

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO SUL  
INSTITUTO DE LETRAS  
PROGRAMA DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM LETRAS

RAFAELA DAIANE DA ROCHA

**DAUGHTERS OF RAIN AND SNOW: TRAUMA, IDENTITY, AND BODY IN  
*THE FARMING OF BONES AND SOLAR STORMS***

Profa. Dra. Rita Terezinha Schmidt  
Orientadora

PORTO ALEGRE

2015

RAFAELA DAIANE DA ROCHA

**DAUGHTERS OF RAIN AND SNOW: TRAUMA, IDENTITY, AND BODY IN  
*THE FARMING OF BONES AND SOLAR STORMS***

Dissertação apresentada como requisito para a  
obtenção de grau de Mestra em Letras pelo  
Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da  
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

Profa. Dra. Rita Terezinha Schmidt  
Orientadora

PORTO ALEGRE

2015

### CIP - Catalogação na Publicação

Rocha, Rafaela Daiane da  
Daughters of rain and snow: trauma, body, and  
identity in The farming of bones and Solar Storms /  
Rafaela Daiane da Rocha. -- 2015.  
77 f.

Orientador: Rita Terezinha Schmidt.

Dissertação (Mestrado) -- Universidade Federal do  
Rio Grande do Sul, Instituto de Letras, Programa de  
Pós-Graduação em Letras, Porto Alegre, BR-RS, 2015.

1. Trauma. 2. Corpo. 3. Identidade. I. Schmidt,  
Rita Terezinha, orient. II. Título.

*For those who, even broken, still stand.  
And for the women who, one way or the other, became my motherland.*

‘[...] but mourning was our common ground [...]

Hogan, *Solar storms*

Speak to me of the things the world has yet to truly  
understand, of the instant meaning of each bird's call, of a  
child's secret thoughts in her mother's womb, of the  
measured rhythmical time of every man and woman's breath,  
of the true colors of the inside of the moon, of the larger  
miracles in small things, the deeper mysteries.

Danticat, *The farming of bones*

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would thank the Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul for the opportunity of taking this course.

The Conselho Nacional de Pesquisa – CNPq for the financial support, without which I would not be able to pursue this research.

Professor Rita Schmidt, for her knowledge, kindness, and patience throughout the years and for her trust in me as student and friend.

My friends and colleagues, who have enriched my life and inspired me with their works.

My family, for their understanding and never-ending support, for their love, and compassion, and their faith in me.

## ABSTRACT

The Parsley Massacre – the killing of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic in 1937 – is the theme of *The farming of bones* (1998), written by Edwidge Danticat, who offers the reader a fictional testimony of a survivor of the violence of genocide. Similarly, in *Solar storms* (1995), Linda Hogan makes the descendant of a massacred people the protagonist of a search for the past and her people's history. Both novels employ narrative strategies for a fictional representation of trauma, as personal and collective experiences, implicating the reader in the production of meaning (CARUTH 1996; FREUD; 1920). It is by reliving and re-experiencing the past that traumatized subjects can make sense of their present condition and claim an identity for themselves (HALL, 2006). It is by revising the past, a historically silenced past, that the voices of a community can be heard and their stories brought out to light. In this study, I am also interested in how these stories are constructed, in what are their effects on the surface of the text and their implications in the empowering of subjects. Moreover, I investigate the connections between the traumatized body and the mind, understanding the body as an historical surface for the inscription of human experience (GROSZ, 1994).

**Key-words:** Trauma; identity; memory; body; marginal narratives.



## RESUMO

O ‘Parsley Massacre’ – o assassinato de haitianos que viviam na República Dominicana em 1937 – é o tema de *The farming of bones* (1998), escrito por Edwidge Danticat, que oferece ao leitor o testemunho ficcional de uma sobrevivente da violência do genocídio. De forma similar, em *Solar storms* (1995), Linda Hogan faz a descendente de um povo que foi massacrado a protagonista de uma busca pelo passado e pela história de seu povo. Ambos os romances empregam estratégias narrativas em busca da representação ficcional do trauma como experiência pessoal e coletiva, implicando o leitor na produção de sentido (CARUTH 1996; FREUD; 1920). É através do recordar e reviver o passado que os sujeitos traumatizados podem tentar compreender sua situação presente e reivindicar uma identidade para si mesmos (HALL, 2006). A revisão do passado, e precisamente de um passado silenciado, proporciona que as vozes de uma comunidade possam ser ouvidas e suas histórias trazidas à luz. Nesse estudo, eu busco investigar de que forma tais histórias são construídas, quais seus efeitos na superfície textual e suas implicações no empoderamento dos sujeitos. Além disso, investigo as conexões entre o corpo traumatizado e a mente, compreendendo o corpo como uma superfície histórica que recebe a inscrição da experiência humana (GROSZ, 1994).

**Palavras-chave:** Trauma; identidade; memória; corpo; narrativas marginais.

## **List of Images:**

1. Market day at the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.....	37
2. Map of the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.....	42
3. Rafael Trujillo.....	43
4. Map of the Boundary Waters.....	59
5. Boundary Waters seen from above.....	67
6. Travelling through the Boundary Waters.....	68

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1. TRAUMA, BODY, IDENTITY.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.1 Identity, nation, fiction.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.2 Trauma, and literature.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.3 Cultural trauma and the need for narrative.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.4 Trauma and body.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>2. RELIVING THE PAST: trauma and the search for meaning.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>2.1 Haitian literature.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>2.1.1 <i>The farming of bones</i>.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>2.2 Native American literature.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>2.2.1 <i>Solar storms</i>.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>73</b>

## INTRODUCTION

My passion for stories began when I was still a child. I used to collect little books that I was given at school and I would come home and read them to my grandmother, who was illiterate and who, most of the time, would just hear me out of kindness. I really do not think she was interested in the life of bees, in Hop-o'-My-Thumb, nor in Jack and the Beanstalk, but she would let me read aloud for hours, and I was convinced that she loved the stories as much as I did. The truth is that she would rather do anything else while I sat reading and, as I grew older, I could simply not understand how she could not care about all those wonderful stories and strange worlds I described to her. What I was not able to understand at the time is that, for me, those narratives were possibilities, if not actually real, while for her they were only stories, tales made-up to distract children and fill their heads with impossible lives.

That is something that has followed me, indeed, through time: how can one not care for stories? How is it possible that one can ignore the power of words and the way they take you to places that your imagination can only begin grasp? As the years passed, my mother would select, among her collection of romance novels – those very inexpensive ones that you can buy at newsstands – the ones she thought I was old enough to read. Oh, those were marvelous days when I would pretend I was the hero, infatuated with unlikely love stories, and condemned to happily ever after. Those books awoke in me a hunger for reading that I was never able to fulfill, always devouring the next story that would take me away.

In school, reading the classics, I would confirm what I already suspected: that more than being simply a plot, narratives can actually *do* something in the world – not only to be pedagogical and didactic, but also to move you, touch you, infuriate you, puzzle you, question you, challenge you. Gradually, books became such an important part of my life that choosing a career related to them only seemed like the obvious choice. In college, the variety and availability of new works of fiction were facts that only pushed me forward in my interest in literature. Eventually, I was given the chance to be part of a research group led by Professor Rita Schmidt, where my initiation on Women's Writing would push into an immersion in Comparative Literature and Feminist Studies.

The idea for this project was born while I was still part of that research group. I was assigned the reading of *The farming of bones* (Danticat, 1998) for studying and coming up with a line of work that would fit our new subject: trauma. I was absolutely moved by the novel and impressed with its treatment of human suffering. There were many questions raised about my view of the world, about tragedy, about self-knowledge, about nations, about cruelty, about otherness, about what being human means. This novel has been the subject of important studies about trauma and testimony (Hewett, 2006; Caminero-Santangelo, 2009) not only due to its beautiful and poetic writing, but also due to its crafted rendition of human nature and tragedy, which also inspired my research.

In *The farming of bones*, the author Edwidge Danticat constructs the fictional testimony of Amabelle Désir, a Haitian working in the Dominican Republic where, in 1937, a nationalist wave persecutes and kills Haitians in the country. Amabelle is a survivor of the Massacre and, through her account of the events, we are presented to the horrors and indignities suffered by thousands of people during one of the most silenced events in History. By weaving memory and history together, Danticat is able to render problematic xenophobia, genocide, trauma, and survival, issues that still victimize millions every year. For the purposes of this thesis, I decided to compare Danticat's work with *Solar Storms* (1995), by Linda Hogan that, despite being set in a different place altogether, shares with *The farming of bones* a background of violence, mass killings, and the struggle for survival as well as the intricate work with language. *Solar storms* is the story of Angela Wing, a Native-American young woman who decides to return to her homeland, after years spent in foster homes, to reclaim her past. Back to the place of her ancestors, Angela uncovers the tragic history of her tribe, their genocide, and the reasons why she was taken away. Here, too, memory plays a key part in recovering and reconstructing a long-lost past that may help the characters to understand the present.

Both novels establish a dialogue concerning local histories and the human experience of violence, sharing an intertextuality that transcends yet the boundaries of geography. Barthes once said that a text is made of a 'variety of writings' that 'blend and clash' (1974, 21); such 'encounters' of writings add up to our understanding of intertextual relations, not merely in the sense of influence, but intertextuality as one text borrowing elements from others or even aligning in theme, form, and/or plot with another. *The farming of bones* and *Solar storms* share similarities in their plotlines

(an individual trying to recover her identity), in their narrative devices (memory as a tool for reconstructing a lost past), and in their narrative voices (first person narratives). Such borrowings or similarities invite a comparison and an analysis of the communication in which they engage and their literary and social effects.

My research will focus on questions of trauma (individual and collective), of body, and of identity that the novels problematize. These concepts shall be explored in the second chapter, where I will discuss the theoretical background for my work, presenting the concepts that shall guide it with both novels. I intend to offer an overview of the theories that most add to our understanding of the key terms, discussing how identity is formed and its relation to our grasp of reality and nationhood, exploring Stuart Hall's ideas and concepts (2006). Then, I explore trauma through a psychological point of view, exploring its effects and relation to literature, taking into consideration mainly the ideas proposed by Freud (1920) and later developed by Caruth (1995; 1996). Finally, I offer a brief overview of studies in corporeality and their importance to developing a theory of the 'traumatized body,' subscribing to the studies by Elizabeth Grosz (1994).

In the third chapter, I will offer a brief overview of the Haitian and Native American literatures; then I move on to the analysis of the novels, discussing the representations of trauma in both texts, as well as the work with language employed by the authors, and the importance of the body, especially the traumatized body, in the perception of subjectivity and identity.

Finally, in the conclusion, I offer a reading of both novels, investigating how these stories can interfere in the concepts of identity and belonging through the voicing of individual stories of trauma. I also attempt to draw a comparison between the texts and present a possible reading for the roles played by the traumatized body.

## **1 TRAUMA, BODY, IDENTITY**

### **1.1 Identity, nation, fiction**

Linda Alcoff, in her *Visible identities* (2006), refers to identity as something that changes, moves, and reshapes itself according to the situations and demands it encounters. Thus, identity is not a limiting notion that binds the subject to an essence or fixed state; rather, identity is a mechanism for the formation, identification, and assertion of the self. It is possible, then, for the subject to identify herself with a variety of group identities (such as worker, daughter, Brazilian, etc.) constructing a multiple and moveable identity.

Such heterogeneity evokes Stuart Hall's (2006) concept of 'the crisis of identity' that, according to the author, is the result of several identifications that coexist in the subject and form her identity. Hall maps three different concepts of identity in modern times: (1) the Enlightenment subject, unified, possessing reason, conscience, and action, whose center is unchangeable and fixed; (2) the sociological subject, whose identity is formed from the interaction between the 'I' and society, but still holds an 'essence'; and (3) the post-modern subject, who does not have a fixed or permanent identity, but whose dislocated identifications with several groups or categories lead up to the fragmentation of an identity once thought unified since the subject assumes 'different identities at different times' (p.11). Such fragmentation does not imply, however, a non-reconciliation of these identifications, but only a multiplicity of them working simultaneously.

Such changes in the way we perceive and live identity became more pronounced as both society and science evolved: the emergence of the modern state forced change upon our perception of the 'individual' (Hall, p.30). It is important to bear in mind how local and specific processes influence the formation and development of identities: colonization and the impasse of identity, dislocation of peoples, rising of nations that legitimize or not certain identities to the detriment of others.

In the same direction, the constitution of Social Sciences soon directed our gaze towards the subject immersed in society and yet more and more looking inward, concerned with individual matters that gradually replaced one's inclination to think oneself as a member of a community to give way to a more individualist position.

The tendency of prioritizing individuality also favored a closer look to the inner workings of subjectivity, the constitution and maintenance of the self, and its relation to others. All of these processes render a complex and intricate web of relations and identifications – these can be based on religion, class, gender, ideology, ethnicity, and a variety of social groups, which implicates the sharing of certain cultural traits, both by individuals and by the community. Such identifications will, ultimately, grant an apparently unified identity because, if Saussure was correct when he said that we cannot fix the meaning of any form, not even of our identity, then our ‘unified self’ is but an imaginary unity that keeps us from facing the crisis of our fragmentation (Hall, p.41). We may agree, thus, that thinking of oneself as ‘unified’ and ‘cohesive’ is a useful defense mechanism preventing us from collapsing under the overwhelming diversity of our subjectivities.

Among the identifications that we establish to the world around us are those that fall into the category of cultural identifications; that means we share common patrimonies such as language, art, traditions, beliefs, etc. with a group of people. Such cultural identity is mostly represented by the notion of nationality, that is, that by abiding to certain values that permeate the lives of people, one is part of a nation. A national identity is formed and transformed inside the representation of the nation, which happens through discursive strategies. Thus, the idea of ‘nation’ only exists in discourse: it is a symbolic community, a metaphorical agreement that refers to more or less elastic boundaries delimiting a nation. Benedict Anderson (1983), had already developed the idea of the nation as an ‘imagined community’, a social construct onto which its members project some sort of affinity, similar interests, and a sense of fraternity.

The national culture of an imagined community is lived and passed on through some mechanisms that include the memory of the past and its exaltation, the desire of living together, and the perpetuation of heritage. According to Hall, there are several strategies for disseminating the so-called ‘national culture’: the narration of the nation; the emphasis on the origins and the continuity of the nation; the foundational myth, and the idea of a pure and original people. Such discourse, then, sets the individual’s identity between past and future in the sense that it urges the subject to preserve his national identity and, at the same time, reveals the threat posed by ‘others’ against his own identity (p.56). A national culture, understood then as a discursive device, tends to erase all differences and promote a sense of unity and equality, even if the social



reality of a nation proves otherwise. The media plays an important role in the dissemination of the idea of 'all as one', but literature can also greatly influence the outcomes of the representations available.

The nationalist discourse, as said before, tends to erase all differences, yet we can say that they still exist because even if this discourse has the power to narrate, it is not actually able to *prevent* resistance. Inside the unified 'one', discourses emerge questioning and often opposing the national stability in the sense that they defy and confront established values and the seemingly calm surface of the nation-state. They raise awareness about difference and injustice and are usually suppressed by the dominating discourses inside a nation. As Edward Said (1993) said, the attempt of nations at blocking 'other narratives from forming and emerging' constitutes one of the main traits of cultural domination (p.xiii). Colonization, for instance, is one of the processes that emphasizes the illegitimacy of those who do not belong to the nation; these processes stress the frontiers of belonging and, through discursive practices, subvert the very concept of nation as the 'motherland'. This is the truth for most colonizing nations, whose need for dominance and power overshadows any empathetic reasoning. In an era where discussions on *how* to teach the history of the British Empire at schools is still an issue, it is not surprising that we learn that the British government destroyed all evidence of mistreatment in the colonies<sup>1</sup>. As the world still shivers at the memory of the Holocaust, it seems easier and more convenient to think of it as an isolated event, when the truth is that millions of people have gone through the same at different times throughout History, but the facts are silenced and all evidence vanishes<sup>2</sup>.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, literature and politics were committed to building a national literature, since art was being led, consciously, to represent the elements of nationality (Schmidt, 2013). The historical novel was predominant in the Americas as a foundational milestone for giving coherence to the national imaginary, inspired by the European novels of the same genre. In this context, these texts were responsible

---

<sup>1</sup> Article available at <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/apr/18/britain-destroyed-records-colonial-crimes?newsfeed=true> Accessed on February 2015.

<sup>2</sup> A recent study by Caroline Elkins uncovered the horrific events in Kenya in the 1950s, by the end of the British Empire, when a local revolt was suppressed using brutal and inhumane practices. Article at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/apr/23/british-empire-crimes-ignore-atrocities>. Accessed on February 2015.

for representing the idea of a nation, of supporting an ideological process whose ultimate goal was to propagate the nation's hegemony.

It is interesting to observe how *memory* is at work during the processes of nation-building and colonization: there seems to be an invisible agreement through which colonizers deny their empires and actions while the colonies try to put the past of domination behind. Memory plays a key role in repressing these events, providing a defense mechanism that molds the political and social conditions of a nation through the construction of a historical past, repressing all manners of difference and alterity. However, the repression here is not an unconscious process but a more deliberate and necessary step toward survival and toward the maintenance of the nation. Human nature taught us that the fear of repetition of horrific events leads us to suppressing them, even denying them, and avoiding their sources. History taught us the same: the belief that silencing events is the best way to prevent them from happening again. Sibylle Fischer (2004) points out, however, that 'silence and fear are not beyond interrogation' (p.ix); thus narratives or testimonies that break the silence and emerge precisely to confront and antagonize the official account of events work as a manner of questioning the imposed hegemonic, peaceful state.

Fiction, then, provides an insightful look into certain periods and happenings, proving its cultural and historical value as a mouthpiece for generations and peoples around the world. Narrations often lay the ground for inquiries and offer a way for people to 'assert their identity and the existence of their own history' (Said, 1993, p.xii), which otherwise might simply be neglected, providing a means of survival and resistance. Above all, fiction is able to function as a stage for the conflicts that are part of the national landscape: processes of exclusion brought about by the national state or by colonization, historical processes that require a search for an identity, cultural processes that on their turn form identities, literary canons, and traditions.

Homi Bhabha (1994) suggests that in our modern world we need to take into consideration that identity is claimed by several positions that move away from the primary categories of race and gender. If our identity is the result of not only race and gender, but of class, sexual orientation, geopolitical surroundings, etc., then we:

need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or

communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1994, p.2)

The in-between spaces function, then, as enunciative spaces of the nation from which marginal literary productions emerge. This literature has the ability of interfering in the national canon's constitution, of offering 'contestations', oppositions, and diverse perspectives that provide new lights upon the nation's experienced reality, reintroducing the cultural difference and functioning as performative acts, also demanding a historical revision of the role of minorities inside a nation. These texts form the nation's discursive frontiers, whose restaging of the past exposes the invention of tradition by vocalizing the violence suffered by the collectivity. Such violence can take the form of an institutional violence in the sense that subjects experience racism, sexism, and classism (and so on) from social institutions and are deprived from their basic needs. It is possible to perceive this type of violence in national policies and discourses, but also in literature, when marginal subjects are excluded from representation in the national canon. Therefore, not only a text can present violence against minorities – as a means of denouncing it, of protesting it – but it can also be the source of violence – as a means of justifying it.

Thus, literature from the margins emerges as a literature of protest that aims at political empowerment and at questioning the very idea of community (Bhabha, 1994), at challenging the tradition and the idea of power through domination. The events usually brought about by marginal literatures are related to violent historical experiences often omitted from the national discourse; these narratives offer a supplementary point of view to the national history, yet they are silenced or suppressed exactly because they do not allow forgetting the very events they narrate.

By fighting forgetfulness, marginal literatures rescue from silence events that the national discourse desires mute. Vivian Nickel (2012) points out that forgetfulness constitutes any representation of the past and that certain historical processes of identity construction are legitimized by prioritizing certain events and subjects instead of others (p.17). In this sense, certain events are better 'forgotten', as I suggested before, as a defense mechanism for survival and for the preservation of society's homogeneity. However, literature from the margins is limited by representation and language and a certain amount of incommunicability of events connected to traumatic experiences.

## 1.2 Trauma and literature

When we talk about trauma, we are dealing with deep, complex and individual processes of assimilation of events that disrupt one's existence. And it is almost impossible to talk about the mind and not mention Sigmund Freud, the well-known father of psychoanalysis, who were not the first to try to understand what trauma is, but was the one who advanced most significantly concerning what we now know about the subject. In his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud states that trauma is a wound inflicted not on the body, but on the mind. This means that trauma may be dealt with not only as a physical injury (or its menace), which seems to be the most common conception of the term, but also as an event or circumstance that somehow threatens the individual and her safeness. More than the physical impact of such experience, the mind also suffers the effects of it, sometimes in a much larger extent than the body. For the wounded body, according to Freud, is healable and can recover from its injuries, whereas the mind does not work so: the traumatic event is experienced in such a manner that the mind is not able to process it as it happens and the sense of time of the individual is somehow 'broken' or 'discontinued'. This unexpected event cannot be fully grasped and it tends to repeat itself (after a certain time of latency) in an attempt of the mind at grasping it; this repetition can take the form of nightmares or repetitive actions, for example. Freud says that 'the fact that the traumatic experience repeatedly forces itself on the patient even during sleep is assumed to be proof indeed of just how deep an impression it made. The patient is assumed to be, so to speak, psychically fixated on the trauma' (1920, 2010, p.83). Such fixation brings with itself a necessity of (re)working the events into coherence, which can imply the necessity of some kind of narrative, spoken or written, as an attempt of not only organizing the past but also conferring meaning to it.

Cathy Caruth explores the genesis and development of the Freudian theory of trauma in her *Unclaimed experience* (1996). Caruth follows the origins of Freud's studies on the subject, adding also Paul de Man and Lacan's perspectives about survival. Here, I believe, lies one of the most important points of Caruth's work: the difficult life of those who survive traumatic events and the almost impossible freedom from it. According to the author, surviving a traumatic experience implicates a 'kind of double telling [...]: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story

of the unbearable nature of its survival' (p.12). This 'enigma of survival' that follows trauma (p.76) can be perceived in several testimonies and narratives – an enigma that can be interpreted as some kind of (unfounded) guilt, a conception that one does not deserve to have survived, which is commonly observed when it comes to survivors of cultural traumas, such as wars, natural disasters or genocides.

Caruth agrees with Freud's idea of repetition and fixated actions that try to 're-play' the traumatic event. In her introduction to *Trauma: explorations in memory* (1995), Caruth explains that the effects of trauma constitute a pathology, debatably called 'post-traumatic stress disorder'<sup>3</sup>, which constitutes a response to overwhelming events that can take the form of 'repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event' (p.4). Also, the author introduces one of the key concepts of her theorization: the idea of 'belatedness', which refers to the impossibility of comprehending trauma as it happens. An idea connected to the Freud's *latency* period, which is linked to the concept that the realization of the traumatic experience only comes later, in a process of assimilation that can take years, hence 'belatedly'. Caruth says:

[...] the pathology [PTSD] cannot be defined either by the event itself—which may or may not be catastrophic, and may not traumatize everyone equally—nor can it be defined in terms of a distortion of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it. The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event (1995, p.4–5).

As Caruth puts it, the traumatic event is only assimilated through its repetition. Therefore, the pathology is an effect of the experience, not the experience itself. Such effect, or possession, is an attempt to unveil the truth or reality that is trauma. However, such truth is not available in a conscious level, but reinforces its existence through its symptoms. If, according to Freud, the traumatic event disrupts the

---

<sup>3</sup> PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder. Caruth defines it as 'an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. As it is generally understood today, post-traumatic stress disorder reflects the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that it cannot control. As such, PTSD seems to provide the most direct link between the psyche and external violence and to be the most destructive psychic disorder' (*Unclaimed experience*, 1996, p.76).

individual's notion of time and space, then trauma may be understood as an 'absence', 'the absence of something that failed to become located in time or place' (Marder, 2006). Thus, this 'haunting' of symptoms that constantly repeat themselves and that are trying to reverse this negative presence, this lack of cohesion in one's experience.

Caruth indicates that the compulsion for traumatic memories or acts 'seem to point to the necessity by which consciousness, once faced with the possibility of its death, can do nothing but repeat the destructive event over and over again' (1996, p.83). In this sense, we can say that the trauma never really leaves the survivor's mind – in fact, the survivor is haunted by this always present memory of horror; yet, such memory (or memories) may come back as an unassimilated event, not fully processed by the individual, and extremely hard to place in time.

It is interesting to point out, and perhaps clarify, the opposing ideas of 'absence' and 'always-present memory': even though we can understand trauma as an absence, as a point in one individual's experience of time and space when something so overwhelming takes place that this experience is temporarily blank, memories and repetitions become a mechanism for trying to piece the before and after of trauma together. Thus, as such memories come back to, or should we say never leave, the individual, they can be perceived as a form of ghostly presence of the traumatic event – it is there, but not quite.

Here, the concept of 'spectral memory' can help us better understand this conflict. Developed by Amy Novak (2006) using Freud's paradigm between the memory that 'repeats' and the memory that is 'remembered' (p.11), the 'spectral memory' can be considered a type of haunting of the present, 'a sign of abnormality or illness' (*ibidem*). The traumatic memory stands as an enigmatic past that repeats itself and is not inserted completely in the level of 'discursive signification' (p.25) but exceeds it, being thus fragmented and often incoherent. These memories are more susceptible to distortion since they bear a significant amount of emotional distress, which makes the understanding of the past ambiguous and unclear.

If it is through language that the subject understands the world and is able to relate to it, language also plays an important role when it comes to elaborating and structuring the traumatic memory. More than that, the subject is constituted not only by the differentiation between sexes, but also by discovering his own language, by entering into discourse; thus his existence and his individuality gains meaning. I would

like to establish a comparison between the subject acquiring meaning through discourse and the trauma narratives as it should be already clear: if the individual is able to signify his life through language, if all of his experiences are processed and comprehended through discourse, then the traumatic experience must also undergo this process, so that it can be signified and given meaning. Once we agree that all of our lives are formed by little narratives – from routine activities to major events – I do believe that the telling of a trauma may be the beginning of a ‘healing’ process. By healing I do not mean the complete and ultimate extinction of the traumatic memory – given everything that has been said so far, it is clear that such accomplishment is impossible; but I mean healing as the process of revisiting the trauma as one event that has to be examined and understood so that one can better deal with its deep, emotional effects.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that traumatic memories are usually quite impossible to articulate in rational and linear thoughts as they are placed outside of language. What narratives can do regarding these experiences is try to articulate memories, feelings, and impressions, but never the *experience* itself. Every trauma has, intrinsically, an incommunicable trait very similar to the status of language: if language is a mere representation of things but not the things themselves, a simulacrum of the world, then trauma narratives are not the trauma themselves, but a representation of that experience. As Caruth points out, trauma victims ‘carry an impossible story within them’ (1995, p.5). As trauma cannot be communicated, trauma narratives are an attempt to transform this impossibility of a (whether personal or cultural) history into a story that can be told, narrated. What we may consider a ‘healing process’ depends upon the ability of the individual of turning unspeakable memories into a story so that he can get to know himself and his own past – we may consider this process as a ‘facing of one’s own demons’, a process that can help the individual to cope better with reality and the traumatic aftermath.

For Caruth, the key to surviving trauma is to find ways of bearing witness to it; trauma is not, then, reduced to an absence, but is also a calling to survival through the contact with others:

The final import of the psychoanalytic and historical analysis of trauma is to suggest that the inherent departure, within trauma, from the moment of its first occurrence, is also a means of passing out of the isolation imposed by the event: that the history of a trauma, in its

inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another (1996, p.10–11).

However, if telling one's own story is a necessity brought on by the traumatic event, this process can only be complete when there is a listener. Listening, here, becomes not only a matter of empathy and solidarity, but also of an ethical commitment towards the other. In being a listener of someone else's testimony, I am implicated in that story in the sense that I also can get to know myself through the other's life. It is by listening to the other's pain that I am touched, that I am able to identify with the other, that I acknowledge our connection, and that I am confronted with injustice and able to change. As Caruth puts it, 'history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, [...] history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas' (1996, p.37).

Literature, then, becomes one of the ways to tell and share experiences that cannot be expressed by ordinary, daily modes – especially when they exceed our understanding of them. Such narratives, even though they offer an endless and immensely creative mode of expression, cannot offer heal, nor cure, to a traumatic past, but they can provide listeners to witnesses and survivors. According to Caruth, the sharing of trauma narratives can help eliminating not only individual, but also cultural, isolations:

[speaking of, and listening to, trauma] does not rely, I would suggest, on what we simply know of each other, but on what we don't yet know of our own traumatic pasts. In a catastrophic age, that is, trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves (1996, p.11).

I am inclined to agree with Caruth when she points to the 'catastrophic' quality of our times, taking into consideration how we are compelled to empathize with people through their hardships and tragedies. How sad it is that only in awful moments we can find things in common. However, I would like to believe that exactly through these hard times is when we should commit ourselves to others and to their stories, not only by listening, but also by becoming aware of the fragility of values such as justice, respect, and difference.



When we talk about trauma literature, we generally have two genres in mind: historical trauma and *testimonio* (testimony). Testimonies are generally defined as ‘life narratives’ that present someone’s real life experience with no direct objective other than to elucidate events and, as a consequence, provoke social changes once readers are socially and politically engaged by the story. The sharing of one’s suffering can be the first step toward changes since testimonies are usually connected to situations of injustices and violence against minorities. Often, these narratives play an important role in touching people and moving them to fight for human rights, for instance.

Marta Caminero-Santangelo (2009), in her studies on trauma narratives, points out the differences between historical trauma and *testimonio* narratives. According to the author, the first is oriented towards the past while the latter is oriented towards the present (p.6). If both genres have sometimes overlapped or been used interchangeably, here they are set apart for their temporal inclinations. The author points out that the distinctions also extend to the ‘urgent’ character of a *testimonio*, which aims at current events, and urges action right now (*ibidem*). Both *testimonio* and historical trauma rely on reinforcing on the reader that the events (re)told are true. ‘In this sense’, says Caminero-Santangelo, ‘the testimonial function in a novel is the concern with reproducing this truth effect even within fiction’ (p.7). Therefore, we can have a fictional testimony inside a historical trauma text as a narrative device for ensuring credibility and realness. The author goes on:

Literature of historical trauma like *testimonio*, is notable for its documentary impulse – its effort to enclose within its fictional narrative concrete references to ‘real’ historical conditions. The concern with truth effect frequently takes the form of a reproduction of the very act of ‘witnessing’ within the fictional narrative itself (p.7).

This ‘documentary impulse’ makes both historical trauma literature and testimonies concerned with the representative quality of the narratives: they do not have an end in themselves, but they stand for many other trauma narratives, for a collectivity of stories that are linked by traumatic experience – the story of one survivor is the story of a whole community, and the story of a community is the story of a nation, and so on.

The testimonial function of trauma literature can offer a vehicle for the voice of margins, of the minorities, or, as Caminero-Santangelo puts, of the subalterns (p.8).

This voicing allows for other aspects of the truth to be revealed and heard, often providing a contrasting point of view to that of the 'official' history – we hear then from 'the other side', a side often silenced by hegemonic forces and political interests. Such narratives often deconstruct the binarisms of 'good versus evil', 'right versus wrong', and 'true versus false' by presenting, yes, other sides to the stories but also by complicating matters of responsibility, social justice, nation and belonging that, otherwise, would count only with one 'official' version.

Thus, narratives of historical trauma do not refer only to those directly involved in the events, but also to the whole of humankind – and even though I take the risk of this sounding dated and tacky, I mean it in a Humanist perspective. The reader can be implicated in these stories by reading them, by participating in their (re)telling, by taking action because of them, by changing our ways of seeing and understanding things. I do believe that trauma narrative play, most importantly, a social role of raising awareness and breaking down resistances, of telling stories that otherwise would not be heard, and of awakening in their readers the sensibility towards the pain of others.

Caminero-Santangelo also reinforces the difficulties of telling trauma as well as points out the marked need for telling. This necessity for narration entails also the distinctions between narrating in a *testimonio* and narrating in a trauma narrative. The author explains:

Though the distinction certainly is not an ironclad one, we might posit that what distinguishes deliberative testimonio fiction from literature of historical trauma is the difference between the 'desire to be heard' and the 'hunger to tell'. While trauma gives rise to the need to tell, in testimonio, by contrast, there is an enormous weight on hearing, on reception, because only if the audience truly listens can it be motivated to take action in the current crisis. Deliberative testimonio, that is, exists for its audience, not for 'therapeutic' or 'archival' purposes (p.21).

The testimony can be conceived as a means for stating the truth rather than merely accessing it, as theorists Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub state in their *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). In their book, both authors propose to investigate the relationships between literature and testimony, 'between the writer and the witness [...], between the act of witnessing and testifying and the acts of writing and of reading, particularly in our era' (p. xiii). Such relations, as I hope to have made clear by now, are of great interest to trauma

studies for they represent the possible intervention that literature is able to make in our social world.

Felman and Laub reinforce the idea that testimony cannot be a totalizing account of traumatic events, but a narrative formed by 'bits and pieces of memory' in which language is only attempting to express an experience that exceeds one's own understanding. They explain:

Testimony is, in other words, a discursive practice as opposed to a pure theory. To testify – to vow to tell, to promise and to produce one's own speech as material evidence for truth – is to accomplish a speech act, rather than to simply formulate a statement. As a performative speech act, testimony in effect addresses what in history is action that exceeds any substantialized significance [...] (1992, p.5).

Qualifying testimonies as 'speech acts' only adds to the idea that these stories actually have a function in the real world. As speech acts, trauma narratives are performative utterances that do not simply describe a certain reality, but they are able to change them as they describe them.<sup>4</sup> In fact, these stories do not only change 'the world' or a 'reality' – which can seem too abstract – but they do change their listeners/readers who become part of a creation of knowledge both to that who tells the story and to others.

In the second chapter of the book, Laub points to the listener as an important part of the process of narrating trauma. Her assertions, I believe, can be applied to the concept of 'readers' as well. 'The testimony to the trauma thus includes its hearer,' she says, 'who is, so to speak, the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time' (p.57). Thus, there is no telling without listening and the listener becomes, at some level, the partner to the story being told, once he/she is emotionally engaged in the narrative. Laub goes through some important points about this listener: that he/she needs to be attentive to 'the lay of the land' both in the witness and in himself; that he must understand how difficult it is to bear witness, since the boundaries of times, space, and subjectivity become blurred, and that the listener must know:

---

<sup>4</sup> When I talk about 'speech acts', my main reference is J. L. Austin's *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1962.

that the speakers about trauma, on some level prefer silence so as to protect themselves from the fear of being listened to – and of listening themselves. That while silence is defeat, it serves them both as a sanctuary and as a place of bondage. Silence is for them a fated exile, yet also a home, a destination, a biding oath. Not to return from this silence is rule rather than exception. (1992, p.58)

Once the silence is overcome, the process of reconstructing the history of the trauma begins. Laub names this essential process as the ‘re-externalization of the event’ (p.69) that consists in articulating and transmitting one’s story, transferring to it to another person and then assimilating it back again – thus, one’s narrative become an echo for the individual himself/herself, and the listening then is not only performed by the listeners, but also by the one who tells. Such ‘self-listening’ helps with the articulation and understanding of one’s own experience and as an exercise in analyzing one’s own choices when verbalizing trauma.

Often, literature offers a means of expression for these stories due to its more poetic, metaphoric language where discourse does not need to be so connected to mere representation of the events ‘as they were’. The freedom provided by the inventiveness of the literary text can work in favor of the story that is going to be told, either by the survivor or by an author who creates a fictional survivor. As said before, fictional accounts of trauma are considered historical trauma narratives, but that does not exclude testimonies from them. Also, the fact that they are fictions do not prevent them from representing the political and psychological dimensions of trauma. As Cathy Caruth reminds us,

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (1996, p.3).

Written narratives become, thus, a media through which the traumatic experience can be signified. By no means I intend to infer that the fictional representation of trauma equals to the experience of survivors – I do believe that the trauma of the latter should not be overlooked nor undervalued. My point is that fictional narratives lend themselves more creatively to the representing a harsh, evil event. And I also believe that the sensibility of writers, of artists can offer new

perspectives as well as elucidate historical moments oftentimes shadowed by either other events or by power interests.

### **1.3 Cultural trauma and the need for narratives**

Taking into consideration all that was said about trauma so far, we can take one step further and think that there are traumatic events that are not only individual, but communal. Natural disasters, slavery, the Holocaust, wars, these are historical marks that change and affect the way people, and a collectiveness of people, experience time and life and are known as ‘cultural traumas’. According to Jeffrey C. Alexander:

cultural trauma occurs when member of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways (2004, p.1).

Such experiences also pose a threat to that community’s existence, especially because they violate certain presuppositions upon which that society is built. In the case of the Haitians’ Massacre in 1937, for example, we can think that the precepts shattered by the event were equality, justice, and safety. In this particular case, of course, we should take into consideration that the violence against Haitians is historically a feature of the Dominican people – the disputes and misunderstandings between the two nations go back into the past and have been somehow incorporated into the unconsciousness of both cultures.

These conflicts have not been overcome and hostilities are present in their relationship up until this day, which can be clearly seen in the events that took place around September 2013 when a court decision threatened to strip citizenship from children of illegal Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic. According to the Dominican Government, these people would have to leave the country back to Haiti, where they were no citizens either, which would create a human rights crisis.<sup>5</sup> Almost five months later, the Dominican President, Danilo Medina, assured he would present a bill to the Congress to help legalize the situation of those born from illegal

---

<sup>5</sup> Source: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/27/dominican-republic-citizen\\_4002844.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/27/dominican-republic-citizen_4002844.html). Accessed on February 28, 2014.

immigrants.<sup>6</sup> However, smuggles still happen frequently and the results can be disastrous.<sup>7</sup>

As a cultural process, this kind of trauma is mediated much more largely and widely, thus forcing a reformulation of the collective identity and of the traumatic memory of the events. Scholar Ron Eyerman points out that whereas a physical trauma involves a wound and ‘great emotional anguish’ (even if this sounds a rather simplistic definition), cultural trauma affects the sense of cohesion of a group of people, causing a rupture in social life. He adds:

In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event as the significant ‘cause,’ its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as mediation and representation (2003, p.2).

Thus comes the need for narratives that, whether testimonies or fictions, are able to claim collective memories and offer a reenacting of trauma through literature. Such narratives are not translations or transpositions of the traumatic experiences because, as said before, these events do not lend themselves in such a way, but when turned into literary texts they offer a possibility of access and an attempt to become ‘speaking’. Such narrative fictions evoke what cannot be directly represented – neither presented due to its horror – casting light upon histories that would otherwise go unknown.

According to Paul Ricoeur (2010), narratives that problematize historical traumatic events have the function of imposing order to chaos, even if they present a non-conventional structure – as in *The faming of bones* – and they also confer shape to that which is shapeless. In this sense, we can consider the traumatic memories the shapeless contents to which narratives can attribute order and meaning. Ricoeur goes on to tell that the horror of trauma stories is connected to events that should never be forgotten, and that the intersecting between history and fiction confers upon the fictional narrative the role of inciting the very traumatic memory (p.323).

---

<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latestnews/Dominican-Republic-to-present-bill-to-help-Haitian-descendants2014-02-23T10-17-51>. Accessed on February 28, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> I refer the reader to one of the many news about smuggler’s boats that do not succeed and end in tragedy in the waters between Haiti and the Dominican Republic <http://www.newsobserver.com/2014/02/23/3649161/capsizing-death-toll-rises-to.html>. Accessed on February 28, 2014.

Narratives of individual or cultural trauma gained force throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, impelled by the Human Rights movement, especially after the Holocaust. Local groups seeking more equalitarian opportunities and treatment for minorities gained momentum as well, thus encouraging the emergence of narratives engaged with, or reflective of, cultural traumas. According to Sidonie Smith and Kay Schaffer, collective movements that fight for human rights:

seed local acts of remembering 'otherwise,' offering members new or newly valued subject positions from which to speak and to address members of their own community in acts of solidarity. They also offer members of the dominant community occasions for witnessing to human rights abuse, acknowledging and affirming the rights of others (2004, p.16).

Trauma narratives become, then, the 'other side' of History, coming from the margins to decentralize the hegemonic experience of the 'truth', or least a version of it. Smith and Shaffer say that 'the literature of trauma in the West, exemplified by Holocaust narratives, has become the dominant paradigm for understanding the processes of victimization, remembering, witnessing, and recovery' (p.22). Readers/listeners are ethically engaged in the sense that these narratives focus on the responsibilities of listening (reading) and understanding. Such narratives also have the ability of reaching wide audiences, calling upon the more human dimension of both the texts and people. The authors say:

Acts of listening and reading, however diverse in location and purpose, seed new awareness, recognition, respect, and willingness to understand, acknowledge, and seek redress for rights violations. While such narrative acts and readings are not a sufficient ground for social change, they are a necessary ground (2004, p.226).

Smith and Schaffer make an interesting point in discussing two approaches to life narratives: (1) they can be super valued by the market of publishing houses and then become a kind of commodity, losing the pungent, striking features of a counter-narrative and (2) while such process may happen, the popularity of such novels can be of aid to the Human Rights, working as a means for keeping their campaigns in the public radar. I do not think the popularization of these narratives *per se* to be an issue – the problem may reside in the fact that these narratives are, perhaps, not being read as the signs of awareness that they are. Oftentimes the process of turning a text (or a

certain genre of text) into a mass consumption product has the downside of stripping it from its importance and social resonance.

However, I believe it is also the role of the academy to give more attention to life narratives, not only because they offer so much in terms of life experience and efficiency in denouncing Human Rights violations, but also because they are rich resources for debates and more structural analysis. Each passing day, I am more inclined to believe that the role of the school/academy is to raise the awareness of students to their roles as human beings in society. More and more, I sense that the humanity in people is shadowed by a sense of immediate pleasure, thus making simple, basic traits of common sense (and even humanity) shrink to the point of oblivion.

And here, I believe, lies the power of literature. Other than providing simply entertainment, it can offer a life-changing, eye-opening experience. While we witness a decay of human rights and moral commitment to justice and tolerance, many displaced, marginal movements seem to be gaining momentum across nation states, denouncing and exposing 'the other side' of History.

#### **1.4 Trauma and the body**

So far, I have focused on the psychological aspects of identity and its formation. Now, I would like to explore the 'other side' to its development, which concerns the body's materiality and its effects on the subject's identity. This interest springs from the fact that my corpus of study presents women whose body was changed due to a traumatic event and who struggle with the effects of such changes both physically and psychologically. My investigation here is based largely on Elizabeth Grosz's work in *Volatile bodies* (1994) for I consider her studies to enlighten some very important aspects of the individual's relation with his or her body. In addition, I believe that the approach to corporeality can be of aid in understanding the specificities and complexities of the traumatized body

I would like to start such exploration by discussing the long tradition of dichotomous thinking that separates mind and body. The binary opposition, which has been proposed by philosophy for centuries now, elevates the mind to a privileged status and regards the body as inconvenient, even if necessary, vessel to the human mind, placing over it a negative value. In fact, binary oppositions have ruled over our History



by establishing a series of terms paired as two sides of a positive-negative spectrum. The correlation between mind and body has been presented side by side with other pairs equally opposed: reason/passion, self/other, temporality/spatiality, form/matter, psychology/spatiality, and so on (Grosz, p. 3).

One of the most rooted oppositions deriving from this binary division is that between men and women, where men stand on the positive side of the equation, equal to mind and the rational thought, while women are placed on the negative side, equaled to the body and irrational, emotional thoughts. This seemingly simple and harmless division have caused more injustices and barbarities than we can count – women, being deemed ‘less’ in philosophical terms, were also treated like so in the socio-political world. The belief that mind and body are not connected led to the idea that the mind is disembodied and yet, it is the male body that produces objectified and verified knowledge (Grosz, p.5). Thus, the mind was believed to be the sole responsible for the individual’s identity and experience of the world.

Since its origins, philosophy has treated the body as something to be ruled (if not overruled) by the mind. ‘The body has been regarded as source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason’ (Grosz, p.5). The ultimate separation between mind and body was instituted by Descartes, whose dualistic thinking is the ultimate responsible for the elevation of consciousness above corporeality (Grosz, p. 7). I would like to point that the reduction of the mind to the body or of the body to the mind is a denial of their interaction; both terms do not mutually exclude themselves, but are two sides of the same coin.

For the purposes of this study, I subscribe to the line of research that considers the body a signifying medium – not reduced to an object nor a tool, but a vehicle of expression connected to the mind and not separated from it. As Grosz puts it, ‘the mind is the idea of the body to the exact degree that the body is the extension of the mind’ (p.12). Thus, it becomes impossible to dismiss the effects that external events have on both mind and body. And not only that, we have to take into consideration the effects of all that is upon and surrounding the body: class, gender, race, etc. According to Grosz, ‘the body must be regarded as a site of social, political, cultural, and geographical inscriptions, production, or constitution’ (p.23). The body, then, is not opposed to culture, nor excluded from it: the body is a cultural product, resulting of a series of elements and events that keep on changing it and, in consequence, affecting the individual’s self.

I would like to suggest that the traumatized body is the site of inscription for a personal and often communal history, which should be considered of equal importance as that of the mind. As I analyze my selected corpus, I hope to make evident that the traumatized bodies are not only a tangible evidence of violence, but also a place of collision between inside and outside, a locus that may be the beginning of the construction, and acceptance, of a new reality.

## **2. RELIVING THE PAST: trauma and the search for meaning**

*His creed was one of memory, how  
remembering – though sometimes painful –  
can make you strong.  
Danticat, *The farming of bones**

### **2.1 Haitian Literature**

As a French colony, Saint-Domingue (as it was called during colonization), inherited the habit of admiring the work of French writers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That, of course, reflected the colonizer's way, once most of the population was illiterate and literature and drama was mostly appreciated in the mansions of well-to-do families (Bostick, 1956). The indigenous culture was of no interest to the colonizers, who made no particular effort to establish a local tradition that would represent natives and their history. It should be remembered, however, that most of the population on the island was of slaves, whose origins were diverse and whose communication posed a problem, once their languages differed among themselves. The emergence of the Creole – the dialect resulting from the simplification of the French language and the African dialects – enabled not only communication,

but also a means of expression that would become the most spoken tongue in the country after the independence.

In its origins, Haitian literature, starting with the Declaration of Independence in 1804, was written mostly in French and took the French masters and their literary style as models. According to Bostick (1956, p.252), Haitian literature is divided into three main periods, or movements: the first period started with the Declaration and was inspired by the deeds and victories that led to the country's freedom. The second period can be roughly located between 1860 and 1915, the moment of Haitian romanticism, when the literary art flourished and great Haitian poets emerged. This was a literature of strong patriotic features, but still focused on the French-speaking minority. The third period began around 1915, when the United States invaded Haiti,

starting what would be called the American Occupation, generating national commotion and shock. Several militant literary magazines were created and the idea of empowering through indigenous culture gained force with a literature more concerned with political issues.

As many Latin American ex-colonies, Haiti was governed by dictators whose governments forced many writers to leave the country and seek refuge somewhere else, where they could write more freely about their homeland and its oppressive politics. Rafael Lucas (2004) mapped certain recurrent themes in Haitian literature produced specifically under Duvalier's dictatorship (1957-1971): madness or possession; misery, violence, and suffering; bitterness; dispersal; interrogation of memory; and the use of witness/testimony strategies. I believe these themes can also be found in the literature produced inside other oppressive systems, once dictatorial governments share certain common traits. Such themes point to the traumatic nature of the literary production under totalitarian regimes, evidencing the repression and predation 'aimed to strip the human being of the ability to revolt' (p.55). The author also highlights how a dictatorial system causes changes in the perception and representation of reality, once there is an effort from the authorities to legitimize a history, folklore, and references according to their intentions. Moreover, people are maintained under a state of 'mental domestication and colonization', subjected to aggressions and tortures that aim at destructing any individual notion of personality and identity.

Dictatorial regimes stress the borders of a nation and legitimize xenophobia and other discriminations based on class, gender, race, etc. The 'other' becomes a threat that must be suppressed or eliminated, conquered or expelled from the territory in which he/she has no right to be. Literature, then, can become a locus for denouncing excluding practices and, more importantly, can offer a middle ground, a piece sign towards reconciliation.

According to Mercer Cook (2004), Haitian literature suffers from the very same problems that stricken its country: 'poverty, politics, illiteracy, language, and color' (p.220). Poverty and illiteracy prevent locals of purchasing books; most of the Haitian literature is written in French and must be translated to achieve other markets. Cook points out how it is possible to detect in certain texts the subtle presence of the color complex, a non-founded guilt whose origins date back to the slaves' revolution that freed the country. The American Occupation also contributed to the complex through the prejudice of the American soldiers; however, it also influenced contemporary

Haitian literature, leading the intellectuals to perceive more clearly the extent of the American influence over the country. The Occupation helped define and evidence social disparities, making the upper class more conscious about their responsibilities towards the peasantry. 'This, plus the example of a similar literary trend in other countries, broadened Haitian literature at the base, made it more Haitian, more realistic, and consequently more human' (p.223).

Since 1931, with the publication of *La Montagne Ensorcelée* by Jacques Roumain, ninety-nine percent of the Haitian novels have been concerned with the peasants and the representation of their life, poverty, dreams, virtues, and vices. Cook highlights how this representation is made in a favorable, sympathetic light; she even points out how Haitians have learned, through their own history of suffering and injustices, to relate to other people's pain in a kind of kinship (Cook, 2004, p.230).

Despite its efforts and productions, we can agree that the Haitian literature remains widely unknown, even for those authors who left the country in search of exile. It is, at least, an interesting situation that the second nation in the Americas to conquer independence and the first to abolish slavery has received so little attention and interest. From a political point of view, Haiti represented a threat to the other colonies in the Americas, a symbol of the successful slave revolution whose example could endanger the very achievements of colonization (Brickhouse, 2001). In its precociousness, Haiti became the unspeakable example of a popular revolution and, because of this very reason, a target for powerful nations to try to conquer it back into submission. For its Dominican neighbors, the idea of being conquered by Negroes was alarming and unsettling, so much so that the division and rivalry between the two countries remain until this very day. After being mistreated and misconducted by failed regimes and governments, Haiti, which once was the pearl of the Antilles, became an impoverished, devastated country, both by the hands of man and nature.

It is in the middle of such socio-political turmoil that emerges the work of Edwidge Danticat, a Haitian writer who immigrated to the United States while she was a teenager. Born in 1969, Danticat and her brother were raised by family while her parents struggle for better life conditions in the US. When she was thirteen years old, Edwidge went to live with her parents and her confusion and discomfort with her new situation led her into literature. After completing her studies in Fine Arts, Danticat undertook classes of creative writing, meanwhile working with artists and filmmakers

whose work on Haiti she greatly admired. Always concerned with her country and its history, she collaborated on documentary and art projects about Haiti.

Danticat's thesis became her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in 1994 and her short stories appear on several periodicals, being translated into more than seven languages. Her fiction is extremely concerned with national identity and national politics, mother-daughters relationships, and diaspora. Danticat problematizes, through her main characters, the problems that strike her country, exploring possibilities for representing violence without victimization. The valorization of tradition is also present in her work through references to the need for narratives, passing on Haitian history, culture, and way of life.

### **2.1.1 *The farming of bones***

In *The farming of bones*, published in 1998, author Edwidge Danticat portrays the compelling story of Amabelle Désir, a Haitian orphan who lives in the Dominican Republic and works as a maid in a sugarcane plantation, whose life is forever changed by the civilian Massacre of 1937. While in the Dominica Republic, she meets Sebastien Onius, who becomes her lover, fiancé, and confidant. The narrative in the first person confers a testimonial effect to the events and conveys Amabelle's story in an up-close, personal manner, since, from the beginning, the reader is faced with the narrator's hauntings. In the opening of the book, we are introduced to a world of nightmare, despair, and seduction. Amabelle and Sebastien are together, once 'he comes most nights to put an end to [her] nightmare, the one [she has] all the time, of [her] parents drowning' (Danticat, p.1). Sebastien is the key to her sanity but his appearance in the middle of the night should be the first the warning to the reader that something is off. Amabelle shows a dependence on her fiancé's presence: 'When he's not there, I'm afraid I know no one and no one knows me' (p.2); when alone, she spends her days 'grieving for who [she] was, and even more for what [she has] become. But all this when he's not there' (*ibidem*). The double use of the adverb 'there' should also be considered a sign – why not 'here'?; such word choice points to a distancing of the subject in relation to her narrative and induces the reader to wonder *where* these meetings take place and *where* Sebastien goes when they are not together.

This first chapter functions as a test, a charade that must be solved by gathering all clues spread across the pages – once we decipher the underlying meaning, we can start to grasp how this narrative will work. Danticat is laying the grounds for building a narrative that slides through time and space, even if it takes its time to build up an impossible division between *now* and *then*. The strategy, however, is subtle. Maybe at a first reading, the reader will not be able to make a clear distinction between the first and the second chapter; maybe the narrator is telling a dream, a nightmare, a memory. The important thing to consider here is, besides the clues throughout the text, the verbal tense that the narration assumes: the first chapter is told in the present tense, much like a summoning of that which is being told, a living portrait of an event that often repeats itself– and we can say that because we are told that Sebastien ‘comes most nights’. ‘He is gone’ before sunrise, leaving Amabelle with the memory of their night together and the bodily impressions left on her – his touch, his smell, his taste. It is only when Amabelle turns to a seemingly simple childhood anecdote that the reader is able to estimate the meaning of that encounter:

When I was a child, I used to spend hours playing with my shadow, something that my father warned could give me nightmares [...]. Playing with my shadow made me, as an only child, feel less alone. Whenever I had playmates, they were never quite real or present for me. I considered them only replacements for my shadows. There were many shadows, too, in the life I had beyond childhood. At times Sebastien Onius guarded me from the shadows. At other times, he was one of them (Danticat, 1998, p.4).

Therefore, when I wondered before *where* the meeting between Amabelle and Sebastien took place, I did not mean it physically, but in *time*. If it is possible that at times Sebastien is a shadow, how can we be certain that the encounter between the lovers was real? In fact, we cannot know that, even if the clues lead us to considering the scene a dream or an illusion. It is only later in the narrative that we will learn Sebastien’s fate and the causes for Amabelle to summon him so.

With the first chapter ending on that note, the second chapter assumes a more factual tone. It begins, ‘Birth and deaths were my parents’ work. I never thought I would help at a birth myself until the screams ran through the valley that morning [...]’ (Danticat, p.6) and it goes on to tell how Amabelle had to assist her mistress, Señora Valencia, on delivering her children. The narration is in the past tense and the events assume a linearity and an objectivity much different from that of the previous chapter.

From now until halfway through the novel, a rhythm will be set: every other chapter will be told in the present tense and their contents will not be a continuation of the previous chapter, but rather will possess a life of their own. I would like to recall, here, what was said before about the emergence of the 'spectral memory' (Novak, 2006), and how it differs from the 'remembered' memory. This distinction is of aid for understanding the narrative strategy employed by Danticat: the chapters narrated in the past tense are built around a 'narrative memory', that is, they tell Amabelle's story in a time-oriented, cohesive manner that follows her life in the farm as a worker, the break of the conflict between Haitians and Dominicans, and her attempt to escape back to Haiti through the border. The chapters narrated in the present tense represent the irruption of a traumatic past that (re)emerges in the form of a 'traumatic memory' and disrupts the narrative flow of the narrative memory. They also disrupt the reading experience, once they are inserted where they do not seem to belong and the reader is forced to try and make sense of them, just like Amabelle must struggle to keep narrating her life's story without being haunted by her traumatic past, which is impossible. These chapters reenact memories, or distorted versions of them, or even dreams, nightmares, or imagination that signal the presence of trauma in the subject's own discourse – chapters/memories that cannot be ignored nor repressed.

It is interesting to point out that the chapters concerning the traumatic memory are focused mainly on Sebastien and Amabelle's parents, which indicates their importance for her story, but also their central placement in Amabelle's traumatic past. We learn that her parents are no longer alive through the conversations with Sebastien and the frequent mentioned 'drowning'. In chapter 9, Amabelle relives the day of their deaths, when she was still a child: the three of them crossed the river that sets the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and went to Dajabón, 'the first Dominican town across the river' (Danticat, p.50). After shopping for pots, the family is ready to go back home when rain in the mountains raises the river's currents. Amabelle's father insists that they can still cross the river safely – he will first carry his wife, then go back for the child. As they prepare for crossing, Amabelle notices that the boys who usually offer themselves to carry the traveler's things across the river are too afraid to enter the water. That should be a warning sign, but her father is convinced that he is able to cross. However, the water is raising fast. 'The water reaches up to Papa's waist as soon as he steps in. Once he is in the river, he flinches, realizing that he has made a grave mistake' (p.51). The boys on the other edge try to throw a rope for the



couple to grasp; the violence of the current will not allow that. The tension that has been building up explodes with a rather ‘matter-of-fact’ paragraph: ‘The water rises above my father’s head. My mother releases his neck, the current carrying her beyond his reach. Separated, they are less of an obstacle for the cresting river’ (p.51-2). And they are gone. These lines seem to display a distancing from Amabelle’s part as if any emotional involvement is impossible. More than that, I would like to suggest that this more ‘factual’ narration is a sign that Amabelle tries to distance herself from the events, when in fact her whole life still circles around them. This attitude is an attempt of rationalizing a traumatic experience, one that changed her life completely, for she became an orphan left in a foreign country to fate’s hands. In a novel haunted by emotionally charged, poetic chapters, it is at least an interesting choice to narrate a horrific experience with detachment, not using adjectives, and portraying the facts devoid from emotion. However, the words following the parent’s death are heavy with despair, even if the narration remains to the point: ‘I scream until I can taste blood in my throat, until I can no longer hear my own voice. [...] I walk down to the sands to throw the pots into the water and then myself.’ (p.52). Some of the boys that tried helping her mother and father stop Amabelle from killing herself.



**Figure 1:** Market day at the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Many Haitians cross the border through the Dajabón River looking for affordable goods.

Source: <http://www.viewpress.org>

As a reader, I am left with the impression of a calm surface that hides a turmoil within. Not from Amabelle's child self because we can see that she is driven by fear and despair, but from the Amabelle narrator, whose choice of words and tone for telling such a day in her life is more haunting than if she had told the same events in a much more emotional manner. The same strategy can be perceived during the narration of her escape back to Haiti during the Massacre. As I mentioned before, forgetting may be a useful defense mechanism for survival; however, forgetting such happenings as the ones that fill Amabelle's life is impossible. She must, then, find ways of still exist under the weight of experience and the manner through which she does that is by distancing herself. The memories of her parents and Sebastien are filled with tenderness, loving words, and a dream-like, rather nostalgic quality. The accounts of the traumatic events are, however, different in tone: they seem to say 'this is what happened to me', but not 'this is what I suffered'. There is not an attempt of victimization, even if we understand that Amabelle as a child was a victim of fate and as an adult, alongside her compatriots, was a victim of unfounded rage.

After her parent's death, Amabelle was taken to work at Don Ignacio's sugarcane farm, where she established a close relation to Señora Valencia, the master's daughter. In the farm, she meets Sebastien, who left Haiti with his sister in search of a better life in the Dominican territory after the death of his father; their sharing the same loss sets a powerful bond between them, a mute understanding of pain and grief. The hierarchy in the farm, and in the Dominican Republic in general, was that Haitians would always be below, less, and only good to be used as labor force. The racial conflict dates from a long time in the region, springing from the conflicts between slaves and slave owners that led to Haiti's independence in 1804 – the first independent nation in Latin America and the first nation to conquer independence through slave revolts (Fischer, 2004).

Michele Wucker (1999) points out that the rivalry between Dominicans and Haitian originates in the history of both countries – their competitiveness has socio-political reasons as well as economical. Under Spanish and French domination, respectively, the nations have long been involved in a dispute over power and land, freedom and domination. According to Wucker:

unlike Haiti and other countries in Latin America, the Dominican Republic does not celebrate anniversaries of independence from a European colonial power. Every

February 27 [since 1844], it reminds itself that it fought off its neighbor, Haiti, to become an independent nation' (p.40).

Interestingly, in 1865, both nations united against the Spanish domination and expelled the Spanish troops from the region; after that, they started fighting over the definition of a border, a fight that had been on and off for years now.



**Figure 2:** The border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic  
Source: <http://graphics8.nytimes.com>

In 1915, the United States invaded Haiti. Under their influence, on January 1, 1929, the Dominican Republic and its neighbor signed a treaty that drew the frontier line between them – the very same frontier we have today. Haiti conceded part of its borderland, which caused Haitians that lived in the area then to belong to the Dominican nation. About a year later, a military *coup* led the Dominican president Vásquez to resign and, after false elections, Trujillo was elected president (Wucker, p.44). Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina was trained by the American military during their stay on the island and orchestrated the *coup* that removed Vásquez from the power on his own benefit. Despised by the Dominican elite due to his humble origins and dubious past, Trujillo soon became infatuated with power and greed that, however,

did not surpass his need for proving himself almighty.<sup>8</sup> His actions made him unpopular among elite members, but favored him among peasants and workers; however, appearances had to be maintained and some members of the upper class would offer banquets in honor of the Generalísimo Rafael Trujillo, Benefactor of the Nation and Father of the New Dominion.



**Figure 3:** The Generalísimo Rafael Trujillo, Benefactor of the Nation and Father of the New Dominion.

Source: <http://britannica.com>

On October 2, 1937 Trujillo attended one of these festivities in the town of Dajabón, at the border, where the International Highway was being built. Trujillo was not happy about the speed of the construction site neither was he happy with so many Haitians living on his side of the border. About a decade before, several Haitians had migrated to the Dominican Republic to work on the sugarcane plantations that constituted, at the time, a vast exportation business. With the Crash of 1929, the price of the sugar was severely affected and Haitian workers were no longer necessary. With so many unemployed foreigners and the bad economy imposing restraints, old brawls began to reemerge. By July 1937, foreigners were obliged to register with migration

---

<sup>8</sup> Wucker lists the ‘absurdities’ that Trujillo ordered, among them changing the capital’s name to Ciudad Trujillo and introducing the merengue to the ballrooms, ‘to the dismay of the elite’ (p.45), who considered the rhythm inappropriate due to its African origins.

officers, which caused about eight thousand deportations of Haitians back to their country (Wucker, p.47).

Local denounces of Haitians stealing cattle along the border and of deported citizens sneaking back into the country also added to Trujillo's dissatisfaction. Rumors concerning the death of Haitians by the hands of Dominican soldiers were flying around. During the banquet on October 2, Trujillo confirmed those deaths, saying that 'the solution must continue' (Wucker, p.48). On October 3, the massacre of Haitians officially began.

In the novel, the racial conflict inside Don Ignacio's farm is heightened on the day his grandchildren are born. Valencia's husband is a colonel working under Trujillo's orders and when he is told that his wife gave birth to twins, he rushes home from the barracks to meet his son. Amabelle overhears Señor Pico, the husband, telling his wife that he was honored with the task of leading a group that would 'ensure the Generalísimo's safety at the border. [The group] would also be in charge of a new border operation'. Valencia worries that her husband will stay away for too long. Pico ensures her that she should not worry, that 'the operation [will] be quick and precise. To tell the truth, part of it had already started' (Danticat, p.42).

One thing that Señor Pico omits, though, is that, on the way back home, driving faster and faster through winding roads, he runs over a Haitian worker and does not stop to help. Later that night, Sebastien tells Amabelle that his friend was hit by a car on the road and is now dead. The sadness and tension among the workers only increases, for they already know who is the responsible. Mimi, Sebastien's sister, asks Amabelle, 'Your people killed Joël rushing home to their babies, didn't they?' And she adds, 'If one of our men had killed Kongo's son, they'd expect to die' (Danticat, p.63). Amabelle tries to calm Joël's mother down:

'What can be done?'  
'An eye for an eye, as Mimi says.'  
'No eye, for no eye,' I said. 'We cannot start a war here.'  
'It would not be a war,' she said, 'only something to teach them that our lives are precious too.' (Danticat, 1998, p.66)

It is unlikely that any action taken by the workers against Pico would have any effect other than having them deported, tortured, or killed. Not only because Pico is son-in-law to the farm's owner, but mainly because he works for the military and, as any good soldier, holds Trujillo's words to his heart. Talks about the situation of

Haitians all over the country have already reached Don Ignacio's plantation and people are getting scared. While visiting some of the Haitians who do not work in the cane fields, Amabelle talks to some of them.

'To them [Dominicans], we are always foreigners, even if our granmèmès' grandmèmès were born in this country', a man responded in Kreyòl, which we most often spoke – instead of Spanish – among ourselves. 'This makes it easier for them to push us out when they want to.

'You heard the rumors?', another woman asked, her perfect Kreyòl embellished by elaborate gestures of her long fingers. 'They say anyone not in one of those Yanki cane mills will be sent back to Haiti.' (Danticat 1998, p.69)

Here, the question of belonging and identity comes strongly into place. Without ever being accepted as Dominicans, even if being born inside the national borders, Haitian-descendants are not allowed to stay since they do not own papers proving their origins. They are denied the right to belong to that nation in which they were born and raised, in which they build a life for themselves, and they are also denied belonging to their ancestor's homeland, once they were not born there and have no papers that the Haitian government would accept either. They end up belonging nowhere, having no motherland to claim as their own nor one to which to go back. Deprived of a nation, they create a community for themselves through language and through the customs of their people. As we saw in the quotation above, they speak Kreyòl among themselves because that was the language of their parents and because, as they are denied complete access to the Dominican citizenship, they are not able to recognize Spanish as a language that would represent them – it will always be the language of the 'other'.

The mere fact of being in the presence of a compatriot functions as an assertion of community. When Amabelle visits Father Romain, he likes to remind her that they came from the same village, as it seems to be a common practice. 'It was a way of being joined to your old life through the presence of another person. At times you could sit through a whole evening with such individuals, just listening to their existence unfold [...] (Danticat, p.72). The bonds formed by people who are displaced from their homes, for whatever reason, are usually a way back, a manner of constructing an invisible connection.

It was their way of returning home [...]. This was how people left imprints of themselves in each other's memory so that if you left first and went back to common village,

you could carry, if not a letter, a piece of treasured clothing, some message to their loved ones that their place as still among the living (Danticat, 1998, p.72).

This nostalgia for home is also reflected in Don Ignacio's behavior, himself having fled from the Spanish-American war (1898) to go to the Dominican Republic and establish himself there. When asked if he liked living there, he answers:

'Do I like how things are conducted here now, everything run by military men? Do I like the worship of uniforms, the medals like stars on people's chests? Do I like this?' he looked up at Señora Valencia's spectacularly large portrait of the Generalísimo. [...] No', Papi said. 'I don't like any part of it' (Danticat, p.78).

It is ironic, then, that his daughter married a military man. Unfortunate, or necessary, the alternative being that she married a Haitian or a Haitian descendant, or a low-class Dominican. Amabelle, however, cannot help sympathizing with Don Ignacio, who she sees an orphan as well, 'for whom this side of the island had not always been home', in a reference to her coming to the Dominican Republic and also a reference to that not being her home, her place on earth, her welcoming land.

As months pass, some people start to plan going back to Haiti through the mountains, crossing the border illegally again. Doctor Javier, the family's physician, offers Amabelle a chance to leave and go back to Haiti as a midwife. He is taking some people across himself after he learns that 'on the Generalísimo's orders, soldiers and civilians are killing Haitians,' and that they are approaching the valley (Danticat, p.140). Amabelle does not believe it is true:

This could not touch people like me, nor people like Yves, Sebastien, and Kongo who worked the cane fields. They were giving labor to the land. The Dominicans needed the sugar from the cane for their cafecitos and dulce de leche. They needed money from the cane (Danticat, 1998, p.140).

Amabelle does not consider leaving Sebastien and she is confused as in what to believe. Still, she prepares a bundle in case she needs to run and goes after Sebastien. She finds him and tells him that he, his sister, and she have places in the doctor's truck for crossing the border. 'Even after they killed Joël, you thought they could never harm you', Sebastien accuses her. 'Perhaps I had trusted too much', Amabelle ponders, 'I had been living inside dreams that would not go away, the memories of an orphaned child.'

When the present itself was truly frightful, I had perhaps purposely chosen not to see it' (Danticat, p.143). From this moment on in the novel, there are no more chapters dedicated to the reliving of memories, or dreams, or imagination. From the day of the Massacre onwards, Amabelle's narrative is focused on surviving the crossing of the border, as if in fact she now is able to see the truth. Even if consider that Amabelle is telling her story from future – how long into the future we are not certain –, still her narrative becomes inseparable from her traumatic memory. The events of that day were so full of impact that it is no longer possible for her to isolate fact from emotion and the result is a crescendo of tension that culminates in the crossing of the border back to Haiti.

Right after Sebastien leaves to fetch his sister, some military trucks speed past Don Ignacio's house. Soon, Señor Pico appears with two trucks loaded with soldiers to apprehend the cane workers. Doctor Javier's mother comes and inquires Señor Pico about the arrest of her son. 'If Doctor Javier was taken', Amabelle wonders, 'what of Sebastien, Mimi, and all the others who were leaving with him?' (Danticat, p.155). Physical conflict explodes between soldiers and workers and Amabelle wonders why the soldiers are not shooting the ones who are fleeing. Running among the men, she reaches the grove where she hid her bundle, and from there she watches the soldiers take some of cane workers into the trucks. Amabelle reaches the church where she and Sebastien would meet, but it is deserted. In order not to be seen by any soldier, Amabelle makes her way through the cane field: 'it was pitch black inside, as dark as it might be in a coffin under the ground, with six feet of dirt piled over your face' (p.159). The reference to a coffin and death is also comparing the cane plantation to a cemetery, where the canes themselves resemble bones in their resistance, but also alludes to the several lives lost in the field, from either injuries, malnutrition, or old age. 'The farming of bones' will also gain another meaning after the Massacre, when thousands of bodies had to be buried, or 'planted' into the soil in a sad reproduction of the act of planting, when one actually plants death.

After walking through the cane field, Amabelle talks to Kong and finds out that military trucks went to the chapel and took everyone there. Almost certainly, they took Sebastien and Mimi too, who were there waiting for her. Kongo says that 'If they don't kill [the prisoners] at once, they'll bring them to the border prison of Dajabón' (Danticat, p.161). Amabelle decides to go to Dajabón, her only goal being to find Sebastien and be reunited with him. The next morning, Amabelle leaves with Yves for



the border; they meet Tibon on the way, a survivor of the previous night's attacks, who tells them that the soldiers took some prisoners to a cliff and forced them to jump or to 'go against a wall of soldiers with bayonets pointed at [them] and some civilians waiting in a circle with machetes' (p.173). The soldiers then instructed civilians where to hit so the Haitians could die faster and more easily. According to Wucker:

Trujillo's soldiers used their guns to intimidate, not to kill. For that, they used machetes, knives, picks, and shovels so as not to leave bullets in the corpses. Bullet-riddled bodies would have made it obvious that the murderers were government soldiers, who unlike most Dominicans had guns. But death by machete can be blamed on peasants, on simple man of the countryside rising up to defend their cattle and lands. Even a bayonet leaves wounds like those of a simple knife that the true authors of the crime can be masked. This elaborate façade left out one crucial detail: if the massacre was, indeed, the result of a Dominican peasant uprising against the Haitians, why were there no casualties on the Dominican side? And why did a number of Dominicans, at a great risk to their own lives and livelihoods, hide Haitians in an effort to protect them from Trujillo's murderers? (Wucker, 1999, p.48)

The horrors and brutalities of those days will never be fully disclosed, mostly because the Massacre was silenced, but also because some truths are too harsh to meet the light of day. However, we can have an idea of the violence of the Dominican uprising: armed with their cutting tools, Dominicans brought to an end thousands of lives – an exact number was never revealed, and sources disagree greatly on the matter – in what would later be known as *El Corte* for Spanish-speakers, in a reference to the cutting of the blades. English-speakers often refer to the killings as the *Parsley Massacre*, in a reference to the test that Dominicans put through Haitian through, as we will see happen with Amabelle.

On her journey towards the border, Amabelle is surrounded by despair, tragedy, and pain – she and her travelling companions share their stories and sufferings, they smell bodies being burned, they see women and boys hanged from a tree, and yet they dream of better times. Amabelle plans to rent the house where she lived as girl or at least to find a way to prove that the house belonged to her father. She is still not certain of what happened to Sebastien and his sister and hope keeps her going.

When the group of fugitives reaches Dajabón, the crowd is still on the streets, celebrating Trujillo and his name. Army trucks surrounded the church where supposedly the President was, and the crowd was still exhilarated by his speech, which

promised to end the ‘problems with Haitians’ (Danticat, p.189). While two of their group, Wilner and Odette, looked for someone to help them cross the river, Amabelle, Yves, and Tibon should wait for them by the square’s fountain. While they wait, a group of five young men approaches them, their hands full of parsley sprigs. Michele Wucker explains:

[Soldiers and civilians] would accost any person with dark skin. Holding up sprigs of parsley. [They] would query their prospective victims: ‘¿Cómo se llama ésto?’ What is this thing called? The terrified victim’s fate lay in the pronunciation of the answer. Haitian, whose Kreyol uses a wide, flat *r*, find it difficult to pronounce the trilled *r* in the Spanish word parsley, *perejil*. If the word came out as the Haitian *pe’sil*, or a bastardized Spanish *pewehi*, the victim was condemned to die. (Wucker, 1999, p.49)

It was the ultimate test. While confronting the boys in the square, Tibon is hit with a machete on his back and is kicked as he falls to the ground. In front of the church, an orchestra plays a popular, cheerful song. The boys surround Amabelle and Yves, and wave the parsley sprigs in front of them, “‘Tell us what this is,’ one said. ‘Que diga perejil.’” (Danticat, p.193) Even though Amabelle is convinced that she is able to pronounce the word, as she has so many times, she is not given a chance. ‘Yves and I were shove down onto our knees. Our jaws were pried open and parsley stuffed into our mouths. My eyes watering, I chewed and swallowed as quickly as I could, not nearly as fast as they were forcing the handfuls into my mouth’ (*ibidem*). Convinced that if she eats the parsley, she will be allowed to live, Amabelle tries to focus on the fact that they are not being beaten.

It is when Yves can no longer eat the parsley that things escalate into chaos. Both Amabelle and Yves are beaten up and have rocks thrown at them. ‘My whole body was numbing’, Amabelle describes, ‘I sensed the vibration of the blows, but no longer the pain. My mouth filled with blood. I tried to swallow the sharp bitter parsley bubbling in my throat’ (Danticat, p.194). She even thinks that there might be poison on the parsley. Here, we begin to understand how the trauma is inscribed *on* Amabelle’s body, and not only on her psyche, extending beyond the memory into her very being. Amy Novak (2006) points out how, by considering her body ‘a map of scars’, Amabelle ‘anchors together the physical pain of her body with the act of testifying. It is her body that bears the record of the past, and the story it tells is not seamless but disfigured, flawed, even imperfect’ (p.103). The visceral description of the attack at the border

leads to a climactic moment when Amabelle is no longer able to register pain, when the violence escapes the limits of speech and her silence is buried under the screams and ovations given to Trujillo.

Suddenly, Yves and Amabelle are left on the ground to their fate while people run towards the church to see Trujillo depart – people run and walk over them, as if they were simply part of the pavement. After the crowd disperses, Wilner and Odette reappear and take them to a house where they will for dawn to cross the river. Amabelle is developing a fever; she has cracked teeth and an open lip. ‘All of the pain of first being struck came back to me,’ she tells. ‘I reached up to touch my misshapen face. Odette moved my hands away from my jaws’ (Danticat, p.197). As the soldiers approach their hiding place, the four of them have to leave the house; they walk into a grove of coconut palms, ‘which whistled in a breeze I could not feel. Perhaps my whole body was beyond feeling now, beyond healing’ (Danticat, p.199), she says, in a reference to what we can consider the shock as an aftermath of the attack; however, this passage foreshadows how Amabelle’s bodily experience of trauma will never be overcome. As Novak reminds us, ‘This corporeal figuring reminds readers that the apparent element of latency in trauma is not because the event did not register, but because the body upon which it is written evades the narrow limits of language and representation’ (2006, p.103). From this moment on, Amabelle’s relation with her body will change completely; slowly, she starts to take notice of her injuries, but she is not able to understand their extent yet.

Trying to fool the guards that are on watch on the bridge, the group changes their mind and decides to cross the river while it is still dark. By the bridge, sentinels are throwing corpses into the river. Amabelle is terrified of the water’s depth, yet she is afraid of swimming with Odette and being responsible for her drowning, as she cannot move properly. However, it seems Odette is not a good swimmer, and Amabelle decides to hold the woman’s waist and help her against the water. “Behind, on the shore, someone was calling to Wilner, ‘He! He!’ We stopped our struggles immediately, letting the current carry us downstream” (Danticat, p.201). A shot rings and Amabelle covers Odette’s mouth, so she cannot scream, because at that moment they know that Odette’s husband was hit. Still covering the woman’s mouth and nose, Amabelle swims toward the shore; when they reach it, Odette will not gain consciousness. ‘She had saved us at the square, so we wanted to save her too’ (p.202). They carry her to a grassy field, where she spits out water from the river and, with her dying breath, mouths the

word 'pèsi' (perejil), not as plea or a supplication, but a challenge, a provocation, not only to the Generalísimo, but also to the whole world.

By the next morning, Amabelle and Yves are taken to a makeshift clinic that gathers injured people from the shore. Amabelle receives medical attention, and she cannot help but notice the astounding amount of injured people around her. There are burned victims, a woman whose leg has to be removed, all of them moaning and calling for those they lost on the other side. Amabelle is examined and, as the doctor announces that the amputee woman is not going to survive, she is sure that "this would be the last time [she] would see someone dying, so sure was [she] that when the doctor said 'She's not going to live,' he was also talking about [her]" (Danticat, p.207). Amabelle, then, dreams of her mother, who comes to tell her that she is not going to die. In her dream, she sees her mother smiling, which is something she did not do very often. In fact, her mother's restraint of affection was always something that hurt Amabelle and created in her an absence of maternal love, even when her mother was still alive. The loss of her parents increased this feeling as, up until now, Amabelle's mother had always appeared to her as a stern, reserved woman. This loving, gentle dream apparition functions as a proof of motherly love, assuring Amabelle that she is going to be well in spite of everything.

In the makeshift clinic, those who are not severely injured gather around and tell their tragic stories. It seems to be the only thing they can do. "Taking turns, they exchanged tales quickly, the haste in their voices sometimes blurring the words, for greater than their desire to be heard was the hunger to tell" (Danticat, p.209). Amabelle, laying in her cot under the tin roof, listens to all the stories and takes part in their grief, but unable to tell hers, since her jaw is badly hurt. Trauma becomes, here, not only an impossible narrative in its psychological extent, but a physical impossibility, being at the same time a presence and an absence that haunts the traumatized subject.

Those who speak at the clinic also wonder about the Haitian government's silence in face of the situation, 'our so-called president says nothing' someone says (Danticat, p.212). In fact, Sténio Vincent, then the Haitian president, was surprisingly mute during the Massacre; apparently, his relationship with Trujillo was an amiable one as he secretly received the dictator's political support. Early in 1938, months after the killings, Vincent and Trujillo drew up an agreement that would allow the wounded and the families of the deceased to seek damages from the government, which would

pay them with money that the Dominican president agreed to concede (Wucker, 1999, p.54).

This process is painted with darker colors in the novel, when Yves and Amabelle go to the court house in Haiti and have to wait for weeks to be heard by the judge, because there are so many people to tell their stories that the building is always full. Those who are heard by the judge say that they have their names written down on a notebook and are given the chance to tell their tale – nothing else is given to them. After three weeks of waiting, the survivors are told that the money is over and there will be no more audiences (Danticat, p.235). By then, Amabelle is already living with Yves' family in the Capital and trying to recover from her injuries. There has been people coming to Sebastien and Mimi's mother, who lives nearby, to tell her that her children were shot in a place called Santiago, the site of brutal killings during the Massacre. Even though Amabelle assures Sebastien's mother that she does not believe it to be true, she knows she lies due to all the things she saw in Dajabón and the tales she heard at the clinic (p.241).

Amabelle is forced to face the new reality of her body. If before, with Sebastien, she felt feminine and seductive, now she feels that '[her] body could no longer be a tempting spectacle, nor would [she] ever be truly young or beautiful, if ever [she] had been. Now, [her] flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament' (Danticat, p.227). As Amy Novak points out,

The very presence of the scars pose an impossibility to forget, as they are a reminder, inscribed on the flesh, of the memory of the violence suffered. The body becomes the site of both enunciation and its absence. It is from this site that language originates and, in the case of trauma, that a wound arises that consumes language. The text emphasizes the body's place in signification, reminding that the psyche, commonly seen as the repository of physical feelings and senses, is not the transcendent entity of a degraded physicality, but is also itself always embodied (2006, p.104).

In this case, the materiality of trauma forces an understanding that goes beyond the 'psychic wound' once the traumatic experience is registered on the bodily surface. The body, then, offers a silent testimony of the history not only of an individual, but of a nation, calling attention to the effects of trauma and its silencing. 'The disfigurement of Amabelle's own body', says Novak, 'and those of others remind the present of a past that historical narratives have evaded' (2006, p.105).

As time passes, Amabelle says that her body ‘began to feel better’ (Danticat, p. 229), as if she and her body were two separate things – her body feels better, but she never says ‘I feel better’. ‘Thinking of Sebastien’s return made me wish for my hair to grow again – which it had not –, for the inside of my ears to stop buzzing, for my knees to bend without pain, for my jaws to realign evenly and form a smile that did not make me look like a feeding mule’ (*ibidem*). If every movement and every moment of her day brings her pain and discomfort, the memory of what happened at the border is still alive and present, shaping her days into never-ending suffering. This second half of the novel portrays Amabelle’s struggle to accept her forever-altered body as well as the transformation that this changes will cause on her personality.

The reality and tangibility of trauma is expressed by Amabelle: ‘This past is more like flesh than air’ (Danticat, p.281), in a reference to the visible evidences of her tragedy – not only her body, but the others’, the ones she sees every day, struggling like her, all of the survivors who try to move on and are reminded of the violent experience by looking at themselves and by looking around. Time is not able to erase the memory, even if time can blur the lines of reality and memory, now and then. ‘His name is Sebastien Onius. Sometimes this is all I know,’ and perhaps this is all Amabelle needs to know. The years could not separate her body from Sebastien’s (or at least the memory of such bodies): ‘My back aches now in all those places that he claimed for himself, arches of bare skin that belonged to him, pockets where the flesh remains fragile, sealed like unhealed burns where each fallen scab uncovers a deeper wound’ (Danticat, p. 281). If with Sebastien Amabelle felt perfect and desirable, her altered body and his absence stand as a cause for vulnerability and fear. According to Heather Hewett,

Sebastien's view of his "woman child" lover suggests how gender is intertwined with able-bodiedness and youth: to be feminine is as much defined by the presence of certain traits (youth, innocence, and beauty) as it is by the absence of others (markings, deformities, disability) (2006, p.130).

The combination of the erotic moments with Sebastien and the tension that builds until the Massacre, as well as the events following it, accentuate the contrast of love and violence – the scenes of love and tenderness pose as only a distant memory when compared to the closeness of the violence experienced at the border. Amabelle

loses Sebastien, her youth, and her body as she once knew and loved it; she also loses her sense of femininity, since it was her fiancé's eyes and touch that gave her certainty of beauty. Hewett explains that 'in this shift of perception we see the ways in which constructions of gender and sexuality depend upon able-bodiedness and youth, and the reluctance, as many disability studies scholars have pointed out, for others to view disabled women as sexual beings' (2006, p.131). This situation results in Amabelle living like a ghost, evoking Sebastien's memory as seen in the first chapter of the novel, reliving their moments together, and imagining his presence.

After Trujillo's assassination in 1961, Amabelle is able to go back to the River. She looks for an answer concerning life and death, for after all these years, she still does not understand if she was supposed to have jumped in the water after her parents or simply kept on living (Danticat, p.309). That river became a symbol for all the things Amabelle lost and all the things she had to leave behind, but was unable to; it not only marked the frontier between the two nations, it also was the divisor line between the life she had and the life she could have had. In a final attempt to reunite with those whom she lost, Amabelle enters the river by the end of novel, 'paddling like a newborn' and 'looking for the dawn' (Danticat, p.310). Amy Novak suggests that by entering the river Amabelle is looking for 'someone else to bear her pain for a while' (2006, p.109) and then takes up on her narrative, the same that we read, telling it to the river. I would like to suggest that by entering the water, Amabelle is seeking some kind of closure and, at the same, a new beginning; her action also alludes to forgiveness and kindness – if the water takes, it also gives, for in the novel its role is one of life and death, a paradox that Amabelle needs to overcome in order to stay alive.

Amabelle needs to narrate, to give the testimony that the authorities did not want to hear, in order to make sense of her past. She does not want it to be forgotten: 'The slaughter is the only thing that is mine enough to pass on. All I want to do is find a place to lay it down now and again, a safe nest where it will neither be scattered by the winds, nor remain forever buried beneath the sod' (Danticat, p.266). By telling her story, Amabelle is also telling the story of all survivors, of the wronged ones, but also of those who died, whose voices were silenced and hid under the weight of the official history. With this narrative, Danticat provides an opportunity for those who were never heard, for those who remember but could never tell – Amabelle becomes their mouthpiece, making sure their story will be remembered and their truth will meet the light of day.

## 2.2 Native American literature

Literary works that rewrite the history and the representation from a post-colonial point of view also interest the Native American peoples, who have suffered the effects of the ‘official’ history, from which they were excluded or in which they are misrepresented. The confrontation between Native Americans and settlers extended beyond physical and cultural contacts; it posed a barrier of language and, most of all, a difficulty in understanding, and accommodating to, a society that organized itself around the written word. We must remember that the written language was, in the early years of contact between settlers and natives, a weapon used by white men to take lands over treaties that the natives could not read and a means of teaching the children a different way of life through education in religious schools. The narrative tradition in the Native American culture was, primarily, oral; written narratives only emerged after the colonization started and the first natives were alphabetized.

According to Liane Schneider (2008), the concept of an ‘American literature’ commonly takes into consideration the documents, letters, and sermons written by the settlers in American soil. The author points out, though, that any serious literary review of the formation of the national literature must take into consideration the indigenous cultural experience and their contribution to the national culture (p.55).

Another interesting point raised by Schneider is that of the indigenous identity: the sense of belonging in this case is much more related to the tribe or nation than to the Native American community *per se* (2004, p.56). This identification makes sense when we consider how tribes and nations differ among themselves in terms of language, culture, social organization, history, and so on. Thus, the indigenous life is plural, heterogeneous, and hybrid and then emerges the question of *how* can we say that someone or something represents the Native American tradition. According to the author, such belonging is no longer defined only by means of blood or race; cultural factors come into place when considering someone or something Native American – communal, social experiences must be part of an individual so that he/she can be considered as a member of a community, tribe, or nation. However, it is important to note that the idea of a ‘pure’ native is a romanticized and unrealistic one, once Native



Americans are not frozen in time, but looking for a dynamic identity, adapted to contemporary America (p.56-57).

The recent, increasing interest in Native American literature has provided a varied and rich amount of resources on the subject. Schneider points out that the contemporary theorists distinguish two main types of indigenous literature: one that is more connected to traditional stories and songs that have been passed down through generations; and a second type of literature that is written in English usually following standard genres, such as narrative, poetry, biographies, etc. (2008, p.57). Importantly, the idea of the 'true' Native should be abandoned by writers, critics, and readers as we long as we understand that a Native American writer is able/is allowed to write using a Western genre without abandoning his/her culture. 'A produção indígena cultural contemporânea é claramente híbrida, justapondo experiências, linguagens, e ações diversas' (p.59).

The role of the reader also validates the definition of a Native American literature when, even if reading a novel, he/she finds difficulties in understanding the day-to-day tribal life, or the references done by the author. In this sense, we can think of an indigenous literary tradition that does not have to be built around traditional oral genres to be unique and different from Western genres. The Native American literature, by making appropriations, already subverts the established patterns through its hybridity and themes. According to Schneider, the important thing take into consideration is the different points of view that this literature will present, which may differ greatly from ours, in terms of gender, social organization, and religious perceptions. (2008, p.62).

William Penn (1997) says that some Native American writers chose to ignore some Western demarcations and combine forms, times, and chronologies in order to build a bridge between the gaps that exist between them and the dominating culture that surrounds them (p.3). Such gaps were formed through colonial and post-colonial experiences, and these writing also offer a certain 'renovation' to what it is understood as American Literature, adding to the imaginary and offering diverse experiences of reality and culture. Also, the contemporary Native American literature can offer a new, more positive view of the American Native, different from that of the 'red skinned men' that the Western cinema and literature propagated.

Liane Schneider highlights the importance of the storytellers inside non-hegemonic groups and how the question of authorship can be defied by the oral

tradition: in the Native American communities, for instance, the storyteller is not the central figure in the story neither does he/she take the credit for a tale. In fact, the concept of authorship is a communal one and the stories belong to everyone – they are not a finished product – and the very idea of authorship is put in check by the appropriation of a Western genre by a Native American author (2008, p. 66). The author continues:

Vale destacar que o surgimento dos romances, ao contrário da literatura oral, está intimamente ligado à ênfase dada ao indivíduo na sociedade ocidental. Desde a criação do gênero romanesco, os romancistas têm focado principalmente tópicos particulares, centrados em focos individuais, passando a ser considerados como criadores de enredos originais. Desta forma, enquanto os poetas indígenas fazem referências a uma tradição antiga e anônima, os romancistas indígenas usam um gênero totalmente estranho a suas culturas, onde o nome do autor é marca fundamental, às vezes até determinando o sucesso editorial e o prestígio de um trabalho de ficção específico. Nesse sentido, os romancistas indígenas poderiam ser definidos como “aculturados”, já que escrevem, de fato, em um gênero ocidental; ou como “apropriadores” – já que fazem uso de um modelo cultural estrangeiro para seus próprios objetivos, apresentando seus questionamentos pós-coloniais (2008, p.66).

We should remember, however, that the European influence is only one among the many influences that form what we recognize as American Literature. There are, obviously, several differences between the Western and the Native American literatures; these differences portray dissimilarities in culture, for instance. One of most marked difference between these literatures is the perception of time and space. Most tribes understand time as cyclic and the space as spherical, which implicates that everything is connected and equally important. Schneider explains:

Esse conceito, logicamente, afeta a literatura, especialmente o romance produzido por indígenas. Geralmente não há protagonistas absolutos, redondos, em tais textos e o tempo não tende a ser organizado cronologicamente. Na verdade, a organização dos textos apoia-se muito mais na importância dos eventos e na sua inter-relação, do que em uma ordem sequencial previamente organizada e sistematizada (2008, p.68).

This approach does constitute a modern take of literature, but it rather represents a point of view of the world that was present long before the arrival of

foreign settlers to the American territory. Another feature that presents itself in the Native American fiction is the cultural conflict between different peoples. Most of the characters represented are at least bicultural and problematize the effects of colonization and its consequent historical changes (Schneider, 2008, p.70).

However offering an important supplement to the American canon, Native American fiction still represents a rupture to the established hegemony and a literature that does not ratify the present of the nation. Arnold Krupat (1983) highlights how important it is that the minorities' work interfere in the canon, because 'claims of Native American literature have been urged in conjunction with movements toward cultural pluralism and away from monocultural purism, with movements toward racial and sexual equality and away from the Western hierarchies of race and gender' (p.147).

In the context of the Native American literature, the work of Linda Hogan has collaborated greatly to the discussions of Native identity and issues of exploitation. She comes from a traditional Chickasaw family and was greatly influenced by her uncle, who helped the Indian people during the 1950s and also a mixed Indian community near Denver. Member of the Native American Academy, her work involves writing as well collaborating with scientists, social work with Native teens in risk situations, and environmental causes.

### **2.2.1 *Solar storms***

Linda Hogan's novel, from 1995, presents the story of Angela Wing, a Native-American girl who, when she was still a child, was taken from mother and sent to foster homes outside of her native land. Now that she is seventeen, she decides to go back to the island where she born, looking for her ancestors and for an explanation for her past. The story is told by Angela herself, which offers the reader a privileged look over her life, feelings, and discoveries. Much like *The faming of bones*, the novel has a confessional tone and makes use of memory to reconstruct Angela's past and the story of the land. The set of the novel is the Boundary Waters, located in the United States-Canada frontier, more precisely between Ontario and Minnesota, and consists of networks of waterways and wetlands.



**Figure 4:** Map of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area

Source: <http://www.canoeconomy.com>

*Solar storms* also works by weaving together two kinds of memories: a narrative memory through which Angela tells the story of her journey back home and a traumatic memory that, unlike the fragmented accounts of Amabelle, relies on other people’s memories of the past to build a background for the present. The distinction between these two kinds of memories are those presented earlier, according to Amy Novak (2006): the narrative memory is concerned with the chronological aspects of the story, whereas the traumatic memory focuses on the trauma experience, at times presenting dreams, delusions, memories. The other voices that take over Angela’s narrative are visually signaled by the use of italics; they always recount a tale of the past, enlightening Angela (and the reader) about the origins of life on the island, the disputes for indigenous territories and resources, and family history, all tales related to the trauma that devastated the land and its people.

If in Danticat’s novel we saw testimony as a means for survival, here it is loaded with a traditional, communal weight that is characteristic of older societies: that of listening to the elders sharing their experiences of the world. As Felman and Laub (1992) pointed out, the testimony is a narrative made ‘bits and pieces of memory’, and this is exactly what Angela’s narrative offers us – from each member of her family, Angela gathers little stories that will complete her background, which is also the background of the community. If the testimony needs a listener, this listener in *Solar storms* is, of course, the reader; but I would like to point out that, inside the narrative, Angela becomes the primary listener onto which, as ‘blank screen’ (*ibidem*), the events

are projected and assimilated – it is only later, through Angela’s narrative, that the reader gains access to those other voices.

None of the words spoken is empty: they are carefully chosen and gathered, and each story, each information about the past has its own time to surface. Storytelling, here, is connected to a way of life – as mentioned earlier, oral tradition plays a very important role in the transmission of knowledge inside Native American communities. The act of telling a story assumes a double importance, then, functioning also as a path leading to secrets and memories that Angela cannot access on her own. These accounts display a certain generosity and respect from Angela’s part as well, who allows others to have a voice in her story, proving that one’s life is always connected to others’ and that one’s history cannot be built alone. Moreover, I would like to suggest that these tales also signal emotionally charged moments in which Angela is not able to retell or to reconstruct with fidelity and objectivity. The novel’s language is poetic and full of metaphors involving nature and mankind; however, the excerpts in italics are more elaborated and sensitive and they differ strategically from Angela’s narration, making it evident that there are several voices inside the novel.

When Angela goes back to Adam’s Rib, the island where she was born, she is looking for her great-grandmother, Agnes Iron, with whom she had already exchanged correspondences and inquired about going back. “Come at once,” Agnes had answered, and alongside the letter, she sent money for Angela to buy the ferry ticket (Hogan, 1995, p.23). When she arrives, Angela realizes how poor and isolated the place is, but she stays out of curiosity about her blood relatives and the place.

Angela, just like Amabelle, bears on her skin the denouncing scars of violence. She wears her hair over the right side of her face: ‘[...] I hope [my hair] covered the scars I believed would heal, maybe even vanish, if only I could remember where they’d come from. Scars had shaped my life’ (Hogan, p.25). Going back to Adam’s Rib was not, then, only a recovery of a communal, family past, but a mission to find out how she was scared – to uncover the reasons why. Actually, Angela already knows that her scars ‘had something to do with [her] mother [...]. While [she] never knew how [she] got the scars, [she] knew they were the reason [she’d] been taken from [her] mother so many years before’ (*ibidem*). Angela has lived with her scars for years, but that does not make bearing them any easier; she has always tried to hide them from other because she ‘hated that half’ of her face (p.33).

The other side [of her face] was perfect and I could have been beautiful under the light of earth and sun. [...] Even then, before the mirror, I tried not to see them, and I wondered what Agnes saw, or Dora-Rouge, when they looked at my angular cheekbones and large eyes, the red hair so unusual above the dark skin, and when they saw the scars. Maybe they felt the same surprise and fear as I did when I looked at my face. Of what, I didn't know. My scars had no memory, were from unknown origin. There were others as well, on my body (Hogan, 1995, p.33-4).

The lack of 'memory' to Angela's scars consist of the main plot of the novel – her pursue of her mother, or at least of her mother's story, as a manner of trying to understand that woman who was able to hurt her daughter so. The effects of scars are, of course, not only physical: they are constant reminders of a traumatic past and of the absence of the mother. If Amabelle suffered for not having a loving mother, at least she was certain that her mother never did her any harm; in Angela's case, the aggression came from her own mother, a figure who is not traditionally connected to fear and violence. The lack of a maternal presence in her life led Angela to look for love anywhere she thought she would find it: 'My ugliness, as I called it, had ruled my life. My need for love had been so great I would offer myself to any boy or man who would take me' (Hogan, p.54). This behavior, however, was never able to fulfill the lack of motherly love, so much so that it made her go back to her birthplace to look for this very woman who always haunted Angela's life despite of not being there.

Angela sees in Agnes, and in all the women that form her relations, a salvation, a way back to recovering 'all that has fallen away from [her] mind, all that had been kept a secret by county workers, that had been contained in their lost records: [her] story, [her] life' (Hogan, p.27). Beside Agnes, Angela also meets Dora-Rouge, her great-great-grandmother and Agnes's mother, and Bush, Angela's step-grandmother, who took in Angela's mother, Hannah, and later rescued Angela herself from Hannah.

It is through Bush that Angela will get to know more about her mother. Bush was married to Agnes' son and was abandoned by him when he met Loretta and eloped with her. Together, they had Hannah. The family line, and especially the female line in *Solar storms*, is of great importance: it is from mothers to daughters that the effects of trauma are passed down. According to Irene S. Vernon, 'Hogan builds a story with layers of trauma experienced and witnessed, traumas that emanate from non-Native colonizers and then are passed down from Loretta to Hannah and then to Angel' (2012, p.37). In her article, Vernon establishes a connection between trauma's endless impact

on the life of subjects and the impacts of the colonial experience on the lives of Native Americans:

Several scholars argue that the colonization experience of Natives, including loss of land, violence, removal of children from their families, and other cultural, social, and economic destructions, creates a 'soul wound,' a wound so deep that it reaches the vital core of their being [...] (Vernon, 2012, p.35)

The author suggests, then, the existence of an 'intergenerational trauma,' which consists of a trauma, or traumatic situation, among a population that was silenced, either due to a collective agreement or due to external pressures (Vernon, 2012, p.35). The effects of the lack of addressing the traumatic experience can be perceived on the next generations, for instance, in the cases of Native children who have heard listened to the testimonies of their grandparents and parents who were forced into going to boarding schools and being raised in a culture different from their own (*ibidem*). But what, one can wonder, could be the effects on the youth of an event that happened generations back? Vernon points out that:

Intergenerational trauma includes the passing of violent behavior, a sense of hopelessness, along with unresolved grief, all symptoms found among Native youth today, with such trauma affecting their view of the world, themselves, the meaning of life, future their expectations, and their moral development. (Vernon, 2012, p.35)

As I intend to discuss, the 'passing of violent behavior' is the most visible effect in Angela's ancestors, so much so that it in fact explains her scars. The unbearable suffering is acted out as a repetition of the behavior that the women before Angela witnessed and endured, with mind and body abused until the victim became the perpetrator. This suffering can, of course, be understood as the suffering of the community, which was attacked and dissipated; that will become clear as we advance in the narrative.

The story of Hannah, Angela's mother, began with her mother, Loretta. But then, the story of Loretta began with the first women on Adam's Rib, the mixed-blood wives of the French trappers who came to island looking for better businesses. They called themselves the Abandoned Ones, for once the French had worn out the land and no more fur was available, they simply moved on, leaving the women and children

behind (Hogan, 1995, p.28). While the Abandoned Ones gained life as they could, a group of Europeans, looking for making room for settling camps and their pigs and cattle, they poisoned carcasses and left them out for the wolves and foxes from the region. The Abandoned women and their children were so hungry that they ate the carcasses 'of deer that the settlers left out for the wolves'; Loretta watched 'the desperate people of her tribe die' (p.38; 39), and became impregnated with the scent of bitter almonds. The smell derived from the cyanide used for poisoning, a smell that went with Loretta everywhere and became, to a certain extent, the ill omen of evil and death. After the death of her tribe, she suffered physical and psychological abuse by the male settlers and eventually 'became the one who hurt others,' until there was no 'love [...], no belief, [...] [no] conscience, [...] anything left in her' (p.39). The impact of seeing her tribe die and the abuses she endured turned Loretta into the survival of terrible violence whose effects would be inherited by her daughter, Hannah.

Hannah, the one who looked as if she had been 'born of the storm,' also carried the almond smell on her skin (Hogan, p.97). The exact causes of Hannah's appearance in Adam's Rib, alone and out of the water, and the quality of the relationship between herself and her mother are not clear in the novel, even if deductible. Through Bush, though, we learn that Hannah's 'skin was a garment of scars. There were burns and incisions. Like someone had written on her. The signatures of torturers [...]' (p.99). Hannah's body is the site and the living memory of trauma: the trauma of invasion, of abuse and violence, a violence inherited and learned on her own skin. Thus, Hannah cannot escape from the memory of trauma, just as Angel cannot escape her scars, for their bodies are living proofs of brutality. As a child, Hannah is not able to express her feelings properly neither is she able to feel any real attachment to any other living thing, deprived of love and respect as she is. Ultimately, Hannah repeats the behavior she learnt from her mother and her aggressors, the only behavior she has ever had as an example, being also victim and perpetrator of violence. Vernon offers an important observation on the matter:

Reflecting the various ways in which people handle trauma, Hogan offers a variety of responses through her characters. Some react by drinking, crying, and self-destructive behavior, while others turn to hope for a better life. While some characters work toward recovery, others begin to resemble the colonizer (Vernon, 2012, p.39).



Hannah's situation is a powerful example of someone suffering from PTSD symptoms: she has severe insomnia; when she sleeps, she has nightmares; she is delusional for she imagines a hand living inside her, that at night comes out to molest her; she sees burned children and fire (Hogan, p.98; 99; 100; 103). Her life is living pain, both psychologically and physically – the only behavior she is able to mimic is the one under which she was brought up.

People around Hannah fear her. Her mysterious past and glacial nature are enough for people to link Hannah to be the figure of the *windigo*, the evil cannibal spirit that possesses humans and turn their hearts into ice. The connection between Hannah and coldness is important to understanding her effects on others around her: uneasiness, a chill, an instinctive feeling that something is not right when she is near. Such characterization reinforces the idea of Hannah's incapability to love; by linking her with a mythical figure, the other characters attempt explaining and understanding the terrible things that were done to her, as her aggressors remain nameless and faceless. On the other hand, the appeal to the supernatural sets Hannah apart and beyond humanity, lost to salvation, untouchable. The unspeakable horror of Hannah's childhood assumes the form of an evil force inside her, the only plausible explanation that the community was able to accept, since around Hannah people 'felt the world that was ruined and would never be whole again' (Hogan, p. 101).

Angel's heritage, then, is all that Hannah had to offer: an inability to establish connections, which leaves her isolated from any human emotion. The metaphors comparing Hannah to snowstorms, iced water, and piercing wind are plentiful; they concede her a mysterious, dangerous aura that only adds to her dehumanization. It is only Bush and Agnes that try to 'save' her, that still believe that she can be brought back into the world of the living, that try to love and care for her, but all without success.

Angel's trauma – the loss of her origins, the violence endured, her fragmented identity – is not only her own. More than being only her family's traumatic history, I would like to suggest that Angel's traumatized lineage represents the trauma of a community that underwent the colonization and domination of white men. Such history might have started centuries ago among her ancestors, but it becomes more latent with Loretta, who witnessed the killing of her people by the white settlers. That sets the beginning of the devastation, not only the devastation of land, but of culture and the Indian identity. Hannah is the peak of the traumatic experience as she stands

as the epitome of the violence disseminated by men, of the abuse of force and power over nature and people. According to Laura Castor:

Hannah speaks to a history of conquest so deeply embedded in Native experience that any resistance, if it is to be succeeded in the long term, must begin with the full acceptance of loss. Part of this includes both the loss of the power of the *windigo* myth as a valid way of explaining the world and the loss of the savage Indian of the American West. As a place where the memory of genocide is made visible, Hannah's body is the place where memory can also be revised (2006, p.170).

If Hannah is the place of the memory of trauma, Angela is the fragmented self resulted from the historically traumatic events – as a member of that community, Angela must revisit the place of her origin (both Adam's Ribs and her mother) in order to reclaim the past, to own her identity and then begin the future. As Angela says, 'I wanted an unbroken line between me and the past. I wanted not to be fragments and pieces left behind by fur traders, soldiers, priests and schools' (Hogan, p. 77).

Bush offers Angel the link to her past as she tells her Hannah's story, and also the story of her own birth. 'According to Bush, I was born in a house of snow' (Hogan, p.108). Angela is born under a heavy winter storm that bulged the roofs of houses. The midwife feared leaving Angela alone with Hannah – she would not even sleep through those first days – to get more wood to the fire or more milk for the baby. '*Hannah's breasts were dry. Like her mind and her heat, her body had nothing to offer. It had already abandoned you,*' Bush says (p.110). While Hannah was asleep, the midwife went outside to clean the roof of so much snow, but when she tried to get back into the house, Hannah had locked the door. The midwife decides to walk through the snowstorm up to Bush's house to fetch her, the only hope to call Hannah to reason. Both women hurry back to the house and Bush knocks on the door, calling for Hannah. '*At once, the door opened, but there were no sounds of footsteps along the wooden, settled floor. Hannah was not the one who opened it, even though no others were there to be seen*' (p.111). When they enter the house, the women cannot find Angela anywhere. Hannah keeps saying that that was not her daughter. Bush goes outside and looks around the house.

*Maybe you were resigned to fate, to a birth delivered to ice. I found you tucked into the branches of a birch tree. You were still and blue and a thin layer of snow had fallen over your head and naked stomach, the kind Indians call*

*pollen snow because it meant more was coming. You were alert, alive, but silent and cold as ice. I put you beneath my shirt, next to the warmth of my body, and you searched for a breast. You searched out warmth. You wanted to live. You were tiny, you were cold, and you wanted to live* (Hogan, 1995, p. 112-3).

It is only later in the narrative that we learn how Angela was given her scars. By then, Bush and Angela are in the North, fighting the construction of dams, when Angela actually meet Hannah, who lives nearby. 'I didn't know what I'd expect to feel, seeing my mother for the first time, maybe happiness or anger,' Angela says. 'At best a kind of peace, something that might order my life and explain me to myself' (Hogan, p.230). The first meeting does not go well, and Hannah leaves in a hurry. Days later, Angela receives news that her mother is very sick and she decides to go see her. In fact, Hannah is about to die and when Angela decides to stay with her in this final moment, she discovers that Hannah has had a baby girl. While Angela takes care of her mother, she remembers the story of the cannibal *windigo*, the evil snow spirit. 'I sat thinking to what had happened to my face,' she says, 'what sharp teeth had done to my life' (Hogan, p.249). It becomes clear, then, that Hannah behaved just like the creature in the story to which people connected her, trying to eat human flesh, regardless of that flesh belonging to her daughter. After Hannah's death, Angela is filled with kindness:

Yes, she tried to kill me, swallow me, consume back into her own body, the way fire burns itself away, uses itself as fuel. But even if she hated me, there had been a moment of something akin to love, back at the creation. Her desperation and loneliness was my beginning. Hannah had been my poison, my life, my sweetness and pain, my beauty and homeliness. And when she died, I knew that I had survived in the best of ways for I was filled with grief and compassion (Hogan, 1995, p.251).

Hannah's death offers Angela an opportunity to grow and to understand her mother. The second moment of the narrative, that of the journey into the dream-like world of the waters, also will lead her into a new reality, a reality where the world as it was supposed to be, balanced and fair, is coming to an end: 'Our lives in that place were being taken from us, the people removed from the land, water, animals, trees, all violated, and no one lives with full humanity without these elements' (Hogan, p.324). Also part of Angela's heritage, the collapsing world run by white men who want to build dams in the Boundary Waters' region takes all the women from the family up North to

fight the constructions. It is also an opportunity for Angel to find her mother. It is throughout this journey that Angel will come to terms with her history and the history of her people from whom she was separated when she was a girl. It is, therefore, not only a journey into the land and landscape itself, but a journey into the self, a discovery of one's own life and mysteries, and the understanding that her very life is connected to all that is alive.

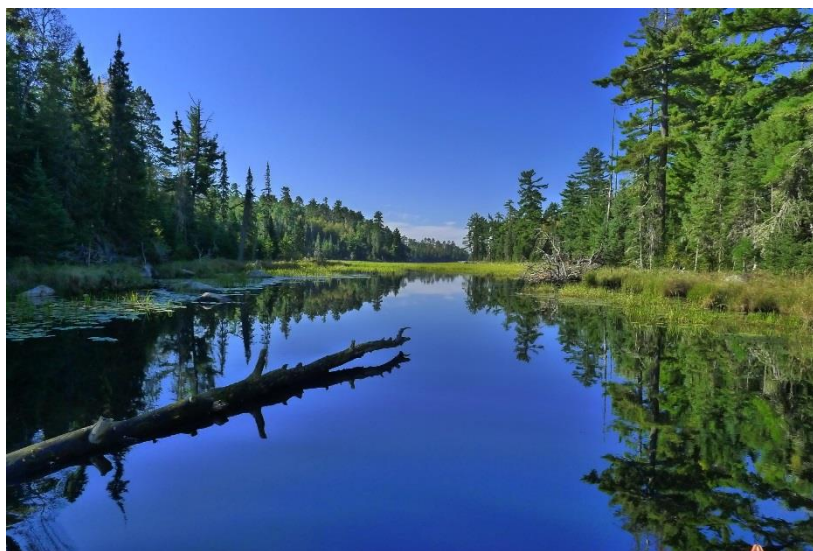


**Figure 5:** The Boundary Waters seen from above  
Source: [www.earthworksaction.org](http://www.earthworksaction.org)

Irene S. Vernon points out that ‘[...] Hogan presents a process of reconstruction, of self discovery, and cultural recovery to bring about individual and community healing, but she also presents a story of those who cannot heal’ (2012, p.42). It is healing that Angela looks for, healing for the scars she believed that would fade away if she knew her history, but above all, healing for the soul. The role of water is extremely important in this process, standing as a symbol of origin, (re)creation, life as well as wilderness, nature and transcendence.

Unlike Amabelle, Angela does not fear water, as it has never taken anything from her. On the contrary, water was giving her the life she always wanted. ‘But I was like Agnes had said: water going back to itself. I was water falling into a lake and these women were the lake [...]’ (Hogan, p.55). Surrounded by water, journeying into water, obtaining food from the water, Angela establishes a clear, easy, and fundamental relation with water, something that Amabelle will only attempt by the end of *The*

*farming of bones*. Both women's connection to water will, eventually, evidence water's healing powers, its offering of new beginnings and regeneration. Hannah, on the other hand, washed up on Adam's Rib's shore, does not establish a peaceful relation to water, for hers are stormy, dark waters and at other times frozen and merciless waters.



**Figure 6:** Travelling through the Boundary Waters

Source: [www.bwca.com](http://www.bwca.com)

Angela's growth and learning also changes the way she sees and perceives herself. When she is talking to a boy named Tommy, who is romantically interested in her, he asks her to tell him about the scars. 'I looked at him,' she tells, 'I thought how I'd asked Bush about my scars. I thought of the last time I'd seen myself in the little piece of mirror in my bedroom. I thought how scars were proof of healing. "What scars?" I said' (Hogan, p.125). It is interesting to perceive how Angela assumes, here, a very different position than that of Amabelle's regarding her body. Of course, their situations are extremely different and the circumstances of their injuries also differ greatly, but Angela's attitude of acceptance seem to allow her a certain kind of lightness of spirit. As Elizabeth Grosz (1994) points out, the 'psyche is the projection of the body's form' in the extent that mind and body form a 'lived relation' (p.27). Traumatized bodies function, then, as a locus where inside and outside, psyche and physicality converge and offer a possibility of understanding the new reality of the altered body. In Angela's case, this convergence works out a positive result, because she is able to project her acceptance into her behavior. However, I also want to suggest that in this case Angela found a family/community that accepts her the way she is, people to whom

her scars are sign of experience and survival. In Amabelle's case, the impairment of her body leads to her emotional impairment as well, in the sense that she is never able to leave the past and create a new beginning. As suggested before, maybe we can consider the ending of *The farming of bones* as a 'rebirth', a start over, but Amabelle's loneliness may have been a burden much heavier, as she remains surrounded by people, but alone.

I pointed out before the importance of storytelling to Native Americans and we can see here how, through the stories of her people, Angela was able to discover who she is, her origins, and what is expected of her towards the world. Piece by piece, the stories gave her a background and she was able to put these pieces together and form her own story. Angela claims an identity for herself, an identity connected to the Native culture and beliefs and is able to find a place to which belong in a community struggles for continuation, but that sees in the youth a chance for a new beginning.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

*The farming of bones* and *Solar storms* are centered on the impossibility of narrating trauma and the effects such incommunicability can cause on the textual surface. As I tried to demonstrate, the first person narratives allow textual experimentation with language and offer different manners of telling that portray the difficulties of verbalizing such stories. Both the novels' structures and the construction of characters are under the service of rendering tangible that which is impossible to tell.

Also at the center of the novels is the question of identity and belonging. Even if produced in diverse environments and dealing with different realities, both texts share the concern with national history. In Danticat's novel, this issue is related to the national borders and the 'invasion' of the country by foreigners, who are denied the right of belonging to that nation, socially and politically, and are thus placed at margins of the nation. In Hogan's text, the question is not precisely that of nationality, but of cultural margins inside a nation, where the distinction between 'them' and 'us' define disputes between majorities and minorities and the negotiation of difference. The novels that speak from the margins work as empowering tools for subjects who are not usually front and center in the representations inside mass media consumption, impacting the way in which members of these communities identify themselves.

In the specific case of traumatized communities, the representation of their histories offers a supplement<sup>9</sup> to the official History, not competing or demoralizing any of the points of view, but adding a different perspective to events that may go silenced. The literature produced under the influx of violence tries to denounce the effects of the violence suffered. In the case of Haiti, for instance, that lived under dictatorship, we can perceive how Danticat tries to dramatize the act of stressing of the national borders, which is one of the main effects of the dictatorial state. Hogan, on the other hand, tries to display how colonization emphasizes the illegitimacy of those who do not belong to the nation through exclusion and violence, as it is made clear in the episode of the poisoned carcasses.

---

<sup>9</sup> I use here the concept of 'supplement' derived from Derrida, in which an 'originary lack' allows the addition of a supplement. In this case, I consider the national canons not as whole and complete in themselves, but lacking of contrasting points of view; the literature from the margins, then, offering a different perspective on the representation of the national culture, ideologies, socio-political arrangements, and history, works as supplement to the said canons. (Derrida, 1976).

Both novels also present as a key element the need for narration, for telling the stories of trauma. Moreover, the stories of both protagonists can be reinterpreted as the stories of their respective communities. The novels, thus, contribute to the discussion concerning the problems of race and the institutionalization of violence, which can be perceived in the silence of the official records about the events, like the Massacre in Haiti.

As I said earlier, the hunger for narrating trauma is accompanied by the need of a listener. These novels can only fulfill their role as testimonies if and when they find readers, as they are performative texts. As performative acts, testimonies have the ability to address history and articulate social spaces in which the testimony does not simply report facts but confronts the reader with ‘strangeness’ (Felman and Laub, 1992). The strategies used by the novels in order to attract the reader vary, but are equally effective: while in *The farming of bones* Danticat employs a non-linear narration that defies the reader to unravel its timeline, in *Solar storms* Hogan is more objective, but offers different voices to help build a line of events that lead to the present.

The reader assumes a very important role in the reading of these stories. He/she has access to what other characters may not and is in charge of reconstructing the story. Also he/she becomes ethically engaged when listening/reading, for, besides being a matter of empathy and solidarity, it is a matter of allowing this narrative to exist in the world.

In both novels, it is also evident the problematization of the traumatized body – its effects can, too, be perceived in the texts as the characters understand and experience the world through their bodies. I tried to discuss how the characters’ bodies altered their perceptions of themselves, and therefore, their identities; now, I would like to suggest the reading of these traumatized bodies as a metaphor for the nation and for the territory upon which violent crimes are committed. The violence perpetrated against both women’s bodies in the novels mirror the atrocities committed against the Haitian nation and the Native American nations. The depredation of the body is also the depredation the land and its people, and the fact that both characters lack, in different levels, a present mother figure can also be understood as a metaphorical motherless nation.

In both novels, the female body is subjected to subjugation and, to a certain extent, to colonization – in *The farming of bones*, Amabelle and others live out of the exploitation of their bodies, of their strength, and working force; when in Dajabón,



Amabelle is subjugated by the mob and rendered defenseless, her body abused and discarded as if it had no value. In *Solar storms*, Loretta and Hannah are reduced to a body that is used for pleasure and disposed of when the abuser has had his share; they are victims of the same violence dispensed to the land, as it was clear with the case of the Abandoned women. Both Amabelle and Angela carry on their skins the scars of abuse, the same treatment given to their people and nations.

Their healing processes differ greatly, based not only on the extent of their psychological and physical injuries, but mainly on their surroundings: Angela finds in the community, in her own people, the power of acceptance and support to start anew. Amabelle, on the other hand, faces the loneliness and despair of the traumatic aftermath in the midst of silence and pain. The approaches to these traumatized bodies also differ: Angela is young, still a teenager, full of energy, and able to work; Amabelle, even if young, is impaired, and work represents a physical strain that sometimes overwhelm her.

However, it is by accepting their bodies and assuming their changes as part of who they now are, that the characters are able to move forward – Angela begins her new life as member of indigenous community, her motherland that welcomed her. Amabelle, on the other hand, tries to find a middle ground in the waters of the Dajabón River, the in-between space. Going on with the comparison between characters and nations, I could say that Amabelle is the scared Haiti, whose history of violence and mistreatment is almost too unbearable, so much so that Amabelle still reminisce about a glorious past that shines brighter than the future. Angela is a different story: she made her piece with the past and is concerned now with moving on, with sharing with the world the ways of her people and the ways of her land.

Working through traumatic plotlines, Hogan and Danticat are able to render problematic questions of belonging, identity, and body consciousness exploring textual devices and poetic language, building a transnational connection by exposing similar traits of their histories, with convergent and juxtaposed features. The representation of trauma depends on the ability of literature to exceed the boundaries of imagination and its capacity of providing a medium for stories that must be told. The stories of violence against minorities have been claiming to be heard and the testimonies offer them chance to be removed from the shadows and given a voice. The narratives originated at the margins of the nation can offer very much to our understanding of the world, of ethics, and of our responsibility toward each other. The narratives of trauma

are uniquely able to unbury the ghosts of the official history and give the silenced ones a chance to be heard.

## REFERENCES

ALCOFF, Linda. **Visible identities**. Oxford University Press: New York, 2006.

ALEXANDER, Jeffrey C. **Cultural trauma and collective identity**. University of California Press: Berkley, 2004.

ANDERSON, Benedict (1986) **Imagined communities**. Verso Books: London, 2006.

BARTHES, Roland [1973] **S/Z**. translated by Rihcard Miller. Blackwell: New York, 1974.

BHABHA, Homi. *The location of culture*. Routledge: New York, 1994.

BRICKHOUSE, Anna. 'The Writing of Haiti: Pierre Faubert, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and beyond'. **American Literary History**, vol. 13, no. 3 (Autumn, 2001), pp. 407-444

BOSTICK, Herman F. 'Toward Literary Freedom: A Study of Contemporary Haitian Literature'. **Phylon** (1940-1956), Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 250-256.

CAMINERO-SANTANGELO, Marta. "At the Intersection of Trauma and Testimonio: Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*." **Antípodas: Journal of Hispanic and Galician Studies**, 20 (October 2009), pp. 5-26.

CARUTH, Cathy (Ed.). **Trauma: Explorations in Memory**. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

CARUTH, Cathy. **Unclaimed experience – Trauma, Narrative and History**. Johns Hopkins University Press: Maryland, 1996.

CASTOR, Laura Virginia. "Claiming Place in Wor(l)ds: Linda Hogan Solar Storms." In: **MELUS** 31.2 Summer 2006. pp. 157-180.

COOK, Mercer. Trends in Recent Haitian Literature'. **The Journal of Negro History**, vol. 32, no. 2 (Apr., 2004), pp. 220-231.

DANTICAT, Edwidge. **The farming of bones**. Penguin Books: New York, 1998.

DERRIDA, Jacques. **Of Grammatology**. Translated by Gayatri Spivak. John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1976.

EYERMAN, Ron. **Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity**. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003.

FELMAN, Shoshana; LAUB, Dori. **Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History**. Routledge: New York, 1992.

FISCHER, Sibylle. **Modernity disavowed: Haiti and the cultures of slavery in the age of revolution**. Duke University Press: United States, 2004.

FREUD, Sigmund (1920). **Beyond the pleasure principle**. Translated by C. J. M. Hubback. New York: Bartleby.com, 2010. Available at: <http://www.bartleby.com/276/>  
Accessed on January 7, 2014.

GROSZ, Elizabeth A. **Volatile bodies: toward a corporeal feminism**. Indiana University Press: Indiana, 1994.

HALL, Stuart. **A identidade cultural na pós-modernidade**. DP&A: Rio de Janeiro, 2006.

HEWETT, Heather. 'At the Crossroads: Disability and Trauma in *The Farming of Bones*'. **MELUS**, vol. 31, no. 3, Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Literature (Fall, 2006), pp. 123-145

HOGAN, Linda. **Solar storms**. Simon and Schuster: New York, 1995.

KRUPAT, Arnold. 'Native American Literature and the Canon'. **Critical Inquiry**, vol. 10, no. 1, Canons (Sep., 1983), pp. 145-171

LUCAS, Rafael. 'The aesthetics of degradation in Haitian literature'. *Research in African Literatures*, vol.35, n.2, 2004, pp.54-74.

MARDER, Elissa. 'Trauma and Literary Studies: Some Enabling Questions.' In: *Reading On: Trauma, Memory, and Testimony*. Vol. I, Issue I, Fall 2006.

NICKEL, Vivian. **Trauma, memória e história em A Mercy, de Tony Morrison** [thesis]. Porto Alegre, 2012. 107 p.

NOVAK, Amy. "A Marred Testament": Cultural Trauma and Narrative in Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* In: **Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory**, vol. 62, n. 4, Winter 2006, pp. 93-120

RICOEUR, Paul. **Tempo e Narrativa 3: o tempo narrado**. Martins Fontes: São Paulo, 2010.

SAID, Edward (1993) **Culture and imperialism**. Vintage Books: New York, 1994.

SCHMIDT, Rita Terezinha. *Contexto Latino-Americanos: a violência da e na literatura do século XIX*. [manuscrito] Porto Alegre, 2013.

SMITH, Sidonie; SCHAFFER, Kay. **Human Rights and Narrated Lives – The Ethics of Recognition**. Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2004.

SCHNEIDER, Liane. **Escritoras indígenas e a literatura contemporânea dos EUA**. Ideia: João Pessoa, 2008.

VERNON, Irene s. "We Were Those Who Walked out of Bullets and Hunger": Representation of Trauma and Healing in "Solar Storms". In: **American Indian Quarterly**, vol. 36, n. 1, Winter 2012, p.34-49.

WUCKER, Michele. **Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola.** Hill and Wang, New York: 1999.