catalyze and nurture a distinct Black feminist citizenship.

Danticat's Revolutionary Agents

Danticat's works narrate stories where mothers and daughters—women in general—follow, exhibit, or espouse the need for decolonial love, radical Black liberation, and global Black citizenship. From short story protagonists in “Caroline’s Wedding” and “1937,” to story-cycle female-identified protagonists in texts like *Krik? Krak!* (1995), *Behind the Mountains* (2002), *Dew Breaker* (2004), *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013), and the aforementioned Black women-centered novels, to the memoirs published about Danticat herself, the Haitian women characters created by Edwidge Danticat assert roles of protector, majestic forces, revolutionary leaders, truth demanding political figures, and spiritual and moral instructors—roles generally, popularly given to men. According to Jana Evans Braziel, Danticat uses her characters as “literary reflections on a present-day Haiti in which the lives of mothers and children are frequently imperiled by poverty, hardship, and political unrest” (“Défilée’s Diasporic Daughters” 83). Danticat reinvigorates these images with notions of beauty, strength, and love so as to re-frame ideas about the agency of subjugated women and allow their survival narratives to truly be powerful and liberatory.

Danticat's works articulate the multilayered oppression Haitian women face. In Haitian women's literature, Myriam Chancy writes, “the novel most often serves as the vehicle through which identity is articulated and affirmed...imagination is rendered factual rather than false, a key to the real rather than its mere shadow” (Chancy 12). The women in Danticat's novels are agents of knowledge and the reader is made to

witness the state of violence under which they struggle to survive. In order to enact this survival, they must embody differing aspects of what I define as Black feminist citizenship.

The women in Danticat's corpus cultivate one another's mental, emotional, and spiritual evolution while working to liberate each other from oppressive systems of white supremacy, male supremacy, and the interlocking realities of subjugations. Theirs is a radical way of being and loving; it is a decolonial, revolutionary exhibition of love. While their lives are riddled with issues, they are often connected beyond the limits of the material world, and this connection also offers them spaces of freedom. Their love is tangible in the arts and intangible with its magic; it is wholesome and fecund; it is transformative and limitless.

Danticat's women ground their truths in their experiential knowledges; they create dialogic atmospheres of growth; they speak, learn, and articulate their lives with emotion and empathy; and they hold themselves accountable for bettering their own lives. In so doing, they cultivate both the environments that promote love and healing from the wounds caused by oppression *and* nurture autopoiesis. Their truths become such that perpetuate life, living, and revolt—in small and large ways.

Community and conversation are critical sites from which to gain insight for women in the works of Edwidge Danticat. Talking is a pastime with which they learn about their parents, histories, and lives. Using this medium, they learn lessons, histories, and of their expanded family networks throughout the worlds as they maintain connections to home. All the while, talking is also not only a matter for the conscious, tangible world. Similarly, the notions of home are often both fixed and

figurative. “Home” is the entities in which they live across Haiti’s *dyaspora and* the spaces made among and within the people they hold dear. Home is, lastly, a repository for the ancestor as explained by Farah Griffin. In ‘*Who Set You Flowin’?*’, Griffin furthers ideologies that “home” can also be understood as a repository of the ancestors. Consequently, then, home is a metaphorical space where history and ancestral lineages are present. Home can also function as a *return to the source* as expressed by Amilcar Cabral in his 1974 text “Identity and Dignity in the Context of Struggle.”

In “Identity and Dignity in the Context of Struggle,” Amilcar Cabral argues that the concept of “return to the source” is

therefore not a voluntary step, but the only possible reply to the demand of concrete need, historically determined, and enforced by the inescapable contradiction between the colonized society and the colonial power, the mass of the people exploited and the foreign exploitive class, a contradiction in the light of which each social stratum or indigenous class must define its position. (63)

I contend that in many ways “return to the source” can be seen as an evocation of home precisely in this expanded sense because of the complex qualities Cabral presents. This application can apply to the Black diaspora as home is often, if not always, a place in which coloniality and domination must be contended. Even still, home, given the necessary contestations, has the potential to be a liberatory space whether or not it exists within the confines and conventions of an oppressive society.

The impassioned, compassionate, and oft-traumatized realities of Danticat’s

agents are such that reject objective reasoning and the falsehood that such a thing occurs among human beings. They are passionately aligned to the arts; they evocatively express their ideas and desires; they articulate themselves employing emotive reasoning and affected logics; they are dynamic beings who create the worlds of their choosing. In line with this, they *too* often hold themselves accountable to their dreams, loves, and desires. In a world riddled with imperfections, death, and pain, they choose to continue to change the world within and around them.

Danticat's agents practice an inclusive social responsibility upheld by people of the African Diaspora among people who stimulate democracy and demosprudence. Living within both the African and Haitian diaspora, for these agents, the concept of diaspora is a passage of sorts. Diaspora is a passage between locales, temporal spaces, ideologies, hegemonies, cultures, cosmologies, and more. Understanding diaspora in this way allows for a conjoining of Middle Passage Epistemologies,¹⁹ Oceanic theories of what lay in, on, and beneath waters flowing along various routes, *and* the work of many in relation to double, triple and other kinds of consciousness.

Danticat's writings are political and aim to not only include women in the telling of history but in doing this—and more—to also bring about social justice. For Haitian women, activist and writer Beverly Bell argues, “[s]imply changing dominant ways of seeing and of canonizing history cannot transform the forces and structures

¹⁹ Examples of scholars who engage with Middle Passage Epistemologies include: “Specters of the Atlantic” (Baucom 2001); *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging* (Brand 2012); “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic-Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage” (Tinsley 2008). These theorizations and epistemologies about the Middle Passage are brilliant ways of conceptualizing water as registry; geography and cultural flow; differently situated peoples, histories, and imaginings of diasporic conception; and epiphenomenal time. My main contention is that they offer (1) no return and therefore no multidirectional movement and (2) that the way of knowing is not seen as discursive or dialectical.

that threaten or thwart the survival of poor Haitian women...Yet altering the way these women, and others in similar positions, are viewed and understood in the world is a first step toward changing the relations of power that determine the conditions of their lives” (Bell 3). Danticat’s works pursue similar aims. In changing historical narratives; centering Black women and their narratives; portraying corporeal memory and the epigenetic of trauma; and more, Danticat aptly articulates the importance and agency of women and adds to the foundation upon which Haitian women can change power relations and the circumstances of Black women like themselves.

In the Haitian women writers’ tradition, politics are discussed mainly as they relate to the personal. The stories of Danticat’s agents, texts “read as a literature of revolution” (Chancy 6), offer key tenets regarding the need for radical change and the varied ways to achieve these. Written in conversation with works of authors of the Combahee River Collective and therefore proposing “fundamental paradigmatic shift[s] in how we think about oppression” (“Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination” 221), Danticat’s texts offer examples, by way of the protagonists, as to how to put theory into praxis. Further, Danticat’s works also ensure an “embracing [of] a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, [which, then,] re-conceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance” (“Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination” 221). Danticat’s creations make clear that the work of truth, testimony, confession and “letting the wound speak” engenders political realization, social change, and psychosocial, political, and transnational decolonization (Kaussen 215). After reading Danticat’s works, the task of creating further change is left to the reader.

Danticat politicizes the personal and fictional renditions of Haitian women's lives. In that it is political, Danticat's writing "points to a new way of intervening at the juncture between cultural production and political praxis" (Nesbitt 74). It is not, however, "[a] programmatic manifesto" (Nesbitt 82). Instead, Danticat "brings the compelling force of an unrivaled poetic sensibility and micrological sensitivity for suffering to testify to the destruction of human possibility and to recover the persistent splinters of hope lodged in the wreckage of post-Duvalierist society" and American imperialism (Nesbitt 82). Danticat uses fiction to entice the world's imagination and to liberate our notions of what kinds of solutions are, in fact, possible.

Danticat and Black Feminist Citizenship

Admittedly writing "for the person [she was] at fifteen, for the girl looking for an image of herself" (*Edwidge Danticat* 177), Danticat authors literature for the very reasons mentioned in the introduction to *Edwidge Danticat: The Haitian Diasporic Imaginary*. Writing varied narratives of different kinds of people, Danticat centers the voices of the marginalized to craft tales historically tied and politically astute. These stories render readers implicated in the making of better futures for protagonists and the people they represent. Her narratives and works draw on a Haitian diasporic imaginary that reconstitutes love, citizenship, and liberation.

Black feminist citizenship, I am arguing, is contoured by politicized travel; reinforced cultural cosmology and/or epistemology; critique of hegemony; and balanced intersectional living and radical autopoiesis. Its components include decolonial love, radical Black liberation, and global Black citizenship. It is incurred

within the politics of travel and passage. The migrations and transformations along the way confirm diaspora as passage and strengthen democracy and demosprudence. Home, love, being, and law are constructions both within the confines of oppression *and* without them.

Throughout Danticat's work, we see that the very traumas that are passed down genetically and the very realities that cause weathering can be both learned from and repaired. We see the very survival of protagonists as resistance and therefore as profoundly political. We see the ways that collective struggle for liberation in the tangible world also entails "personal and subjective transformations" (Caldwell et al. 12). It begins within, most especially when this very world is attacking your health.

In understanding Danticat's revolutionary agents, we are forced to learn that the subjugation of the past is reshaped and ever-present—we see this in the ways structures and systems attack people every day. This everyday violence makes necessary small acts of resistance—a trait also engrained in Black women's spiritual and corporeal memory and made living in story-form. As a result, we are forced to "expand and challenge traditional notions of what constitutes the political, who is seen as a political agent, and how social change can be effected by women who are excluded, either in fact or by law, from full citizenship due to their race, nationality, or social class" (Caldwell et al. 12). We are forced *too* to think through the lessons clarified by these women so as to also partake in resistance.

CHAPTER DE (2):

CONFLICTING LOUGAWOU:

ROXANE GAY'S CONTESTATION WITH RETURNING

AND *DYASPORA*

Without a doubt, it is important to read books whose protagonists are Black/Latinx first generation women [of the United States]. It's important for us to read about characters who not only look like us and our families, but [who] also sound like us. There are a lot of negative portrayals and stereotypes of our people in the media, especially in the books we read in school. Most of the books I read for class have a white man as the protagonist and very few times I see people of color, specifically women be the lead in the story and have a positive role. Usually, the plot revolves around their relationship with a man, including conversations with other women in the story. We need more books with Black/Latinx first-generation women protagonists to get rid of this norm and the low, poor self-esteem that comes with it. It can reshape misinterpretations made about our people and make us feel more confident about our identity. If more people read these types of books, it'd further empower women of color and break barriers.

J.M.
High School Student
Athlete
Activist

Representation is a matter again expressed as important to this speaker. Most specifically, she declares it “important to read books whose protagonists are Black/Latinx first generation women” who look and sound like “us and our families.” While counterbalancing negative portrayals and stereotypes is privileged, the speaker also offers that it is particularly valuable to have women protagonists who positively impact the narrative. A high school aged youth, she wishes to read more about these kinds of characters because of their impact on her psyche and the ways that seeing herself read and made visible in this way will, according to her, directly impact her wellness. While misrepresentations are indeed in need of reshaping, and eliminating, the expressed direct correlation between reading, wellness, and empowerment is poignant.

What could we offer our youth in public education systems if we employed culturally responsive education as a means of political education?

In what ways could we offer wellness to youth navigating our oppressive world if we taught them to read—in all the meanings of this word—and shared with them literature about peoples like them in addition to literature of revolution?

What kinds of revolution could we spark in “simply” reading the works of writers herein and others like them on a public scale?

“Conflicting *Lougawou*” is my endeavor to imagine the women in Roxane Gay’s texts not only as survivors but their stories as emblematic of Black feminist citizenship *even* as stories of horrific brutality. It is my effort to correct the misinterpretations mentioned in the epigraph. Though not named *lougawou* (flying rebellious women of Haitian popular culture) these women experience a level of violence against Black women, misogynoir, that cannot be ignored all the while living in a white supremacist, anti-black, capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal, misogynist world. Their very living is a radical act and their survival a rebellion. They are, therefore, akin to the *lougawou* in the Haitian imaginary.

To be a Black woman writer is to use one’s standpoint epistemology to author truths and offer to the world tales that question the world as is. Haitian women writers writing about migration use their works to complicate and clarify what it means to be *dyaspora*²⁰ in the contemporary moment.

Speaking on displacement, home, and exile they author stories that are also intensely political and tied to the socio-political theories discussing intersectional epistemology, American systems of oppression, liberation, and more. Moreover, their texts also shed light on and expand what it means to be Black, woman, and writer. One of these writers is Roxane Gay, and I will convey in this chapter the ways her works engage with these themes.

²⁰ A contested term, I use *dyaspora* as the Haitian Kreyol version of “diaspora.” It is the term many use to qualify people who are of Haitian ancestry but live away from the peninsula. Though sometimes used in a derogatory sense, there are efforts to find power in this diasporic identity. I use it in the affirmative to convey the “in-between” natures of people in the Haitian diaspora.

Roxane Gay is a contemporary Black writer of Haitian descent. Her parents migrated to the United States in pursuit of advancing their studies and later sustained a middle-class life in middle America (Cochrane). Raised in *dyaspora* as the eldest sibling of two boys, Gay was also nurtured in migration throughout the United States of America. Born in Nebraska, Gay and her family traveled to Colorado, Illinois, Virginia, and New Jersey, shifting and moving as per the needs of her father's job (Cochrane). An avid reader from her youth, Gay is also a survivor of sexual assault and gang rape (Cochrane). Marked by her violation at the age of twelve, her published works center themes of class and class privilege, race, gender, misogyny, rape and rape culture, power, and popular culture.

Writing for Roxane Gay has offered space for healing, reclamation, truth-telling, and more. According to Gay, writing is a way

to think through what it means to be in this world. I definitely write to reach other people, but I write for myself first. I don't mean that in an arrogant way. It's just that this is me trying to make sense of my place, and how did I get here, and why am I so lucky in some ways, and so unlucky in others? So it starts with me, and then I move beyond the self, as much as I can. (Cochrane)

Throughout this chapter, I will discuss the ways Gay's work serves as both ethnography and metafiction, *and* how her engagement with Feminisms offers ample room to examine Black feminist citizenship as well as *dyaspora saudade*.

Roxane Gay and Revolution

Though in *dyaspora*, Gay's work continues the trend of revolution as articulated by Haitian women writers before her. Haitian women authors writing in the contemporary moment craft migration narratives that elucidate rebellion, complicate understandings of citizenship, and reaffirm various ethics of Black feminisms. Women authors of Haitian descent living in the United States write at the intersections of Haitian and Black feminisms. The Migration Narratives they author convey what it means to be immigrant, Black, and women. In a time during which each of these identity factors is under attack, it is essential to look to these works in order to deduce new ways to move forward.

Contemporary Haitian women writers artfully continue the work of the various Haitian women authors before them. Myriam Chancy writes that "much of Haitian women's literature should be read as a literature of revolution" (Chancy 6). These authors' portrayals of Haitian women can be read as examples of writing that expresses the plight and oppression of marginalized people in a way that problematizes normalized epistemics and hegemony. This literature of revolution helps to relocate the blame for society's ills in the actions and modes of existence of the powerful while working too to convey the agency of disempowered women. The main characteristics of this genre of literature include: creating new definitions of self, vocalizing one's truths, and employing agency.

Haitian women writers, like Roxane Gay, create so as to recognize and tackle the facts of life for Black children. Anthropologist Aimee Meredith Cox purports that our "failure to understand and address the interlocking systems and entrenched policies that affect the entire diverse community of Black people in the United States

has disastrous life-or-death consequences for the community's most vulnerable members: children and adolescents" (Cox 6). Haitian women writers create Migration Narratives to do just this. They employ strategies of Haitian and Black feminists to further their cause. Haitian feminists resist patriarchy with self-definitions and use art, namely literature, to give voice to women's struggles. Black feminists use Black women's experiences to illuminate and critique intersectional subjugation while offering articulations of the possibilities for radical change. Haitian women writers do similarly with their works; it is my goal to push the conversation further.

In this chapter, I will principally discuss Roxane Gay's "Things I Know About Fairy Tales" and *Untamed State* alongside brief discussions of *Ayiti*, *Bad Feminist*, and *Hunger*. I will describe the ways these texts engage the concept of ethnography, metafiction, Black Feminisms, and Black feminist citizenship while contesting a simplified understanding of *dyaspora*. In Gay's articulation of these ideas, the novel and short story become political tools through which Gay conveys her feminism.

Dyaspora Kidnap and Identity

As a means of sparking re-creation, Haitian women writers of migration narratives author processes of autopoiesis for their protagonists. In so doing, they promote a questioning of the world as is and an answering of said questions in ways that allow freedoms. If in migration sparked by political and economic imperatives Haitian women are forced to leave behind the worlds that created them, they are also

offered opportunities to use the insight gained in flight and fleeing to re-create themselves.

Edwidge Danticat, the previously discussed esteemed contemporary Haitian woman author, conveys that artists create dangerously because their art and subjects expect rebirth in the face of a world demanding their silence and demise. She writes:

The artists who came up with these other types of memorial art, the art that could replace the dead bodies, may also have wanted to save lives. In the face of both external and internal destruction, we are still trying to create as dangerously... as though each piece of art were a stand-in for a life, a soul, a future...we have no other choice. (*Create Dangerously* 20)

Haitian women authors of migration narratives boldly craft their protagonists' coming of age and migratory experiences also as journeys to themselves. The young women often are propelled into forms of exile because of the situations in which they live. In leaving, they embark on excursions betwixt and between both nations *and* their various identities.

Writer of the Haitian *dyaspora*, Roxane Gay, is known for both her fiction and also her definition of "bad feminism."²¹ Gay firmly believes that identifying as both of the Haitian diaspora and a feminist, albeit a bad one, requires a political agenda that necessitates being and telling truths. Furthermore, for her protagonists, she uses those truths as grounds on which to recreate oneself. With ties to both Haiti and the United

²¹ Roxane Gay wrote a book by this title in which she discusses navigating feminism and finding her place within it and this world. A brief discussion of this book is forthcoming in my dissertation.

States, she seeks to write of Haiti as “an island of contradictions” so as to decenter negative media portrayals while also reflecting her *dyaspora* contentions (*Ayiti* 75). “Given how much the media loves to write the same old story about Haiti,” Gay is surprised “that there aren’t [many] other voices trying to provide different perspectives” (Duncan). Serving as one of these “other voices,” Gay authors a complex image of Haiti where

art and music are rich, textured, revelatory, ecstatic. The sugar cane is raw and sweet. And yet... There is no infrastructure—no sewer system, no reliable roads, erratic electricity. Women are not safe. Disease cannot be cured. Violence cannot be quelled. The land is eroding. The sky is falling. (*Ayiti* 75)

The safety of women and the presence of seemingly insatiable violence are two topics Gay interrogates in both her short story, “Things I Know About Fairy Tales,” and her novel *Untamed State*. In the two, she employs her fiction as ethnography and engages with metafictional writing.

Ethnography, Metafiction, and Fairy Tales

Roxane Gay’s fictional tale serves as ethnography principally because, in creating it, she offers different insight on Haitian women’s subjectivity—here defined as the state of being a subject with history, power, and perspective. Furthermore, if the writing of anthropological ethnography is a literary process, one necessarily involving invention and capturing stories, then some literature can *be* ethnographic given “the

willingness of new ethnography to see the lines between empirical reality and literary creativity blurred” (Ingram 184). Being *dyaspora* and given the in-betweenness of that identity, Gay is both the anthropological emic and etic. As emic, she can analyze from the perspective of an insider—a woman of Haitian ancestry. As etic, she offers the analysis of an outsider—a Black woman born in the United States. This positionality, this being intermediary, allows a unique standpoint from which Gay may work toward her project of complicating understandings of Haiti and more specifically writing about Haitian women’s safety and the violence they endure in Haiti. After all, as Ruth Behar points out, “it is no longer social scientists...who are shaping U.S. public understanding of culture, race, and ethnicity, but novelists such as Toni Morrison and Amy Tan” (Behar qtd. in Ingram 184). As she too authors ethnographic fictions, Roxane Gay participates, alongside the aforementioned writers, in literary anthropology. Her short story also hints at metafictional intent.

Originally published in 2011, “Things I Know About Fairy Tales” was again published in the short story collection, *Haiti Noir 2*; it is a tale of kidnapping, *dyaspora*, and the intersections of race, gender, and class. The story may be considered metafiction because Gay authors a short story about popular fairy tales in which both her protagonists and the tales themselves are characters used to critique both fairy tales and the world at large. In “Things I Know About Fairy Tales,” Gay addresses and critiques the system of patriarchy that allows for violence against women while she explores the fictions women create and interpret so as to navigate their lives.

Patricia Waugh contends that metafictional writings “not only examine the

fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text” (Waugh 2). In “Things I Know About Fairy Tales,” Gay calls attention to experiences of sexual violence, abuse, and kidnap while allowing space for fairy tales and the lessons they teach. Waugh argues that metafiction pursues questions of reflection, construction, and mediation of experiences in the world by “drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book” (Waugh 3). “If individuals now occupy ‘roles’ rather than ‘selves,’ then the study of characters in novels,” Waugh posits, “may provide useful models for understanding the construction of subjectivity in the world outside of novels” (Waugh 3). Waugh argues that as our knowledge of the world is mediated through language, “literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model for learning about the construction of ‘reality’ itself” (Waugh 3). Gay herself uses words and language to construct and amplify truths.

When discussing the notion of truth in both her work and that of author Zadie Smith, Gay states

[i]t is an audacious, elegant choice [Zadie] Smith makes, to offer closure without offering closure, to offer answers to the question of who a woman inhabiting multiple identities is without offering answers. This is what I do when I write, or at least this is what I try to do, what I hope to do—disguising my voice with my voice as I tell some version of the truth. (Fassler 3)

Gay does just this in “Things I Know About Fairy Tales.” She thus employs language and fairy tales so as to provide focal points for the reader. These focal points, upon

dissection, offer insight into her aforementioned agenda as an artist.

Gay uses “Things I Know About Fairy Tales,” to shed light on the subject of kidnap in Haiti and to offer a way to contest male supremacy and misogyny. Her feminist agenda is part of the legacies of both Haitian and Black (American) Feminisms. The fairy tale characters and the women in the short story reveal lessons that the protagonist uses to survive and then to live again. “Things I Know About Fairytales,” according to Gay is “about a Haitian American woman who endures and survives a violent kidnapping in Port-au-Prince, and it shows how you can go from living a happily ever after to once upon a time when you least expect” (Diamond). Having experienced horrific encounters while kidnapped, the protagonist's “happily ever after” is shattered.

Using the lessons she learns from women and fairy tales, however, she is able to reimagine new ways to live again. Gay participates in the legacies of Haitian and Black feminists while complicating views of Haiti, Haitian women, and fairy tales. Furthermore, Roxane Gay authors this story of kidnapping so as to mediate her *dyaspora* intersectional identities, provide potential solutions to Haiti's untamed democracy and state, and, finally, to offer insight towards the creation of whole, complex, counterbalancing epistemologies.

Roxane Gay and Haitian Feminism

As *dyaspora*, Roxane Gay's work exists at the intersection of Haitian feminisms and Black feminisms. The two each work towards the project of Black

women's equity and use similar means to achieve this. Haitian feminists define women as exiles in their own country; resist patriarchy with self-definitions; and use art, namely literature, to give voice to women's struggles. Black feminists use Black women's experiences as the criterion of meaning; privilege and interrogate intersectionality, and promote the personal as political while also articulating possibilities for radical change; they too use art as a tool for social change.

Haitian women's resistance to patriarchy is predicated on their self-definitions, their success in former struggles, and their quests for actualized citizenship. Their anti-patriarchal stance "is best understood as symptomatic [but not only as a result] of U.S. racist attitudes instituted during the Occupation and sustained by the misogynist practices of the Duvalier government" (Chancy 43). Haitian feminist thought and resistance, with varying degrees of both support and success, "presents itself as a defiant strain of Third World feminism in the West, hinging on socialist reform, a belief in the universalization of human rights and a steadfast dedication to the uplift of woman in nationalist and global agenda" (Chancy 45). In achieving these reforms, Haitian feminists believe they can also achieve equality. All of these tenets are at play in the literature of Haitian feminist writers.

Haitian women feminist fiction authors create so as to change their worlds. The experience of the "Haitian woman is defined by exile within her own country, for she is alienated from the means to assert at once feminine and feminist identities at the same time that she undergoes the same colonial experiences of her male counterparts" (Chancy 13). The Haitian woman is made to appear less Haitian and less deserving of the equal rights that her male counterparts are gifted at birth. In an effort to counteract

this misogyny, “Haitian women writers demonstrate...that the project of recovering Haitian women’s lives must begin with the re-composition of history and nationality” (Chancy 13). Haitian women writers contend this exile by speaking back to the power structure with the intention of affecting societal change. This change, however, begins within.

It is important to note that many Haitian feminists were and are also authors. Beginning with Marie Vieux-Chauvet’s *Amour, Colère, Folie* and existing across waters, this tie between creative fiction and feminist politics continues. Haitian feminist writers utilize fiction to re-imagine a nation and history that is inclusive of the stories of Haitian women. In their works, they also critique the state and Haitian power structures that oppress them. They thus create a canon of liberatory literature in which “revolutionary consciousness is developed and honed” (Chancy 27). This canon supports the progression from “*speech activation* to *dialogue integration*, to the paradoxical *creation of an imperceptible woman’s space*, to the *enforced implementation of women’s rights*” (Chancy 27). Subsequently, after literature and the re-appropriation of speech and speaking, the politicization and the raising of consciousness soon follow. Haitian feminist literature is meant to catalyze actual change in real time. Haitian feminism “stands as a model of Third World feminist politics in that it is articulated through critical praxis” (Chancy 28) and is clearly not *only* about theory. Often Haitian feminists create texts to fictionalize the realities of women and disseminate revolt. Daily are the acts of resistance that stem from and/or are inspired by decades of fighting colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy. These women therefore harness this rebellion into their literature. Haitian feminism, then,

refutes silencing and sparks change.

Haitian feminism negates notions of the inability of the oppressed to speak for herself. This is, seemingly, a common notion in both Western and white feminist ideology. Haitian feminism distinguishes itself from mainstream Western feminism “in its refusal to acknowledge *lack of consciousness*” (Chancy 38). Instead, Haitian women advocate for another approach, one that “*presupposes* that the consciousness of the oppressed is a given and that considers the paramount issue to be the *communication* of that consciousness” (Chancy 38). To support efforts for communication, Haitian feminists “speak on behalf of themselves individualistically in order to take part in the *dialogic expression* of a feminist agenda articulated by Haitian women as a socio-political group” (Chancy 38). In expressing her own individual reality or the individual reality of the characters in her novel, the Haitian woman feminist writer articulates aspects of the realities of Haitian women and hopes that actions are taken to ameliorate their existences. The discourse in the literature is indeed political and in it, Haitian feminist writers re-claim their abilities to qualify their struggles, speak out against their subjugation, and—in articulating the sources, natures, and dynamics of their oppression—affirm means by which to change their reality. Black feminists, too, work toward radical social change using similar practices of speaking truths.

Roxane Gay and Black Feminist Genealogies

Roxane Gay’s work engages Black Feminism and Black feminist

methodologies in a diasporic context. Black feminism is the “sustained socio-political commitment to centering the lives of Black women and girls while actively struggling against racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and other intersecting modalities of oppression that affect even those who do not identify as either Black or female” (Williamson 16). Black feminist methodology, according to Patricia Hill Collins, is a methodology that can be used to understand the way that Black women as authors use standpoint epistemology to write literature of revolt.

Drastically changing the location within which truth is founded, Patricia Hill Collins offers “criterion of meaning” as a means of valuing the experiences of Black women as ways of knowing. Collins dictates that as knowledge and wisdom do not go hand in hand in Black communities, the site of wisdom exists outside of academia. She writes:

My aunt used to say, “A heap see, but a few know.” This saying depicts two types of knowing, knowledge and wisdom, and taps the first dimension of an Afrocentric feminist epistemology. Living life as Black women requires wisdom since knowledge about the dynamics of race, gender, and class subordination has been essential to Black women’s survival. African-American women give such wisdom high credence in assessing knowledge. (“The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought” 758)

As such, this wisdom, gained from experiencing and enduring institutional oppression, must be passed down among Black women for their continued survival. As neither this mode of knowledge production and replication nor the site within which this

knowledge is founded is deemed legitimate in the world of academia, Black women are not often seen as having concrete and substantiated knowledge. The information gained from living and praxis is unduly valuable, as it enables survival. Therefore:

[f]or ordinary African-American women, those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences. Thus, concrete experience as a criterion for credibility frequently is invoked by Black women when making knowledge claims. (“The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought” 758)

Additionally, three components used in articulating Black women’s subjugation are: the use of Black women’s experiences as the criterion of meaning, the inclusion of the ethic of caring, and the presence of the ethic of personal accountability (“The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought”). Using Black women’s experiences as the criterion of meaning necessitates believing that Black women are *subjects* and their instances of revolt diagnostics of power.²² Privileging the ethic of caring requires discussing emotions and interiority and refuting the exterior show of impartiality and quiet. Promoting an ethic of personal accountability is mandating that every effort

²² Citing Foucault, Lila Abu-Lughod posits that, we can “use resistance, ‘as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their points of application and methods used’” (Abu-Lughod 42). Abu-Lughod continues, “[w]e could continue to look for and consider nontrivial all sorts of resistance, but instead of taking these as signs of human freedom we will use them strategically to tell us more about forms of power and how people are caught up in them” (Abu-Lughod 42). Understanding resistance, in all of its expressions, helps also to understand the impact of power on the lives of marginalized peoples.

Black feminists engage with work toward the goal of social justice.

Honoring a community-oriented vision constructed to combat the multiple forms of oppression Black women confront, the aims of Black feminists are necessarily political. Black feminists view “Black women’s struggles as part of a wider struggle for human dignity and social justice” (*Black Feminist Thought* 276). Black feminist bell hooks states, “[a]s a group, Black women are in an unusual position in this society for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower than that of any other group” (*Feminist Theory* 144). From this positionality, calling for and working toward social change, this effort to eliminate Black women’s social injustice will, in effect, eliminate that of all other people (“Combahee River Collective Statement”). The statement indicates:

[w]e realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation. (“Combahee River Collective Statement”)

Liberation and all radical change, for Black feminists, has many variables. Roxane Gay takes on combating the issues of patriarchy and misogyny.

More contemporaneously, Roxane Gay's work also exhibits contemporary trends in Black feminisms. Current trends in Black Feminisms celebrate fugitivity. Taking flight from the oppressive structures that birthed its necessity, Black feminists today are also contemplating the praxis of existing beyond the boundaries, beyond the moment. In art, theorization, and activism, many demand that we go further. Rooted and radical in their determinations, many key thinkers mandate that Black feminisms continue to evolve.

One of the most recent articulations comes from Alexis Pauline Gumb's *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity*, in which Gumbs writes: "she looked at herself in the mirror and all over the dance floor and flashing on tv and wondered how did i spill. how did i spill out everywhere?" (Gumbs 51). As a Black Feminist text inspired by Hortense Spillers, Gumbs crafts a spilling through which to examine the escape—from confines, oneself, and more. Black feminism in this view is fecund with fugitivity. It necessitates existing outside of the borders and confines of the oppressive structures it was created to upend. It is a site that centers redefinition, growth, and healing. It is a catalyst of resistance, reeducation, and revolution. When the speaker above asks, "how did i spill out everywhere" (Gumbs 51), her voice is one of horror, exaltation, and excitement. Gumbs artfully authors what many Black women encounter: the looking around at the images of oneself in the world. This action is one marked with horror given the media portrayals of Black womanness and more. It is also the realization that you too are everywhere, more beautiful in your not being alone. It is the fact that you are not alone and, in so being, multiplied also in strength. Gumbs offers spilling as the act of exceeding the limits of containers, fluid exhalation,

falling (apart?) and dislodging. It is this very spilling that allows these scholars and writers to come to demand the continued evolution of Black Feminism. Trends in their mandates dictate a triad refutation. To move beyond this moment and toward liberation, they argue, require refusals, reeducation, and resistance. Applied to the Haitian women writers, they “spill” via migration and socio-political understandings thereafter, outside of the definitions and boxes, and exist at intersections of various traditions and rhizomes even though also in the *dyaspora*. We, though, may use these intersections to develop bridges and expand diverse understandings of identities and resistances.

Coincidentally, Roxane Gay herself identifies as a feminist even if one who sometimes also spills, in this instance escaping the very standardized designation of “feminist”. Gay finds solace in the Audre Lorde quote: “I am a Black feminist. I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my Blackness as well as my womanness, and therefore my struggles on both of these fronts are inseparable” (Lorde 4). “As a woman of color,” Gay writes,

I find that some feminists don't seem terribly concerned with the issues unique to women of color—the ongoing effects of racism and post-colonialism, the status of women in the Third World, working against the trenchant archetypes Black women are forced into (angry Black woman, mammy, Hottentot, and the like). (“Bad Feminist” 91)

Upset with this reality, Gay continues to talk on these issues herself. She still, however, chooses to self-identify as a feminist; she proclaims

...I also want to be myself. Bad feminism seems like the only way I can

both embrace myself as a feminist and be myself...No matter what issues I have with feminism, I am one. I cannot nor will not deny the importance and absolute necessity of feminism. Like most people, I'm full of contradictions, but I also don't want to be treated like shit for being a woman...I am, therefore, a bad feminist. I would rather be a bad feminist than no feminist at all. ("Bad Feminist" 95)

Being a "Bad Feminist," author Roxane Gay takes up the baton of Haitian and Black Feminist women writers and she authors stories of kidnapping and state violence so as to mediate *dyaspora* intersectional identities, provide potential solutions to Haiti's untamed democracy and state, and, finally, to offer insight towards the creation of whole, complex, counterbalancing epistemologies. As a result, Gay directly articulates a definition of Black feminist citizenship.

On Fairy Tales and Gay's Bad Feminism

Continuing Haitian and Black feminist lineage, Roxane Gay authors as agents of change the kidnap victims and marginalized women of color in the short stories "Sweet on the Tongue," "Things I Know About Fairy Tales" and the novel *Untamed State*.

"Sweet on the Tongue" was published in Roxane Gay's first collection of short stories, *Ayiti*, in 2011. The collection was re-issued in 2018. In the tale, the protagonist is newly married and honeymooning in Haiti where she is kidnapped, raped, and held in "a hot sugar warehouse with strange, violent men" (*Ayiti* 45). Months later, she

gives birth to a son, a child of her victimization, who “has a sweet tooth” (*Ayiti* 40). The story is of her recovery in the midst of secrecy and with tenuous familial ties. She is kidnapped because of patriarchy and misogynoir; the man who orchestrates the entire thing frames his reasoning as betrayal. Fabien, the hotel worker who tries to kiss her days before he abducts her in the market, states “[i]f only you had given me a little kiss” (*Ayiti* 47). Fabien rationalizes his misogynoir as a vengeance due to the protagonist’s audacious labial denial when, in fact, his disrespectful belief that he is owed her body is a result of male supremacy, misogynoir, and patriarchy. He repeats this refrain both before assailing her again and when she is returned to her home after being brutalized.

A medical practitioner who falls in love with a wealthy, former patient, the protagonist of “Sweet on the Tongue” in Gay’s first collection of short stories *Ayiti* is both victim and survivor. The kidnapping and rape definitely mark her and change her, but she also finds healing in spaces of love and truth-telling. She gives birth to her son, C.J., and both she and her husband adore him. She rekindles her relationship with her family while strengthening her relationship with her husband. At the end of the tale, she finally shares with her family that she has had a child after being raped and kidnapped and revisits the idea of having more children with her husband. Both are narratively framed as paths to recovery.

Roxane Gay’s “Things I Know About Fairy Tales” is also about rape, kidnap, marriage, wealth, and children—in addition to being about male supremacy, patriarchy, misogynoir, and more. In setting the didactic tone in this story, Gay dictates the way the text should read. The protagonist states “[w]hen I was very young,

my mother told me she didn't believe in fairy tales. They were, she liked to say, lessons dressed in fancy clothes. She preferred to excise the princesses and villains and instead concerned herself with the moral of the story" ("Things I Know About Fairy Tales" 192). Privileging learning from tales, the next paragraph reads as ironic. "Once upon a time, not long ago," the protagonist begins,

I was kidnapped and held captive for thirteen days. Shortly after I was freed, my mother told me there was nothing to be learned from what had happened to me. She told me to forget the entire *incident* because there was no moral to the story. ("Things I Know About Fairy Tales" 192)

Her mother is summarily incorrect and Gay sets the protagonist *and* reader up to look for the lessons within each tale. Though kidnapping does not a fairy tale make, Gay introduces the texts with the words of the protagonist and her mother to inform the reader that there are lessons to be learned in revisiting fairy tales. Additionally, the protagonist herself, refusing her mother's characterization of her experience, seeks to learn from what happened to her. Hurt but unafraid, she begins her narrative making special note of Haitian and Cuban women's statements throughout the text who advise her on ways to survive this horror.

Corinne LeBlanche, a survivor of kidnap, teaches the protagonist that having lived through the horrid events, she must maintain her safety and protect her children. "My parent's friend," the protagonist declares,

Corinne LeBlanche, was kidnapped not long before I was taken. She and her husband and four children lived in Haiti year round. She always

swore, to anyone who would listen, that if she were ever kidnapped, her husband Simon best meet her at the airport with her passport and children once she was returned because she would never spend another night in the country. (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 195)

Though she loves her country, Corinne understands her capacity for demospudence and that the fact of being kidnapped necessarily limits her freedom, life and those of her family. As such, if it were to happen, she dictates that they must all migrate as protest. Because her husband, a businessman named Simon, “didn’t yet understand that these things went differently for women” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 195), he laughed at his wife when “Corinne made such declarations” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 195). The protagonist communicates with Corinne when the two were safely away from Haiti and living with their children in Miami. While the United States is not necessarily a safe space for many peoples, including many Haitian peoples, the two leave the country in which they were abused and seek to maintain their and their children’s safety at all costs elsewhere—knowing this. An elder kidnap victim teaches the protagonist using different means.

The Gilles family matriarch’s experience demonstrates to the protagonist that she has merely to live past the “incident.” In telling this woman’s story, the protagonist conveys that “[t]wo years ago, the matriarch of the Gilles family was kidnapped. She was eighty-one. The kidnappers knew the family had more money than God. They failed to realize she was frail and diabetic. She died soon after she was abducted. Everyone was thankful her abduction was abbreviated” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 195). The Gilles matriarch dies and, oddly, people rejoice in that

because she did not have to experience too much brutality. Her life is, however, eclipsed by kidnap and death. Surviving, then, is the ultimate rebellion—a radical expression fortified by loving oneself in ways that disrupt the matrices of domination within which one’s abusers thrive. The protagonist, consequently, refuses such an abbreviation; she chooses to survive her kidnap and live beyond it. A Cuban woman furthers this lesson of survival.

From her unnamed Cuban friend—likely a friend made in Miami, a site to which Cubans and Haitians immigrate—the protagonist learns that she must do whatever it takes to survive and *then* she has to *live* with her choices. Though a perverse take on the actualization of real liberation, the restitution of agency in situations of dire need and atrocity, is commendable. This Cuban woman tells the protagonist a

popular lullaby from her country, about a mother with thirteen children.

The mother kills one child to feed twelve, and so on and forth, until she is left with one child, whom she slaughters. Finally, she returns to the middle of the cornfield where she slaughtered the other children, and slits her own throat because she cannot bear the burden of having done what needed to be done. (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 197-198)

“A West Indian woman,” the Cuban friend declares, “always faces such choices” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 198). That these are the “choices” confirms the need for change—change that can only come with radical Black liberation. To get to the liberatory point, however, one must survive the present—one, therefore, has to make choices in such a way that allows one to live with them. The protagonist

experiences rape among other horrific violences and fights each of the men who come to violate her: “I fought, but I also begged them to use condoms. I did what I had to. Worse things could have happened. I was not broken” (“Things I Learned About Fairy Tales” 194). Once freed, she chooses to live with those choices—employing the words of this friend. She is forever changed by the “incident” of kidnap, and she remains “unbroken.” Whole and transformed she uses these lessons and those of the fairy tales to help piece her life back together as she moves into her ever-after.

Fairy tales, for the protagonist, offer critical lessons during the timeline of the narrative. With every change of pace or scene, the protagonist provides context for comprehension by way of a fairy tale. Taking age-old stories, “fairy tales,” that are critiqued for both their standardized disempowerment of women and support of patriarchy, Roxane Gay—Bad Feminist, pink-loving author who she is—employs their narratives but offers different readings. The stories themselves appear to change. These altered narratives, for the protagonist, lend themselves to alternate views on ways of being.

The story of “Little Red Riding Hood” offers the protagonist a new way to be secure. Having lived a life of privilege her world is shattered by her kidnap and she is unable to negotiate the Haiti she knew with the Haiti she is forced to encounter. She deduces that “Little Red Riding Hood didn't see the danger she was facing until it was too late. She thought she was safe. She trusted. And then, she wasn't safe at all” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 192). According to the protagonist, the story of Little Red Riding Hood is really that she was led falsely to believing she was safe; she trusted too much; and she did not remain attentive. The lesson, then, is that using her

own sight and paying attention to the world around her assists a woman in beginning to protect herself.

This refutation of consent to the governing authority as to their capacity to lead and maintain safety is at the core of demosprudence. This is the citizenship work being done to “define and assert their political cultural, personal, and collective rights from de-facto second class positions” (Caldwell et al. 4). Believing herself safeguarded by class and class comforts, the men in her life, and her skewed knowledge of the world, the protagonist realizes that these were all false—she is the only person who can keep herself (and child) secure. She, then, has to change how she moves in and sees the world. The Story of “Snow White” also teaches her about navigating the world in which she resides.

The stories of “Snow White” and “Sleeping Beauty” remind the protagonist of gender-based oppression and affirm the need for radical Black liberation. The protagonist is targeted because she is a rich *diaspora*. She is raped because she is woman. When discussing Snow White, the protagonist states “[m]y father is fond of saying that a woman’s greatest asset is her beauty. Snow White had her beauty, and her beauty was her curse until it became her greatest asset” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 192). Soon after, the protagonist shares Sleeping Beauty’s tale. “Sleeping Beauty,” the protagonist recalls, “was cursed by her birthright, by her very name. In one telling, her fate was sealed by Maleficent before she ever had a chance. Even hidden away, she could not escape the curse placed upon her” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 193). Sleeping Beauty is set up by fate and cursed by her birthright. Snow White and Sleeping Beauty are fated to experience hardship because beauty is seen as

a preeminent female trait. The protagonist, having experienced rape at the hands of her kidnappers, knows the limitations of such superficial birthrights. In a liberated world, the kidnappers would have all they needed such that they no longer needed to kidnap and women would be respected for their whole beings not just their uses to men. “Rapunzel” also arms the protagonist with other directional tools.

Turning to the theme of self-sufficiency, the story of “Rapunzel” helps the protagonist employ her agency. Having had interdependent relationships all her life, this fairy tale reminds her to also look inward for strength and solutions; it reminds her of the beauty in independence. The protagonist argues “[t]he thing about Rapunzel was that she had the means to her own salvation all along. If she had only known that, she would have never been cast out by the enchantress and been forced to wait to enjoy her ever-after with her prince” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 193-194). Had Rapunzel only let down her hair and used it to climb down the tower, she would have freed herself. This story marks the point in her kidnap after which she begins to make a sexually-educated demand of her rapists: that they use condoms. Though she is not entirely equipped to pay her own ransom while being held hostage, she is knowledgeable of ways to avoid the transmission of sexual diseases and therefore able to assure she has none upon gaining her freedom. This business transaction, as she refers to her kidnap, need not permanently ruin her sexual health. This is also a transitional point in the story as all the fairy tales hereafter directly mention “ever-after.” This gives the impression that this story helps her develop new inspirations to keep living. Knowing herself to be empowered with the means to save herself, she stops looking outside of herself for all of her salvation. She, instead, starts to think of

ways to continue to save herself after her release. Similar conceptions of the power in perspective also appear in the story of “Cinderella.”

Cinderella’s tale informs the protagonist that perspective dictates how one understands change. Moreover, acknowledging and understanding suffering can help one appreciate life and living. “At least Cinderella,” the protagonist asserts, “had her work to keep her busy—the familiarity of sweeping floors and washing windows and cooking the daily bread. If nothing else, because she had truly suffered she could appreciate her ever-after” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 196). Cinderella’s story offers new ideas on change and perspective; if Cinderella’s suffering helped her appreciate splendor afterward, the protagonist’s own suffering will do for her the same. Beauty’s story, too, addresses another aspect of perspective.

The protagonist believes that “Beauty learned to love the Beast. She forced herself to see past the horror of his appearance, past his behavior, past the circumstance of how they came to know one another” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 196). It is at this very moment in the story that she is able to humanize her captors and abusers and offer a critique on white supremacy and American xenophobia. Though she imagines neither love nor friendship with these men, her kidnapping makes her privy to their world, their trials, and their tribulations. This incident offers her a different perspective of Haiti and Haiti’s internal problems, problems her American friends trivialize and use for light conversation at dinner parties. Comprehending that perspective affects how she visualizes and categorizes change *and* allowing for new insights to change her own perspective about access and privilege, the protagonist harnesses the powers of hope and conceives of new grounds

for structural change. This transformation most certainly involves ending violence against women and misogynoir, as much as it also now involves addressing economic inequities that promote kidnapping in the first place. This change first requires that she herself make different choices.

The story of “Alice in Wonderland” enlightens the protagonist about the issue of choice. Alice chooses Wonderland because it allows her an escape. According to the protagonist, “Alice had choices in Wonderland. Eat me, drink me, enjoy tea with a Mad Hatter, entertain the Queen of Hearts, down, down, the rabbit hole” (“Things I Know About Fairy Tales” 198). The protagonist *chooses* now not to make the same choices when she is freed. She presents herself as she is to her parents, asserts herself more critically with her husband, and begins her process of healing. She refuses to live a lie and pretend that her kidnap did not teach her anything. Struggling to build her ever-after anew, she finds solace in remembering that she is unbroken—even if forever changed—and capable of living after her horror.

While the critique of fairy tales has a long feminist genealogy, Roxane Gay offers new insights. Throughout the short stories, Roxane Gay employs literature as a metafictional ethnography so as to both critique fairy tales and the world that allows for misogynoir, patriarchy, and male supremacy. In so doing, Gay artfully empowers her protagonists with agency and expanded ways of understanding their intersectional identities in an oppressive world. Gay does similarly in *Untamed State*.

Untamed State, Race, Class, and Gender Politics

In creating her novel *Untamed State* (2014), Roxane Gay offers potential solutions to Haiti's feral democracy and state. As the novel develops, the protagonist, Mireille Duval Jameson, is kidnapped and torn from her comfortable *dyaspora* bourgeois life and taken into the ghettos of Haiti. The novel is of two parts: Happily Ever After and Once Upon A Time. The first involves the actual kidnap and the interspersed flashback stories of her falling in love. The latter is about Mireille trying to pick up the pieces of her life after the rape, torture, and abuse during the period in which she was held captive. Noting that she was called "*dyaspora* with the resentment those Haitians who cannot leave hold for those of us who can" (*Untamed State* 11), Mireille is clear that her captivity is just as much about power as it is about money.

While kidnapped, Mireille comes to understand more about power, law, and truth in the worlds of men. Arguably *Untamed State* picks up where "Things I Know About Fairy Tales" leaves off. As a short story written to shed light on the subject of kidnapping women in Haiti and to offer a way to contest male supremacy, the fairy tale characters and the women in the short story reveal lessons that the protagonist uses to survive and then live again. Having experienced horrific encounters while kidnapped, the protagonist's "happily ever after" is shattered. Using the lessons she learns, however, she is able to reimagine new ways to live again. *Untamed State* is similarly situated.

Both Mireille and the short story protagonists recreate and fortify themselves for life after being kidnapped. In surviving the abuses happened upon them by men seeking money, power, and control over the bodies of Black women, the survivors work towards life after violation. Though particular to these narratives, the

experiences of the women within them speak also to the realities of many at the intersection of race and gender oppression seen through the lens of class stratification. These stories voice a narrative of agency in that they speak both to what happens after trauma and to the work of healing.

The subject of kidnap in Haiti, unfortunately, is popularly revisited time and again. One such instance is discussed in the opening of *Haiti Noir 2*, the collection in which this short story is published. “Recently,” Edwidge Danticat writes, “Haiti saw its own ‘you can’t make this up’ high-profile crime stories explode then fizzle in a way that might intrigue then disappoint any noir reader. The son of a very rich family was revealed to be part of a massive kidnapping ring. He had abducted the son and daughter of another rich family, with whom his family was feuding. He was arrested then forced to lead an elite police team to the house where his victims were being held” (*Haiti Noir 2* 9). As if this were not bad enough, the story continues into public spectacle and ends up implicating the United States. “The kidnapping victims’ rescue and subsequent reunion with their families,” Danticat continues, “was all captured on tape and later aired on a *Cops*-like television program called *Alo Lapolis* (*Hello Police*). Aside from a single brief court appearance, the kidnapping ringleader, as of this writing, was never heard from again. He had supposedly been taken to a brand-new American prison, where he and his comrades were the sole inmates” (*Haiti Noir 2* 9). Wealth, kidnap, American “intervention,” does this not sound familiar? What, then, is Roxane Gay’s own intervention? Quite simply, it is that the women remain altered by misogyny and patriarchy but also whole; they too affect change beginning within.

In crafting narratives about a middle-classed Haitianness, Gay also expands

standardized understandings of what Haitians “look like” while also necessarily involving class as a mitigating factor for kidnapping—both for those who kidnap and those who are kidnapped. That the people kidnapped in her tales are women of the Haitian *dyaspora* explodes the idea of safety in wealth or migration. Roxane Gay authors stories of kidnapping so as to mediate *dyaspora* intersectional identities, provide potential solutions to Haiti’s untamed democracy and state, and, finally, to offer insight towards the creation of whole, complex, counterbalancing epistemologies.

Her work takes part in the legacy of Haitian and Black feminisms as she uses her art to critique racist, sexist, and classist power structures. In said work, she offers Haiti as an “island of contradictions” (*Ayiti* 75) and discusses the varied lives, intersectional identities, and different experiences of Haitians throughout the *dyaspora*.

In writing about kidnap, she sheds light on the particular experiences of sexual abuse and rape that women encounter while critiquing colonial, patriarchy, imperialist, and capitalist institutions that catalyze these forms of violence. Authoring “Things I Know About Fairy Tales” and *Untamed State* gives voice to these women’s realities and changes the way they are viewed solely as broken, fragile victims. Instead, Gay articulates them as changed and whole, agents of their lives before and after the horror. We bear witness to this by reading of the interiority of the protagonist’s kidnap and the lessons she learns from it. We experience her change, her growth and—though of brutal and unfortunate series of violations—the story allows us to privilege her ability to work through (and past) the “incident.” This narrative trajectory and her

capacity for change both speak volumes of the protagonist's character.

Noir, Lougawou, and Black feminist citizenship

Edwidge Danticat writes that after the first *Haiti Noir* was published in 2010, people kept asking if I wasn't contributing to a negative image of the country by editing a book filled with so many "dark" stories about Haiti. My answer was, and remains, that showing the brilliance of our writers and their ability to address Haiti's difficulties through their art can only contribute to a more nuanced and complex presentation of Haitian lives. (*Haiti Noir* 8)

Understanding this context and need for complexity, the protagonist in *Untamed State* is flawed, sexually experienced, opinionated, and powerful; her story exists in contradiction to presentations of Haitian women's kidnapping that participate in portraying sexist ideals of women, sexual purity, and socio-cultural naiveté. *Untamed State* mandates that we deem vulgar and barbaric her situation but not necessarily the people about whom this text is written—most certainly not the women. This nuance and the complexity about which Danticat speaks is evident in Gay's work and, for that reason alone, we should care about it. Furthermore, that Gay implicates the United States in kidnapping and Haiti's international subjugation while also addressing issues of classism, racism, sexism, and xenophobia in both contexts gives this story a more international edge and therefore a more global critique.

This noir genre, exemplified in the Roxane Gay's work, allows her to

formulate a foundational exposure of recent Haitian national history. Implicit in the story is a critical approach and an attempt at reconstructing the political and social conflicts of male supremacy and abject poverty in a struggling, Black, capitalist nation-state. She addresses the “how” and “why” of kidnapping in Haiti—especially by way of the kidnapping of women. In this work, Gay engages the subjects of women’s memory, gendered experiences of violence, sexual violence, and socialization—the socializing fairy tales become possible tools for the strengthening of civil society. If the fairy tale lessons were adhered to by Haitian women nationally and internationally, if women’s bodies were not used as means to access power, if women’s stories, thoughts and concerns—their very *lives*—were deemed valuable and of equal importance to those of men, the situations of Haiti and the world would be different.

Gay’s writing conveys *dyaspora* contentions with which she herself struggles:

I grappled with being Black in America and being Haitian in Black America and being Black American in Haiti and being middle class when that was rarely considered a possibility for someone who looked like me. I was also trying to make sense of desire and sexuality and wanting so much for myself that felt forbidden. I was trying to figure out who I was and what might be possible for me. I was trying to write toward a space where I could reveal my most authentic self to the people who knew me but did not...My fiction has also taken on a lot of these issues. (Fassler 1)

As a *dyaspora* literary anthropologist, Gay uses both texts to shed light on the subject

of kidnapping in Haiti and to offer ways to contest male supremacy and misogyny. In so doing she also offers critiques of capitalism and colonialism. Her feminist agenda is part of the legacies of both Haitian and Black (American) Feminisms, as previously described.

The key features of Black feminist citizenship are also here at play. Roxane Gay's work cleverly articulates decolonial love, radical Black liberation, and global Black citizenship. In that her protagonists practice a "love that can access and guide our theoretical and political '*movidas*'—revolutionary maneuvers toward decolonized being" (Sandoval 140), the women in Gay's works teach us a lot about decolonial love. Decolonial love has a dialectical relationship to freedom—in practicing it, one finds freedom and in so doing one also creates space to further the practice of both decolonial love and freedom. In Roxane Gay's texts, the protagonists experience varied traumas including kidnapping and rape and also craft new kinds of love and intimacy after trauma. These spaces of love and intimacy offer them moments of freedom—freedom to heal, recover, and be in the world as they know it. In these spaces are the *movidas*, movements, that Sandoval dictates.

When the protagonist in "Sweet on the Tongue" returns to her family's home and continues the process of healing and truth-telling, she is maneuvering through her healing process that allows her to also address the trauma of her past. This movement allows her to also negotiate a renewed way of being that results in her introducing her son to her family and agreeing to and wanting to have more children.

The protagonist in "Things I Know About Fairy Tales" moves through similar processes and comes to herself anew, able to begin the healing process by way of love

as well. Upon leaving the island, on a flight home, still in the midst of her traumatizing experiences, she imagines the other end. She states, “[t]he plane took off. My chest tightened because I knew I would never really get away from that place” (“Things I Know About Fairytales” 199). After locking herself in the airplane bathroom, she continues “[a]fter I threw up, I stared at the stranger in the mirror. I imagined going down, down the rabbit hole of my own happily-ever-after” (“Things I Know About Fairytales” 199). Knowing that healing is a process and committing to it, surrounded by love of family and returning home to Miami, she is able to access a certain kind of freedom and in doing so make space for more healing. Both protagonists practice a decolonial self-love *and* radical Black liberation.

The radical Black liberation these protagonists experience is a product of the decolonial love and healing. That they survive the trauma is not enough—they too choose recovery. Knowing that they experienced kidnapping, rape, and other violations, in the end, they “finally dared to hope” (*Untamed State* 250). At the end of their periods of torture, the Black women brutalized are affirmed in their belief that “the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy” (“Combahee River Collective Statement” 268). It was these very systems—the political-economic systems of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy—that created both the conditions and the rewards for their brutalization and these conditions predate them. As such, their only liberation must come with the abolition of these systems. The hope alluded to at the end of *Untamed State* is both a hope for personal recovery and healing and Mireille’s own future, but also for the future of the women her story represents.

In *Hunger*, Roxane Gay's ethnographic memoir published in 2017, Gay discusses gaining weight as a method of control and mediation of the patriarchal, masculinist gaze. Gay expresses feelings of emptiness after her experience of sexual violation—an experience fictionalized in her short story “Strange Gods” in the book *Difficult Women* (2017). In *Hunger*, she authors

I was hollowed out. I was determined to fill the void, and food was what I used to build a shield around what little was left of me. I ate and ate and ate in the hopes that if I made myself big, my body would be safe. I buried the girl I had been because she ran into all kinds of trouble. I tried to erase every memory of her, but she is still there somewhere. She is still small and scared and ashamed, and perhaps I am writing my way back to her, trying to tell her everything she needs to hear. (23)

Driven to eat by an attempt at safety, she also writes of love and freedom in *Hunger*. Gay inscribes

[i]n writing this memoir of my body, in telling you these truths about my body, I am sharing my truth and mine alone...I am saying, here is my heart, what's left of it. Here I am showing you the ferocity of my hunger. Here I am, finally freeing myself to be vulnerable and terribly human. Here I am, reveling in that freedom. Here. See what I hunger for and what my truth has allowed me to create. (*Hunger* 252)

This truth, though creating a body defined as morbidly obese (*Hunger* 14) by medical professionals, is a truth of healing. It is also a call to action. If the world as is creates

the need for safety that creates morbidity, we have work to do. We are charged in reading Roxane Gay's work to create a world that disallows the violences in which the protagonists live. Such a newly created world has to be grounded in the tenets of Black feminist citizenship.

Manoucheke Celeste argues, as does Patricia Hill Collins, that "Black women in the United States, lacking power as neither male nor white, have epitomized noncitizenship" (Celeste 144). As the epitomized noncitizen, the citizenship Black women in Gay's short stories profess is to a global Blackness that endeavors to change the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy as coined by bell hooks (qtd. in Celeste 166). This global Black citizenship aims to unite all sides of the water and the many rhizomes of the diaspora.

In her article "Meditation on Haiti (and Charleston) as a Certain Kind of Black," Anthropologist Gina Athena Ulysse proffers that the goal of this unification is to address the varied violences throughout the diaspora and to indeed create a better world. Ulysse states that:

Despite our somatic plurality and the color gradations we encompass, Haiti and Haitians have always been portrayed and understood as *that* kind of Black. A Blackness of a particular kind that, truth be re-told, radically changed the world. It was an avant-garde Blackness that not only pulled off a successful slave revolution, which caused the disorder of all things colonial, but also brought the sanctity of whiteness into question. The Haitian Revolution disrupted the notion that Freedom (with a capital F) was the sole domain of whites or those close to

whiteness. Indeed, the value ascribed to those Black lives continues to deteriorate. Moreover, those among us who are visibly marked with that Blackness have had to continually dissuade folks that we are not genetically coded to be their property or the help. This is not limited to Haiti and is symptomatic of a greater Black Diaspora struggle as continuous state-sanctioned and market-driven violence on Black bodies attest here and elsewhere. (“Meditation on Haiti”)

Ulysse, in this call to action, offers the Haitian Kreyol word *rasanblaj* which means to “assemble, to regroup, to gather.” In this gathering and unifying, Black people can collectively refute the noncitizen status by demanding and actualizing a global Black citizenship. In doing this, another world becomes possible. This better world is the result of achieving true Freedom, with a capital “F”. This Freedom is one that will indeed prove that not only do Black lives matter but all Black lives matter. It will convey that this truth is dictated by our very humanity, a reality denied and ignored given intersectional oppressions. Global Black citizenship is the path to achieving this and Gay’s protagonist, in their being in and of the diaspora and victimized at “home,” convey that this very Freedom is needed in all of the places we are to inhabit if anyone is to access it at all. This Freedom is akin to that attained by *lougawou*.

Lougawou and Story Endings

Roxane Gay’s protagonists are *lougawou/lougarou* because of their rebellion. Gay figuratively does as did Edwidge Danticat when authoring her short story “Nineteen

Thirty-Seven” and “Testimonial.” Gay “counters the discourse...by re-appropriating the figure of the flying woman and re-conceptualizing the magic of her flight” (Chen 50). Inasmuch as this is true, Gay also creates imaginative space to craft what happens once these women made victims survive and heal. Representing the varied women abused in these ways, Gay’s protagonists migrate “across the spaces of diasporic distance and the times of historical past [and] to a reemodied presence—an ancestral line for *femmes d’Ayiti*” (“Remembering Défilée” 84). This ancestral line continues to embody rebellion and revolt.

The women in Roxane Gay’s works are not only survivors but their stories are emblematic of Black feminist citizenship even as stories of horrific brutality. Using ethnography, metafiction, and noir, Gay crafts for readers a call to action while articulating the failures of our world: male supremacy, misogyny, misogynoir, rape culture, patriarchy, imperialism, and more. Gay crafts her narratives alongside a robust critique of fairytales and contemporary feminist analyses of these tales—from the psychoanalyses of mother-daughter relationships to works on feminism and fairytales. Moreover, the protagonists in Gay’s texts are also like the *lougawou* of Haitian popular cultural productions as also engaged in Edwidge Danticat’s work. Though not named *lougawou*, these women experience a level of misogynoir that cannot be ignored while living in a white supremacist, capitalist, imperialist, patriarchal world. Their very living is a radical act and their survival a rebellion made possible because of decolonial love, radical Black liberation, and global Black citizenship. As such, they are akin to the *lougawou* in the Haitian imaginary because they are rebellious women who refute domination and refuse to die.

In Haitian popular culture,²³ there is a normalized discourse of *lougawou* as criminals, and linking narratives of sexual and physical violence can venerate healing. *Lougawou*, in Danticat's stories, are not often criminal—as were their human male counterparts.²⁴ They are simply women who dared to fly. As we see in “Nineteen Thirty-Seven,” Défilé is said to have been a woman of fire-wings and typified as criminal because she is believed to have killed a male child (*Krik? Krak!* 35). Since Défilé's story is similar to the imprisoned mother in “Testimonial,” her culpability may be assumed to be non-existent in this text. In fact, the women's own trajectory of receiving wings has little to do with the death of a child. It has everything to do with their choosing to live as they chose and the very fact that doing this is rebellious.

Writing of the *soucouyant* stories of Haitian woman writer Yanick Lahens, Giselle Anatol writes of a character similar to the *lougawou*:

No claims can be made for the authority or authenticity of any of the tales, but what remains consistent...is the representation of vampiric evil as a woman of the African diaspora—a woman, following the scholarship of Nicole Fleetwood, who is perceived as suffering from excess body and excess flesh, and, typically, excess sexuality, although the latter is not generally acknowledged in the mainstream imagination. (Anatol 36)

²³ Giselle Anatol, in *The Things That Fly in the Night: Female Vampires in Literature of the Circum-Caribbean and African Diaspora*, discusses “the figure of the *soucouyant* (or whatever name she is called, depending on the region)—the frightening old hag, skin-shedder, bloodsucker, fly-by-night—remained persistent in the cultural imagination” (36). The *lougawou*, like the *soucouyant* is a popular cultural figure in many parts of the Caribbean.

Condemnations of evil and excess exist in stories of the *lougawou* as well. As such, it is clear that historic traditions and normative gender stereotypes still plague Haitian women today. “Thus,” Anatol continues,

although it is true that the nineteenth century (and earlier) belief in Black women’s innate degeneracy and sexual rapaciousness—especially when those women left the domestic space to occupy the public sphere...attitudes about Black women’s dangerous, lascivious, and pathological nature continue to be reinscribed with the preservation of certain cultural forms. (Anatol 36)

In *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom*, Daphne Brooks argues that “black women’s bodies continue to bear the gross insult and burden of spectacular (representational) exploitation in transatlantic culture. Systematically overdetermined and mythically configured, the iconography of the black female body remains the central ur-text of alienation in transatlantic culture” (Brooks 7). Examining this study, Anatol concludes that while

Brooks’ text focuses on the plethora of images produced between 1850 and 1910, her argument that the ideology continues to haunt contemporary women coheres well with my work. It comes as no surprise that although the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critiques of Black women’s behavior in circum-Caribbean cultures were specifically taken from observations of peasant women, the images ended up defining Black women of all social and economic classes and

restricting behaviors across borders of caste, complexion, and time.

(Anatol 36)

This policing of behavior and being, regardless of class, complexion, and time—though felt particularly intensely in low-income communities—is apparent in narrations and depictions of the *lougawou* and Black women contemporaneously.

Marie-José N’Zengou-Tayo conveys this present-day context and argues that *lougrou* is “[s]trongly associated with women’s experience of transgression” (“Fanm Se Poto Mitan” 127). In Danticat’s novels, N’Zengou-Tayo notes, that *lougrou* appears “to be a woman who does not abide by male ‘rules’...who cannot fulfill male expectations in terms of sexuality ...[who] usually lack the submissiveness expected from them” (N’Zengou-Tayo “Fanm Se Poto Mitan” 127). The same is true for Roxane Gay’s protagonists. Using this logic, the protagonists in Gay’s short stories and novel could be considered *lougrou/lougawou* both in their bold living prior—her refusal to kiss someone aiming to avail himself of her body in “Sweet on the Tongue;” their marrying white men in “Things I Know About Fairy Tales” and *Untamed State*—and their refusing submission at length in all of the tales most especially in their survival afterward. These women characters transgress in ways similar to the *lougawou* of Haitian popular culture. In fact, Haitian popular culture proclaims that a *lougawou* “is an old woman who removes her skin at night to fly like a ball of fire. She drinks young children’s blood or eats human flesh” (“Fanm Se Poto Mitan” 127). The popular culture narrative is created to dehumanize women who do not abide by society’s white, male supremacist and capitalist rules.

The protagonists in Gay's creations reframe the misrepresentations while offering narratives about marginalized peoples often ignored and violated. They effectively survived physical violation and brutality happened upon them for the purposes of retaliatory financial gain. In so doing, the protagonists confounded normalized notions of their subjectivity and submission. They refuse their own death even as parts of themselves died while they negated being subject to a horrific rape and misogynoir. Consequently, they were birthed anew. When the power they nurture and make manifest in spite of brutality and oppression is best understood, it is such that can transform many readers, especially those who look like them.

CHAPTER TWA (3):

THE POLITICS OF BEING LÒT BÒ DLO:

ELSIE AUGUSTAVE’S GLOBAL MIGRATION AND

THE “HAITIAN MIGRANT CRISIS”

Authors such as Ibi Zoboi, Elizabeth Acevedo, Edwidge Danticat, Meg Medina, Julia Alvarez, Rosa Guy, Esmeralda Santiago, Ntozake Shange, Octavia Butler, Zora Neale Hurston, and many others write into our realities protagonists that are too often ignored or stuffed into stereotypical boxes.

When we read works of writing by Black women and Latina writers that feature Black women and Latina protagonists, the voices and identities of women of color are elevated. As a girl, reading books about girls like me stretched my imagination. As a teen, reading books about teens like me opened new beliefs about what was possible for me and the world. And now, as an adult, reading about women of color gives me fire to question, hope, heal, and love. There is power in seeing yourself or seeing someone connected to you within pages written by authors who see you and in some ways are you.

Voice and identity can be quelled or honored through literature. When Latinas and Black women are protagonists written into existence, Latinas and Black women experiences are validated and made visible beyond those pages.

C.M.S., 40
Advocate
Activist
Thought Leader

Being all too often “ignored” and “stuffed into stereotypical boxes” are realities many marginalized peoples experience, often to their detriment. Moreover, they are experiences often expressed in the texts studied. Elevating Black and Latinx women’s voices and experiences are innately radical in a world of systemic oppression. This speaker conveys this and more. Equally important is the way she articulates that reading literature that exercises the above goals catalyzes and empowers readers.

Voicing realities of the marginalized, stretching imaginations, and catalyzing questions, the authors in this study honor our legacies, amplify our protestations, and help heal traumatic wounds. Validation and visibility move beyond the page and to readers, the world, and the archive. This is one of the critical mandates and readings of the work of Black women writers.

One such writer, Elsie Augustave, lends her words to clarify the experiences of migrants and adoptees from Haiti. Centering diaspora identity formation, interracial and transnational adoption, Black romantic and spiritual love across boundaries, and Vodou cosmological tradition. Augustave authors a text that exemplifies Black feminist citizenship and its principles. Augustave’s work and the work of organizers in the United States working to address the needs of diaspora illuminate new possibilities for our futures as they elucidate both the layers to the current issues migrants face and allude to past solutions that should be revisited.

There is a new iteration of *dyaspora* migration that compels the name “Haitian Migrant Crisis.” This predicament confirms anti-Blackness and xenophobia throughout the Americas. Activists of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (<https://baji.org/>) and the Haitian Bridge Alliance (<http://haitianbridge.org/>), in particular, aim to address the needs of the people caught in the hairs of the expression of this crisis in the United States.

Haitian woman writer Elsie Augustave understands the power of representation and the potent possibilities of creating marginalized women as subjects involved in negotiating their own liberations. Augustave crafts a novel, *The Roving Tree* (2013), and offers ways for migration to be freeing, educational, and unifying in her portrayal of global migration that is arduous and difficult. At the same time, *The Roving Tree* has didactic elements through which the protagonist’s spiritually-tied and love-filled journeying offers readers an experience of the meaning of Black feminist citizenship globally.

In this chapter, I discuss Augustave’s *The Roving Tree* and propose it as a strong articulation of Black feminist citizenship. I begin with a comparative study of the experiences of Haitian migrants then and now and employ a brief and synthesized historiography of Haitiano-Cubans.²⁵ By these means, I aim to convey the difficulties

²⁵ *Haitiano-Cubano* is a term akin to Afro-Cubano: it acknowledges African ancestry. In the case of the former, said ancestors landed in Haiti before Cuba. *Haitiano-Cubano* is also an identification term that pledges allegiance to the Cuban nation. Many also use a variety of identifiers to profess similar meanings: *residentes* and *descendientes* (da Cunha 68), *Haitiano*, *Cubano*, *Afro-Cubano*. *Haitiano-Cubano* is, however, the term of choice throughout this chapter as it seems to be the most popular. *Haitiano-Cubanos*, as the identifier suggests, have differing relationships to home (Cuba) and homeland (Haiti), and equally complicated relationships to the Haitian *dyaspora*. Many Haitian migrants arrived prior to the Cuban Socialist Revolution ending in 1959, and therefore most have known Cuba as their home for a

of south-to-south migration even as it is an essential way that traveling labor de-centers the West in search of opportunity, cognizant of the intersection of oppression and the failures of the American Dream. I describe the Haitian Migrant Crisis towards that aim while also focusing on territories and nations outside of the novel.

The Roving Tree and Black Global Migration

Elsie Augustave is a newly published novelist but a long time academic. Also born in Haiti, Augustave immigrated to New York—Spring Valley and later New York City. Both Augustave and Iris, the protagonist, share their love of dance and travel to the same countries (Kreyolicious). *The Roving Tree* is a novel written by a mother managing the difficulties of single motherhood ever rooted in *dyaspora*. As such, realities of gender, race, class, and motherhood appear throughout the text.

In *The Roving Tree*, Elsie Augustave crafts women-centered spaces and sister-circles that embody Black feminist citizenship as well as the characteristics of contemporary Black Feminisms. In the novel, Augustave centers the global migrations of a Black Haitian girl, then woman; mother–daughter and matrilineal relationships in migration; and Vodou cosmology, while highlighting the conscientization that arises as a result of these. Iris, the protagonist in this novel, offers dynamic socio-political

large part of their lives (Viddal 11). Moreover, given current complications with transporting goods, there is contemporaneously little-actualized methods of communication and travel between the two nations and between Cuba and the other nations of the Haitian *dyaspora*. The *Haitiano-Cubano* experience, then, offers insight into the more contemporary Black labor migrant realities in South and Central America while also providing information regarding being Black in post-revolution Cuba.

comprehension and cultural grounding for the push–pull factors of migration as well as the ways peoples in migration find commonality along historical and diasporic rhizomes as described by Edouard Glissant in *Poetics of Relation*. *The Roving Tree*, belonging in the genre of Black women’s literature of transnational migration, correspondingly offers fecund, critical space for theorization about migration, immigration, and *dyaspora*.

The Roving Tree is a quintessential novel about decolonial, dynamic, and borderless love. Elsie Augustave artfully creates a fictional narrative that elucidates and personalizes matters of *dyaspora* identity formation; interracial and transnational adoption; Black romantic and spiritual love across boundaries; and the Vodou cosmological tradition. In so doing, Augustave invites readers to navigate the complications of being a Black Haitian woman in Duvalier Haiti, Black Power America, and post-independence Zaire.

Beginning at the end of her life, this novel itself is about a love that travels throughout the diaspora and its varied kinds of Blackness. The Vodou cosmological tradition is evident as the novel commences with Iris writing to her daughter. The act of authoring is conveyed as her last wish, and therefore this novel is itself a wish granted to her by the West African deity Aïda Wedo. By way of this story, we enter the novel and begin again. Iris Odys is born of violation and into financial poverty; her mother, Hagathe, agrees to her adoption so that Iris can experience a world in which her very existence is not threatened by state-sponsored misogyny. Once Iris embarks on a plane to New York to live with her progressive, upper middle-class, white family, she herself starts on a path through which she will discover the world of dance,

explore Black identities and immigration politics, and come to appreciate the importance of spiritual guidance. However, her life's journey eventually takes her back to Haiti upon the death of her mother, then to Senegal to visit a college friend, and finally to Zaire to instruct in a notable dance program and start her own family.

Maternal love prompts Iris' transracial adoption. At her mother's grave, Iris concludes that "[t]he best of Haitian Mother Earth had been washed to sea. She stood naked, barren, watching her fruitlessness become the source of hunger and unrest" (Augustave 135). In essence, the financial poverty, as well as her mother's inability to protect Iris from the hands of a conniving *Tonton Macoute*, are what urges her mother to agree to her adoption. This becomes a loss that her mother is never able to overcome. Knowing this, upon her mother's death, is what gives Iris the strength to continue living.

This novel is global, transnational, and migratory in every way. It is both about Iris' journeying as well as the expeditions of the people she loves who she comes to learn in finding herself. Familial love catalyzes Iris' trip to Zaire and ancestral love protects Iris and allows her to write her story to her daughter. The main characters in this text are ever-moving across national, spiritual, and traditional boundaries and toward a powerful love—a love for their families, people, and countries. *The Roving Tree* is a novel about the many ways love drives and sustains Haitian women of the *diaspora* in the face of hardship, violence, and inevitable mortal death. It manifests an understanding of the limits of the nation-state and the power of love across borders.

The history of Haitians as Africans in diaspora is communicated through family history. Before leaving Haiti, her grandmother informs Iris of her ancestral

grandmother who was from a noble family of warriors. She continues, “[w]e have been transplanted to this land, but we’re Africans” (Augustave 136). This understanding of African identity is profoundly political. It is based on the premise that being African is genetic, cultural, constructed and phenomenological. It expands on the idea that distance, time, violence, systematized oppression, and erasure do not change who people are—especially not when socio-political, historical, and cultural systems created by Black people throughout the diaspora necessarily refute and deem inconsequential this very distance, time, and erasure as a way to combat violence and systematized oppression. In the text, Iris is grounded in love while centering her understanding of diasporic Blackness; the two enable her to thrive in a challenging world—a world in which radical Black liberation is the only way to freedom.

Remembering her grandmother’s hope that she would one day return to Africa, Iris embarks on a life-changing (and ending) trip to Zaire. Protected up until the end of her life by way of her family’s Vodou traditions—in which she does not entirely believe—Iris is granted her final wish and allowed to speak to her newborn daughter by way of her written story. Love is a central force throughout this text and politics its antithesis. The political nature of Iris’ love, however, professes an understanding of liberation grounded in cosmology and diaspora.

In Zaire, Iris is reminded of the similarities in the realities of Black people in the numerous places in which she has lived. Moreover, her fiancé indicates that “Africa and Haiti need leaders who seek power because they have the country’s best in mind” (Augustave 224). In fact, it is the inability of leaders and peoples to create countries and systems that address the needs of its citizens that leads to many of the

deaths and much of the violence throughout the text. It appears, then, as though Augustave's larger point is that an ethic of love has the ability to positively transform the world. Furthermore, if "Eternal Life means loving God, and loving God shows itself in love for people" (Augustave 75), then, a love for people is not only holy but also revolutionary. Radical Black liberation will come, accordingly, when Black people love each other enough to demand, create, and sustain a better world.

Politicized travel marks Iris' conscientization. Initially forced due to her adoption, this journeying still creates the opportunity for Iris to understand herself and the world in new ways. The reinforced Haitian and African cultural cosmology and epistemology erupt as Iris seeks to understand her origins and Haitian culture. The two cement her comprehension of diaspora and help her engage in an African-centered and women-centered ethos. Iris' critique of the hegemony of racial capitalism is balanced with intersectional living experienced while navigating the diaspora on the African continent. Thus, Iris also experiences radical autopoiesis as she creates for herself the life she deserves. The novel becomes a forum for discussing the impacts of race, immigration, class, and more on identity formation and the pursuit of the American Dream elsewhere.

Augustave is a storyteller of near-forgotten and silenced tales. She crafts a story of Haitian immigration that few discuss, encompassing elements such as the difficulties and opacities of adoption by white American families. She also shares with readers a tale about migration to nations other than the United States. This allows Augustave to present south-to-south migration patterns ever present in the Haitian *Diaspora*.

In *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant writes:

Everywhere that the obligation to get around the rule of silence existed a literature was created that has no “natural” continuity, if one may put it that way, but, rather, bursts forth in snatches and fragments. The story-teller is a handyman, the *djobbeur* of the collective soul. (69)

The Glissant assessment is also evident in Augustave’s work as she crafts a story about Haitian global migration. As a storyteller, Augustave crafts a narrative that seizes and splinters what we know of *dyaspora* migration patterns. The collective soul in Augustave’s work is that of Haitian women in *dyaspora* living their protest of subjugation and in honor of their ancestors. The women protagonists themselves are given new breath in the novel. They focus on home as a prime site from which self-creation can occur.

Augustave authors her protagonists’ coming of age and migratory experiences also as journeys both in homes/homelands and to themselves. Iris is propelled into exile by way of her families but comes to know both Haiti and the spaces they all occupy anew because of her journeys. Augustave gives expression to Haitian Anthropologist Gina Athena Ulysse’s claim that “home ...is where the most primary of social institutions are organized...As the domestic realm remains a site of struggle for females, it is an important setting in which to consider how subjectivity is made” (“Papa, Patriarchy, and Power” 26). Readers are often left to question if leaving Haiti with a white family was what was best for any of the women in Iris’ family. Iris’ migration, experiences, and the knowledge gained in both do, however, help her, in the end, to recreate herself and define for herself whom she wishes to be. This is

radical autopoiesis in process and these protagonists engage in elucidating the purposes of rebellion.

Understandably, Iris loves her mothers and child; the ways she embodies and comprehends liberation; and the manner in which she understands Blackness and the world. The love she exhibits is for herself and her matrilineal line. They remain connected beyond the limits of the material world, and this connection offers them spaces of freedom. Their love is tangible in the arts and intangible with its magic; it is wholesome and fecund; it is transformative and limitless. The liberation she believes in is centered in grounding her truths in experiential knowledges; creating dialogic atmospheres of growth; speaking, learning, and articulating her life with emotion and therefore eliciting empathy; and holding herself accountable for bettering her own life—even when doing so kills her. Iris embodies an understanding of citizenship as an inclusive social responsibility upheld by people of the African Diaspora among people who stimulate democracy and demosprudence.

Living within both the African and Haitian *dyaspora*, for Iris, the concept of diaspora is a passage of sorts. Her vision of *dyaspora* is a passage between locales, temporal spaces, ideologies, hegemonies, cultures, cosmologies, and more. The *dyaspora saudade* she experiences is also profound and embodied in her artistic and cosmological expressions.

Elsie Augustave authors processes for her protagonist that reveal Black feminist citizenship in practice. Iris' conscientization is marked by politicized travel—a journey that exposes diverse systems of oppression; reinforced cultural cosmology and epistemology that centers Vodou and a women-centered way of being. Her

critique of Eurocentric hegemony is expressed in her well-balanced intersectional living and radical autopoiesis through the end. Her passage through these moments helps clarify the raising of consciousness at the core of Black feminist citizenship.

The Roving Tree is a brilliant text for people interested in studying Black women's identity politics, religious syncretism, the effects of political dictatorships on marginalized peoples, and the manifestations of Black feminist citizenship.

Haitian Global Labor Migration – Haitiano-Cubanos as a South-to-South Case Study

The Haitian Revolution and subsequent subjugation, the financial and physical brutalities enforced by the Haitian dictatorship after the American Occupation (1915–1934), and the Goudou Goudou, a popularly used onomatopoeic description of the catastrophic Haitian earthquake of January 12th, 2010, all propelled at differing times the exodus of people in Haiti in diverse directions. Marked by Haiti's initial history of anti-imperial revolt during the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) and the resulting anti-Haitianism—which may also be read as anti-Blackness—the Haitian migratory labor-force and the realities people face in migration speak to the impetuses to leave and the difficulties of surviving in the global wage labor systems generated by the United States. Even so, Haitian religious, cultural, and language retention practices remain as constants.

Throughout much of the historiography of Haitian global migration exist trends involving labor migration, cultural retention practices that infuse language,

religion, and family-structuring with political purposes. These migrations have been south-to-south as well as south-to-north.

In the last decades, Latin American historiography, however, has only recently become interested in issues of contemporary Black labor, access, and migration during and after the epochs of whitening, racial democracies, and socio-political movements. Scholars understandably focus more on either African slave labor and the ways it and the people forced to work within it shape the creations of nation-states or on the successes and failures of white supremacist *Embranquecimento* (whitening) projects or contemporary issues of access and marginalization that Afro-descendants face. Regarding studies of Afro-Latinidad, critical contemporary texts include: *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (2010); *Afro-Latin@s in Movement: Critical Approaches to Blackness and Transnationalism in the Americas* (2016); and *Comparative Racial Politics in Latin America* (2019). Each tackling interconnected issues, these texts serve as critical foundational studies of race, class, migration, and movement building in the Americas.

Subsequently, the topics of a more recent historical moment—one of which involves intra-Caribbean or intra-Latin American migration of the descendants of African peoples—remains understudied, though with growing interest. In light of this academic dearth, scholars researching throughout the Caribbean and Latin America delve into discussions of multi-ethnic and multivalent Blackness. Scholars such as Miriam Alves, Kia Lilly Caldwell, Zaire Dinzey-Flores, Kwame Dixon, Juan Flores, Juliet Hooker, Miriam Jiménez Román, Paul Joseph (Pablo José) López Oro, Marta Moreno Vega, Keisha-Khan Perry, Walter Thompson-Hernández, Melissa M. Valle,

Erica Lorraine Williams and more are researching and creating scholarship to address this academic silence. Not only focusing on the many different ways to understand Blackness and be of African descent in any given nation, they also concentrate on the more contemporary migrations of Black peoples that catalyze further differentiation. The questions these scholars ask include but are not limited to: what are the different ethnicities with which Afro-descendants identify? How do Afro-descendants author, acknowledge, and affirm their histories? What is their place in current hierarchical societal formations? What practices do they maintain, which evolved in migration?

In the context of Haitian migrants, there are many answers to these questions that offer insight into the more contemporary Black labor migrant realities in South and Central America with growing migration to Africa. In comprehending the Haitiano-Cubano experience, specifically, we can better comprehend what is at stake for Haitian migrants and what may be possible with better migratory conditions.

Capitalism, Imperialism, and Migration: Some Historical Context

The first official American military occupation of Haiti—beginning in 1915 and ending in 1934—was a major impetus for rural Haitians to leave the country (“From Haiti to Cuba and Back” 7). Citing reasons of forced exile, American co-optation of land, racism, rape, and other forms of violence as they left Haiti, migrants journeyed to search for better lives elsewhere. Some of the Haitians who left at this moment fled to the global south, to Cuba for example, while others went elsewhere. Many who chose the global south did so for political reasons. Regarding Cuba

specifically, Caribbean immigration to Cuba gained momentum after the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and American takeover of the construction of the Panama Canal in 1904. Haitian migration of this epoch rose exponentially between the United States occupation of Cuba that ended in 1909, the 1913 Cuban government legalization of migration, and the 1915 United States occupation of Haiti (Fahoome 57; "From Haiti to Cuba and Back" 52). It continued to rise thereafter, quelling only when American troops withdraw. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century both Haitians and Cubans opposed imperialism.

In fact, the nineteenth century marked a period of much socio-political anti-imperialist mobilizing throughout South America. Political activities of Cubans in Haiti necessitated a situation of mutual support. Historian Matthew Casey discusses this and writes about the various ways people in both nations opposed imperialism in all its many forms. Cubans migrated to Haiti to plot ways to overthrow Spanish rule and Haitians to Cuba in support of these efforts and after 1915 in opposition to the American occupation ("Between Anti-Haitianism and Anti-Imperialism" 56; Volpato 44).

Using concepts of "common history" and "Pan-Americanism," Cuban Manuel R. Fernandez—and later Antonio Maceo and José Martí—and the *Club Segunda Campaña*, a variety of Haitians, and the *l'Union Patriotique-Cuba*, circumvented anti-Haitianist ideologies so as to further their anti-Imperialist causes. Cataloging the interactions between Haitian and Cuban anti-imperialist groups and the Haitian government, Casey argues that the two politicized groups and people created familial and radical bonds across and within nations in an effort to embody this ethic of Pan-

Americanism. Though he uses as sources primarily political male-bodied agents, Casey's argument appears well founded given the detailed accounts of mutual support. This ethic does not, however, better the lives of Haitians who then migrate to Cuba in search of livelihood.

Between 1898 and 1929 "300,000 workers migrated from Haiti, Jamaica, Barbados, and elsewhere in the British Caribbean to Cuba" (McLeod vi). Of course, these are only the official numbers and some scholars conjecture that as many as 600,000 peoples of the Caribbean migrated to Cuba during this time. Historian Marc McLeod constructs a comparative study of the diverging experiences of Haitian and British West Indian (namely Jamaican) labor migrants to Cuba during the early twentieth century. Navigating racism and economic difficulties, McLeod argues that the two populations managed their existences differently based on various identity factors like language, literacy, nationality, and religion. Haitians rural labor migrants, the more undesirable of the two, were denigrated and further marginalized as Black, largely illiterate, formerly rural and currently insular, Vodou practitioners while they were also deemed invaluable as agriculturalists and workers (McLeod 172). They simultaneously occupied the lowest rung in the migratory labor social strata and the highest rung in the racist Cuban imaginary—as people who worshiped the ungodly, were likely to spark rebellion, and forcibly denied integration. Haitians, therefore, were the primary targets of repatriation efforts in nationalist, anti-American, imperialist Cuba after 1933.

"Amidst economic decline in the 1930s," McLeod states, "Cuban authorities forcibly deported at least 38,000 Haitians, but they did not repatriate any British West

Indians” (McLeod 172). Haitian migrants experienced treatment unequal to that of Afro-Cubans and dissimilar to other Black migrants. McLeod links this differentiation predominantly to both their nationality and culture as well as the inability of their homeland government to offer them protections that Britain could offer its marginalized subjects. Though he writes little of cultural retention practices—other than the continued practicing of Vodou—he notes that Haitian culture is probably what best supported both Haitians’ survival in isolation when they were avoiding deportation and Haitian cultural survivals in present-day Cuba.

Richard Fahoome, who studies Haitian labor migration using the lenses of slave and wage labor, focuses less on culture and Haitian migrant incorporation into society but mentions briefly that language and religion served as deterrents to complete subjugation. Fahoome posits the impetus of financial gain as primary for both American business people and Haitian migrants. He argues that the technological advances in sugar production allowed companies in the United States to shift from owning human beings to owning land and technology and that this shift promoted the transition from slave to wage labor in the agricultural industry. One could conceivably argue that, given the similarities between the systems of agricultural wage labor and American sharecropping, these systems are not terribly far removed from the system of slave labor. Nonetheless, Fahoome shows that these systems *are* different. Focusing on the influence this transformation had on the Haitian migrant sugar workers in Eastern Cuba in the early to mid-twentieth century, Fahoome argues that though migrant workers were paid, they lived impoverished realities as piece wage earners and under the system of oppression in this “new” labor system.

This is the same wage labor system that renders Iris' maternal family cash poor and compels Iris' mother to seek Iris' adopted mother. Speaking of her granddaughter, Iris' grandmother Lamerchie states:

“The child has no future here,” Lamerchie said, as the women shared a supper of corn porridge and discussed the Winstons' desire to take Iris to the United States. “Children need to be educated nowadays. How can we poor folks of Monn Nèg help her? If you want your child's fate to be different from yours, let her go.” She puffed on her pipe, watching the smoke rise. “We must consult the spirits,” she decided. (Augustave 112)

And the spirits decide that they should “send her to the white man's country” (Augustave 114) because Iris' mother refuses to take another job working for some wealthy family because it was at such a job in her past that she was violated.

Discussing European slave labor in the Caribbean, United States finance capita and emerging imperialism, and sugar production and wage-labor under finance capita, Fahoome's focus is primarily on the economics of American sugar production in Cuba. As such, Fahoome briefly sheds light on American economic interests also in Haiti; he indirectly implicates the American government and military intervention in the co-optation of Haitian government for American financial gain. He writes:

The American occupation of Haiti coincided with the removal of Haitian peasants from their land. Some 33 different pieces of land reform legislation were initiated by the occupiers between 1915 and 1930. The new Constitution of Haiti, which was passed “over the heads

of a powerless Haitian Congress”...provided “the right to ownership of agrarian property is granted to foreigners resident in Haiti”...The previous Haitian Constitution had decreed “No white person of any nation shall set foot in this country as master or proprietor, nor hereafter acquires any property.” It was estimated that about 50,000 peasants were removed from their land in northern Haiti. (Fahoome 63)

Citing political economists Mats Lundahl and Roger Plant, Fahoome conveys American attempts to revive the plantation agriculture in Haiti were met with very limited success and so instead they brutally expelled thousands of Haitian peasants from their lands (Fahoome 64). There was no mere coincidence in the American military occupation, the American government sponsored changes in legislation, and mass Haitian migration to American sugar plantations in occupied lands in Cuba. In an effort to convey both this and cultural retention practices, historian Matthew Casey investigates social history.

Matthew Casey’s social history of Haitian migration to Cuba shows the historical ways Haitian men and women “navigated the harsh working and living conditions in both Haiti and Cuba by creating and maintaining kinship, commercial, religious, and social networks in sugar plantations, coffee farms, and urban spaces” (“From Haiti to Cuba and Back” iv). These transnational links, he argues, shaped living and labor conditions in *Haitiano-Cubano* communities. Furthermore, Casey claims that in reconstructing Haitians’ interactions with other workers outside the gazes of company and state, we witness the ways these institutions functioned on the ground and may question the extent to which national-level racial ideologies

determined local social relationships. Demonstrating various aspects of workers' social actions and the ways they shaped the implementation of migration and trade policies, Casey succeeds in understanding "workers' lives by emphasizing economic activities and coping strategies that occurred outside of formal wage activities and union mobilization" ("From Haiti to Cuba and Back" iv-v).

Casey's works are notable because they complicate understandings of Haitian labor migration and social formations. He concludes that:

Haitians' movements to Cuba did not begin with the legalization of migration in 1913, nor did their integration into Cuban society begin in 1959. By focusing on the migrants themselves, [he] ... sought to challenge the prevalent idea that Haitians were subject to the whims of states and sugar companies in both Haiti and Cuba. Analyzing their work, on sugar plantations and elsewhere, reveals a heterogeneous group of laborers that did not fit into the neat categories of company administrators who sought to divide their workforce along racial lines. Expanding the scope of analysis to times and spaces outside of work hours reveals social, economic, and religious networks that Haitians formed in an effort to cope with the harsh conditions of sugar work. The fact that individuals of other nationalities engaged in these informal activities alongside Haitians raises new questions about life and labor in rural Cuba. ("From Haiti to Cuba and Back" 306)

Such an expansion is also relevant to today's studies of Haitian migrants. Given the harshness of their experiences, culture and language became important avenues of maintaining ties to home.

Culture Keeping: Language, Dance, Cosmology, and Haitiano-Cubano Experiences

The Haitiano-Cubano experience may be used as representative of what happens in migration. Though there are similarities and differences in migration to the United States (principally to places like New York City and Miami, but other locales as well) for example, some patterns remain constant. Culture, language, and cosmology are the trinity when discussing *Haitiano-Cubano* cultural maintenance and preserving ties to home, Haiti, throughout the Haitian *dyaspora*. Anthropologist Yanique Hume posits that “despite the fact that the community is comprised of first- and second-generation Haitians who categorically identify with their hyphenated identities, or even at times view themselves as Cuban, language is the principal marker of ethnic and cultural difference” (Hume 80). This marker, language, denotes belonging in this community. *Haitiano-Cubanos* in Barranca, furthermore, utilize rural traditions that center family, and promote cooperatives and collective sharing of home and land responsibilities. Hume writes that separate “from their extended families and homeland, Haitian labor migrants relied on reestablishing kinship and social networks as part of their process of integration into Cuban life” (Hume 80). Similar reliance on social networks is exemplified throughout the *dyaspora*.

We see this demonstrated in Iris' understanding of Haitian Kreyol and the importance she imbues in maintaining an understanding of the language. Latham, Iris' godfather, helps to make her life more balanced. Described by Iris as a man with "the same skin color as the people of Monn Nèg [but] he couldn't speak Creole" (Augustave 26). It is Latham who decides to take Iris to a dance class in order to help her express her conflicts about living in a predominantly white environment. Iris is, then, inspired to go to the course because "[t]he thought of hearing sounds from [her] childhood in rural Haiti was suddenly like seeing and feeling the sun in the middle of a winter day" (Augustave 28). Iris, then, continues her childhood love of dance as she takes to studying dance so as to feel closer to Haiti and Africa. "For me," Iris proclaims:

the class became valuable to my understanding of my heritage, as the instructor introduced me to the richness of Haitian folklore and brought to life the circumstances of the survival of the Ibo, Nago, Congo, and Mandinga traditions on the island...I began to feel closer to Africa, the place where most Haitian culture originated. When I danced to the rhythms of Africa, my soul found healing in a holistic manner that took me, each time, deeper into a level of consciousness and self-realization. The dance classes triggered an emotional and physical release that uplifted and energized me and allowed me to explore and accept the essence of my being. (Augustave 29)

In learning dance, Iris heals herself, develops an epistemological grounding, and deepens her cosmological understanding. Iris is also inspired to maintain an

understanding of Haitian Kreyol because of dance. She ventures, frequently with Latham, into New York City to connect more to the *dyaspora* community there. “On a quest to connect with more Haitians,” Iris states,

I visited the Haitian book and record shop in Manhattan on Amsterdam Avenue near 85th Street. The owner, a bald, round-bellied man who had given Latham and me business cards at the meeting in Brooklyn, introduced me to his friends as a long-lost daughter of Haiti. He remembered I had told him I couldn’t speak Creole anymore and that I didn’t know any Haitians other than my dance instructor and the drummers. The men looked at me with pity, as though they thought I was deprived.

I listened to the men discuss Haiti’s latest political development. They spoke Creole laced with English. It vaguely reminded me of Monn Nèg and forced me to summon memories of the little girl I once was. Even though her presence in me was undeniable, a body of more recent experiences overshadowed her. (Augustave 33)

Iris goes on to get book and music recommendations from this community and, in the process of dancing, reading, and listening to music, she re-learns some Haitian Kreyol and becomes more whole. As we experience with Iris, cultural practices throughout the *dyaspora*—dance, music, and language most especially—are critical to Haitian cultural expression and maintenance.

Anthropologist Grete Viddal discusses *Haitiano-Cubano* cultural retention practices and implicates the Cuban state as a primary force with which *Haitiano-*

Cubano culture becomes validated. Viddal argues that *Haitiano-Cubanos* retain their culture due to personal and state official impetuses. Moreover, Viddal believes that *Haitian-Cubanos*

maintain their traditions, beliefs, and cultural identity as much because of their contact with state agencies, research institutions, tourism, and staged folkloric performance as despite these. The Haitian heritage community in Cuba, once considered outlandish and “other,” came to be inserted into the Cuban national imaginary through participation in the economy and imaginary “folklore.” (Viddal 51)

Their participation in the Cuban national imaginary is vital due to socialist efforts for equality. Their inclusion into Cuban national culture allowed some pathways for more inclusion into the nation as a whole.

According to Olívia Maria Gomes da Cunha, the role of the state in this effort is critical; it marks a definite shift in the modes of incorporating *Haitiano-Cubanos* before and after the Socialist Revolution—most especially after the 1985 laws legalizing associations (Cunha 72). Using state and privately sponsored festivals and social organizations to promote Haitian Vodou, dance, music, *Haitiano-Cubanos* instill pride in their heritage and maintain that other Cubans do so as well. That Iris in *The Roving Tree* is also an avid dancer and enthused by cultural expression is equally critical.

The *Haitiano-Cubano* experience offers insight into more contemporary Black labor migrant realities in South America. Accordingly, we can note unjust and dissimilar treatment of Black migrants—treatment predicated on imagination and

fear—as well as differentiation and exclusionary practices between migrants, rural, and low-income peoples. We may also work to do differently and seek examples as to what “different” looks like. As Casey shows, there is no monolithic Black immigrant, and regarding migration, we need account for the needs of diverse migrant populations as well as create realities that do not amplify oppression but rather mollify and radically alter it. Casey’s study includes the stories of Haitian low-income, largely illiterate, rural sugar plantation laborers *and* those of elite, literate, urban political actors.

Augustave’s novel conveys the realities of Iris in diverse countries and living in assorted situations. While she is not *Haitiano-Cubano*, the narrative does share and offer imaginative exaltation as to what a world could look like in which all migrants are welcomed and the issues from which they flee non-existent upon arrival.

There are many different aspects to the history of Haitian labor migration to Cuba that scholarship relatively ignores; these are namely features of collaboration, community building, and mutually beneficial practices between labor migrant communities and people living in the areas these communities inhabit. Additionally, understanding the impetuses for migration—the push–pull factors—helps us to truly comprehend the implications of racism, American imperialism, and capitalism on the circum-Caribbean. Augustave engages these themes in *The Roving Tree*.

Decolonial Migration and The Roving Tree

More specifically, what Augustave does well in *The Roving Tree* is align Iris' migration to the concept of decolonial migration. Iris moves through the "first" and "third world" as needed. She brings with her the benefits of each reality and travels in search of knowledge of self and a space in which she can be fully human. Given the oppressive and contentious realities of her life in the United States and the connected-disconnectedness she feels in Haiti, Iris moves to Zaire.

Iris' travels represent a different type of political-economic migration than that which legal scholar and lawyer E. Tendayi Achiume discusses in her paper "Reimagining International Law for Global Migration: Migration as Decolonization." Achiume successfully argues three points: that economic migrants are political-economic migrants; that these migrants are working to contest the forced co-dependency of first and third world nations, a co-dependency fused during colonization; and that this contestation is intrinsically decolonial because of its refusal to accept the inequitable order of the world and its circumvention of the imposed nation-state. Iris is given from her birth mother to her adopted mother because her birth mother embodies this decolonial reasoning. While Iris at first does not choose decolonial migration, she later chooses it differently—though very much in support of Achiume's argumentation.

Hagathe agrees to her daughter Iris' adoption because she is concerned about both violation of Black women and girls as well as poverty ruining Iris' life. After Hagathe shares with researcher Margaret, Iris's adopted mother, that a violent *Tonton Macoute* hates Iris because he believes that Iris is the reason Hagathe rejects him, Margaret, proposes to Hagathe, Iris' birth mother, that Iris move to the United States.

Hagathe only agrees after being violated by the same *Tonton Macoute* days later. At the hospital to which she was carried by Margaret's husband John when the two found Hagathe lying by the road abused and semi-conscious, Hagathe exclaims

I'm here at the Lord's mercy...Thank you for everything you and your husband have done. I wouldn't be alive without you. Doctors in this country don't even look at you if you cannot pay in advance. Mèsi anpil, thank you very much. I've decided to let you take Iris with you...Wait until she's an adult before bringing her back here; wait long enough for that *Tonton Macoute* to forget her. (Augustave 43)

Hagathe gives Margaret her blessing because she wants Iris to access a life free of financial worry and sexual violence.

This echoes some aspects of Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in which readers also encounter terrorism and misogyny by the *Tonton Macoutes*. Sophie Caco, remember, is the product of a *Tonton Macoute* raping Martine, her mother. In that novel, Sophie heals from her mother's wounds in reclaiming her matrilineal lines of the past, present, and future. Danticat's assessment is useful here as she writes that "[i]n the fairy tales, the *Tonton Macoute* was a bogeyman, a scarecrow with human flesh" (*Breath, Eyes, Memory* 138). *Tonton Macoute* was named after a fictional creature and the tactic of naming the paramilitary this way, according to Francis, done with the purpose of creating a "cultural linguistic block that already discredits the reality of women's stories of sexual abuse by relegating abuse to the realm of the unreal" ("Silence too Horrific to Disturb" 81). In writing that he also wore "denim overalls and a carried a cutlass and a knapsack made of straw," Danticat

pulls the *Macoutes* back into the realm of the real and tangible world as this is how they were perpetually identified, in conjunction with their dark-lensed sunglasses.

Danticat continues the child's tale in effect by writing that "[i]n his knapsack, he always had scraps of naughty children, whom he dismembered to eat as snacks" and highlighting the lesson for children that "[i]f you don't respect your elders then the Tonton Macoute will take you away" (*Breath, Eyes, Memory* 138). In doing this, Danticat builds on the typical understanding of *macoutes* that believes the telling of this story condones "abuse as appropriate punishment for a subordinate who has misbehaved" ("Silence too Horrific to Disturb" 81). The latter part of this quote, however, allows for a different reading. It may be read to suggest that if Sophie truly respects her elders, she will want to do as her therapist Rena dictates and reclaim her bloodline—as respect of matrilineal relations would require such. In honor of this, then, the *tonton macoutes* in mythical or real form are with whom she must inflict her wrath at being subjugated. As such, the reading becomes, respect your elders and don't let the *Tonton Macoutes* take you away. This way of analyzing the story is evinced in the ways Danticat writes the end scene in which Sophie is battling the cane stalks at the site of her mother's rape and her grandfather's demise that led to her family's further impoverishment. In this scene, Sophie wins.

Hagathe, in a way, wins in *The Roving Tree* because Iris is adopted and then moves to the United States to live with a wealthy white family. This "winning" is contradictory as it is predicated on the reality that Hagathe understands that white supremacy and wealth are tied and though they are implicated in her own oppression, they can also be manipulated to save her child. Achiume argues that "decolonization is

the pursuit of a long overdue geopolitical reordering of benefits of a global order defined by interdependence forged in the colonial era” (Achieme 145). For Hagathe, Iris’ migration allows her to benefit from the very global order that renders her cash poor and violable. Achieme assessment offers further evaluation of past and contemporary realities:

As people move across international borders fleeing or rejecting severe political-economic conditions and the fallout of these conditions, the movement of these individuals can be understood to enact an important step in the process of decolonization. If colonialism was a mandatory invitation to co-depend in a relationship characterized by asymmetric benefits, decolonization as I conceive of it here is the pursuit of a more equitable marriage between the geopolitical center and the periphery. (Achieme 145)

Hagathe propels Iris into this rejection of the severe political-economic conditions of poverty in Haiti. This very same poverty is such that forced Hagathe to work as a maid in the Bonsang household and therefore to be raped by Brahami Bonsang, Iris’ rich mulatto father. Iris’ being, then, of “good blood” (*bon sang*) as her father’s name literally means, did not protect her in Haiti given the social order. She, therefore, had to seek safety elsewhere. Achieme contends:

the fact of this marriage [between the geopolitical center and the periphery] is neither per se a problem, nor a relation that can be undone—there is no divorce in sight likely to fully sever global interdependence, although recent shifts in global politics suggest that

the interdependence may become more brutal before it becomes less so.

(Achiume 145)

As the marriage must remain, migrants move in search of benefitting from said wedlock. “It is the distribution of power and benefit within this marriage that is untenable,” Achiume continues, “and for many in the Third World, a more equitable marriage may be achievable only through long and deadly journeys from geopolitical peripheries to their centers” (Achiume 145). Iris’s first move is emblematic of precisely this quest for equity.

Still, Iris’s journeys later in life are differently decolonial. Returning to Africa is drilled into her by her grandmother and other cultural sages because they understand that to be the home of their cosmological grounding. When first beginning to dance, Iris

listened to the instructor talk about African spirits, like Ogoun Badagris and Damballah Wedo, who would descend into the soul of their Haitian children all the way from Africa, the magical place that had been an enigma ever since the girl in the cafeteria had said that was where people like me belonged. (Augustave 29)

Altering a negative encounter into something aspirational, Iris reveres Africa and believes it her rightful home. Travel there, then, only makes sense. When Iris chooses to return to the global south, first for Hagathe’s funeral and then in search of the Africa she fused with her cultural identity, Iris is articulating a political migration that embodies Black feminist citizenship while speaking to the very lessons learned from *Haitiano-Cubano* experiences. Given the problematic predicaments Haitians who

migrated to Cuba experienced—issues of wage poverty, anti-Black xenophobia, and isolation—and the beautiful practices of cultural adaptation and maintenance through language, dance, and Vodou, Iris’ latter migrations speak to the wonders of south-to-south migration given “first world” colonial advantages that cement systems of oppression.

Achiame defines “colonial advantage” as “the economic and political dominance of colonial powers at the expense of colonies during that period” (144). She indicates that the

colonial advantage and its instantiation in modern international law conferred benefits to national hegemonies that were European (e.g. Russia) or the progeny of Europe (e.g. the United States of America), to ruling elites of postcolonial nations, to nonstate actors (e.g. transnational corporations), and to others engaged in different imperial projects (e.g. China). (Achiame 144)

The cementation of systematic oppression is a global issue from which many nations benefit. Achiame argues that south-to-north migration is decolonial because it suggests a “remarkable personal circumvention of the nation-state by every individual who crosses from the Third World to the First motivated by the very features that distinguish the two” (145). I would argue that north-to-south migration by people originally of the global south (or south-to-south migration in its varied forms), can also be understood as decolonial particularly because it recognizes the distinguishing features between the two and employs the benefits of the access and power in the north to benefit the south. Iris’ later migrations also employ this logic.

In *The Roving Tree*, Iris chooses to move to Zaire because she is a “roving tree”—rooted in the diasporic rhizomes that make the *dyaspora* and the African Diaspora. She wants to work in Zaire principally because when witnessing a performance by the National Art Institute of Zaire, “[t]he sounds of the drums called to [her], reached the pulse of [her] soul, and revealed memories of a distant life” (Augustave 141). This performance recaptures and reminds Iris of the life she had in Haiti dancing in her grandmother’s garden; her life in the United States learning varied dance forms counseled by her African American godfather, Latham; and the life she dreams of in an Africa where she was told she belonged. Different from a simple return in which most systems of oppression are maintained, Iris acknowledges the difference that being in *dyaspora* allows and codifies but seeks return because she is tied to the birthplace of her ancestors and knows that she will be better off there.

This offers direct contrast with a negative, formative experience at her predominantly white school in Westchester when she is verbally assaulted for being Black. “That nigger better not sit here...they're loud, lazy, and stupid,” (Augustave 16) Iris was told one school day in her first years of school. This same day, she is told to “Go back to Africa!” (Augustave 17). While there are negative associations with Africa, Iris’ matrilineal spiritual history offers already a balanced view of Africa. Iris remembers this during the final moments of Lamercie’s and her own life. She recalls that Lamercie, Iris’ maternal grandmother tells her “We have been transplanted to this land, but we're Africans” (Augustave 136). Lamercie goes on to speak of her maternal grandmother, Iris’ great-great-grandmother, and to encourage Iris to return herself to Africa as Lamercie will not be able to given her impending death.

In the end, Iris' move to Zaire is decolonial because it is done in an attempt to reverse the violences forced by colonialism and to both re-member her rhizomatic family lineage and to remember her family across space and time. Iris' move is also decolonial because it is an effort to bring the knowledge gained in *diaspora* and the access and power gleaned in living in the global north to Zaire. The novel is definitive and the scholarship reveals that south-to-south migration, even in its extended form as experienced with Iris, is a choice throughout the Haitian migrant experience as is south-to-north. Still, the most recent conjoined iteration of this experience continues to produce the current Haitian Migrant Crisis.

The Haitian Migrant Crisis, Organizing Goals, Creative Vision

What is currently defined as the Haitian Migrant Crisis is, in large part, a result of the Goudou Goudou/earthquake of 2010. It is also, however, the fault of disenfranchisement, American imperialist capitalism, and varied systems of oppression as it is these that laid an uneven foundation on which Haiti stands. Gina Athena Ulysse clarifies much of this in *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives: A Post-Quake Chronicle*. This migrant crisis, highlights anti-Blackness and xenophobia throughout the Americas as well. Activists of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) and the Haitian Bridge Alliance (HBA), aiming to address the needs of Black immigrants and the causes of their compelled and forced exoduses, have published reports examined herein.

The Haitian Bridge Alliance (HBA) is led by president Guerline Josef²⁶ and their mission is to

guide, elevate and empower Haitian immigrants through advocacy, organizing, outreach, direct services included but not limited to immigration detention visits, transitional housing, legal assistance in partnership with UCI Law Clinic, The Public Law Center and other allies, educational, social and cultural programs so that they may fully integrate into American society while maintaining their cultural heritage as they continue to navigate the complex immigration system in the U.S. (“Guerline Josef”)

The HBA²⁷ was created to help fill the vacuum between the resources available to migrants in Southern California and the migrants themselves. Of the six members of the HBA leadership team, four are women (“Guerline Josef”). The migrants in Southern California are there as a result of the crisis at foot popularly called the Haitian Migrant Crisis—a term commonly used by organizers at this time as well.

²⁶ Guerline Josef is also an advocate against misogyny and child abuse (“Guerline Josef”). According to the biographical page on the National Alliance for the Advancement of Haitian Professionals (NAAHP), the goal of the Haitian Bridge Alliance is to “assist thousands of Haitian refugees who spent a dangerous journey from Brazil to California crossing 10 countries and 11 borders in search of a better life” (“Guerline Josef”).

²⁷ Historically, on the “About” page of the Haitian Bridge Alliance’s website, it read that “Haitian Bridge Alliance, also known as ‘The Bridge’ is a coalition of Haitian non-profit organizations and community activists who have come together to serve the Haitian community in California and beyond” (“About”). The page is currently nonexistent given the difficulties of both the work the HBA does *and* funding this work in these times. Still, the goal of the HBA, as described on Facebook, is to “work to develop a self-sufficient community of Haitian immigrants in California and beyond. Our vision is not myopic but rather broad enough to believe in a Haitian community in California that is strong at its foundation so that it doesn’t crumble when crisis hits”(“Haitian Bridge Alliance”).

According to the Black Alliance for Just Immigration, a national organization that “educates and engages African American and Black immigrant communities to organize and advocate for racial, social and economic justice” (“Who We Are”), the Haitian Migrant Crisis sharply increased toward the end of President Obama’s term:

In early 2016, the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI) began hearing reports of a sharp increase in the number of Haitian migrants seeking entry into the U.S. at the southern border. The migrants, including many families with children, had walked from Brazil through Central America and Mexico, to seek refuge in an America that was quickly closing its doors to immigrants and Black people. Advocates and organizers at the border estimate that 4,000 Haitians were paroled into the U.S., and approximately another 4,000 were detained or deported, and 3,000 Haitians were denied entry outright. At the same time, growing communities of African refugees and immigrants at the border were seeing increased Immigration and Customs Enforcement presence and vapid displays of white supremacy and even instances of violent hate crimes. (Adossi 3)

Given the site of conflict and the demographic in crisis, reserves for support and people available to help were limited at best. Moreover, “BAJI also learned that resources for recently arrived Haitian and other Black immigrants, such as housing, legal services, and Haitian-Creole and African language translation and interpretation, were scarce” (Adossi 3). This is a human rights crisis that, given the path of migration, is distinct.

The 2010 Goudou Goudou *and* climate change catalyzed this Haitian Migrant Crisis. Additional studies reveal, however, that environmental factors “[a]fter the 2010 earthquake, Isaac tropical storm and Sandy hurricane/tropical storm (in August and October 2012) increased the destruction scenario in Haiti, reaching regions already affected by the earthquake” (Pacifico 227). The situation immediately after the earthquake was untenable. “According to official estimates,” Robert Fatton Jr. asserts:

the earthquake killed 222,570 people and left 300,000 injured. It forced about half a million inhabitants to exit the capital for the rural areas and over 1.3 million to live in makeshift encampments lacking proper shelter and sanitation. In addition, 80% of Port-au-Prince’s buildings including the National Palace and virtually all government ministries [were] rubble. Finally, both the health and educational systems that were already grossly inadequate [were] completely destroyed.

Thus as a Haitian put it, “tout ayiti kraze”—the whole country is no more. (Fatton 164)

The combination of these natural events catalyzed a situation distinct in a country under-resourced, under-developed, and denigrated since her nineteenth-century revolution.

Migrants, made environmental refugees, therefore fled deterritorialized. “Deterritorialization,” according to Carole Boyce Davies:

refers to a form of dispossession being removed from one’s ability to claim a land space in which one historically lived...The logic of deterritorialization though includes removal from grounded place-on-

earth but also includes both the psychic, and the physical or geographical, losing one's residence in a known earth-bound location and having to re-establish in another one, but sometimes via water or through space to find safe landing elsewhere. ("Dislocations, Dis-posessions" 223)

The factors that lead to the Haitian Migrant Crisis offer a similarly situated view of statelessness, dispossession, and deterritorialization to the ones in Boyce Davies' study. Given climate change, the lack of socio-political structures, and the economic repercussions of the 2010 earthquake, the lands to which they laid claim were also in revolt and no longer lands on which they could build and advance their lives. Therefore, migration was the only realistic option for many Haitian peoples.

Cementing new migratory paths, these migrants also formed new identities and catalyzed new responses. Scholar Carole Boyce Davies argues:

Transnationalism and diaspora have become loaded terms, the first initially signifying the movement of capital across nations but now also reflecting a series of movements including culture and a series of socio-economic and political practices; the second capturing both the communities and locations recreated following migration—voluntary, forced, induced as well as the larger imagined community with emotional and historical origins elsewhere. Global migratory processes have ushered in new identities, as they create parallel histories. These ongoing migrations consistently create new identities as their actors struggle to hold on to older ones. ("Dislocations, Dis-posessions" 224)

This transnational propulsion of now *dyaspora* has concretized a parallel history of Haitian migratory flow. To be clear, Haitians immigrated to Brazil before the earthquake; the earthquake simply compelled more people to follow that migration route. According to sociologist Andrea Pacheco Pacifico and International Law scholar Érika Pires Ramos, “Haitians’ arrival in Brazil occurs in an atypical context of international migration, due to the immediate cause of forced displacement (natural disaster as a trigger), to the geographical shift in the migratory route (moving from South–North to South–South) and to the response strategy given by the Brazilian Authorities to ‘asylum’ or ‘assistance’ requests” (Pacifico 228). Quoting a study regarding a new migratory flux from Haiti to Brazil, Pacifico cites that the study authors Duval Fernandes, Rosita Milesi and Andressa Farias “identify the following route: Haiti (Port-au-Prince) – Dominican Republic – Panama – Ecuador, Peru or Bolivia – Brazil. The main gateway of Haitians in Brazil has been the Northern states of Acre and Amazonas, from where Haitians cross the Amazonian borders of Peru and Bolivia and suffer from intense activities of trafficking networks (*coyotes*)” (Pacifico 228). This current route sparked new socio-legal reactions.

This recent migration pattern has had subsequent legal responses as “[t]ransit countries (Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia), in turn, have adopted different measures to facilitate or restrict the passage or even the entrance of Haitians in their territories” (Pacifico 228) and new glimpses of historical trends as “French Guiana is also a destination sought because of its native language (French)” (Pacifico 228).

South-to-south migration is not entirely new to Haitian peoples. In *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora* (2011) edited by scholar Regine O. Jackson, we

are offered the concept of lateral movement as per the first section of the text. “Lateral Moves” as a concept engages “marginal migrations” within Haitian Diaspora—the migration of Haitians to other Caribbean islands. The different chapters examine the choice of lateral movement as opposed to migration to northern and historic metropolitan centers of like Miami, Montréal, and New York. From movement to the Dominican Republic to recent migration to Brazil, Haitian migrants often demonstrate an ever-expanding *dyaspora* that is also located in other nations of the global south. The post-earthquake preponderance in the choice of Brazil is an expression of this tendency given the systematic oppression seen in the United States. It also occurred because Brazil—before its economic downturn that agitated and compelled its own anti-Haitian xenophobia—did something new and noble.

Two years after a high court in the Dominican Republic rendered tens of thousands of Haitiano-Dominicans stateless (Kingston 482), Brazil offered another option for south-to-south migration. “In November 2015,” the Brazilian government “announced that it would grant permanent residency to the 43,781 Haitians who had entered the country illegally during the past five years” (Kingston 484). Though a novel move that conveys global south solidarity—especially given Brazil’s colonial advantage—because of the varied issues of systemic oppression, namely white supremacy and classism, this alone did not support the holistic integration of migrating Haitians into Brazilian society. Social scientist Lindsey Kingston conveys, though, that “[d]espite its good intentions, Brazil’s informal policy of resettling Haitians also comes with negative consequences for the displaced” (Kingston 484). More specifically, Brazil’s “open-door policy fuels what has been called Brazil’s ‘largest

immigration wave since World War II” (Kingston 484) without the means of supporting Haitian migrants logistically. Accordingly, “[c]ritics argue that the Brazilian government does little to support newcomers after they arrive. Jobs in construction, agriculture, and factories are drying up as Brazil faces an economic recession, and many Haitians find themselves unable to afford the high cost of living—much less sending money home to support loved ones in Haiti” (Kingston 484). These realities, paired with experiences similar to the aforementioned ones in the Haitiano-Cubano experience, compel further migration. Kingston continues “[m]igrants also face racial discrimination and struggle to learn the Portuguese language, often resorting to sharing overcrowded shelters in urban centers” (Kingston 484). With the growing feeling that the situation is worsening, many migrants chose to reroute. Structurally,

without access to formal asylum procedures or refugee status, Haitians in Brazil qualify as immigrants but do not receive the protections afforded to people fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution. While the Brazilian government can provide them entry into the country, the state is under no obligation to provide assistance or protections afforded to resettled refugees from war-torn places such as Syria or Iraq. Instead, Haitians must often rely on the charity of churches and non-profit organizations, as well as immigrant communities; they are also vulnerable to abuse by unscrupulous employers and traffickers. (Kingston 485)

Haitians and *Haitiano-Brasileiros*, as a result of the difficulty in sustaining their lives

in Brazil and later the economic downturn and the socio-political climate it created, resort to the south-to-north migration they avoided months and years before.

The Haitian Migrant Crisis increased in severity in 2016. According to the BAJI report titled “Black Lives at the Border,” an opportunity arose to collaborate between the coasts of the United States. “As this human rights crisis emerged,” it states, “BAJI began building relationships with the few Black immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations working at the border including Haitian Bridge Alliance and Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans – San Diego” (Adossi 3). The Haitian Migrant Crisis offers contemporary opportunities to observe the tenets of Black feminist citizenship in action.

In one of the stories of this report, we are introduced to Anabelle’s tale and see that her understanding of love and dedication to family catalyzed her migration. “Anabelle,” the report reads “is first and foremost a mother, having birthed six children. Because of the economic devastation caused by the earthquakes in Haiti, Anabelle moved to the Dominican Republic to provide more for her children. She soon left for Brazil” (Adossi 4). Grounded in a migration pattern that is decolonial and in accordance with Achime’s understanding, Anabelle leaves for Brazil a political migrant who aims to provide for the nurturing of her children’s minds, bodies, and spirits by way of remittances. “The economic hardships of Brazil,” however, “did not make her passage easy; she was stuck there for a year without work” (Adossi 4). Understanding the world, Anabelle decides to journey to the land of many in the *dyaspora*. “Realizing her dire situation and inability to support her husband and children back in Haiti” (Adossi 4), Anabelle “reached out to a friend who

offered her financial assistance to come to the United States” (Adossi 4). Embedded in her experiences with other people of color is an understanding of marginalization of many different kinds of peoples.

According to the report, “Anabelle’s subsequent trek from Costa Rica to Nicaragua proved to be the most arduous: she was very often under attack at gunpoint. Through the kindness of strangers and indigenous people, she finally arrived in Mexico where she crossed over to San Diego” (Adossi 4). Anabelle’s positive encounters are linked by a mutual understanding of the interconnectedness of oppression and the need to end subjugation if we are all to thrive in this world. Anabelle, and women migrants like her, face white supremacy, male supremacy, capitalism, imperialism, and more in her life. It is this very intersectional oppression that makes Anabelle’s current situation all the more difficult. The Haitian Migrant Crisis is a crisis in part due to climate change *and* due to the colonial advantage that cements systemic oppression in the global south.

Anabelle’s main challenge during the crisis is due to limited resources in our efforts to support migrants, usually Spanish-speaking but not always. “Much like other immigrants of African descent” (Adossi 4), the report indicates, Anabelle has been her unable “to get immigration translation services in Creole, a widely spoken language in Haiti” (Adossi 4). The issue of translation for migrants who do not speak Spanish, including indigenous migrants of Central and South America, is an issue of resources—it is not that having Spanish translation is “bad” it is that having only Spanish or romance language translation services for migrants coming through Mexico is certainly not enough. Anabelle’s reality and attempt at decolonial migration

is thwarted “[b]ecause of a linguistic mix-up” (Adossi 4). Given this mix-up “she was unable to attend her court appearance at the time appointed by the judge, and as a result was given a deportation order in absentia” (Adossi 4).

For the first time, according to these reports, non-Mexican migrants “are the majority of people crossing the border, and the total amount of people crossing is the lowest since 1970” (Adossi 6). Accordingly, more non-Mexicans than Mexicans were apprehended at U.S. borders in fiscal year 2016 (Gonzalez-Barrera), including Haitian people like Anabelle. Furthermore, studies observed that

A large drop in Mexican migrants accounts for the major decrease in total migration. Along with this decrease in Mexican migrants, there has been a sharp increase in non-Mexican migrants coming from Central America, the Caribbean, Africa and parts of Asia...People from the Caribbean make up the largest share of migrants entering the border outside of Central Americans and Mexican migrants. Nearly 7,000 Haitian immigrants are now residing in several border towns in Mexico. A recent *Voice of America* report found that 19,000 African and Haitian migrants arrived in Mexico in 2016 and up to 700 a day were arriving in Tapachula, Mexico in the same year. The reality of border towns on the Mexican side of the border reflects the changing face of immigration. (Adossi 6)

All of the faces of immigration need support—and helping requires organizing, socio-legal changes, policy-shifts. The immigration choices made during the Trump administration further worsened the already dire situation. When Trump signed an

Executive Order titled “Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements” in January 2017, he signed Anabelle's fate. Choosing a plan that mandates “costly plans to further militarize the U.S.-Mexico border, curtail[s] due process, and expand[s] problematic detention and enforcement practices” (Adossi 10) sowed the seeds of family separation in addition to the deportation of many political-economic migrants. The order, according to the report, “will likely result in asylum seekers, families, children, and others being turned away and denied access to humanitarian protection guaranteed for decades under U.S. and international law” (Adossi 10). This is abhorrent and that which is apparent and articulated in Iris’ migration away from the United States. In drafting the report, BAJI aims “to continue mobilizing Black communities and allies to advance dignity, freedom, and human rights for all Black immigrants and refugees” (Adossi 14). In authoring this chapter, I am arguing for this and more.

In conclusion, I contend that this effort is exemplary of the point of the introductory quote and in line with Elsie Augustave’s goal in *The Roving Tree*. Our present reality, in the United States, forces us to look to other ways to support migrants and marginalized peoples, decisions that have to reflect the lessons learned from the past. Because of the need for intersecting and innovative racial, gender, equity, and immigrant justice movement solutions, among others, reading Haitian migrant novels about Black women and seeking to resolve the Haitian Migrant Crisis offers an opportunity to employ the lessons learned.

A Black feminist citizenship approach allows us to ask: what would a world look like in which Iris Odys’ and Anabelle’s lives and humanity matter? We must also

seek answers to: what would a world be like in which the colonial advantage was redistributed and systemic oppression dismantled? Elsie Augustave offers us some answers to these profound questions but the complete answers are ours to create.

Said responses have to go past the issues of visibility introduced in the opening quote and require decolonial love, global Black citizenship, and radical Black liberation. *The Roving Tree* offers the textual information to clarify current scholarship on migration. It forces readers to stretch their imaginations and nurture innovative solutions as to what world we need create so that people are no longer marginalized, in search of safe spaces. It mandates that we question both our actions and those of our governments in an effort to bring said world into existence and heal the traumas engendered in migrations past and present.

CHAPTER KAT (4):

CRIMMIGRATION AND LIVING THE AMERICAN

NIGHTMARE IN DREAMS:

IBI ZOBOI'S SPIRIT WORLDS

Reading books whose protagonists are Black/Latinx first-generation women is important because people and especially girls of color are able to relate to women who look like them, have had similar experiences, and understand the situations they have been through. Also, being able to have these women as protagonists is important because people who are not from where these women come from will have the chance to learn about them...[W]e usually get protagonists who are men—white men to be exact. And [we] never get to read the importance of a Black/Latinx first-generation woman. People forget the impacts these women have had in society and in the overall world and to acknowledge [this] through literature is important. It is important to have these women as protagonists in books we read because it gives students and teachers a taste of reality and what is out there. It also helps the public education system because it ends up being something different than what we're taught in classrooms. Being a student here in the United States, it's important to show and allow young girls of color to read about women who are like them.

G.R.
College Student
Writer
Social Influencer + Activist

Black and Latinx women's literature in which Black/Latinx, first-generation people, most especially women and girls, are the subject helps both readers and researchers articulate the importance of our very beings and our work in the society overall while also counterbalancing normative narrative about our subjecthood and existences.

In this epigraph, the speaker identifies the didactic significance and the epistemological implication of this literature. For her, supporting young girls in reading about similarly situated predecessors and examples helps them understand both the interconnectedness of their struggles and the ways in which their freedoms and successes are tied.

Such a statement brings to mind the moment in popular culture during which Issa Rae, comedian, show creator, social influencer proclaimed "I am rooting for everybody Black" while on the red carpet at the 69th Primetime Emmy Awards in September of 2017. The reading and rooting are examples of bearing witness of and acclaiming triumph for Black peoples experienced throughout the diaspora.

Ibi Zoboi is an author and thought leader whose work seeks to honor truths, and critique normative, hegemonic, institutionalized, intersectional oppression. Appropriately, the truths honored in her texts are didactic, exemplary, and help bear witness to some of the greatest and yet accepted atrocities of our time.

In the socio-political climate of the United States in 2018, people's very beings exist in constant contestation and protest of the new white supremacist, misogynist, jingoist, and xenophobic "norms." With increasingly conservative, anti-Black, anti-Muslim, xenophobic law and order dictates from the White House, this political moment is ripe with rebellion. Authors like Ibi Zoboi offer readers both examples of people in revolt *and* teach of the impact of these realities on marginalized peoples—as indicated in the epigraph. The texts of these authors are relevant to the public education system because they offer different epistemologies than those oft-taught in classrooms. For students, especially students of color here in the United States, it is essential to show and allow young girls of color to read about women who are like them. In examining works by Ibi Zoboi as well as the ideologies and politics of her text, we center the multifaceted nature of novels about transnational migration and the ways they are keenly also about Black women's liberation. Thus, *American Street* (2017) belongs in the genre of Black women's literature of transnational migration. I argue throughout this study that this genre is also an important site for theorization about migration, immigration, and *dyaspora*.

Black women's transnational literature of migration conveys that "[l]iterary and cultural production are... intimately and pervasively present in how we construct analytics of race, gender, and location, in that they invoke and provoke contradictory desires to have the known world reflected but also to create new and varied connections" (Pinto 17–18). Precisely because it offer humanistic inquiry and provoke reading difference and comprehending differently, as Samantha Pinto suggests, Zoboi's text promotes radical shifts in representations of Black women themselves and

the worlds in which they both inhabit and aim to better.

Both including and before the creation of contemporary movements like #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, and more, radical Black women continue to invigorate, embody, and expand the socially-defined boundaries of Blackness, womanhood, and radicalism and, as such, justify the need for new definitions. These women complicate the standardized binary boundaries between respectable and radical; re-imagine quotidian rebellion; highlight and convey the multiple forms of women's leadership; and characterize anew the various intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality oppression. According to the introduction of *Want to Start A Revolution* by Dayo Gore et al., contemporary Black women also highlight “the diversity of strategies and approaches Black women employ” (Gore 6) while artfully conveying the “differing ways Black women [imagine and enact] their ‘freedom dreams’” (Gore 6). The dreams, as we see in Zoboï's novels, are genuinely nightmares and through them the protagonists argue for the America of radical protesters against the United States government.

In this chapter, I introduce Haitian author Ibi Zoboï and examine her first novel *American Street*. Moreover, I describe the ways the text engages the concept of Black feminist citizenship, crimmigration, and later *dyaspora saudade*. In articulating this and the politics these texts contest, the novels themselves, I envision as political tools.

Crimmigration and Coming of Age

Ibi Zoboï is a newly published novelist, an author who herself migrated from

Haiti and came of age in 1980s Bushwick, Brooklyn—a neighborhood Zobi describe as a “war zone” in this epoch (233). In her own words, she wrote *American Street* because she “wanted to write a contemporary story set in a disenfranchised environment, to examine an immigrant coming from one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere to one of the poorest cities in America” (Poray Goddu). Furthermore, Zobi “wanted to look at what happens when economic disparity and a rich culture, like that of Haiti and Detroit, clash, and what happens to a teenager in the center of that clash” (Poray Goddu). Zobi chose to place her debut novel in a city that in 2016 was filled with the dilapidated, underinvested, under-resourced, precarity of Bushwick, Brooklyn when she was coming of age.

In an interview about her debut novel and her forthcoming work *Pride*, Zobi states

[w]hen I first started writing *American Street*, there was a *New York Times* article called “Last Stop on the L Train: Detroit.” It was about gentrification and how even Bushwick has become so expensive, so the next stop was Detroit. I have a history with Bushwick. And Detroit looks very much like how Bushwick used to look in the 1980s when I first immigrated there. (Turner)

This choice of literary setting demands attention as it demonstrates Zobi’s interest in social justice issues at the intersection of race and class. Moreover, the literal place in which the plot occurs, the home, is also significant.

8800 American Street is a home that evokes quite clearly that the American Dream is farcical as it does not expand to address the needs of everyone. In the

eponymous chapter, low-income male poverty, depression, death and more are cemented into the foundation of the home itself. All the men who live there die tragically: Adrian Weiss, the first tenant in 1924, is shot and killed; Wilson Coolidge who moves there from Ohio in 1942 is struck by a car; Alabama native and child of sharecroppers, Lester Charles Walker—the first Black father in the home—is shot and killed by his white neighbor; and “all through the eighties and nineties...[d]eath claimed the lives of dealers and junkies alike” (Zoboi 162). In 2000, Fabiola’s uncle, Jean-Phillip François, buys the house from the city only to later die by way of a “single bullet to the head outside of the Chrysler plant” (Zoboi 162). Death is an ever-present force in this novel used to different ends. “Death,” Zoboi writes to close the chapter on 8800 American Street:

Parked itself on that corner of American and Joy, some days as still as stone, other days singing cautionary songs and delivering telltale riddles, waiting for the day when one girl would ask to open the gates to the other side. (162)

This girl is Fabiola, the novel’s protagonist. With a character who resembles a *lwa* of mortality and with whom Fabiola converses and works to save her cousin, Fabiola is the girl who does the asking and changes the fates of her family. A book written by an author whose experience is akin to that of her protagonist and created to illuminate stories of disenfranchisement, migration, and poverty in predominantly Black communities—understandably, *American Street* is an informative text.

In *American Street*, Ibi Zoboi crafts women-centered spaces and sister-circles that embody Black feminist citizenship as well as the characteristics of contemporary

Black feminisms. By specifically qualifying mother–daughter and matrilineal relationships in migration, the American DreamNightmare,²⁸ and cosmology, the protagonist in the novel searches for her mother and home. In so doing, the text offers fecund socio-political understanding with which to navigate the current socio-political climate.

Zoboi shows readers how oppression impacts Black women and hints at how we all may overcome subjugation. *American Street* is a text that charts Fabiola’s growth in Detroit. Leaving Haiti as a pair conjoined in all ways barring physically, Fabiola and her mother are separated in New York City. Moreover, Fabiola’s mother is detained upon entering the United States, and Fabiola must continue to Detroit alone. The novel begins:

If only I could break the glass separating me and Manman with my thoughts alone. On one side of the glass doors are the long lines of people with their photos and papers that prove that they belong here in America, that they are allowed to taste a bit of this free air. On the other side is me, pressing my forehead against the thick see-through wall. My shoulder hurts from the weight of the carry-on bag. I refuse to put it down for fear that they will take it away, too.

“Manman” I whisper to the glass, hoping that my voice will ease through, fly above all those people’s heads, travel on a plane back to New York, and reach her. (8)

²⁸ Deliberately conjoined in this study, I use the phrase “American DreamNightmare” to denote the varied ways that pursuing the “American Dream” creates nightmarish realities for immigrants, primarily immigrants of color.

Fabiola is abruptly taken from her Manman, mom, in ways that evoke imagery similar to 2018–2019 media portrayals of family separation—this time, though, the mother is the one in the placed in a cage but without her child. Zoboï continues:

We had been holding hands for courage when we arrived at Customs in Kennedy Airport. Manman had carried all our important documents in a big yellow envelope tucked into her large purse—our passports, her visa, and the papers to prove that we are who we say we are, that we are from the city of Port-au-Prince; that I am an American citizen by birth and I left for good when I was only an infant; that we own a little house in the neighborhood of Delmas; and that Manman has a business selling brand-name pépé—second-hand American clothes. All of these things to prove that we are only visiting relatives and plan to return home to Haiti. (9)

Fabiola's existence in the United States is an attempt to survive after fleeing home; it is E. Tendayi Achiume's decolonial migration embodied. Questioning their ability to know the truth, and wondering if her mother was detained because of some prescient gift, Fabiola wonders thereafter:

But how could they have read our minds? How could they have known that my mother's big sister in Detroit had been sending us money to leave Haiti forever? How could they have known that we didn't plan to go back? (Zoboï 9)

Unable to determine exactly what went wrong, Fabiola replays the scene of her mother's arrest and subsequent detainment:

“Ms. Valerie Toussaint, I need you to come with me,” the man had said. His voice was like the pebbled streets in Delmas, rough and unsteady as they pulled Manman’s hands from mine; as they motioned for me to continue through the line with Manman’s desperate please trailing behind me—*Alé, Fabiola! Go Fabiola! Don’t worry. I will meet you there!*—and as I got on the connecting flight from New York to Detroit. But too much has happened for me to cry now. (Zoboi 9)

Fabiola is unable, though, to maintain her composure once it sets into her mind that her mother has been taken from her. She protests:

On the plane ride leaving Port-au-Prince for JFK, I had curled into my mother and together we looked out the window. Up high in the sky, all the problems we had left behind seemed so tiny—as if I could pick them up one by one and fling them out of the universe.

On the flight to Detroit, I am alone. I look down at America—its vastness resembling a huge mountain. I felt as if I was just a pebble in the valley.

My mother will be on the next plane, I tell myself over and over again. Just like when she sends me ahead on my own by foot, or by *tap-tap*, or by motortaxi. I tell myself that this won’t be any different. (Zoboi 9)

Fabiola’s new reality is, however, very different. Upon landing Fabiola searches for her mother in tempered English. In one conversation with a woman official, Fabiola states,

“Excuse me, miss? I am looking for Valerie Toussaint coming from New York” (Zoboi 10) and finding only confusion, Fabiola repeats, “Valerie Toussaint in New York...They took her. They say she can’t come to the United States” (Zoboi 10). Upon inquiry from this official as to whether this Valerie has been detained, Fabiola “stare[s] and blink[s] and shake[s her] head” (Zoboi 10). She searches her “brain for the word, trying to find the Creole word for it, or a French one—*détenir*: to hold back, to keep from moving” (Zoboi 10). Unable to assist, the official tries to send her on her way but Fabiola replies, “No...I have to be with Valerie Toussaint” (Zoboi 11) and waits with all her suitcases in a foreign airport as a wintry nightscape creeps into the scene. The first chapter concludes with Fabiola waiting:

I look around and then stretch out my arms on each side of me. I pray that Manman will get to taste this cold, free air before she rests her eyes tonight, wherever they are keeping her. And then tomorrow, she will come to this side of the glass, where there is good work that will make her hold her head up with dignity, where she will be proud to send me to school for free, and where we will build a good, brand-new life. *Une belle vie*, as she always promises, hoping that here she would be free to take her sister’s hand and touch the moon. (Zoboi 11)

For the remainder of the text, Fabiola’s mother remains detained, stuck in the American Crimmigration system.

Fabiola’s mother becomes part of what scholar Julia Sudbury argues is global lockdown. Using the term “lockdown” to denote what prison movement activists refer to as “the repressive confinement of human beings as punishment for deviating from

normative behaviors” (xii), Sudbury’s lockdown gestures to the larger instances of the American carceral state. “Although prisons and jails are the most visible locations for lockdown,” Sudbury protests, “the term encourages us to think about connection with other spaces of confinement, such as immigration detention centers, psychiatric hospitals, juvenile halls, refugee camps, or Indian boarding schools” (xii). Thinking of lockdown globally, Sudbury furthers, evokes “the antiglobalization movement’s critique of global capital and U.S. corporate dominance” (xii). Global lockdown, therefore, signifies:

a local manifestation of transnational flows of people, products, capital, and ideas....both the fabric of the prison and the people caged within it are shaped by global factors, from free trade agreements and neoliberal restructuring to multinational corporate expansion. The prison is thus simultaneously local and global, or to use a neologism coined by Nawal el Saadawi, it is “glocal,” a product of local, national, and global political, economic, and cultural phenomena. (Sudbury xii)

In their decolonial journeying to an anti-Black and anti-immigrant United States, Fabiola and her mother are rendered deviant and must therefore be punished within the United States carceral system. Describing the friends Fabiola envisions her mother making in the detention center, she states:

It’s your first night, but you’ve made some friends—two men and one woman. And they are black, black like you—black as if they’ve sat in the hot midday sun for most of their lives selling any and everything they could find just to make enough money to buy a plane ticket out of

that hot sun. They're from Senegal, Guinea, and Côte D'Ivoire, because they speak a broken French just like you. (Zoboi 29)

In both describing them as Black and sharing the type of labor with which they engage, Fabiola crafts these peoples as the very people made deviant in the American immigration system. *American Street*, in centering this narrative amidst a larger coming of age story of trials and tribulation within a young, Black, and women-identified body, offers testimony of the subjugation of bodies characterized as similarly deviant for simply choosing to live and seek chances at lives more in line with what they know they deserve.

These testimonials of survival are part of a more extensive practice of contesting the existence of cages as solutions to human behavior and need. Leading “the charge for the integration of antiglobalization and antiprison praxis,” Sudbury contends that “[f]eminists of color have been at the forefront in developing transnational feminist practices as a framework for understanding the gendered impact of global economic and political restructuring” (xii). Transnational feminist practices, Sudbury argues, strategically demonstrate the flawed and problematic nature of the entirety of our carceral system. Sudbury maintains that

Transnational feminist practices assist us in unpacking the global prison by drawing our attention to the ways in which punishment regimes are shaped by global capitalism, dominant and subordinate patriarchies, and neocolonial racialized ideologies. In so doing, they place the experiences of women of color and third-world women at the center of our analysis of prisons and the global economy. Women’s testimonies

of survival under neoliberal cutbacks, border crossing, exploitation in the sex and drug industries, and life under occupation and colonial regimes provide a map of the local and global factors that generate prison as a solution to the conflicts and social problems generated by the new world order. (xiii)

Their testimonies also speak to the realities of being Black, female-bodied, poor, under the practice of mass-criminalization in the United States—a tradition that offers as a result global lockdown. *American Street* is one such tribute to the survival of Haitian immigrant women who, against all odds and through use of familial networks, epistemology, and cosmology resist their own deaths as well as violence perpetrated on their bodies. Landing in Detroit, despite a treacherous journey during which she loses her mother, Fabiola meets her family and begins to rebuild her life.

In Detroit, she encounters her aunt, Matant Jo, and three cousins while also learning of life, love, and complex urban realities. Chantal, Princess (Pri), and Primadonna (Donna)—Fabiola's cousins—are all different kinds of Black girls and all seek different paths towards happiness—each with a story of her own within the novel. Describing the sisters, upon first meeting them, Fabiola elucidates much about their gender expression in the novel's beginnings. Regarding Pri, Fabiola shares

I can only tell she's a girl by the shape of her body—but her oversized jacket, loose jeans, high-top sneakers, and hat with three bumblebees on it make her almost look like a boy. (Zoboi 13).

Of Chantal, Fabiola declares “another girl runs towards us—Chantal. She’s smaller than Princess, with black framed glasses—almost twenty years old” (Zoboi 13). Lastly, Fabiola sees Donna and affirms:

Primadonna is behind her—tall with long, flowing hair reaching down to her elbows. She is wearing sunglasses even though it’s nighttime...I look her up and down to see that she is much taller because of her fancy high heels. She lives up to her name with her diva hair and sunglasses at night. (Zoboi 13)

As we soon discover, Chantal is the oldest sister and tasked with helping the family achieve success in America. Charged early on as her mother’s translator—a title for many *dyaspora* youth—Chantal is the only one of Fabiola’s cousins who was born in Haiti. “Creole and Haiti,” Chantal professes,

Stick to my insides like glue—it’s like my bones and muscles. But America is my skin, my eyes, my breath. According to my papers, I’m not even supposed to be here. I’m not a citizen. I’m a “resident alien.” The borders don’t care if we’re all human and my heart pumps blood the same as everyone else’s. (Zoboi 90)

These borders, it appears, are unduly oppressive and dehumanizing. Dedicated to walking “a path that’s perfectly in between,” Chantal is book smart and street smart and masters both worlds as well (Zoboi 90). While at first, Chantal clashes with Fabiola because Fabiola forces Chantal “to remember the home [she] left behind” (Zoboi 90), the two later reach an understanding precisely because Fabiola makes

Chantal “remember [her] bones” and helps the family to heal (Zoboi 90). The twins have different masteries of American life. Of the two, Fabiola declares:

Princess and Primadonna, or Pri and Donna now—[are] my twin cousins. *Les Marassa Jumeaux*, who are as different as hot pepper and honey. Their faces are mirrors of each other, but their bodies are opposites—one tall and skinny and the other short and chunky—as if Princess ruled their mother’s womb and Primadonna was an underfed peasant. (Zoboi 14)

It is worth noting here that the *marassa*, a deified figure in Vodou, also appears in the work of Edwidge Danticat.

Articulating the concept of the *marassa* in Vodou epistemology in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Danticat authors:

The Marassas were two inseparable lovers. They were the same person duplicated in two. They looked the same, talked the same, walked the same. When they laughed, they even laughed the same and when they cried, their tears were identical. 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, those Marassas. Admiring one another for being so much alike, for being copies... The love between a mother and daughter is deeper than the sea. (84-85)

Writing of a particularly difficult moment between Sophie and Martine, Danticat inserts this description of the *marassa* into a scene in which Martine rapes Sophie, her

daughter, by way of a virginity test that Martine inflicts upon Sophie. In this scene, Martine shares this tale to convey the love she has for Sophie. To the concept of *marassa*, doubling is significant.

In Nadège Clitandre's *Edwidge Danticat: The Haitian Diasporic Imaginary*, she writes

[i]n an interview, Danticat explains her use of the Marassa figure. She asserts: "I wanted to use all connotations of twins in the story. Going back to the mother–daughter relationship, the idea that two people are one, but not quite; they might look alike and talk alike but are, in essence, different people". (98)

"Doubling," Danticat continues in this interview, "acknowledges that people make separations within themselves to allow for painful experiences but also the separation allows space to do very great things" (*Edwidge Danticat* 99). In many ways, Fabiola and her mother are also Marassa, as I also proclaimed of Sophie and Martine in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in my undergraduate thesis and as Danticat herself professes them to be in the above quote. Fabiola and her mother's doubling is purposeful and intentional given their forced separation. The obvious and literal Marassa in *American Street*, though, remain Pri and Donna. Though their nicknames conjoined signify only one of the twin's names, Primadonna, the two characters experience characteristics similar to Vodou Marassa and greatly assist Fabiola in the coming of age in migration novel.

Named "Princess" and "Primadonna" because their mother "thought being born in America to a father with a good-paying job at a car factory and a house and a

bright future meant that [they] would be royalty” (Zoboi 37), the twins experience great hardship in their lives—Pri because she is tasked with physically protecting her family (Zoboi 38) and Donna, at first, because she is bullied for being beautiful and later by way of an abusive relationship with the young man who initially stopped the bullying. Together, the three sisters, before Fabiola’s arrival, made a fascinating trio: “Chantal is the brains, Donna is the beauty, and [Pri is] the brawn. Three Bees. The biggest, baddest bitches from the west side” (Zoboi 38) with whom “[n]obody...fucks” (Zoboi 38). They developed this team as a means of protecting themselves in an anti-immigrant, anti-Black Detroit. They include Fabiola in this team to further the same means. Fabiola’s identity and coming of age are central to the novel and exhibited throughout the text. Interestingly, it is through the twins and Fabiola specifically that Zoboi examines black girl sexuality, gender expression, and identity formation. Each character expresses varied and layered identities, and their young women-centered relationships aptly interrogates the difficulties of growing up Black and woman in America.

Embarking on a journey of her own, Fabiola falls in love with a young man, Kasim, who ends up gunned down by the police—broken as his name implies in Haitian Kreyol. By the end of the novel, Fabiola learns as much about herself as she does about the American criminal legal system²⁹ and Crimmigration.

Coined by César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández, Crimmigration is the intersection of criminal and immigration law. Given the changes in the 1996

²⁹ A term chosen by activist and legal scholars to replace “Criminal Justice System” precisely to convey the injustice that exists as the bedrock of this system.

immigration and terrorism laws, the policing and criminalization of immigrants has since skyrocketed. In the article “Creating Crimmigration,” Garcia Hernández states that:

Crimmigration law ... developed in the closing decades of the twentieth century due to a shift in the perception of criminal law’s proper place in society combined with a reinvigorated fear of noncitizens that occurred in the aftermath of the civil rights movement. Specifically, in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, overt racism became culturally disdained and facially racist laws impermissible. (1457)

While blatant and visibly white supremacist laws were then less allowable, this did not mark the end of white supremacy. “Derision of people of color, however,” Garcia Hernández continues “did not cease. Instead, it found a new outlet in facially neutral rhetoric and laws penalizing criminal activity” (1457). “Criminal” became of new language used to dehumanize on the basis that people who could not follow the laws did not deserve rights bestowed to them. This application of “criminal” expanded to apply to both citizens *and* non-citizens and Crimmigration became a way to exclude undesirables. García Hernández writes that:

[w]hen immigration became a national political concern for the first time since the civil rights era, policymakers turned to criminal law and procedure to do what race had done in earlier generations: sort the desirable newcomers from the undesirable. (1457)

Though much of the legal immigration policy in the United States of America is white supremacist, the specific laws that César Cuauhtémoc García Hernández refers to were created under President Bill Clinton (1993–2001).

In 1996, under President Clinton, two laws came into being: the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) and the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA). Both, paired with the never-ending War on Drugs, now result in the mass incarceration and deportation of immigrants because the laws redefined aggravated felony to include a *long* list of low-level offenses for which immigrants may be detained and deported; eliminated many legal defenses against deportation; set up mandatory and prolonged detention stipulations; created new fast-track deportation procedures; and further involved local law enforcement in deportation processes.

President Barack Obama (2009–2017) is popularly known as the president who deported the most immigrants given these new rules—a trend that began in the George W. Bush administration (2001–2009) as Bush implemented these laws similarly (Horsely). Reviewing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) data, however, shows that:

while the Obama administration record is characterized by much higher removals than preceding administrations, it also shows less focus on increasing absolute numbers of overall deportations and a higher priority on targeting the removals of recently arrived unauthorized immigrants and criminals. (Chishti)

Nevertheless, after the 2017 presidential elections, it was expected that these laws would only be fortified with new legislation and result in further criminalization of immigrants and non-citizens.³⁰ “The process of focusing and targeting enforcement resources,” Muzaffar Chishti of the Migration Policy Institute argues “has set the initial stage for the Trump administration” (Chishti). In the first weeks of his presidency, the 45th president, Donald Trump (2017– present),

signed two executive orders promising wide-ranging expansions of the enforcement system, including priorities that focus on removing not only noncitizens with criminal records, but also those who have committed potentially criminal acts or who have abused public benefits. (Chishti)

This legacy of xenophobic legislation continues at present and the expectation of a continued legislative attack on immigrants has come true. Crimmigration, we know, is the nexus of immigration and criminal law. It is the expansion of the system of mass-incarceration in the United States to further criminalize immigration. It is an avenue of mass-criminalization and part of the global lockdown.

After the 1996 legal changes, newly reinvigorated under President Trump, Crimmigration continues to perpetually break apart families and detain people for minor infractions—actions made criminal principally because of the ethno-racial identity of the actor. There is now abundant evidence of white supremacist, jingoist use of immigration policy as a political tool.

³⁰ For more, please see these infographics in Appendix 1

American Street, however, artfully represents literary art as a tool for political mobilization. In humanizing the experience of Crimmigration in one Haitian context, it is a text that centers love, family, and women (mothers in particular) as realities that energize and support Haitian women of the diaspora in the face of various violences. Fabiola's story in *American Street*, however, takes on a different shape—with a critique of crimmigration as its backbone. In this context, the text is also a political device.

Fabiola leaves Haiti to pursue the American DreamNightmare with her mother and family in Detroit. In the midst of decolonial journeying, she learns of her mother's undocumented status and faces the realities of the American Crimmigration System. This structure is such that the novel *American Street* clarifies our justice system as a divisive, violent, and problematic force in Black and immigrant communities.

It becomes clear that Ibi Zoboi crafts *American Street* to give voice to this critique and the many Black girls who live with the daily atrocities of our world. According to Zoboi and offered in the "Author's Note" of the novel, "[w]hile working on *American Street*, I pulled from my own memories of living in between cultures, the experiences I had in high school, and the many tragic stories about violence and trauma that girls...endured" (234). She continues

In Haiti, many girls dream of the freedom to live without the constraints of oppression. Yet more often than not, these girls and their families leave their home countries only to move to other broken and disenfranchised communities. I kept thinking about how these girls

balance their own values and culture with the need to survive and aim for the American dream. (Zoboi 234)

The pursuit of this dream often become nightmarish as it is critically challenging to obtain given realities of intersectional oppression. Such is true for Rachel Jeantel, the daughter of Haitian and Dominican immigrants *and* the friend on the phone with Trayvon Martin when he was murdered. Rachel's story inspired Zoboi. Zoboi writes:

One girl in particular stuck out in my mind. When Trayvon Martin was killed in Florida in February of 2012, he had been on the phone with Rachel Jeantel, the daughter of a Haitian immigrant...I recognized a little bit of myself in Rachel, and in many Haitian teen girls I've worked with over the years. We fold our immigrant selves into this veneer of what we think is African American girlhood...This tension between our inherited identity and our newly adopted selves filters into our relationships with other girls and the boys we love, and into how we interact with the broken places around us. I saw Fabiola in these girls, and that's how this story was truly born. (235)

The protagonist of *American Street* is Fabiola, and her story is born of an American tragedy. The novel is birthed as a result of the murder of a Black boy and the media haranguing of his Haitian–Dominican–American friend unduly and twice traumatized throughout the trial of his murderer and thereafter. For Fabiola, though, Zoboi authors spaces of freedom and a coalescing of these identities. Amidst the isolation and confusion she feels, given her living in *dyaspora*, Fabiola, like the protagonist Iris in *The Roving Tree*, turns to Vodou and Haitian cosmology—she prays, dreams of her

mother, and remembers past religious ceremonial practices. She also learns from her cousins' ways of knowing and builds her epistemology based on these multi-faceted sites of knowledge and knowledge production.

When she witnesses the intimate partner violence one of her cousins experiences, Fabiola builds a critique of hegemonic gender relations and ableism. When she then loses a loved one, she fortifies a critique of ethno-racial politics in the United States. In the end, Fabiola, growing from her experiences in Detroit, becomes anew and helps her family begin again.

Throughout *American Street*, Fabiola also dreams of her mother in order to maintain ancestral ties and cosmological grounding in Vodou. After leaving the Detroit airport to which she was supposed to arrive with her mother but has not, Fabiola feels as though she is “leaving a part of [her] behind—a leg, an arm. [Her] whole heart” (Zoboi 13). When she finds out that her mother is being deported, she feels as if “there were no blood vessels, no rib cage, no muscles holding up [her] heart to where it beats in [her] chest, it would’ve fallen out onto the floor” (Zoboi 11). As is the case in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), Fabiola’s dismemberment is a result of oppression, a reality of living in the American Crimmigration System—the two parts of which (Immigration and the Criminal legal system) mirror chattel slavery. Fabiola’s missing body parts write onto her body the experience of a legalized, New Jim Crow for non-citizen bodies.

In the Winter 2015 copy of the journal *Hypatia* (vol. 30, no. 1), there exists an article titled “Octavia Butler and the Aesthetics of the Novel.” In it, Therí Pickens outlines

three components of Butler's aesthetic: open-ended conclusions that frustrate the narrative cohesion associated with the novel form, intricate depictions of power that potentially alienate the able-bodied reader, and contained literary chaos that upends the idea of ontological fixity. (Pickens 167)

In so doing, Pickens conveys that disability (and in extension, dismemberment) created in systems of oppression, among other institutional violences, "shifts how we understand national memory and wholeness" (Pickens 171). Pickens writes of *Kindred* that "Dana's missing arm literally writes her experience of enslavement on her body and connects the ability to remember with the experience of dismemberment" (Pickens 170). As such, the same logic may be applied to Fabiola. Experiencing the American Crimmigration System maims her and writes onto her this contemporary form of enslavement. In the United States, the Crimmigration system is one part of our more massive carceral state.

In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Michelle Alexander argues that there is a new racial caste system that functions entirely "not as an independent system but rather as a *gateway* into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization" (32). "This larger system," Alexander continues, "referred to here as mass incarceration, is a system that locks people not only behind actual bars in actual prisons, but also behind virtual bars and virtual walls—walls that are invisible to the naked eye but function nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did at locking people of color into a permanent second-class citizenship" (32). It is important to note that the system is not just what

we know to be our criminal legal system. Alexander writes “[t]he term *mass incarceration* refers not only to the criminal justice system but also to the larger web of laws, rules, policies, and customs that control those labeled criminals both in and out of prison” (32). This behemoth, this perpetuation of slavery by new name, undergirds our country and fortifies historical systems of oppression. The “New Jim Crow” paired with the Crimmigration system function together to directly attack marginalized peoples deemed undesirable by the power structure. Though operating in a different system—Crimmigration—undocumented peoples and non-citizens are in a mirrored carceral system of deportation and detention centers. This twin system is also a part of the New Jim Crow system courtesy of 1996 policies.

Faced with these realities, Fabiola seeks refuge in spirituality and culture. Continuing to practice Vodou becomes the only way she can maintain communication with Haiti and her mother. Fabiola, in fact, learned the tradition of Vodou from her mother. According to Fabiola, real Vodou is having “spirit guides” (Zoboi 256) and practicing is paying homage to “*lwas* [who] are like saints” (Zoboi 256) to whom she prays for help. Fabiola entreats the *lwas* to save her mother and to help her in times of need, fear, or distress—as would a mother.

In fact, Zoboi demonstrates that Vodou is “a complex pantheon and mythological system practiced by many in the Haitian diaspora” (235). She indicates as well that she principally “wanted to give Fabiola a strong cultural connection to Haiti so that she’s spiritually grounded when faced with tough decisions” (Zoboi 235). Given the empathetic point of view of the protagonist, readers can encounter the beauty of both Vodou and the disenfranchised, criminalized, marginalized community

Fabiola loves. After all, Zoboï authored the tale for this reason. She articulates that “[t]hrough Fabiola’s eyes, her new world and the people who inhabit it are just as complex and magical as [are] her beloved saints and *lwas*” (Zoboï 235). Zoboï authors Fabiola as someone for whom Vodou and Haitianness (read: Blackness) are grounding sources of courage and pride.

Scholarship on Vodou offers similar explanations. Claudine Michel argues that:

A serious analysis of the Vodou religion as practiced in Haitian society and abroad reveals the Vodou is a broadly encompassing worldview, a comprehensive system that shapes the human experience of its adepts in their search for higher grounds and purpose in life...the Vodou religion is omnipresent, pervasive, strong, and performs key functions in all aspects of Haiti’s social and political life. As such, the ancestral religion represents a key element of Haitian consciousness and provides moral coherence through common cosmological understandings (28).

Consequently, that Fabiola chooses to continue to practice Vodou and in doing so maintain connection to her mother is significant. It is also profoundly political and conveys a refutation of Western expectations of assimilation.

As in *The Roving Tree*, Fabiola’s conscientization is marked by politicized travel—a journey that examines our justice system and exposes diverse systems of oppression; reinforced cultural cosmology and epistemology that centers Vodou and a women-centered way of being. We also experience a critique of the world as is,

balanced intersectional living, and radical autopoiesis through the end. Her processes help clarify the raising of consciousness at the core of Black feminist citizenship.

The Politics of the Text

In her book *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, Myriam Chancy argues that Haitian feminism follows a pattern which “progresses from *speech activation* to *dialogue integration*, to the paradoxical *creation of an imperceptible woman’s space*, to the *enforced implementation of women’s rights* beyond a closed sphere of women’s interactions as revolutionary consciousness is developed and honed” (Chancy 27). Zobi’s novel artfully conveys the pattern of consciousness-raising that Myriam Chancy identifies. Fabiola exhibits these concepts in the stories written about her life. In undergoing processes of conscientization, Fabiola also engages in a “self-conscious struggle that empowers women...to actualize humanist vision[s] of community” (“Defining Black Feminist Thought” 15). Fortified by these visions of community, the protagonist helps readers think of worlds in which her trials and tribulations, her *mòn* would cease to exist. Zobi, in writing this migration narrative, argues the importance of conscientization in *dyaspora* and therefore complicates understandings of citizenship—in all locales.

Zobi employs first-person narration paired with reader empathy to maintain the Black woman immigrant subject as arbiter of knowledge and her viewpoint, the point of view that provokes change. In a conversation with youth about how to author experiences so that readers may truly understand, Ibi Zobi proclaims “...don’t

describe what they look like, describe how they feel.”³¹ According to Zobi, and many authors, a writer does this so that readers can connect to that feeling. This is a tactic that helps authors elicit empathy in readers. Once readers can connect to the various feelings of a protagonist, they can also more easily connect to their experiences. If the protagonist is a Black woman immigrant subject, then her trials and tribulations become every readers’ and her problems also theirs. As in this novel, the protagonist seeks to solve her own problems, her realities provoke not only that the reader takes on her causes, even if only for the remainder of the texts, but also take on her questions about a society that would enable such subjugation.

Questioning and complicating the normative idea of the American Dream and thus evaluating the existences of intersectional oppressions and illuminating the American Crimmigration system is an essential feat for Zobi. The phrase “American Dream” itself only appears twice in the text, once when describing 8800 American Street and then another time when explaining the goal of the text in the “Author’s Note.” In fact, “dream” appears nineteen times in the text and often in proximity to failure, violence, difficulty, or upset. One of the few times it is joined with something positive is when Fabiola talks to Pri about holding onto prayers and songs from her mother as a means of survival. Pri, in indicating what she also holds onto, states, “Myself. My family. Hopes. Dreams. Shit like that” (Zobi 231). Nearing the end of the tale, this moment of closure and connection is one of the few that the two cousins have so holistically.

³¹ On 24 March 2017, Ibi Zobi visited The Brotherhood/Sister Sol to converse with young Black and Latinx writers about *American Street* and overall techniques to be better writers.

Ibi Zoboi constructs the failure of the American Dream as a foundation for what has become known as Crimmigration; articulates the “New Jim Crow” and Crimmigration as bastions of contemporary American society, and conveys all of this as a structural problem in the United States. Fabiola must reclaim her self in spiritual and physical worlds by manifesting a new dream in direct opposition to these systems. This state-sanctioned criminalization, silencing, disappearing, detaining, and deportation of immigrants *are* fundamental to the American Crimmigration system as already indicated. Zoboi counterposes a critique of the American criminal legal system with a characterization of Black immigrants’ encounters with state-sanctioned violence and Crimmigration systems through Fabiola’s story and those of Fabiola’s Manman and boyfriend. Though different in many ways, she offers that these are of the same beast. In the end, *American Street* elucidates the intrinsically problematic nature of these intertwined systems invigorated and birthed by systematized oppression of Blackness, womanhood, immigration, and more.

Black feminist citizenship in American Street

Fabiola embodies Black feminist citizenship in the way she loves herself and her family; constructs the path to liberation; and sees herself in the world. The decolonial love she personifies cultivates her mental, emotional, and spiritual evolution. Though she is not always successful, she works to liberate her family and loved ones from oppressive systems of white supremacy and the interlocking realities of subjugations. Thus, her love is revolutionary. Her articulation of radical Black

liberation aligns her to the spirit world and allows her to dynamically understand her reality. Articulating herself by employing emotive reasoning and affected logic Fabiola is sometimes wrong and misunderstood, but she remains true to devising her own understanding of the world using different metrics to hold herself accountable to her truths, dreams, loves, and desires. Fabiola exemplifies global Black citizenship; she feels an inclusive social responsibility upheld by people of the African Diaspora among people who practice social equality and uphold social justice dictates popularly defined. She exhibits this politic in her trying to right the wrongs of the world she encounters—often unsuccessfully but definitely nobly.

Zoboi's work articulates the global Black citizenship evident in Black feminist citizenship. In so doing, Zoboi clarifies some of the realities of Black immigrant life: the functions and dysfunctions of class and poverty; the heightened race-awareness given the specific context of the country from which one emigrates (especially when you are not in the minority); the non-changing, hyper-traditional gendered understandings people actively choose to hold on to for reasons unclear; the role young immigrants play as cultural translators for everyone; the survival instincts needed and dangerous jobs one must take on simply to get by; the finality of choices one makes that others take for granted; the ethereal nature of both present and past in the day to day. She does this intelligently, artfully and, occasionally, through use of comedy. The implications are that the socio-politics and cultures that create these realities also create nightmarish lives for Black women immigrants.

Ibi Zoboi's *American Street* touches on the terrifying realities for Black immigrant women and girls while also including stories of detention and deportation,

instances of Haitian cosmological spiritual structures, and existences of urban violence, dilapidation, and decay. Mass criminalization, mass incarceration and poverty inflected urban violence are in Zoboi's crosshairs and lay the foundation on which her protagonist's shaky ground endlessly shifts. Crimmigration—its operations on her family, community, and self—and diverse structures of oppression are the reasons for the protagonist's inability to live the “American Dream”.

Still, and in spite of these deterrents, Fabiola comes to find a home in her family and America despite her nightmare realities and seeks to bring home her own detained mother. By these means, *American Street* is aptly named and questions America's ability to be the land of the free when so many are imprisoned in and by their daily lives. It also elucidates the protagonist's contentions with assimilation. In *American Street*, Zoboi critiques the American immigration system, criminal legal system, and its criminalizing of immigration. She also counterbalances these by privileging differing cosmological understanding and centering love and women-centered spaces. Accordingly, this act of historical, archival, and societal correction is exemplary of contemporary Black feminisms as well.

American Street + Concepts and Contemporary Black Feminism

Maria del Guadeloupe Davidson posits that Black Feminism must refuse the oversimplification of its liberatory grounding if it is to continue to spark the liberation of Black women, young and old. She states:

Black feminist theory exists: (1) to *name* Black women's multivariate oppressions; (2) to *explain* Black women's multivariate oppressions; and (3) to *resist* Black women's multivariate oppressions. (del Guadeloupe Davidson 172)

The three active elements here are naming, explaining, and resisting. Key to doing *all* of this, according to del Guadeloupe Davidson, is expanding beyond its current limitations and eliminations—exclusions “embedded in the very structure of its analysis” (del Guadeloupe Davidson 173). In this reading, Black feminism must be expanded to include the complex realities of younger Black women. If Black feminism fails to do this, it will cease being a liberatory theorization—it will become more so one more structure to, in praxis, police the freedom of those it seeks to free theoretically. Zoboi attempts to expand Black feminisms in her novel. Her work exhibits the attempts of her protagonists at full liberation and therefore depicts foundational shifts in equity, realities, and freedom. Additionally, Zoboi's work attempts to address the need for healing in the communities these protagonists represent.

Another interesting position comes from Tamika Carey who asserts that Black Feminism must continue to offer opportunities for re-education if Black women are to use their pain to craft and catalyze liberation. There is a “mind cure,” “reading cure,” and “talking cure” embedded in the rhetor known popularly as the Black feminist woman writer. In my analysis of Zoboi's *American Street*, I see these articulated. The mind-cure, according to Carey, invokes thinking positively; the reading cure necessitates reading for self-improvement; and the talking cure employs dialogic

confessions in an effort to release pains. Black feminist writers, Carey argues, “have wielded and continue to wield African American rhetorical traditions as forms of social praxis in light of the development of Black Feminism as a social theory” (Carey 16). Because Black feminists built a literary theory that privileges “epistemological standpoints, oppositional knowledges, and discursive practices for understanding” (Carey 30) all as tools for protection and healing, Black feminists in the contemporary moment still operationalize these standpoints, knowledges, and practices.

Carey contends that the “*rhetorics of healing*” are

a set of persuasive discourses and performances writers wield to convince their readers that redressing or preventing a crisis requires them to follow the steps to ideological, communicative, or behavioral transformation the writer considers essential to wellness...these rhetorics transcribe problems into lessons by invoking messages of personal affirmation, notions of familial belonging, institutional responsibility, or broader racial uplift...Readers feel that they have taken away valuable coping strategies, while the most popular proponents...feel that writing texts that pursue the goal of healing is something of an activist endeavor. (Carey 18)

As a text that contains “*rhetorics of healing*,” *American Street* inculcates in individuals

ways of knowing, being, and acting that enable them to reread their pasts, revise their sense of self, and resume progress toward their life

goals [that become also] a way to help ensure individual and community survival. (Carey 18)

Black women's healing, then, is tied to Black women's very survival. It should not, according to Carey, serve as simply a commodifiable good used to further white-supremacist, hetero-patriarchal capitalism, and misogynoir. Tied, then, to survival Zoboi aims to positively impact her readers while also articulating the need for healing in the peoples her characters and readers represent.

In naming Black women's multivariate oppressions, explaining the ways they exist in our lives, and resisting them—while also healing from the realities this triplicate spurs—we can truly revolutionize our world.

Zoboi's Call to Action

This chapter examined Ibi Zoboi's *American Street* and illustrated the ways her novel articulates Black feminist citizenship. Hers is a text that employs both creative and political tools. I maintain that centering Black, immigrant, young women and authoring for them complex identities helps to vocalize the various needs of marginalized communities and craft illustrations of the spaces of freedom peoples in these communities work to maintain in opposition to their subjugation.

I titled the chapter "Crimmigration and Living the American Nightmare in Dreams: Ibi Zoboi's Spirit Worlds" so as to analyze the interconnected relationships of the "New Jim Crow" and the Crimmigration system while also acknowledging creatively constructed, counterbalancing and cosmological freedom strategies in

American Street. The system of criminalizing the very beings of marginalized peoples in the United States is appalling in each of its parts—criminal legal system and the Crimmigration system. Since the two are both arguable twin systems of the “New Jim Crow,” exposing the second half is as important as is revealing the former and Ibi Zoboi crafts a story that does this. Given these systems, Zoboi describes the nightmare of immigration to the United States—one that splits families, reinforces systemic oppression, and inhibits access to the promoted dream because of said subjugation. She forces readers to experience the falsehood of that dream and, instead, imagine ways to create a more just world in which hemispheric American Dreams prosper and instill in their very foundations paths to success for Fabiola and girls like her. In the place of the current world, Zoboi requires a world in which the West and Eurocentricism are de-centered, *and* family separation, detention, and police killings are non-existent. To this end, Zoboi offers “spirit worlds” as spaces of freedom while fighting for liberty in the material world.

I further contend that it is in problematization of love, liberation, and citizenship that we find spaces to deconstruct these very same matrices of power and domination. It is in reading literature like this, as indicated in the epigraph, that readers—youth especially—may learn from the examples set by both the women in these texts as well as those they represent. It is in sharing these realities—different from the problematic norm—*and* the examples of protagonists who are agents in their own lives, that we can lay the groundwork for different futures. In the ways Zoboi crafts her protagonist to pursue and embody decolonial love, struggle for radical Black liberation, and understand themselves in relationship to global Black citizenship, she helps readers

glimpse at the revolution possible within, in women-centered spaces, in the spirit worlds, and beyond. Her strategy and texts exemplify the possibilities manifested in Black feminist citizenship and allows for the complications necessary to open up spaces for these conversations.

CHAPTER SENK (5):

DYASPORA SAUDADE

Diaspora Saudade is a blend of two concepts, one Haitian and one Brazilian, to address the nostalgia of being in-between *and* the diasporic reality of existing in both. It is the weight of being *dyaspora*, as Haitians define it, and all the word and the conditions entail that are intrinsically tied to the missing of a home. It represents the remembrance of a *you* in a lost home that you will never know but are often reminded of when family wishes you were “less American.” It is the being without a stable home because your roots are seemingly detached from the home your elder family knows. It is also being tied to the home of their memories. It is the reality of home being without you and therefore sometimes without a real place for you even if you wish to return. *Diaspora saudade* is the being at home ethereally but always searching and making home in migration. It is the reminiscing about something that you only really see in the presence, memory, artifacts, and stories of family members.

Diaspora saudade is the “longing for something we are not even sure we ever had but are certain we will never experience again,” (65) as Edwidge Danticat writes in *Create Dangerously: An Immigrant Artist at Work*. Though Danticat is writing about the temporary abandonment of memory when trying to write, I felt this when looking at the ruins of the *Palais National D’Haiti*. This feeling of having missed out on a Haiti my parents knew and a Haiti I would have known if I were not *dyaspora* proliferates throughout my soul. At the same time, I am forced to acknowledge that I have also survived in more ways than one because I am of this very same *dyaspora*—in more ways than one.

The formation of this concept of *dyaspora saudade* is in many ways a reckoning with my own experience; I came to this combination in migration—

emotionally and physically. Growing up in Brooklyn, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother and, other than Biblical movies, one of her favorite films to watch was the classic *Black Orpheus* (1959). Set in Rio de Janeiro, the tale centers a young Eurydice who goes to visit her cousin during Carnival season and falls in love just before dying at the hands of a sinister, malicious spirit. In my young mind, this was always a story set in Haiti. It was not until traveling to Brazil in 2006 with The Brotherhood/Sister Sol that I realized it was actually a Brazilian tale put forth by a French director with an African-American lead. Given my affinity for the film and previous belief about its “Haitianness,” I grew to then believe that if I could not go to Haiti, Brazil would be the next best place to love as a home.

Haiti in the first-generation imaginary is a place of mysteries—both good and bad. For many, it is a place from which parents flee *and* that they love, at least for a portion of their time there. For me, it was also the place of my dad’s passing. As such, returning to Haiti was never a real possibility in my youth. Brazil, then, became a surrogate. I traveled there in 2006; I studied abroad in Salvador da Bahia in 2010—all in an effort to find home. During spring 2010, I learned of the word “*saudade*.” When people spoke of it, they often mentioned the inability to fully translate all that it meant and means into English. It was a longing, a missing, a nostalgia, and more. I learned “*saudade*” as a word in Brazil but understood its meaning after the earthquake in Haiti that same spring.

The migration of Haitians to Brazil, in large part after the 2010 earthquake, further expanded the Haitian *dyaspora*. Given the devastation in Haiti, my location abroad in Brazil allowed me to also encountered Haitians living in Brazil. After the

life-changing Goudou Goudou, my inability to make it to the home my parents knew and my sincere longing gave depth and profundity to the totality of my reality while also giving *saudade* real meaning. When I finally returned to Haiti in 2013, again with The Brotherhood/Sister Sol but this time as staff and translator, I understood *saudade* corporeally; I was home years after a devastating earthquake to a Haiti none in my family knew as intimately.

Just as Amabelle did, who returns to Haiti after the 1937 genocide in *The Farming of Bones* having lived all her life in another country, I went home to a place that was different from the only home I really knew *and* from the home I knew conceptually. Though under completely different circumstances marked with privilege and changed by different types of violences, I also crossed the Massacre River as part of our excursion. The Haiti of my family, of the news, of varied other people's experiences, existed in my head; the Haiti I saw was also different. *Diaspora saudade* is living in between all of these understandings and living outside of them as well. My lived experience served as the basis for this concept, and it is also exemplified in both the texts in this dissertation and other works as explained hereafter.

Diaspora Saudade, "Wake Work," and Power

In varied ways, *diaspora saudade* finds affinity with Christina Sharpe's "wake work" for it is in the wake of push-pull factors that force, induce, and support migration that the *diaspora* exists. In her essay titled "Black Studies: In the Wake," Sharpe argues that "we must be about the work of what I am calling 'wake work'"

(60). “Wakes,” for Sharpe, “are processes; through them we think about the dead and about our relations to them; they are rituals through which to enact grief and memory” (Sharpe 60). For the concept of *dyaspora saudade*, the “dead” symbolizes ontological loss due to migration—the ways of knowing and being that are less tenable and real for people born or living outside of home. “Wake work” necessarily involves allowing “those among the living to mourn the passing of the dead through ritual” (Sharpe 60). *Dyaspora saudade*, then, is the maintenance of cultural practices and traditions reminiscent of home and constructed in collaboration with the new home. “Wake work” also engages with

the track left on the water’s surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming, or one that is moved, in water; the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow; in the line of sight of (an observed object); and (something) in the line of recoil of (a gun).
(Sharpe 60)

In relation to *dyaspora saudade*, these are the unseen worlds that found, ground, and expand through conscientization. Be it cosmology or simply honing a worldview by way of politicization and growth, these things unseen creates ruptures in American hegemony that offer breakthroughs for critique and from which to invoke change.

Dyaspora saudade is also the negotiation of the ruptures as well as the settlements. “Finally,” Sharpe continues, doing “wake work” “also means being awake and, most importantly, consciousness. Living in the wake as people of African descent means living what Saidiya Hartman identifies as the both the ‘time of slavery’ and the ‘afterlife of slavery,’ in which ‘Black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial

calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago” (Hartman 6; Sharpe 60). This contemporary moment “is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” (Hartman 11). *Diaspora saudade* emboldens my wake work experienced as healing, organizing, educating, and helping to develop new leaders to rebel against this afterlife of slavery.

Diaspora saudade involves a consciousness of displacement regarding both the place in which you live and the place your family (and often you) calls home because it is in knowing this that you may understand why they chose to leave home in the first place. This consciousness created from this knowing, then, evokes an awareness of all the necessary forms of “wake work.” It also helps form what Sharpe, citing Sylvia Wynter, refers to as “the ground from which we theorize [and] work from the positions of knowledge and belief of the existence of what Wynter terms ‘rules which govern the ways in which humans can and do know the social reality of which they are always already socialized subjects’” (Sharpe 60). It is also from here that we can work to change the rules. In this way, *diaspora saudade* informs, affirms, and engenders my Black feminist citizenship.

Diaspora Saudade and Diaspora as Passage

Diaspora saudade also addresses the ways that being in diaspora is also about passage. It is about movement, in, among, and between and accounts for passage transnationally, temporally, socially/culturally, physically, cosmologically,

epistemologically, and more. As Blackness and race are socially constructed though with real, lived implications, the African diaspora is both fluid and fixed, with over-determined outcomes and liberating possibility; it is fiction and fact. Thinking then of passage helps account for this seemingly contradictory situation because diaspora can be liberating and limiting depending on the entities with which one engages. *Diaspora saudade*, then, can be freeing as well given the multiplicity in knowing home and diverse ways of being. Diasporic peoples can tap into diverse, wide-ranging knowledges and homes so as to, in this network of knowing, understand a global context and the need for change worldwide. In the novels of this study, the Blackness of each protagonist places her in the African Diaspora while Haitian-ness roots her in the Haitian rhizome. Our protagonists pass between the two milieus all the while continuing to commune between cultures and peoples while communicating between nations and worlds.

Diaspora Saudade and Diaspora Theory

Diaspora saudade addresses the varied oceanic epistemologies as it is in conversation with these ideas. It incorporates Kale Fajardo's concept of "crosscurrents" through which Fajardo argues that:

Oceans and seas are important sites for differently situated people...Oceans and seas are sites of inequality and exploitation—resource extraction, pollution, militarization, atomic testing, and genocide. At the same time, oceans and seas are sites of beauty and

pleasure—solitude, sensuality, desire, and resistance. Oceanic and maritime realms are also spaces of transnational and diasporic communities, heterogeneous trajectories of globalization, and other racial, gender, class, and sexual formations. (Tinsley quoting Fajardo 138–139)

With *Diaspora saudade* we may adhere to the duality expressed in the above quote and in the work of scholars like Michelle M. Wright who seek to move beyond Middle Passage epistemology. In *Physics of Blackness: Beyond Middle Passage Epistemology*, Wright advocates for recognizing “Black collective in *history* and in the *specific moment* in which Blackness is being imagined—the ‘now’ through which Blackness will be mediated” (14) and a “Blackness that is wholly inclusive and nonhierarchical” (14). In employing *diaspora saudade*, I encourage similarly.

In this way, *Diaspora saudade* speaks to the influence of all times, knowledges, and histories in the making of itself. Additionally, it does not evoke new “definitions of Blackness that...exclude, isolate, or stigmatize” (Wright 5) but instead increases the “proliferation of diverse Black communities of individuals whose histories and current statuses as ‘hyphenated’ Black identities across the globe” (Wright 5) as they all exist in the creation of blackness as well. Neither the *diaspora* nor the *saudade* is meant as a negation of home or a perpetual longing that forces dis-identity with any aspect of one’s identity. *Diaspora saudade* is a terminology about the existence of all identities being in *diaspora*, created while being tied to and rooted in varied lands. *Diaspora saudade* is also a complication of time and memory and an exaltation of the ways that memories live presently as people live in the present.

Furthermore, given the fluidity of cognitive and emotional space required by the socio-economic and political realities of our time, the concept of *dyaspora saudade*, mandates motion—temporal, emotional, phenomenological, and more. Omise'eke Tinsley advances the need for fluidity in *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature*. More specifically, with *dyaspora saudade*, we may acknowledge as does Tinsley the flexibility in the space and oceans occupied that also “complicates as it liberates whose myriad blues are colored as much by the stark global economic realities as by individual promises of beauty and pleasure” (138).

Through *dyaspora saudade*, one may acknowledge the conflict of *dyaspora* that is experienced often as *saudade*. It is also the realities of conscientization that come with acknowledging the reasons for a *dyaspora* given the socio-political contexts and realities of our time and times past.

Dyaspora saudade is manifested in an understanding of citizenship that refutes singularity. It, instead, requires embracing many different people in the diaspora—whether they be spouses of family members or chosen friends and partners while also maintaining that the differences between everyone *and* still holding them all together in a conceptualization of holistic family. We see this, most especially in Edwidge Danticat's *Untwine* and here we experience a *dyaspora saudade* that creates space for an exploration of unity between peoples and expansion in the idea of citizenship and belonging that itself offers differing ways to *be* in this globalized and diverse world.

Indubitably, we see the protagonists throughout these powerful novels come to terms with whom they want to be while renegotiating both their understandings of the

world as is and the new norms with which they must operate to create the kind of world within which they can be newly happy and whole. For example, in *American Street*, *dyaspora saudade* is seen in Fabiola's communication with her mom and her turn to Vodou and Haitian cosmology amidst the isolation and confusion she feels given her living in *dyaspora*. Fabiola's mother is a *mambo*—a Vodou priestess—and as such informed her daughter to call on the *lwas*—spirit guides, deities—whenever necessary. Fabiola regularly calls on her “spirit guides to bend time and space between where [she is] standing and wherever [her] mother is” (Zoboi 27). Throughout the text, Fabiola heeds her mother's advice. “You told me,” she proclaims, “to trust every vision, every tingling of my skin, every ringing in my ear, every itch in my palms. They're all signs. They're all the language of the *lwas*” (Zoboi 29). This engagement with Haitian Vodou cosmological expression is an employment of *dyaspora saudade* captured in Fabiola's letter to her mother artfully rendered in the letter below:

Cher Manman,

I see you clearer now because I light my candle and pour libation, rattle the asson, and ring the bell to call all my guides, the *lwas*. You've told me that they are here for me. All I have to do is call on them so they can help me. I believe you, Manman. Even without you being here to hold ceremonies with drummers and singers and a village of followers. I will practice all that you've taught me.

There within the flame of the tea candle again, you are on your bed crying into a piece of brown paper. It's too rough on your cheeks and nose, so you use the white sheet instead. You're careful not to let

anyone see you cry. How did you get there, Manman? What did you do? Is it because you are a mambo—a Vodou priestess who held ceremonies in the courtyard of a Christian NGO building? Are they punishing you for that, Manman? Are they punishing me? I've searched my memory for all the sinful things I've done. I let Marco touch me the night before we left. Was the lwa of love and fertility, Ezili, mad at me for that? Is that why she summoned her lover, Papa Legba, to block you from entering the gates to this freedom, to this sister of yours, to your nieces, to me?

Matant Jo misses you so much that she is incapable of doing anything for herself. The other day, she held my face in her hands and prayed to God that it was your face and not mine. And just like I saw you do in the tea-candle flame, she grabbed the corner of her white sheet and wiped her tears.

Kenbe fem. Hold tight.

Fabiola

(Zoboi 61)

Unable to understand her mother's detention, she turns to the cosmologies of Vodou as a means of comprehending her world and resolving her afflictions. As Matant Jo, Fabiola's aunt, is incapable of doing much for herself, Fabiola's entreaty to the *lwas* is also a means of rendering Matant Jo's desire to have her sister home with them valid and making it manifest in their lived reality. Evoking images of Cecile Fatiman in the *Bois Cayman* ceremony, Fabiola articulates a *dyaspora saudade* for both her mother

and Haiti.

The evocation of Fatiman recalls the foundational ceremony that sparked revolution. Though regularly cited as a ceremony led by the *oungan* (priest) Dutty Boukman, the *mambo* Cecile Fatiman also had an essential role in the 1791 Vodou rite ceremony in Bois Cayman that catalyzed the revolution (*Haiti, History, and the Gods* 29). On August 14, 1791, Fatiman divined and made her co-conspirators drink the blood of the animal slaughtered to aid in their perceived invincibility (*Haiti, History, and the Gods* 46; Lundy 263–264). Fatiman, possessed by the *lwa* Erzulie, slaughtered a black pig and Fatiman’s incarnation of Erzulie engendered the rebels’ belief that the blood would make them indestructible. The Haitians attending the ceremony, convinced of Fatiman’s power, believed her wholeheartedly and imbibed the strength she both offered and conveyed (*Delices*).

This historical corrective offered by historians to center women is critical. A testament to the importance of both Cecile Fatiman and Erzulie, the evocation of this imagery rightly centers Fabiola and her mother as powerful women and Vodou as a commanding cosmology. That Fatiman embodied one of the three main incarnations of the deity Erzulie—Erzulie Dantor, the one typified as the “Mater Salvatoris,” a mother of salvation who helps deliver Haitian people—to serve this purpose (“Erzulie: A Women’s History of Haiti” 6), is also vital. In recalling this imagery, Fabiola is calling on the *lwas* to help her to both speak to and free her mom *and* help her in her journey to save herself and her family in a foreign Detroit. Using her art to encourage the followers to fight and steel them for battle, Fatiman did as Fabiola does creatively in *American Street*: convey that Haitian women and Vodou cosmology play and have

occupied fundamental roles in Haiti from the very inception of Ayiti.

Fabiola centers Vodou cosmology throughout the novel, as a means of communicating with her mother. This is what the letters become in *American Street*, manifestations of her love of her mother, demonstrations of Fabiola's cosmological grounding in Vodou, and protestations of her mother's imprisonment. Papa Legba³² is expressed and introduced in the text by way of the character "Bad Leg," ostensibly a poor old man who lives at the intersection of American and Joy. Bad Leg's residence is similar to the space in which the *lwa* Legba operates and from here he sings messages to Fabiola. Legba, the African Diaspora deity of the crossing, as framed by Fabiola, is who will join God to help free her mother. Fabiola states:

And if what you've told me is true, that the lwas will show up all around me—in both things and people—then I am surrounded, I am supported. And with the help of Bondye and his messenger, Papa Legba, the giant gate leading you home will soon open.

I will make it so. (Zoboi 175)

For Fabiola, Vodou is an innate part of her epistemology and with it, she will free her mother from detainment in an unjust world. This way of employing, experiencing, practicing, and being informed by Vodou is also accurate for Iris in *The Roving Tree* as Iris forms her identity as a Haitian girl who experiences interracial and transnational

³² Legba is here experienced as a Haitian *lwa* and also a deity of different Afrosyncretic religions throughout the African diaspora. Legba is witnessed throughout the Caribbean and in the works of diverse Caribbean authors. The deity, eponymous in the works of various artists—from Paule Marshall to Kamau Braithwaite, Zora Neale Hurston to Nalo Hopkinson and more, is seen in varied circum-Caribbean productions. In *Legba's Crossing: Narratology in the African Atlantic*, Heather Russell indicates that "[a]ccording to the Yoruba, Esu-Elegbar is the god of the crossing. He is the gateway god...[he] is considered the quintessential tricky shape-shifter" (Russell 9). Crossing the Atlantic and into Haiti, this deity is called Legba.

adoption while also being tied to Vodou and Afrosyncretic cosmological traditions.

In the works engaged in this dissertation, characters confront these knowledges and experiences of *dyaspora saudade* also as means to epistemological and phenomenological understanding. In each respective creation, protagonists negotiate the ruptures in matrilineal and familial lines—fissures caused by violence and denigration—and the seams with which the characters shape assemblages of identities. For them, beauty comes from what is created after the violence and terror, from the magnificence in the wake and after the “wake work”. In consciously placing Black girls and women at the centers of these narratives, the authors also promote the need for conscientization, autopoiesis, self-fashioning, freedom-making, and self-(re)creation in the face of oppression. This then has the ability to catalyze in readers an interest in creating a more just world for themselves—especially when they identify with the protagonists.

Silences and Hieroglyphics

To be clear, these interrogated stories are also loaded with “silences too horrific to disturb” (“Silence too Horrific to Disturb”); silences the authors nonetheless disrupt in their writing of these texts. In Edwidge Danticat’s essay titled “We are Ugly but We are Here,” again, she writes that when

watching the news reports, it is often hard to tell whether there are real living and breathing women in conflict-stricken places like Haiti. [The] evening news broadcasts only allow us a brief glimpse of presidential

coups, rejected boat people, and subjugated elections. [As a result, the] women's stories never manage to make the front page. However, they do exist. (137)

The works of Edwidge Danticat, Roxane Gay, Elsie Augustave, and Ibi Zoboi deem the stories of women and girls worthy of the delegation “top story” news (“Silence too Horrific to Disturb” 75). Furthermore, these women show that there is a space for aspiration and creativity after horror and even death. In a world in which varied social determinants of health, misogynoir, weathering, the epigenetics of trauma, and intersectional oppression make the lives of Black women all the more precarious, the ambition and ingenuity that these authors offer in the wake craft spaces through which to survive and thrive after “wake work” and by way of both Black feminist citizenship and *dyaspora saudade*.

The texts of this study are in and of themselves transformative as it is in these texts that the authors explore topics that include: Black feminisms, state violence; racialized and gendered identity formation; sexual exploration & sexuality; women's relationships; and Afro-syncretic religions and decolonial migrations. Their creations engage in Black feminist politics as they too craft narratives that are at once personal narratives of the coming of age of Black girls and politicization of women while at the same time also negotiations of decolonial love, radical Black liberation, and global Black citizenship. Black feminist citizenship exists in conversation with *dyaspora saudade* in the aforementioned ways.

In this world where social constructions/constrictions/inscriptions are pasted onto the Black female body, Black female subjectivity in its embodying of differing

identities allows for *dyaspora saudade*. In “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” Hortense Spillers argues that the Black/white dichotomy in America was conceptualized to write degradation onto the Black body—female or otherwise. Disregarding that such a foundational philosophy was internecine, the white, moneyed, patriarchal power structure turned Black flesh, “that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography” (Spillers 67), into the Black body and wrote onto it all things undignified. Furthermore, this same power structure also inscribed onto the Black female body all the denigration of the female gender. All of these factors engender *dyaspora* and therefore the conditions for *saudade*. If “we think of the ‘flesh’ as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or ‘escaped’ overboard” (Spiller 67); iterations that speak to the realities that force, induce, and support migration, both historically and contemporaneously.

Hieroglyphics on our flesh are made to offer spaces of cohesion and freedom-making. Here I use “hieroglyphics” as Spillers defines them, “[t]hese undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color” (Spillers 67). When Augustave, Danticat, Gay, and Zoboi author their protagonists as Black women and girls, they also author for them a space more beautiful for having survived terror and for living with the hieroglyphics of the past—cartouches more visible given their contemporary subjugation.

Alex Weheliye suggests that “Spillers’s theorization of the flesh highlights one significant instance of this bio-cultural stigmatic apparatus in which ideas are literally

and figuratively deformed into racial assemblages of human flesh that invests human phenomenology with an aura of extrahuman physiology” (Weheliye 66). This flesh, this mark of Black womanhood as written by the authors on whom I focus, is crafted as that which calls for a radical shift in our current power structure such that the brutality these women face would no longer be. In that it forces them to exist in opposition to their happiest and most full and honest selves, the racial, gender, class, and nationality hierarchy of the United States and having to continually negotiate both it and the ways that American hegemony denigrates the other aspects of their identities are such that propel their individual revolutions.

These hieroglyphics of the flesh are also written into the making of *dyaspora saudade*. Though their narratives are clearly written in English—the national language of America and not Haiti—their experiences are not as easily understood because of the constrictions the protagonists (and authors) faces given their assemblage of identity factors. In other words, because their ethno-racial composition cannot be seen given the confounding ways that race in America hides the hieroglyphics of the flesh, they cannot be all of who they are in this world and are forced to be pieces of themselves at differing points in time. When we embody and practice Black feminist citizenship to become our full selves, we are seen within the worlds we create.

Revisiting Research Questions

I commenced this study of the Haitian migration narrative to explore as literature of revolution the migratory subjectivities, pivotal moments of the Haitian migration

narrative, and contemporary Haitian women's writing about coming of age in migration. It is my hope that in addressing my research questions, I articulated all of these points.

At this beginning of this study, I offered questions that framed my research. I interrogated literature written by Haitian women writers about coming of age in migration and examined them in relationship to Black feminist citizenship and later *dyaspora saudade*. I offered Black feminist citizenship and its components, decolonial love, radical Black liberation, and global Black citizenship, as a synthesis of Black feminist consciousness, African Diaspora citizenship, and decoloniality. In the process of engaging my study, I ascertained both answers and more questions.

Regarding the Black feminist citizenship promoted in Black women's forced, induced, and voluntary migration, I believe that decolonial love, global Black citizenship, and radical Black liberation are critical aspects of this epistemology. As examined in varied works written by Haitian women writers, we experience that these principles are sustained in transnational, decolonial migration in response to oppression as both a method of survival and recourse for resistance.

Global Black citizenship, I convey, is complicated and enforced in transnational migration. Given the migratory journeying in search of new ways of living all the while creating migratory subjectivities, a global worldview arises for Black migrants regarding the subjugation of Black people across the globe and that which is needed to engender new ways of living and being. What the women in the narratives interrogated do to address subjugation often involves resisting white, male supremacist, heteropatriarchal, jingoist capitalism. This is the way to revolution.

In Black women-centered spaces created as refuge and in honor of “home,” decolonial ways of being and loving emerge. This propagated decolonial love is freeing and the nurturing and caring it arouses radically centers counterhegemonic truths and realities. Radical narratives about Haitian women’s coming of age in migration challenges normative definitions of love and strengthens foundational understandings of family, sisterhood, and home found in liberatory sociopolitical and cosmological spaces. These spaces and the politics herein engender radical Black liberation.

At the end of this examination of Haitian migration narratives, I remain convinced of their revolutionary potential. As seen in the epigraphs, reading can (and often does) catalyze. Reading Black and Latinx literature written by women can spark revolution, personally and globally—especially when it is counterhegemonic and offers solutions to the diverse iterations of oppression under which we live. There is a reason the canon exists as it does. It is time to radically change it.

Towards a Conclusion

Kenbe Fem, in Haitian Kreyol, translates to “hold tight” in English. It is what is said whenever the world seems to wish to carry you away with heartache, grief, turmoil, and then some. With the title, I allude broadly to “femmes”—women-identified peoples—cis- and transgender—and gender non-conforming folks. I implore readers to hold femmes, not in a masculinist, misogynistic way, but in a way that hears, listens to, and sees us and all we have to offer. I also motion, with this title,

also to the “Kembè fem” indicated in Fabiola’s letters to her mother—a maintaining of cosmologies, epistemologies, and spaces of freedom in an anti-Black, anti-immigrant America; a standing strong and closely together required of women in migration, *dyaspora*, and throughout marginalized communities. Lastly, and a bit comically, the title also gestures to Beyoncé’s pop song “Formation” and specifically the 2016 Super Bowl 50 performance during which she too gestured to the Black Panthers and the uses of art as a tool for activism.

Conclusively, my project is a testament to the fact that the protagonists, writers, and women who inspired them held on and continued strongly. Black feminist citizenship is also a testament to that strength. To love decolonially requires radical shifts in thinking and being and it is only in doing this that real love—love outside the confines of modern-day society’s definition—is possible. To believe in global Black citizenship, one that centers marginalized peoples and imagines a world in which we belong and are all fully human, takes courage. To actualize it requires determination and persistent radical imagination. To effect radical Black liberation mandates visualizing, realizing, and evolving what we know freedom and liberty to mean. It is inscribing at the foundation of our world that everyone’s freedoms are essential to all of our collective liberation. To hold strong is not a feebly, simplistic, superficial demonstration, but what the authors, by way of their protagonist, each conveyed as tools for not only surviving but thriving and recreating the world as it need be.

If we take also as fact the socio-political utility and dynamic importance of the works of Black women and Latina authors—as expressed throughout the chapters and in the epigraphs proceeding each chapter—we may begin to understand the ground on

which this work stands firmly planted, holding onto these stories, storytellers, and of what we all dream. My goal throughout was to center our words, voices, experiences, and more so as to offer this dissertation also as a political tool with which to teach these works, activate readers, and make manifest a new world.

As Danticat offers to the reader as well as the characters space to live, see, and remember the stories both within and without this novel in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, so do I. Danticat dedicates the 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.

(iv)

Danticat writes Haitian women into a narrative that “reclaim[s] the matrilineage that has been occluded due to women’s exclusion from the historical record” (Mardorossian 40). Augustave, Gay, and Zoboï also use their novels to honor Haiti’s women and maternal figures as well. This too is my goal.

The lives of Black women and girls is a topic of concern for each of the authors with whom I engage in my dissertation; it is equally a topic of concern and inspiration for me. In *Krik? Krak!*, Danticat writes

The women in your family have never lost touch with one another.
Death is a path we take to meet on the other side. What goddesses have
joined, let no one cast asunder. With every step you take, there is an
army of women watching over you. We are never farther than the sweat

on your brows or the dust on your toes. Though you walk through the valley of the shadows of death, fear no evil for we are always with you.

(223)

Effused in this quote is an understanding of the vast importance of Haiti's women—on the peninsula and in the *dyaspora*—that is expressed also in the works of Roxane Gay, Elsie Augustave, and Ibi Zoboi. What initially piqued my interest in their works is the manner in which their narratives bring to life dually—and often ternary—oppressed Haitian women. They write of Haiti and her *dyaspora* through the eyes of her girls and women. Beneath this interest lies my fascination with the way they deal with and write of aspects within my reality that remain perplexing to me. As a Haitian/Haitian-American, Black woman, I live at the crossroads of identities as expressed in the beginning. Often I can be found at my wits' end when attempting to explain Haitian epistemologies, cosmologies, and ways of life within a Western context.

The authors evoke in their works a *dyaspora saudade* and Black feminist citizenship of which I have experienced varied iterations in my life. They also address the ways that the permeability and epigenetics of trauma, the physical pain of absence, the tangibility of the dream and spiritual world, the corporeality of memory, and the evanescent yet empowering quality of love give voice to my realities in ways I have never before been able to explain. It is in understanding this—in addition to how this relates to the experience of life in a Black, low-income, female body—that I have found their texts revolutionary to both my understanding of self and for the young women with whom I work.

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APPENDICES

BACKGROUND ON '96 LAWS

In 1996, Congress passed and President Clinton signed into law the **Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA)** and the **Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA)**. Touted as tools to control illegal immigration and combat terrorism, these laws have had severe consequences for immigrant communities, expanding the government's ability to automatically detain & deport people on a massive scale without due process.



As a result, millions of families have been separated.



Some of the worst parts of these laws:

- Redefined "aggravated felony" to include a long list of low-level offenses. An immigrant with such a conviction will almost certainly be deported without an immigration judge weighing any of the circumstances of their case;
- Eliminated many effective defenses against deportation and replaced them with very weak, hard-to-win defenses;
- Set up mandatory and prolonged detention of immigrants in mostly privately run, for-profit prisons;
- Created new fast track procedures that deport people without letting them see an immigration judge; and
- Established programs that further involve local police in deportations, such as 287(g).

Immigrants belong to over-policed and over-criminalized communities of color that have borne the brunt of the harsh criminal and sentencing laws passed in the 1990s. Twenty years later, green card holders, asylees and undocumented immigrants are still being thrown into detention and deportation without due process as a result of these policies. Our immigration and criminal legal systems are intertwined in the worst possible way, creating a pipeline from arrest to deportation that fuels the most abusive and unfair aspects of both.



JOIN THE FIGHT TO #FIX96!



THE GOOD: There is growing momentum to transform the criminal legal system!



THE BAD: But most of those changes will not help noncitizens who have had contact with the criminal legal system.



TAKE ACTION: We need to get the candidates to stand against all the wrongheaded policies passed in the 1990s. **Then we need to hold them accountable.**



MORE CANDIDATE Qs

- What is your position on eliminating mandatory detention and the prolonged detention of immigrants?
- What do you think about local police acting as federal deportation agents as a result of federal programs like 287(g)?
- What is your position on expanding deportation defense waivers for all noncitizens so that they can get a fair day in court?
- Do you think the law should allow for immigrants to show rehabilitation as a way to stay in this country if they have committed a crime?



IMMIGRANT JUSTICE NETWORK
Fairness & Justice for Immigrants

