

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY IN THE TRANSNATIONAL IMAGINARY OF JULIA ALVAREZ
AND EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S LITERATURE

by

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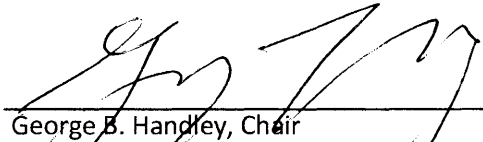
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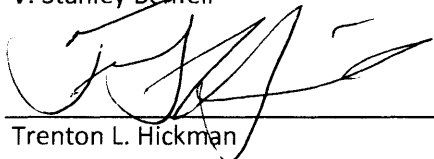
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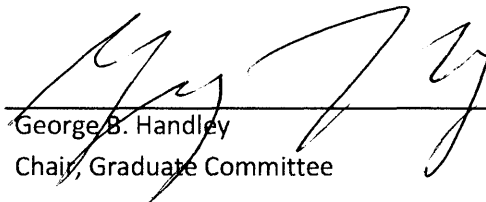

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ABSTRACT

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY IN THE TRANSNATIONAL IMAGINARY OF JULIA ALVAREZ AND EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S LITERATURE

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The increased contact between nations and cultures in the globalization of the twenty-first century requires an increased accountability for the ways in which individuals and countries negotiate these points of contact. New World and Caribbean Studies envision the cross-cultural and transnational encounters between indigenous, European, and African peoples as important contributors to a paradigm within which identity in relation offers an alternative to identities rooted in national and filial frameworks. Such frameworks limit the ability to construct identity without relying upon static representations of history, culture, and ethnicity that tend to privilege one group over another. In the literature of Edwidge Danticat and Julia Alvarez, however, a fictional space is created that rewrites national histories and problematizes rooted identities through their novels' characterization. This fictional space is a transnational paradigm

that—in the vocabulary of the critical theories of Édouard Glissant, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, and David A. Hollinger—explores the effects of cultures founded on ideas of relation and affiliation rather than on rooted socio-cultural legitimacy and ethno-political authority. Danticat and Alvarez's characters engage in a process of present living that allows them to negotiate their experience of diaspora and maintain a stable construction of identity in relation.

Introduction

A Transnational Imaginary

With the increased contact between nations and cultures in the globalization of the twenty-first century, there is need for an increased accountability for the ways in which individuals and countries negotiate these points of contact. Without this increased socio-political accountability and cultural awareness, international relations may unconsciously replicate the prejudices of the past that permitted slavery, segregation, and ethno-racial intolerance. Many multiculturalists of the twentieth century might argue that important advances have been made in the recognition and removal of these prejudiced practices, at least in the United States and Europe. But, according to David Hollinger, while multiculturalism has helped “recognize and appreciate cultural diversity,” it “has too often left the impression that culture follows the lines of shape and color” (x). His book, *Postethnic America*, posits that this impression is the result of ethnic groups identifying themselves with a particular bloc of a politically instituted ethno-racial pentagon. This ethno-racial pentagon divides the American population into blocs of African, Asian, European, Indigenous, and Latino association. The problem with using such an arrangement to claim identity, as Hollinger argues, is that it precludes the appreciation of difference within those categories and defines culture in terms derived “from a history of political and economic victimization based on bad biology” (8). The unfortunate result:

Fewer and fewer Americans believe in the biological reality of races, but they are remarkably willing to live with an officially sanctioned system of

demographic classification that replicates precisely the crude, colloquial categories, black, yellow, white, red, and brown. (8)

Hollinger's fear in *Postethnic America* is not so much that such a classification fails to provide a political system within which to recognize and prevent racial discrimination. But, because multiculturalism identifies with this 'system of demographic classification' it perpetuates the suppression of ethnic and cultural difference.¹ This is detrimental because identity is based so much upon the articulation of individual difference in relation to one's ethnic and cultural heritage. In his postscript to the tenth anniversary edition, Hollinger outlines a political reform that could provide the necessary protection from racial prejudice without interfering in the process of ethno-cultural identity (241).

For similar reasons and fears, this thesis proposes a reform in the process of identity formation. It focuses on the aspect of cultural identity with the acknowledgment that in the novels of Edwidge Danticat and Julia Alvarez much has already been done to divorce identity from such categorizing, political elements as Hollinger's ethno-racial pentagon. Rather than a political call for change, however, Danticat and Alvarez's literature demonstrate an already existing reform in the process by which identity is constructed through ethno-cultural and socio-political affiliation. In their storytelling, Alvarez and Danticat interweave fiction and history in the creation of an imaginary space that promotes fluidity in the process of identity and in our representations of the past and future. This fluidity recognizes the limitations of creating identity founded on national and historical bases and moves beyond them. The imaginary space created by these

¹ Hollinger refers to the racial pentagon as an ethno-racial pentagon, not because it was put in place to define ethnicity, but because ethnic groups sacrificed important cultural differences for political solidarity by identifying with it.

authors is different than the imaginary created in other fictional paradigms because it is invested in a process of identity that recognizes its own constructedness, works against the rigidity of national frameworks, and fosters a fluid relation with history in the present. It is a transnational imaginary that is informed by connections to multiple national, cultural, and historical paradigms. But instead of allowing characters to easily find their identity within one of these paradigms, Alvarez and Danticat's characterizations disrupt the stability of such identities in order to highlight a process of identity in relation within them all.

Root Identity and Identity in Relation

This identity in relation has roots in Édouard Glissant's discourse on the Caribbean experience, *Poetics of Relation*. Of particular importance to this discussion of identity in relation is the image of the literal, earth-penetrating root that Glissant borrows from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (8). In Glissant's allegorical explanation, the root signifies the process by which identity is formed while the earth becomes the figurative repository for the memories, frameworks, histories, and cultural traditions that ground identity. For his discussion of the difference between processes of identity, Glissant relies on a further distinction between a taproot and a rhizome. While both serve as root systems that nourish plants, and by figurative extension identity, the taproot extends deep and downward while the rhizome, "an enmeshed root system, [is] a network spreading either in the ground or in the air" (11). Connecting this concept with identity, Glissant observes:

The notion of the rhizome maintains, therefore, the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle

behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relation with the Other. (11)

When identity is rooted similar to the taproot it reaches back towards an origin by which it secures legitimacy. Glissant later refers to this particular process of identity as “Root identity” (*Poetics* 143). An identity that is rooted in, for example, a personal genealogy traces its origins through a particular branch that is either patriarchal or matriarchal. However, in its efforts to reach back as far as possible to one individual or another, a rooted identity neglects to appreciate the vast number of interfamilial ties that branch out from the main patriarchal or matriarchal line. The process of identity that does recognize these familial ties to in-laws, cousins, and ‘illegitimate’ offspring is that of “Relation identity,” or identity in relation as I will refer to it, which although rooted in the past is not exclusive in its relation to the past (144). Rather than ignore the contributions of non-immediate family members, an identity in relation seizes the opportunity to extend itself, to incorporate and appreciate, the contributions of others to the distinctiveness of the family. Of course, identity is rooted in more frameworks than genealogy and it is also possible to discuss the implications of identities rooted in other cultural, geographical, and socio-political paradigms. But since genealogy is already thought of in biological terms and the third chapter of this thesis will treat extensively the relationship of a mother and daughter, it serves as a pertinent example.

Although not derived specifically from Glissant’s observations of Caribbean modes of relation and identity, the transnational imaginary space of Alvarez and Danticat is based on the same experience of creolization that informs Glissant’s poetics. The process of creolization references the pidgins of African, Dutch, English, French,

Indigenous, and Spanish influence that resulted in common, Creole languages. But the notion of creolization has extended into the description of the non-lingual, cross-cultural relations in the Caribbean, especially during the period of colonization and the plantation system. Creolization is seen as a unique process of the Caribbean because its incorporation of various linguistic and cultural elements was more than the adoption of foreign elements into a distinct culture; for example, the way non-Catholics in the U.S. celebrate St. Patrick's Day or the preservation of French terminology without translation into Broadway ballet. Instead, creolization made of the Caribbean a space where cultural and socio-political elements were melded into a new, rich cultural experience that affected all aspects of society. From Cajun cooking to the Calypso, Jazz to Santeria, creolization fused different cultures together without the hegemonic repression of African and Creole cultures that occurred in the U.S. South. Creolization was facilitated by the highly visible interdependence of master and slave in the Caribbean. Because of the dramatic importation of slaves and the rezoning of arable land for the production of export crops, the Caribbean islands were unable to sustain themselves without imports from Europe. On one hand, the result was an understanding that masters needed their slaves productive and alive, especially after the slave trade was banned, in order to obtain enough money to provide for himself, his family, and his plantation. On the other hand, slaves understood that without the food and shelter provided by their masters they would have even more difficulty surviving in the foreign environment. The socio-economic forces that thus brought master and slave into such a state of codependency also increased the closeness of cross-cultural encounters between European and African cultures.

For Alvarez and Danticat's transnational imaginary and Glissant's poetics of relation it is principally the intimacy and frequency of these cross-cultural encounters, as well as the violence of Caribbean history that ruptured the continuity of cultural memory for many Caribbean peoples, that made an identity of relation not only possible but necessary. Exploration, colonization, evangelism, Atlantic trade, local commerce, slavery and miscegenation all provided numerous encounters between cultures. The plantation system put Europeans, Africans, and what was left of indigenous peoples in even more intimate, daily contact. The distance from European cultural centers and the transgressive nature of early buccaneers who ventured into the Caribbean also contributed to a loosening of cultural boundaries that ultimately influenced rooted identities. When identity is rooted in fluid, creolized cultures, it too adapts towards an identity in relation. To make the term a little more explicit, it may be useful to return briefly to Hollinger's discussion of identity and affiliation. Although his terminology differs, Hollinger asserts that the term 'identity' as used in common discourse is a psychological concept that "can hide to the extent to which the achievement of identity is social process" (6). Like our use of the term 'rooted identity,' Hollinger's concept "implies fixity and givenness" (7). In the concept of affiliation, Hollinger suggests greater flexibility and the idea that "[affiliation] is more performative, while identity suggests something that simply is" (7). Glissant's identity in relation thus finds a correlative in Hollinger's affiliation.

Readership

What must be recognized then is not only are Hollinger's concepts of identity helpful in articulating Glissant's ideas of relation, but they also mark an important intersection of cultural discourse. Both recognize the same cultural processes at work, for

Glissant in the Caribbean and for Hollinger in the United States. But whereas Glissant develops his idea of identity in relation as a reality of both past and lived experience in the Caribbean, Hollinger's project argues for an increased recognition of the process of affiliation in U.S. cultural affirmations. While globalization has increased the frequency and intimacy of cross-cultural encounters in the United States—through industrial outsourcing, the media, and the internet—U.S. culture has not yet understood nor made use of the implications of such encounters as discussed above. It has remained rooted to singular historical representations and a strong national identity. It incorporates rather than assimilates multicultural elements made palpable for American tastes.

In an interview conducted by Renée Shea, Edwidge Danticat shares that “many young Haitian-Americans who have read [*The Butterfly's Way*] have written to me or have told me that there is so much in there that they identify with. *The Butterfly's Way* is also a symbol of our togetherness as well as our diversity” (7). Her readers respond this way because, for them, U.S. culture does not give them the freedom they need to identify within it because mainstream U.S. culture relies on a historically and culturally selective representation of its identity. Danticat asserts, “Haitian-Americans have a lot on their chests and we need as many voices as possible to tell those stories” (Shea 8). Julia Alvarez begins her novel, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, with an apology for the fact that in the United States the Mirabal sisters are “forgotten, these unsung heroines of the underground” (3). Then, in her postscript she writes, “To Dominicans separated by language from the world I have created, I hope this book deepens North Americans’ understanding of the nightmare you endured and the heavy losses you suffered—of which this story tells only a few” (324). Both authors recognize a loss sustained in the United

States because of its resistance to relation and persistence in an identity rooted in nation and history. Both authors recognize in their literary works an attempt to educate, inform, and inspire their readers who live in the United States without a broad enough cultural knowledge to be able to negotiate their individual identities.

For this reason the imaginary space created by Alvarez and Danticat's fiction is structured by the transnational experience of diaspora is stimulated by an exploration of identity in relation. The characters in their texts struggle with identities rooted in nation and history, but find stability in learning how to relate cross-culturally to the experience of other Haitians and Dominicans. The second and third chapters of this thesis will undertake close readings of *The Dew Breaker* and *In the Name of Salomé* to demonstrate this experience of coming to an identity in relation. At the same time, Alvarez and Danticat's methods of narration engage their readers in relation in order to follow the plot and understand the characters. For example, *In the Time of the Butterflies* has four narrators, each of the Mirabal sisters who relate particular moments of their family history from their individual perspectives. Ostensibly,² each character's narration receives equal attention and is recognized as having equal authenticity. This allows the narrative to remain whole at the same time that it makes visible to the reader its constructedness, demonstrating the cohesion and stability possible in relation. Danticat often uses a narrative structure of interconnected stories. These stories are not usually connected by readily apparent chronologies or even the continuity of narrative voices.

² Some of Alvarez's characterizations are more conducive to her overall project than others. Particularly, Alvarez's construction of Mate's character remains childlike and naïve throughout the novel in a way that lessens her role as revolutionary leader. Even though Maté is the sister presented as being the first and most steadfast to follow Minerva's example, the strength of her character is undermined by a persistence in the narrative to depict Maté as an idolizing younger sister simply trying to be like her older sibling Minerva. These aspects of her character weaken the authority of Maté's narrative as they infantilize her and defer her motivations and actions to Minerva.

Instead they encourage and even require readers to create a lot of the narrative on their own from the fragments provided by the short stories.

Moments in Relation

I argue that in this way, Alvarez and Danticat's transnational imaginaries create moments of relation for both the characters in their novels through characterization and plot and the readers of their novels through the narrative structure. These moments of relation are similar to the cross-cultural encounters of the plantation system in the Caribbean. Whereas these encounters led to cultural creolization, the moments of relation in Alvarez and Danticat's novels lead towards a process of identity in relation. Both historical creolization and literary moments of relation depend on events that momentarily disrupt the process by which individuals identify in the world. These moments permit an individual or character to see him/herself in relation to their socio-cultural environment rather than rooted in it. That is to say, the individual is temporarily removed from a fixed position within a context of family, community, or nation. As mentioned above, this occurred historically when white fathers disowned or sold their black offspring and these children were forced, at least socially and culturally, to restructure an identity that could not trace legitimate genealogical origins. In Alvarez and Danticat's novels these moments in relation occur as characters find themselves no longer able to negotiate their identities within the national and historical frameworks their identities are rooted in while living in the present.

The difficulties of living with a rooted identity are made visible in these novels as characters oppose national rhetoric and claims to solidarity with the result of having to redefine their identity in relation to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Characters must

face their fragmented and lost histories that challenge the reconstructions of the past in which these characters have rooted their identity. In order to arrive at this redefinition of identity, characters tap into the same transnational imaginary that stimulates Alvarez and Danticat's novels. In fact, many of the characters discussed below negotiate this transition through a similar process of creativity whether in the formation of a narrative; the writing of a journal, memoir, or article; or even the production of a sculpture. The importance of the imagination in this process of redefining identity is due to the pervasiveness of national identities that appropriate history and rely upon a hegemonic, rooted identity. All of Alvarez and Danticat's readership and the majority of their characters have grown up in nation states that impose national identities on their citizens through education and other socio-political institutions. Thus it requires an exertion of the imagination in order to perceive the possibility of alternate modes of identity and relation.

Nation, History, and Present Living

In his article, "National Narratives, Postnational Narration," Donald Pease describes the process by which a nation imposes identity as national narratives that "recast the reason of state as a teleology (a horizon of narrative expectations emanating from a national origin and organized by a national purpose) and thereby [induce] the state's subjects to collude in their own subjection" (4). In the terms of this discussion, Pease's description reveals that the national frameworks (nation) operative in most contemporary states function similarly to Glissant's taproot. The nation grounds itself in particular histories and ideologies that provide legitimacy to the nation's sovereignty. In the case of the United States, this process involves tracing its origins beyond England to the democratic processes of classical Athens and the Biblical presaging of Zion. It

requires a disassociation from English socio-political and cultural practices in the assertion of the distinctiveness of the United States and the exceptionality of its cultural, socio-political institutions. From this process of national framing, a national identity is developed through the sustained, rhetorical representation of these claims to legitimacy and distinctiveness. The state's subjects, those living under the influence of its national frameworks and not just its legitimate citizens, also root their identities in these national narratives. Unfortunately, the price for a rooted, national identity is the same as the organization of multiethnic identities within the frame of Hollinger's ethno-racial pentagon—unity at the cost of ethno-cultural difference. More detrimentally, this national unity is violently sustained by the repression and rejection of voices within the national community that do not adequately assimilate into the national identity.

In the twentieth century United States, non-European immigrants most often fall into this category of marginalization because they are unable to tap into the rooted, national identity that privileges Euro-Christian origins. The experience of immigrants from Haiti and the Dominican Republic, however, is complicated by the fact that cultural and socio-political practices of these republics have been in relation with the practices of Europe and the United States for nearly half a millennium. For this reason, when Alvarez and Danticat write about the experience of Haitian and Dominican diaspora they must take into account the U.S. national identity that rejects immigrants at the same time as Haitian and Dominican identities in relation to the U.S. facilitate socio-political assimilation. Because of the exclusionary nature of rooted identity, the rejection of Haitianness and Dominicanness takes on the forms of social exclusion, political discrimination, and cultural repression faced by their characters in exile.

Unfortunately, many Haitians and Dominicans have also felt the repercussions of national identity at home on the island of Hispaniola. For reasons more closely discussed in the first chapter, the presence of U.S. marines and U.S. policy in the Caribbean during the beginning of the twentieth century resulted in an increased influence of U.S. nationalism on the identities of Haitians and Dominicans. Not that there was a direct corollary between the two, but in the regimes of two nation defining dictators U.S. national ideologies and policies were exploited and mirrored in Haitian and Dominican nationalism. Both the Dominican dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, and the Haitian dictator, François Duvalier, promoted public images that were a conflation of U.S. cultural archetypes and nationalizing identity strategies. The first novels of both Alvarez and Danticat necessarily focus on the national identities and institutions of these regimes in order to recognize the detrimental effects, like those described above, that Haitians and Dominicans have experienced in their own countries. Discrimination, oppression, and despotism describe the experience of nation that Alvarez and Danticat rewrite in their novels, *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *Krik? Krak!* Their attack on the supposed solidarity of national unity reveals its internal duplicity and biased construction of rooted identity.

At the same time, the degree to which Duvalier and Trujillo's constructions of nation inform the process of identity is such that even those who are rejected by the nation and forced into exile from their homeland, still identify with it. The result is a transnational experience for Alvarez and Danticat's characters in relation to the United States and the nations of Hispaniola. In their introduction to *Transatlantic Literary Studies*, Susan Manning and Andrew Taylor describe the transnational as a "borderless

world” where “homogeneity and singularity increasingly give way to [. . .] spaces of relation and hybridity” (3). But their description gives a sense of the transnational experience that is too amorphous to account for the dual experience of U.S. and Haitian or Dominican national identity in Alvarez and Danticat’s novels. While it is important to recognize the ability for problematizing the rootedness and hegemony of national identity within a transnational paradigm, the transnational imaginary of Alvarez and Danticat is also aware of the persistence of nation within their characters’ negotiations of identity in relation. This awareness relies on an understanding of the transnational experience more akin to Paul Giles’ observation: “at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the national and the transnational can be seen as uncomfortably interwoven” (64). Alvarez and Danticat’s interweaving of the transnational and national in their novels results in a transplanted identity in relation. The transplanted identity is that which informs affiliations with Haiti and the Dominican Republic by immigrants in diaspora. It retains a strong influence from Haitian or Dominican national identity and resists complete assimilation with a U.S. national identity. But it is also an identity in relation, not rooted in either U.S. or Haitian/Dominican identities. Instead, Alvarez and Danticat’s characters identify with both national identities simultaneously, in relation.

The second chapter treats this negotiation of identity in relation by exploring how the characters in Danticat’s *Krik? Krak!* and *The Dew Breaker* engage in the process of present living as a practical function of their transplanted identity in relation. The process of present living hinges on three practical observations made of Alvarez and Danticat’s characters and three levels of meaning of the term ‘present living.’ First, in order to feasibly negotiate their identity in their experience of diaspora, the characters with the

most stable identities simply live in the present. They recognize the events of the past that have made their present situation such as it is, but continue to live their daily lives without constant reference to the past and with only tentative expectations for the future. These characters find stability by forming their identities in relation to the work, human associations, and activities of the quotidian. They relate to the past through stories and memories they constantly bring into the present and share with friends and family. In this way, the past does not remain fixed in its historicity because it is constantly brought into relation with the present, changing with time and each new allegorical retelling.

Second, as a way of realistically living with an identity simultaneously in relation to distinct national paradigms, Alvarez and Danticat's characters appreciate identity as something they present by living, working, acting, and perceiving through one paradigm or another. In *Krik? Krak!* various characters present themselves as Haitian by their cultural affiliations, culinary tastes, and socio-political anxieties while at home among other Haitians. But when out on the streets of New York they are able to present a U.S. identity by eating hot dogs and walking around with the confidence of belonging. The ability to thus present identity allows characters the freedom of affiliation and the sustainability of identity. They take advantage of the degree to which identity is a social process made more flexible in relation and yet enjoy the sustainability derived from the presentation of two national identities rooted in geo-political association. Other characters demonstrate not only the possibility of presenting a certain identity, but also of mis-presenting it.³ The main father character in *The Dew Breaker* chooses not to

³ The avoidance of the terms 'representation' or 'misrepresentation' has greater significance than maintaining a direct correlation with the idea of 'present living.' It is hoped that a conscious orthographic choice on my part will help demonstrate the deliberateness of choice involved in the presentation of identity

communicate his history to his daughter because it would mean admitting his participation in the depravities of the Duvalier regime. He presents himself as a typical, Haitian barber exiled in the United States. He is patient, loving and kind. His daughter, who feels the only way to get to know her parents is to get to know Haiti, looks to friends and media for information since her parents refuse to talk about their past. The result is the daughter reads her father's presentation of identity in association with the stories of suffering she has heard about Duvalier's secret police, the Tontons Macoutes, and the cruelty of his military interrogators. When the truth is revealed, the daughter's own identity—rooted as it was in her father's silence and her representation of his past—is destabilized by the necessity of having to relate to the conflicting histories and negotiate their contrary implications. The immediate result of this revelation is a family broken, full of regret and distrust. Because the father mis-presented himself to his daughter by ignoring significant elements of his past, his daughter misrepresented both her father and her connection to Haiti's past. Chapter two explores the implications and results of this process of present living with greater detail than can be done here. But in order to overcome the effects of mis-presentation and misrepresentation, the third application of the process of present living is essential.

This third application of present living in Alvarez and Danticat's transnational imaginary is a more assertive process of viewing identity and history in relation. It

and the acknowledgement of its subjective construction on the part of Alvarez and Danticat's characters. A re-presentation suggests an iteration of an already established identity, perhaps variable but twice removed from the actual production or initial performance. While individuals may assert this subjective right to primacy, it is a right based on the fact that the individual is the first to experience identity, life, and the world in his/her subjectivity. However, communities, nations, and history are not able to claim such a right as they cannot legitimately claim propriety over a single, objective experience of life events. Thus the distinction will be maintained in this thesis by allowing only individuals the ability to present identity; while community, nation, and history defer to the process of representation.

recognizes that rooted identities and “[n]ational narratives were structured in the [desire] to recover a lost national origin whose projection onto a national future organized an individual quest in the form of a sequences of purposive events” (Pease 4). This means that nation and identity rooted in history represent past events with the intent of demonstrating through an objective chronology the origins and events that legitimize and culminate in the nation or individual thus represented. This representation of history is patently predisposed to project nation and identity in the best possible light even at the expense of other histories that could complicate claims to legitimacy. In order to maintain these projections, nation and rooted identity also envision particular connections with the future. This is necessary in order to keep the present moving in a direction that will allow the future to maintain its claim to the past. Turning to the U.S. for an example, one claim the nation has laid hold to is the idea of U.S. exceptionalism as based on Puritan, Zionist ideals. As a land of freedom and justice, the U.S. has long represented its history as a supernally appointed progress towards a utopian society. When the cruel inhumanity of slavery began to taint this beatific vision, the society turned to an interpretation of the Bible and an investment in 18th century science that inscribed the treatment of Africans in terms that attempted to justify violence within a larger vision of the nation.

What present history shows, however, is that as the religious conglomerate diversified and Christian fervor declined in the United States the validity of Biblical interpretations in the nation was diminished. As scientific discovery continued, immigration of non-Europeans increased, and secular values and morals gained greater acceptance; the national vision also changed. With this altered vision, the nation rewrote its history by placing more emphasis on its multiculturalism and defense of inalienable

human rights. The third process of present living requires an appreciation of the present's ability to alter preconceived visions of the future and to reimagine histories of the past. Because the present is the moment in which relation, adaptation, and change occur most naturally it is privileged by both national histories as in the example above and in Alvarez and Danticat's transnational imaginary. However, in the transnational imaginary this privilege is extended to the past and future in order to recognize that at one time each was or will be 'present' and thus subject to the same relation experienced while living the present. The easiest way to demonstrate this concept is to consider the numerous perspectives, interpretations, and reactions to terrorism in the United States. While there are those that side with the nation's fear and confusion as to why the U.S. might be the target of terrorism, there are very likely many who have strong opinions with which to answer such a question.⁴ Again, imagining that there are many different answers based on various lines of reasoning and intuition, it is easy to envision the diversity of a general discourse on terrorism in the United States.

Can such a representation of the past or future be made as easily? Not when the representation is made within a national frame or in the process of root identity. Just as difficult as it might be for a twenty-first century American to imagine a justifiable, even desirable motivation for the entrance of the U.S. in the Vietnam War or the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, so too is it a very complicated task to imagine a justification for the Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic or the mass killing of Haitians along the Massacre River. But when one considers the fact that the past was once present, that a similar diversity of opinion and ideology existed in the past as exists now, it is possible to

⁴ If a little imaginative help might be useful, please refer to the introduction of *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture*. Ed. Christopher Bigsby. New York: Cambridge UP, 2006. 1-32.

consider alternative interpretations of historical events. This chronological fluidity is essential to Alvarez and Danticat's transnational imaginary because within it their characters relate with past, present, and future in a way that they could not if history remained fixed. There would be no way for the daughter of *The Dew Breaker* to compromise her father's past with her parent's marriage or her relationship to them. While history remains fixed and identity rooted in a single representation of the past for the daughter in *In the Name of Salomé*, there is no way that she can negotiate a stable identity. But as both daughters begin to accept the possibility of relation as it existed in the past and in their affiliation with history, they begin to realize a more stable, compassionate, and open identity in relation.

The problem run into with histories that allow a nation like the U.S. to revision its future, rewrite its past, and yet retain its national hegemony, rests in the experience of nostalgia and the projection of vision. In Alvarez and Danticat's novels, both chronological representations affect the stability of their characters' identities. While nostalgia can be understood as a commemorative appreciation of the past and vision as a unifying amelioration for the future, both disrupt the process of identity and present living in relation. For example, one of Danticat's characters in *The Dew Breaker*, Dany, believes that he has come across his parents' murderer. As soon as this occurs, the character begins to feel obligated to exact revenge for his parents' death and imagines the murderer's reaction upon recognizing Dany. This feeling and imagining persist for a few months as Dany returns to the barbershop that his parents' murderer owns. Dany's vision of the future, that he has dreamed about all his life, to stand up to the man and avenge his parents takes control of his actions in the present. This vision keeps Dany from the

advantage of present living; he cannot go about his daily duties nor find another way of presenting himself or his parents' murderer, and so roots his identity in the accomplishment of his vision of the future. In Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé*, a daughter, Camila, longs so much for her deceased mother that she, like Dany, becomes so absorbed in a single, emotional interpretation of the past—where her mother is lost and unattainable—that she cannot sustain a stable relation to her in the present.

This disconnect is not the result of a refusal to negotiate an identity in relation or to engage the process of present living, but the consequence of having chosen static representations within which to negotiate their identity. For Dany, the only hope he can envision for the future is rooted in securing revenge. For Camila, the only solace she hopes to find in her present is rooted in becoming her mother. It isn't until Dany returns to Haiti to visit his aunt and Camila learns to live with her absent mother that these characters begin the process of present living and develop an identity in relation.

Although the particularities of this transition are further developed in the second and third chapter, here it is important to note that the main impetus for these changes relies on a reintroduction of relation into the past and future, a dynamism in their representations of chronology that allows them to relate with the possibility of alternate visions and reconstructions of history.

Rewriting Nation

Nation and the Caribbean

In his article, “Social Theory and Globalization: The Rise of a Transnational State,” William Robinson attempts to develop a paradigm beyond the nation-state centrism that frames the Western conception of social organization by distinguishing between “*international* and *transnational*”; stating that the “former is a conception of world dynamics founded on an existing system of nation-states, while the latter identifies processes and social relations that transcend that system” (161). Within an international framework, a hierarchy is maintained by virtue of socio-economic binaries that conceal the origins that not only define the relationship between one nation and another, but also make it impossible for the other nation to assert itself outside of the defining nation’s hegemony. However, a transnational framework looks at the interconnectedness of nations outside of such problematic binaries that define the other (Caribbean, Haiti, slave, etc.) in terms of the needs, values, and interpretations of the self (Europe, U.S., master, etc.). Such an approach tends to lessen the effects of privileged, authoritative readings of cultural evolution in the Caribbean. It reasserts the value and importance of marginalized experiences within national histories and recognizes the reciprocity of transference in cross-cultural encounters.

The island of Hispaniola, like other islands of the Caribbean, is a particularly evocative location in which to trace the extent to which transnational frameworks can resituate historical readings because of its regionalism and hybridity. Readings of relation become more important than geographic specificity in locating such islands as Hispaniola.

Through a transnational approach the coordination of various cultural and socio-political influences helps to define those elements that coalesce into a Haitian or a Dominican culture. As Haitians and Dominicans immigrate to the United States, the cultural influences at work across national borders become more important than the longitudinal positioning of the island or the latitudinal juxtaposition of the two countries in describing their interrelations. Even limitations of time are breached with the recognition of the influence of indigenous tribes that is not less for its having been forgotten neither the influence of the United States more for its contemporaneous presence. In the Caribbean there is a persistence of memory, although perhaps not of cultural originations, at least in the process of creolization by which various influences produced the distinct cultures of each island. As the image of Benítez-Rojo's 'repeating island' suggests, the Caribbean islands share in common this process that has produced in "each copy a different one, founding and refounding ethnological materials like a cloud will do with its vapor" (9). The pervasiveness of cultural and socio-political difference that has been at work in the Caribbean for over half a millennium has created an archipelago of distinct cultures that relate in more ways than they differ.

The European discovery of the Americas and the subsequent institution of slavery marked the opening of a space where Amerindians, Spanish, English, French, and various African nations were thrown together.⁵ Living within the plantation system gave birth to a region of cross-cultural relation and interdependence. And, unlike the cross-cultural

⁵ We must keep in mind that long before Columbus arrived the Caribbean was already a deeply transcultural space (if we don't wish to refer to the Amerindian tribes as nations) where, to cite only one example, "Ocean-going canoes carrying as many as one hundred [of the Taino] people conveyed these rulers and their people among the islands of the Greater Antilles, northern lesser Antilles, and Bahamas" (Wilson 7).

encounters experienced by European explorers in North America,⁶ the experience in the Caribbean would not sustain a hegemonic culture. The violence of the plantation and the disparity of the master/slave population could not maintain the illusion of European superiority within the intimacy of the plantation. Slaves used as house servants, wet nurses, and even foremen realized before long that their masters were far less superior than they pretended to be. With the rise of a mulatto class in places like Haiti, black sons of French masters found a degree of liberty and education that made it possible for them to signify white. As slaves saw members of society with the same skin color and physical features as themselves exist within white society, black slaves began to question the fundamental differences that had been emphasized in the plantation system to minimize the physiological similarities.

It could be argued, of course, that similar intimacies and cross-culturalization were experienced in South American, African, and Asian imperialist projects. But in the Caribbean the plantation economy forced an interdependence between European masters and native or African slaves that both accelerated and intensified the effect of the transnational experience on Caribbean cultures. Two major sources of this intensification were the economic and political pressures to maintain lifestyles on the islands that were practically unsustainable. With the installation of the plantation system, Caribbean islands were never equipped, nor meant to be self-sufficient outside the trade triangles of their colonial parents in Western Europe. While most nations in the twentieth century have had to adjust to the restructuring of their socio-economic systems caused by capitalist expansion, the Caribbean has known no other socio-economic hierarchy since

⁶ In North American English and French colonies, Native American populations were decimated and decisive geo-political and social boundaries that limited significant cross-cultural interrelation.

the depopulation of its native inhabitants during the sixteenth century. On the one hand, this means that the Caribbean has not had to go through what Don Robotham describes as “a radical reversal of relationships of property, culture, and power” (308). On the other hand, the Caribbean has not had to negotiate the same transition to international capitalism only because of the symbiotic relationship forged from what is usually considered the parasitic nature of slavery. Although this is not to suggest that the plantation was an equally beneficial system, in the economy of islands such as Hispaniola it was of necessity mutually advantageous for Europe and its Caribbean colonies and for master and slave.

Most immigrants to the Caribbean, whether slave or free, were unfamiliar with the land that rejected most attempts to harness its rich soil and tropical climate to sustain familiar crops and agricultural methods. Rather than adapt, colonizers imported goods and plantation owners settled on crops that could keep transatlantic trade alive, but very little else. The colonies thrived only as long as they provided resources for European markets. From the outset the colonization of the Caribbean was exploitive, forcing the natives to mine for precious ores until their numbers were nearly depleted. But at least for those who were able to escape enslavement by turning to the hills, there was enough familiarity with the land, perhaps even the possibility of fleeing to as yet unmolested tribes (Torres-Saillant 1-3). For the African slaves imported en masse, however, escape from the plantations was almost as mortally uncertain as captivity. As future generations began to call the Caribbean home, a standard of living much different from those of their African ancestors became the *status quo* that even slaves could not altogether ignore. In fact, with the rise of a Creole elite in Haiti and a more general self-awareness on behalf of

the slaves of their position, the argument was not for a return to Africa but a more equal footing in plantation society (Heinl 36-37).

Even the heralded leader of the Haitian Revolution, Toussaint L'Ouverture, understood that to be free in the Caribbean was not to totally abandon European influences, but to somehow come into possession of the capital, resources, and education that made the whole scheme possible (Heinl 87). While the colonizers remained in the Caribbean, liberation from slavery would only lead to class and racial discrimination. But without the European exports, islands like Hispaniola would not be able to sustain the artificially increased populations nor maintain any semblance to the standard of living that had become indispensable. Indeed, after Haiti finally threw off colonial forces it struggled (and still does) to sustain the capitalist, mercantile system that no longer had a privileged investment in the European market.

The leaders who betrayed and succeeded Toussaint (Dessalines, Pétion, and Christophe) attempted various forms of government to help bring the nation out of the socio-economic torpor following the rebellion. Unfortunately, Christophe's kingdom founded itself on a feudal system not much unlike the plantations and Pétion's republic privileged the Creole elite that had risen to replace the expelled colonizers (Heinl 134). As the state of affairs grew more dire, Haitians attempted to resolve the issue of economics by invading the larger and more resource rich, Spanish colony of Santo Domingo. But this arrangement did not last for very long and by the middle of the nineteenth century, Haiti was on bad political terms with both the Dominican Republic and France who had still not officially accepted Haiti's independent status (Torres-Saillant 4-5). Attempts made by various leaders between 1843 (Revolution that ousted

General Jean-Pierre Boyer) and 1915 (the U.S. Occupation) to attract foreign capital and improve international relations were to varying degrees successful. However, continuing, internal socio-political insecurity kept most international investments (political and economic) at a distance.

The Dominican Republic faced similar difficulties after gaining independence from Spain and Haiti in 1844. But the leaders of the Dominican Republic, recognizing their inability to properly manage the country, petitioned both Spain and the U.S. to restore stability by assuming control of the state (*Torres-Saillant* 20). Although in the extreme, these instances of political outreaching presage the twentieth century diplomacy of both republics in Hispaniola—especially with the United States and Cuba. Much of the modern history of Hispaniola relates the way in which Haitian and Dominican governments have looked to the U.S. for financial and political support. In order to maintain this important correlation, regimes played off U.S. fears of Castro’s successful revolution and the spread of communism throughout the Caribbean. But in a way different from U.S. relations with other countries, the plantation past of Hispaniola and the imperialist imaginations of the United States engendered a powerfully transnational space between governments.

When Toussaint attempted to assert political independence from France, he did so relying upon a post-revolutionary French education. His tactics and ideologies simply applied that education to the Haitian predicament. After independence was won in both states, however, political structures mirrored the socio-political institutions of the recently expelled European colonizers. Andrés Serbin describes this assimilation as being “markedly differentiated from the European or North American experience in that, rather

than being based exclusively on government policies of trade liberalization, integration, or economic cooperation, [the Caribbean] has incorporated aspects of political cooperation and social and cultural integration” (141). This method of appropriation and signifying (creolization)—used by slaves to persist in their Vodoun worship even while outwardly Christian and used by Toussaint’s French education in his struggle for the abolition of slavery—was also prevalent in the way Haiti and the Dominican Republic forged relations with the United States. As U.S. political influence increased in the Caribbean, investors returned to the Dominican Republic to capitalize on the sugar industry, humanitarian and anthropological organizations looked to rescue the Caribbean and its cultural roots, and tourism flourished along the Haitian coastlines that so easily washed away inland scenes of misery and hunger.

As the governments became more politically influenced by the United States and economically dependant upon its financial resources, the longstanding cross-cultural process that shaped identity in the Caribbean islands was faced with a troubling notion. The assimilation of U.S. ideology by the Caribbean brought with it a U.S. nationalism that was all too willing to assert its influence in the Caribbean. As Trujillo and Duvalier looked towards the establishment of their own national rhetoric, they easily picked up on elements of U.S. nationalism that defined itself through political, geographic, and ideological distinction. In its efforts to observe the Caribbean as essentially transnational, cultural criticism from outside the Caribbean has read too much into the Caribbean experience in order to provide a precedent for its own anxious grasp of globalization. The rush towards a post-national world perspective is a bit early and perhaps even unfavorable. David Hollinger discusses at length the necessity of a reevaluation of nation,

ethnicity, and culture in *Postethnic America* with one conclusion being that nation—for all its flaws—is a necessary arbitrator between transnational capitalism and ethnoracial particularism in a globalizing world (132-33). A nation, particularly a civic nation “based on the principle of consent and [ostensibly] open to persons of a variety of ethno-racial affiliations”, can pull together in the pursuit of economic solidarity and avoid the ‘ethnoracial particularism’ that feeds violence in Eastern European and African countries (134). The nation, as long as it is not rooted in the past and held in check by a system that permits the voicing of marginalized communities, can still be a useful construct in the twenty-first century. At one level, nation can be helpful in creating identities in relation within a transnational imaginary because it is easier to identify its constructedness and disrupt rooted identities—which this chapter is in the process of demonstrating. Thus, while the Caribbean is discussed as a transnational space *par excellence*, it is necessary to recognize and appreciate the national identities within which Haitians and Dominicans are rooted—national identities constructed in relation to the increasing influence of the U.S. nation.

When U.S. President James Monroe declared during a State of the Union Address that the United States would not tolerate interference or further colonization of the Americas by European powers, his Monroe Doctrine extended the sphere of U.S. influence into the Caribbean and South America. The Monroe Doctrine presupposed a mutual interest among New World nation-states in discouraging European encroachment in the New World. Yet, as noted by Franklin Knight, “Caribbean states cannot always find themselves on common ground with the United States” due to different political objectives regarding Caribbean economies (Knight 38). In the end, these differences

resulted in exploitation on both sides in the pursuit of self-interested gains. By 1904, the situation of the Dominican Republic motivated a corollary to the Monroe Doctrine by President Theodore Roosevelt that validated U.S. interference in foreign affairs for the sake of national security in the New World (Torres-Saillant 24). The Haitian and Dominican governments could not help but have misgivings about the unilateral nature of this proposition. As already mentioned, the Dominican Republic had actually petitioned Spanish political involvement for a time and both republics attempted to solidify ties with Europe in order to barter better trade relations. However, with the continuation of colonization elsewhere, European countries were not as willing to contribute to the strengthening of a competing international market. But the United States, with its privileged demographic and larger geographic, welcomed the opportunity to open the Caribbean markets that thrived on the exploitation of Caribbean resources and necessitated U.S. protection of its private investors.

In July 1915, in response to the assassination of the Haitian president and insurrection in the capital of Port au Prince, American marine forces took control of major positions within the city and helped restore order within the country by setting up a treaty with a provisional Haitian government (Thorpe 77). This was the beginning of the American Occupation that worked to stabilize the country's economy, construct system of roads and bridges, and extend the reach of medical and sanitation services (Douglas 379). A little more than a year later, the U.S. also landed a force in the Dominican Republic to protect American interests and restore order (Torres-Saillant 27). Both occupations (or interventions depending on whose side your on), were to act as a force

towards structuring governments that would ensure better freedom and promote economic prosperity for Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Haitian and Dominican Nationalism

However, for Haitians and Dominicans, the American Occupation was something else entirely. It was the resuscitation of a system of *corvée* that forced Haitians to work on the construction of the roads in lieu of taxation, often by force, and with lethal consequences for any who tried to desert (Douglas 376). The occupation was an embarrassment with the implication that Haitians could not govern themselves and a foreign presence that supported unpopular government officials in office. For Dominicans, it was a military manipulation of their economy by a foreign power for the benefit of private investors and capitalists. Michel-Rolph Trouillot defines nation as a “political claim made on the basis of culture and history” and that nationalism is the shared “sociocultural reality” as lived by members of a social network immersed in the rhetoric of the nation-state (Trouillot 26). François Duvalier and Rafael Leonidas Trujillo took advantage of the ‘sociocultural reality’ of the U.S. Occupations shared by all Haitians and Dominicans as a part of their efforts to unite the people under the influence of their regime. But the dictators had also learned something of the national duplicity inherent in U.S. relations and while with one hand they would petition for funds to stimulate the economy the other would be posed to slap Uncle Sam across the face should a Haitian or Dominican citizen pass by.

In an effort to assert Haitian ability, Duvalier’s attitude towards the U.S. was intentionally ambiguous and deceptive. In order to obtain more financial support Duvalier would plead and woo Washington officials. Playing off U.S. humanitarian aims, he

would accept millions of dollars meant for funding public services and stimulating industry. But as soon as the needed finances were secured he would attack the U.S. for its over-involvement in Haitian affairs. In the Dominican Republic, Trujillo had risen to power thanks to the U.S. occupation, actually moving up the ranks of the American trained Dominican army and receiving various commendations for his prowess and leadership. But towards the end of the 1950s this relationship began to wane as U.S. foreign policy changed but Trujillo remained the same. With increasing international disapproval of the brutality of Trujillo's regime, the U.S. found itself less inclined to support the Dominican dictator whose policies were fostering an increasingly agitated opposition that found in communism, an increasingly attractive alternative (Crassweller 421). Trujillo, offended by the U.S. change of attitude, responded by turning away from his support of the U.S. and taking every opportunity to demonstrate his own political power without the aid of his American detractors.

Of course, in practice Trujillo and Duvalier rarely adapted their political purposes simply to ease U.S. sensibilities. They did not solely rely upon U.S. economic support to stabilize and unify their countries either. Nor did they find it necessary simply to define their country's nationalism in opposition to the United States. Even before the U.S. was strong enough to intervene in Caribbean affairs, the socio-economic situation of the plantation system had delineated strong lines of racial differentiation. Twenty-two years of brutal, Haitian occupation of the Dominican Republic and the 1937 Haitian Massacre polarized the island even more along racial lines that both Duvalier and Trujillo would manipulate in their national constructions.

The actual border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is rather tenuous, having been altered through numerous political treaties throughout Hispaniola's history. Even Trujillo's attempt at constructing a transnational highway, which provided a physical representation of the conjoining of two distinct political entities, was less used than the footpaths worn out between villages along the border (Derby 493). But with the creation of a national image that purported to define what it meant to be Dominican, especially with one that was intensely race-oriented, Trujillo found a way to compensate for the permeability of physical borders. Using exaggerations of Haitian physical features and socio-cultural flaws, Trujillo's nationalist program colored the social networking of Haitian and Dominican peasants. Like images of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Davy Crockett in the United States, Trujillo set himself up as the national hero who embodied *Dominicanismo*, a Dominican nationalism that Howard J. Wiarda describes as "a new social and political myth" that created a sense of Dominican identity, defined by Trujillo, that allowed him to remove opposition to his regime and fortify Dominican solidarity in the name of the nation (Wiarda 109).

Trujillo went so far as to force immigration and resettlement of the population to make Dominicans clearly distinguishable from Haitians living within the Dominican Republic. More ethnically connected than Trujillo was willing to admit, he forced Haitians to the borderlands, depriving them of their positions of ownership in major Dominican cities. Wiarda observes that "Dominicanism meant increased military might to ward off foreign and domestic foes and to increase national prestige; it meant the whitening of the population to make it increasingly distinguishable from the neighboring Haiti" as well as the recognition of public works such as new bridges and highways

whose openings were accompanied by “a great patriotic outpouring” (Wiarda 110). The Trujillo regime was excessively conscious of the role of government in the representation of *Dominicanismo* which meant that it was almost synonymous with another national force at work during the regime, *Trujillismo*. In essence it personified Trujillo as the ideal Dominican, one who, ashamed of his darker skin applied emulsifying cosmetics and denied the African heritage from colonial Santo Domingo. He was figuratively and literally the father of Dominicans, as godfather and patron, as well as successful wooer of numerous young Dominican women (Crassweller 79-81). Trujillo busied himself with creating a national identity that ignored those traditions that would tie the Dominican Republic to its inglorious past and initiated a new order that would bring about a more glorious future.⁷

The Duvalier regime focused upon those aspects of Haitian culture and society that had long been ignored and suppressed by the political leaders of the Creole elite. Duvalier's policies, designed to end the dominance of the mulatto elite over the nation's economic and political life, led to a massive emigration of educated people, deepening Haiti's economic and social problems (Heinl 542-52). Haitian nationalism, rather than rejecting Dominican influence or infiltration into Haitian borders and culture, embraced the history and ethnicity that Trujillo had opposed (Heinl 540). Because Duvalier came into power towards the end of Trujillo's regime and twenty years after the Haitian Massacre, this tactic was very successful in further unifying a country already united in its fear and loathing of the Dominican dictator and the Creole elite who made little recriminations against him. At the same time, Duvalier's identification with the middle

⁷ For a more detailed description of Trujillo's nationalization efforts refer to: Augelli, John P. “Nationalization of Dominican Borderlands.” *Geographical Review* 70.1 (1980): 19-35.

class and its values sanctioned an ideology already held by the people, but as yet unsupported by the government. Duvalier did not have to worry about winning over his people to new national ideologies as had Trujillo; he used them to confirm that the aims of his regime were simply extensions of the true national heritage. For Duvalier and other members of *Les Griots* (a small, middle-class literary circle), “black nationalism and voodoo [were] the essential sources of Haitian art and literature” (Diedrich 50). Duvalier gained influence among the majority of Haitians and the presidency by promoting these important aspects of the black middle class, and peasant landowner culture as national ideals. Stuart Hall describes the black experience as the “‘oneness’, underlying all the other, more superficial differences”; the truth and essence of ‘Caribbeanness’ (Hall 223). Trujillo’s denial of this unifying essence permitted the atrocities of his regime against Haitians and those too black or unable to adequately pronounce *perejil*, the Spanish word for parsley (Matibag 146-47). Duvalier’s approval of the black or *noiriste* experience guaranteed “a central nucleus of supporters” among the black majority (Prince 29).

Duvalier and Trujillo’s nationalism also relied on the conflation of their public image with cultural archetypes in ways that mirrored U.S. and European models. They even promoted themselves as fathers of Haitian and Dominican ideals similar to the United States’ “Founding Fathers.” In the height of their power and delusion, the dictators even saw themselves as messianic figures whose rise to power anticipated a golden age of cultural, political, and economic prosperity. Duvalier promoted an image of a country doctor whose healing power came not only from his French education, but also from his devotion to Vodoun and his office as an *oungan* or priest. While Duvalier had previously held a political office, he had not become rich from the opportunity, but

maintained a humble appearance and an unambitious nature (Heinl 540). He looked towards the Haitian past and its overthrow of colonial rule as a source of inspiration for the aims of his regime and attempted to integrate the prestige of historical figures with himself by accentuating a physical likeness with such early leaders as Dessalines, Toussaint, Christophe, Pétion and Estimé. The veneration held by the Haitian people for these leaders was compounded in the figure of Duvalier in a document published in 1964, 'Catechism of Revolution,' which extolled Duvalier as the embodiment of all five in a kind of revolutionist Haitian Trinity (Prince 28).

The progressive rhetoric was heightened by propaganda that exaggerated the improvements the Duvalier regime had made to local roadways, the extension of national elections to the lower classes, and plans for a modern sea-side metropolis. Slogans from Duvalier's speeches were written in neon lights and placed prominently throughout major cities (Trouillot 197). The 'Catechism of Revolution' even included a version of the Lord's Prayer to offer for the success and longevity of the nation:

Our Doc who art in the National Palace for Life, hallowed be Thy name
by present and future generations, Thy will be done at Port-au-Prince and
in the provinces. Give us this day our new Haiti and never forgive the
trespasses of the enemies of the Fatherland, who spit every day on our
Country. Let them succumb to temptation and under the weight of their
own venom. Deliver them not from any evil. Amen. ("Hispaniola")

Unfortunately, Duvalier's excessive cruelty towards his own people and his emergence as a political force after the success of Castro's Revolution made it more difficult for

Duvalier unify the people with his nationalist rhetoric and to keep them from combining against his regime.

Trujillo, on the other hand, succeeded in his promotion of *Trujillismo* and was supported by the majority of Dominicans who had been inculcated since childhood with pictures, signs, preambles, and celebrations in his honor (Wiarda 121). Because Trujillo personally owned the majority of Dominican sugar plantations and other resources he was able to invest a lot of money in the completion of public works projects that ostensibly served the greater good, but greatly benefited the benefactor. As mentioned above, Trujillo became the symbol of the Dominican, his appropriation of such titles as *el jefe*, *el benefactor*, *el presidente*, and *el líder* created bonds with the public on multiple psychological levels. Cities, mountains, streets, buildings, and even the children of aspiring families were named after Trujillo in celebration of the national identity that centered upon the dictator (Wiarda 133-34). For at least part of Trujillo's rule this national obsession with the figure of Trujillo was promoted by numerous holidays with parades and celebrations that combined nationalism and *Trujillismo* in elaborate displays of wealth and power that entertained the public and made sure they understood their place in Dominican society.

The most notable of these events was Trujillo's attempt at garnering international esteem through an international fair that hoped to honor the achievements of the Dominican Republic under Trujillo and promote investment and trade (Crassweller 293). In anticipation of the December 20th event, a procession to present Trujillo's daughter, Angelita, was prepared for mid-August 1955. For the procession, the Fontana sisters of Rome were chose to design a dress that would demonstrate the wealth, civility, and

prominence of the Dominican Republic. The following is a description of Angelita's dress from Robert Crassweller's *Trujillo*:

Made of white silk satin and sprinkled with rubies, diamonds, and pearls, the gown they created was bordered with 150 feet of Russian ermine, the product of 600 skins. With its 75-foot train, it cost \$80,000. The design of the crown and the high, rolled neck of the dress recalled Queen Elizabeth I of England. An additional \$75,000 was spent for scepter and brooch, and scepters for the princesses who were among Angelita's 140 attendants.

(293-94)

Dominicans flooded the streets to catch a glimpse of 'Queen' Angelita, who was then only sixteen, and her entourage. Of course, few if any present could have imagined such wealth in the Dominican Republic or easily forgotten the maliciousness of Trujillo's regime, but to participate in the celebration and enjoy the holiday was a powerful promotion of national pride.

The speech that Trujillo delivered during the course of the International Fair was particularly prepared to both praise the growth and achievement of the Dominican Republic over twenty-five years, as well as promote the part *el jefe* played in envisioning and attaining that vision. His speech reads in part:

I received in 1930 a Republic which lacked some of its essential attributes as a sovereign entity; today I present it to history as a nation without ties which limit its actions, with full financial autonomy and standing on a basis of equality with the freest nations of the world.

There was delivered to me a people with a weak sense of identity, with their territory still undefined, and today I offer to my fellow-citizens a country the demarcation of whose frontiers has been completed with a fruitful human achievement through religion, culture and work.

(Crassweller 295)

Of course, Trujillo paints his portrayal of the Dominican in broad strokes and without feeling obliged to rationalize the less flattering aspects of his rule. He outlines the inspirational vision that is one of the most convincing examples of a national rhetoric at work as well as demonstrating its detrimental nature. Trujillo has rooted himself too much in his vision of the future to separate his country's wealth and his own. He boasts of 'full financial autonomy' without recognizing that it was his own family that owned a large portion of the Dominican economy and benefited the most from such autonomy (Matibag 144-5). He claims responsibility for securing borders without recognizing the efforts of deportation and massacre involved in securing those borders. In short, Trujillo himself falls into the trap of his own national rhetoric.

Nation and Identity in the Literary Imaginary of Alvarez and Danticat

Because of the pervasiveness of national rhetoric, in order to conceive an identity in relation outside of national frameworks requires a conscious investment in the imagination. The literature of Julia Alvarez and Edwidge Danticat makes that investment in their use of the transnational imaginary. Because of their education they have been able to construct this space with a greater awareness of the socio-cultural implications of their literature. As the two turn to writing about the experience of Haitians and Dominicans they return to the history of the island where they were born. In doing so

they have found the ways in which that history has been told deeply invested in the national rhetoric shaped by Trujillo and Duvalier. For this reason, much more than retelling history, Alvarez and Danticat's novels rewrite the nation implicit in the narrative of Haitian and Dominican experience. The task has been somewhat simplified in the possibility of focusing their attacks on the dictators who made themselves symbols of nation. It is more than coincidence that both Alvarez and Danticat's first novels dealt explicitly with nationalist histories and their origins in Trujillo and Duvalier's administrations.⁸ Before being able to create characters that were able to successfully develop identities in relation within the transnational imaginary, they had to rewrite the national histories of Haiti and the Dominican Republic—make them more fluid histories within which relation might be possible.

In the postscript to Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* the author admits to the fictionalization of her characters, that even as she tried to stay close to the scant facts of their lives "as happens with any story, the characters took over, beyond polemics and facts. They became real to my imagination. I began to invent them" (323). It is in this realm of the imagination that Alvarez intends to counter the dehumanization of these 'sisters of legend' who have become national symbols. The myth that surrounds the Mirabals in the Dominican Republic is one that takes advantage of the fragmented history of the drive through Dominican hills and the events that lead to their untimely deaths. In the Dominican Republic, it would seem that everyone has a relative or friend who knew the Mirabals, had at one time helped them, or was the last to see them before their fatal accident. By the end of her researching of the sisters in the Dominican Republic, Alvarez

⁸ Alvarez: 1991 *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*; 1994 *In the Time of the Butterflies*
Danticat: 1996 *Krik? Krak!*; 1999 *The Farming of Bones*

could but lament their lives that had become “wrapped in superlatives and ascended into myth” and warn against “the same god-making impulse that had created [Trujillo]” (*Butterflies* 324).

The worry here is not only that of a story that makes of the Mirabal sisters more than everyday Dominican women. The more ominous threat is the national appropriation of their deaths and history that would make them victims of some social ill rather than of political intrigue.⁹ The event of their deaths was well publicized and in the latter half of the twentieth century an international day was set apart in tribute to their memory and for the promotion of intervention against abuses towards women. In this way, rather than motivate Dominicans against the regime their deaths became national symbols to promote a social awareness program backed by a concerned and compassionate government. Even more disruptive, however, the national appropriation of their story meant that Dominicans in the future would only be able to relate to the Mirabal sisters in the static representation provided by the government. The personal stories and anecdotes that Alvarez came across in the Dominican Republic received little if any recognition in the national account and the Mirabals became lost to relation. When Alvarez takes on the project to portray the Mirabal sisters she makes sure to assert that the national history is only one way of constructing the Mirabal story by having four narrators. She then writes moments into her characters’ narratives in which they directly reject or reclaim national

⁹ A story, perhaps apocryphal, is told by an intimate of Trujillo, that shortly after their assassination the dictator went to the spot where their jeep was supposed to have lost control and gone over the edge of the mountain. There he remarked with pity the deaths of the three sisters and asserted that an investigation would need to be undertaken in order to dissuade the reports that would inevitably find the government to blame for their deaths (Crasswelller 403). This story demonstrates that in Trujillo’s mind the history of the Mirabal sisters was already being rewritten. They were to be victims of careless driving, domestic violence, or some other social issue that Trujillo could campaign against as another example of his government’s beneficence.

symbols and in which the national representation of an event is countered by the characters' narrative. By doing so, the privileged claim to legitimacy made by nation is problematized and the multiplicity of historical perspectives asserted.

The first occurrence takes place during the main confrontation between Trujillo and a matured Minerva whose attractiveness and ideology create a moment of tension during the "Discovery Day Dance," a celebration of Christopher Columbus' discovery of Hispaniola that Alvarez portrays as a reenactment of the conquering of the indigenous Taino people. As Minerva thinks about the usual hurricane weather surrounding the twelfth of October, she decides that "the god of thunder Huracán always acts up around the holiday of the Conquistador, who killed off all his Taino devotees" (93). At the beginning of the party, the Secretary of State directs Minerva to a place at the head table where Trujillo will also be seated. From intimations that the official's real function is to round up prospective companions for Trujillo, Minerva becomes not only the guest of honor, but also the object of desire.

The scene's climax has Minerva and Trujillo on the dance floor where the dictator does his best to seduce the young Mirabal, continuing the theme of conquering with Trujillo's suggestion that he "could conquer this jewel as El Conquistador conquered our island" (99). But Minerva is not for conquest. Not simply because she already has a boyfriend or is not attracted to el Jefe, but because she has been made to see the seductiveness of the regime that has as "a whole nation fall prey" to the machinations of the government (96).¹⁰ When, during a dance with Minerva, Trujillo makes aggressive

¹⁰ Minerva's character has already discovered the results of *trujillismo*'s grip on the nation through her father's own illicit relations, "*Cosas de los hombres*" (92), and the stories of her adolescent friends: Sinita,

attempts to seduce the adolescent Mirabal, she responds to his sexual advances by complaining of the medals protruding from his uniform. At once rejecting Trujillo's masculinity and his national pride, Minerva sees past the gallantry and nationalism that attempt to conceal the dictator's lust for power and control. As Trujillo removes the symbols of his patriotism to more physically pursue Minerva, his aggressiveness triggers Minerva's own defensive response.

In a pivotal moment, although uncertain and obscure, Minerva slaps Trujillo across the face. While history and even Alvarez's narrative make it difficult to decide whether or not Minerva physically assaulted the surprised aggressor, the confrontation signals the outright rejection of Trujillo and the despoiled nation that he has created. In the uncertainty of the historical record, Alvarez chooses to narrate events that visibly oppose the power of Trujillo and his ability to downplay the effect of the Mirabals has had on his regime. To portray Trujillo's rule as conqueror rather than benefactor is to write against the foundational ideals projected by the regime's national rhetoric.

Later on, when Minerva and Mate are imprisoned with a number of other revolutionaries and social plebeians, Minerva gets everyone to begin singing the national anthem and is put in solitary confinement for a week (228). The juxtaposition of imprisonment and nationalism is purposefully ironic within Alvarez's narrative to invalidate the national symbol of unity. The political prisoners ground their sense of nation in an estimation of the value of freedom for themselves and their compatriots. For them the national anthem represents a quest for freedom that they feel should unite all Dominicans. The prison guards are, whether willfully or not, subjects of Trujillo's

whose family was killed on Trujillo's orders (16-18) and Lina who was made one of Trujillo's mistresses (20-24).

nationalism that punishes those who pose a threat to his regime as enemies of state and traitors to the nation. For them the national anthem represents unity as well, but unity founded in devotion to Trujillo, as the procurer of national liberty. With the singing of the national anthem, Alvarez is able to demonstrate how the nation is unable to unite Dominicans but instead divides them artificially as those who are for the nation (the prison guards) and those who are against it (the prisoners). But of course the prisoners are not against the Dominican nation itself anymore than the prison guards are against the freedom and rights sought for by the political prisoners. But the static vision of Trujillo's nation cannot permit a national construction without him at the helm. That the prison guards and most of the Dominican people have also been rooted in this national future prevents them from even attempting to muster the resolution required to oppose the powerful dictator.

A final scene in Alvarez's novel demonstrates the totalitarian nature of nation that proscribes alternate narrations of events in order to validate its own. In the personal, soul-searching narrative of the oldest Mirabal sister, Patria, the story of her son's imprisonment and release is related. The distraught mother finds herself unsure of her devotions to God and Trujillo. In a telling moment she finds herself praying to Trujillo for the safe return of her boy rather than to the God in whom she had placed her trust throughout her life (202-3). But when the moment of release arrives, she cries out and drops to her knees praying, "Lord, thank you for giving me my son again" (225). In the excess of her need she turns to God, but the next day, the national newspaper reports the incident with a picture of Patria kneeling with her hands clutched in prayer and subtitled, 'Grateful Madre Thanks Her Benefactor' (226). For the reader who has followed Patria's

desperate struggle over the previous few pages there is more than a little annoyance at the national misrepresentation of Patria's gratitude. With the knowledge that Patria's narrative has provided concerning her devotion to God and disgust with a regime that slaughters and imprisons young men, the reader is of course not persuaded by the newspaper article. But for the thousands of Dominicans who do not have access to Patria's story and who rely on *El Caribe*'s national representation, is there much reason to doubt the headlines?

Unfortunately, there is very little reason for those rooted in Trujillo's national framework to doubt such an event. But for the reader who is made to confront both accounts there is plenty of room to question the newspaper's claims. Creating this uncertainty is imperative for a successful negotiation of a transnational imaginary because it weakens the nation's categorical hold on history and fact. An element of uncertainty causes the reader to consider the possibilities of alternate representations (to relate) and better appreciate the fluidity of historical representation and national affiliation.

While *In the Time of the Butterflies*, particularly singles out Trujillo as a presence within history and the novel to be reckoned with, Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* focuses on themes of family, fraternity, and signifying in opposition to national rhetoric. In this collection of short stories François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier only shows up once and then only as the brunt of a joke.¹¹ The characters are not national heroes; some do not

¹¹ In the humorous bedtime story, numerous presidents are invited for an audience with God in Heaven. As each president arrives, God gets up from his throne to greet him—except for His Excellency, the President for Life Papa Doc Duvalier. When asked his reason for having acted so rudely, whether it is because he is black or some other reason, God responds, "I am not getting up for Papa Doc Duvalier because I am afraid that if I get up, he will take my throne and will never give it back" (180).

even have names. Danticat treats historical events, especially the central story of the 1937 Haitian Massacre, or River Massacre, upon Trujillo's orders for an ethnic cleansing of the Dominican borderlands. But she does not rally Haitians together in memory of a dark moment in Haitian history where thousands of Haitians—and a few Dominicans too—died for their dark skin and Creole tongue. Her characters do not carry particularly strong feelings of hatred against the Dominican soldiers who perpetrated the bloody act. Instead, Danticat writes the disheartening story of Haitian division that had Haitians mistreating fellow Haitians. By doing so, Danticat uses an historical event around which a national history has been written (The River Massacre) in the same way as Alvarez's use of the Dominican anthem. Danticat's retelling of the year, 1937, with an emphasis on Haitian cruelty to Haitians disrupts the unifying affect of the national claim to history. The Haitian government used the River Massacre in the same ways that the Dominican government used the deaths of the Mirabal sisters—to further a political objective and foster a nationally prescribed reaction towards the Dominican Republic. But rather than repeat that story of Dominican barbarity, Danticat's story decides to insert a perspective that changes the role of villain and victim. This change reasserts the fluidity of history in order to claim redress from the Haitian government and people whose violent actions were obscured by national representation.

In an important break from national chronologies of these events, Danticat's short stories bring out the trauma of the experience that lingers in the posterity of those who survived. These stories, passed down from mothers to daughters, offer a different perspective on familiar events of a tragic Haitian history. The story "Nineteen Thirty-Seven" opens with the image of a porcelain Madonna shedding a single tear—a signal to

the young girl, Josephine, observing it that it is time again to visit her mother in prison. Josephine's mother had escaped the River Massacre with her infant child inside her just as her own mother was being chopped up and thrown into the river with many more bodies (40). Now she was being held prisoner because someone, "a loved one, a friend, or a neighbor had accused [her] of causing the death of a child" (38). Her mother and other Haitian women were accused of being witches, starved and tortured to keep them from removing their skins at night to fly away and snatch the souls of children. When the malnutrition and mistreatment became so much that Josephine's mother's skin hung loose around her, the soldier beat her to death in the middle of the compound because prison could not cure her.

The central plot of the story concerns the sufferings of Josephine and her mother, with only their memories to tell the actual events of "Nineteen Thirty-Seven." There is even a ritual greeting among women connected to the River Massacre that personalizes the loss even more as they identify themselves with that loss. But there is no attempt to explain the motivations of the massacre, to gauge its effects on Haiti as a nation, or describe the action taken in reprisal. Instead, the story focuses on the loss of a daughter's mother—not from Dominican soldiers, but from Haitian prison guards. Josephine's mother is accused, not by some nationalist propaganda machine for being Haitian, but by neighbors who have lost a child and need someone upon whom to blame their grief. For a treatment of the event that focuses more on the experience of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, one can turn to *Farming of Bones*. But, in *Krik? Krak!* Danticat rewrites the national history used by Duvalier to unite Haitians against Dominican cruelty in order to

refocus on the attitude of the Haitian government towards its own people.¹² She superimposes a story of Haitian brutality over the memory of Dominican violence in order to frustrate the tacit acceptance of national objectives. The narrative disrupts a history rooted in national objectives in order to reaffirm the fluidity of history and relate to the multiple perspectives and histories of individuals.

Krik? Krak! also frustrates the national articulation of political borders and geographic barriers. Danticat is very careful about her naming of the republic and the significance of ‘Haiti’ in her narrative. Rather than to establish the location of her characters (she uses specific city names for that), the act of signifying Haiti serves as a boundary itself, a space against which Danticat describes the location of her characters who no longer live in Haiti. The first of these instances appears in the first short story, “Children of the Sea.” But when ‘Haiti’ is used in this story it is not even in reference to the island, but to a song about the experience of people who must leave the island behind: “When we sing, *Beloved Haiti, there is no place like you. I had to leave you before I could understand you*, some of the women start crying” (9). This first story is that of two journals being kept by a young woman on the island and a young man out in the Caribbean on a flimsy raft headed towards Florida. The reference to Haiti is not that of a national anthem, but a song too well-known among a people of exiles and migrants looking to save their lives by risking them. These characters are no longer part of Haiti and have already begun to use it only as a vague reference to something other than the

¹² An attitude that accepted remunerations from the Dominican Republic to be given to those Haitian families affected, but who never received any money; one that signed an accord with the Dominican representatives that left any governmental investigations as to the cause and perpetrators of the massacre in the hands of Trujillo’s government; and that never exerted sufficient political force to see that the articles of the agreement were achieved. (Piantini 283-288)

watery space they now inhabit. Haiti becomes part of a transnational imaginary that has much less to do with the nation than with its place in the creative space of the song. This way of removing such things as personal histories, names, and events from national paradigms by inscribing them in creative works is often used by Alvarez and Danticat. It is both symbolic of their own fiction's formation of a transnational imaginary and a way to represent processes of identity in relation which we will revisit in the following chapters.

The last of Danticat's textual references to Haiti are found in the final two stories of *Krik? Krak!* In "New York Day Women" and "Caroline's Wedding" Haiti is referred to more than anywhere else in the novel as a reassertion of identity with Haiti even though the family has lived in the United States for a long time. The recalling of Haiti asserts a removal from the United States at the same time that the families are marrying, adopting new cultural traditions, and changing social norms. By the time Danticat gets to these final stories in her novel, Haiti as a nation, a symbol, or a history has been retold so many times that it has freed itself from those positions. As Danticat's novel turns to the experience of diaspora, it becomes possible to observe practical uses of a transnational imaginary in the construction of identity through present living. Having discussed the implications of nationalism in Haiti and the Dominican Republic and demonstrated Alvarez and Danticat's ability to rewrite nation as an element of transnational relation rather than as the legitimate claim to historical representation, it is now possible to enter the experience of the transnational imaginary itself by more closely engaging the novels and their attempts at developing a process of identity in relation.

Diaspora: Present Living

In the preface to René Philoctète's *Massacre River*, Edwidge Danticat finds herself confronted with her own preconceptions about life along the Haitian-Dominican border—perceptions influenced by a national construction of that space. As the site of numerous scenes of violence, Danticat expected to see it literally running with blood since it is so often portrayed that way in Haitian historical narratives (7). But what she found along the river between Ouanaminthe and Dajabón was an experience far less dramatic if no less profound. In contrast to the ghosts Danticat had expected, she found herself “meeting many of the living people of the river” (8). These ‘living’ people are the Haitians and Dominicans whose lives are both strictly delineated by the national borders but are at the same time subversive to national constructions of Haitian-Dominican relations. Rather than being consumed by hatred for one another, this population along the border works and lives together. The central image of two young boys, one Haitian and the other Dominican, bathing together suggests a hope that future generations will be able to coexist in friendship. It is such relationships as these that oppose the nationally opposed relations that are supposed to exist between the two people of Hispaniola.

It is telling that it took, to some degree, the actuality of life along the Haitian-Dominican border for the American-educated, Haitian-raised author to begin to see the possibility of harmonious relations along the border. Whether because of the history handed down to her from a politically prejudiced Haiti or an American sense of democratic government, Danticat's expectations were preconceived by the national paradigms that framed her historical understanding. Her expectation to see a river

flowing with blood was based on an image she'd heard or read in the United States. But at the border, many Haitians and Dominicans, like Philoctète's main characters,¹³ love and live in a space where national identification is secondary to present living. These lives, whether observed in Ouanaminthe or in fiction, "continue to challenge the meaning of community and humanity in all of us" (Preface 9).

Present Living

The idea that living people are somehow a composite of history and ancestry is a prevalent one in many cultures. But in the transnational imaginary of Danticat's fiction, this idea develops into an organic relationship, a continuation of the past into the present, rather than the more Western idea of a closed, unalterable, and self-promulgating history. For Danticat's characters in particular, the safe navigation of transnational, cross-cultural encounters depends on their ability to relate with living realities rather than lifeless memories. Returning to the first application of present living discussed in the introduction, characters achieve a balance of multicultural affiliation by living in the present. That is to say, most characters in literature at work in cross-cultural spaces—written by authors like Rudolfo Anaya, Sandra Cisneros, Junot Díaz, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker—are involved in the day to day requirements of procuring food and securing shelter. Familial relations take center stage in heated arguments, identity crises, the memory of lost loved ones, and deep grudges against those still alive. The emphasis on day-to-day living allows characters to move about in relation and create an identity based on their work and associations rather than rooted in the past.

¹³ The main characters of *Massacre River*, Pedro and Adèle, are a middle-aged couple that have been married and lived along the border for a long time even though Pedro is Dominican, Adèle is Haitian.

But at the same time, these characters are also very much caught up in the histories of their countries and their families. Danticat's characters continuously make reference to the time before Duvalier or the way things were in Haiti for those exiled in the United States. These Haitians in diaspora also have a significant number of their family still living there as well and so their connections to the nation and the past remain strong. This is one of the observations that has made it necessary to describe the space created by Danticat's fiction as a transnational imaginary—to highlight the continued construction of identity in relation to the nation. Because nation and history remain an integral part of Haitian identity even while living in the United States, rather than focus on the less abstruse issue of characters' identity in relation to everyday living this chapter will concentrate more on the second process of present living. It is in this process that a conscious effort is made by characters to present their identity in relation to particular aspects of their history and national affiliations. In the novels, it is a meta-identification technique that reasserts individual agency and responsibility in the construction or presentation of identity. For those characters in exile, the presentation of Haitian and U.S. identity is the most noticeable application of this process brought out in the various narratives. The act of presenting identity is also often countered by another character intent on representing that identity as something other. Just like the discussion of Patria's narrative in contrast to the national narrative in the previous chapter, the juxtaposition of presentation and representation¹⁴ of identity helps to highlight the process of present living through contrast.

¹⁴ Refer to Footnote 3

In the short story “New York Day Women” this is extremely apparent as the Haitian mother, “walking as though she owns the sidewalk under her feet,” is constantly being represented by her daughter Suzette (*Krik? Krak!* 149). The mother’s display of confidence in the streets of New York, signals an identity stably in relation with the U.S. But the daughter watching her is unable to let her mother simply pass as a New York Woman. In her attempt to follow her mother through the busy streets, Suzette remarks with surprise that “[even] in a flowered dress, she is lost in a sea of pinstripes and gray suits, high heels and elegant short skirts” (148). She does not allow her mother to maintain the anonymity intrinsic to the typical New Yorker but, in reference to her clothing, represents her as foreign, lost. Even though her mother walks with self-assurance in her surroundings, purchasing sodas and hot dogs from street vendors, living just like millions of other New Yorkers, in Suzette’s mind her mother is some-Haitian-one entirely different. At home, Suzette’s mother governs her social practices using her Haitian experience. She waits patiently for a dispute between cab drivers to end before crossing the street because in “Haiti when you get hit by a car, the owner of the car gets out and kicks you for getting blood on his bumper” (146). She saves clothes and other things for relatives in Haiti, had taught herself to read as a little girl in Haiti because only her brother’s went to school, and is convinced that her daughter’s figure is pretty enough without her worrying about it since “[only] dogs like bones” (150).

However, the numerous characteristics and actions which Suzette attributes to her thoroughly Haitian mother are not what is most important for the current analysis. For one, these attributes, although described by a sympathetic narrator, are still marginalizing. They indicate the daughter’s surprise at seeing her mother walking through the streets of

New York and are a representation of the mother's foreignness to and in the United States. Even though the surprise is innocent enough on the surface, the same kind of surprise one might enjoy in seeing a longtime friend unexpectedly at an art museum for example, the supplemental descriptors change the tone of that surprise. If, upon seeing one's friend at the art museum, the first thoughts are akin to, "She must not go to art museums a lot to have come dressed like that!", it is easy to make a comparison with Danticat's characters. To assume that the friend's dress and trip to the museum are conscious decisions, but to represent her as a debutante that doesn't attend the museum regularly is unfounded. Any number of reasons, when considered in relation, could account for the choice of dress and none of them have any bearing on the frequency of her museum trips or familiarity with attire protocol. Yet this is exactly what Suzette does, by using her American sensibility to inscribe her mother within the Haitian identity she presents at home.

The danger of Suzette's representation lies in its hegemony. Suzette is so surprised to see her hypertension-diagnosed mother eating a hot dog that rather than alter her mental image of her mother, Suzette takes on a prescriptive role: "With her blood pressure, she shouldn't eat anything with sodium. She has to be careful with her heart, this day woman" (150). This reaction is typical of cultural characterization within a national framework. It only allows for one authoritative identity. Unable to see her mother as other than Haitian, Suzette has to reinscribe her mother within the Haitian identity that she more habitually lives at home. This means that her mother's actions in downtown New York become suspicious, reckless and transgressive. Familial roles are

reversed and one questions the lack of understanding from a narrator all too familiar with the negative rigidity of U.S. racial and cultural prejudice.

Danticat does not leave much room for doubting the duplicity of Suzette's behavior and reasserting the appropriateness of presenting an identity in relation. Right after making these observations about her mother, Suzette senses that she is following her mother too closely. Lest her mother turn around and see her, she decides to hang back awhile before continuing the pursuit. Just as national frameworks hide their invasiveness, Suzette conceals her pursuit rather than confront her mother's un-Haitian behavior. "Would Ma have said hello had she been the one to see me first?" Suzette asks herself as she jumps into a cab to return to work (*Krik? Krak!* 152). Sadly, from a critical perspective, the answer must be in the negative; not because the mother would not want to recognize her daughter, but because Suzette has already shown how much the woman in the park is not her mother. She may be the physical parent but not the native nurturer, the New York mother but not the Haitian ma. The inability or unwillingness to accept an individual's transnational presentation of identity for the sake of maintaining a hegemonic, rooted identity is detrimental. It suggests a hypocritical view towards others that privileges one, Suzette, in being able to present herself as a New York business woman rather than Haitian while denying that same privilege to another, the mother. It also interferes with Suzette's identity in relation with her mother, who she obviously does not know well enough to know how she spends her afternoons, by criticizing or rejecting an aspect of her mother's U.S. identity for the sake of reasserting her Haitian identity.

In the final story of *Krik? Krak!* the roles are reversed in a family where the mother finds it hard to see beyond her cultural identity and thus unable to respect her

daughters' presentation of transnational identity in relation. This mother cries for refugees who died at sea because "all Haitians know each other" (169). She believes that bone soup can cure all kinds of ills, even "perform the miracle of detaching Caroline from Eric, her Bahamian fiancé" (159). This mother, unable to see past the racial discriminations and unrealistic national unity of her Haitian identity, sees her children's U.S. citizenship and naturalization as a double tragedy (160). The mother censures her daughters for not knowing what's good for them, for not having any taste buds. Of course, the mother is speaking particularly of her daughters' dislike for bone soup—a curative Haitian staple. But it is also their lack of taste for Haitian culture and insensitivity that the mother laments. For the mother, this lack represents a loss of Haitian identity in consequence of their prolonged exile in the U.S. Just like Suzette in the previous story, the mother here cannot positively imagine her daughters outside of their Haitian natures. However, the two daughters, while not totally abandoning their Haitian sides, choose to present themselves as American in order to seize the socio-political benefits of U.S. nationality symbolized by Gracina's naturalization certificate and the hope of a passport that guarantees she will not be deported.

In fact, out from under their mother's Haitian gaze, the two sisters are very capable of living their Haitian culture and presenting their Haitian identity. To the degree in which they are able to adapt Haitian customs for their immediate experience, the sisters engage in a process of identity in relation more so than their mother. As part of traditional mourning for their father, Haitian tradition as asserted by their mother compels the daughters to wear red undergarments as a way of compelling the ghost of their father into the realm of the dead. Of course, the two girls want nothing more than for their

father to remain as close as possible to them, “to tell him that he would be welcome to visit us” (172). But taking the tradition even further and more intimately into their cross-cultural experience: “Even though we no longer wore black outer clothes, we continued to wear black underpants as a sign of lingering grief” (172). Rather than defy Haitian culture, the daughters reincorporate it for their own purposes. They continue to wear underclothing as a sign, but rather than repel the ghost of their father, they attempt to evoke his memory. They reminisce about their father’s stories and jokes brought over from a vastly different experience in Haiti.¹⁵ They continue to recall his numerous adages that always hinted at some kind of warning. “We know people by their stories” the mother tells her two daughters and in this way they remember their father, Haiti, and everything else that links them all together (185).

For Danticat too, stories connect Haitians and especially second generation Haitian-Americans to Hispaniola’s western half. But just as Haitian storytellers begin by saying, “Krik?” with the expectation that their listeners will respond, “Krak!”; Danticat’s novels require an actively participating audience. Her novels are of such a fragmentary nature that much is required of the reader to make narrative connections. Even more important, *Krik? Krak!* demands of its readers to challenge standard narrative outlines. For example, the first time I read the novel I decided that it was a chronological narrative, with stories being handed down from one generation to the next. It was even rather easy to read the two last stories discussed above as contextual. Because Danticat’s narrators are only named once if at all, it can be easy to equate them. Not simply literary conventions, these narrators share so much in common in the structure of family life, the

¹⁵ Refer to Footnote 11

challenges of present living, and their cultural assimilation that it is hard to not imagine strong familial connections. In the last story especially, when the sisters begin to play the question game, a variation on the identifying ritual of a group of Haitian women in the ‘1937’ story, it seems only natural that they would have inherited a ritual that over time had forgotten its origins and become a children’s diversion.

However, at the same time, the girls have not forgotten the origins of their repartee:

Ma too had learned this game when she was a girl. Her mother belonged to a secret women’s society in Ville Rose, where the women had to question each other before entering one another’s houses. (165)

And with that memory, their actions mean something more than a simple child’s game brought over from Haiti. In Haiti, the wordplay was used to identify women to one another as members of a society set apart from other Haitians. In the United States, the game, although an adaptation of the original, continues to function as a mode of identification that allows the sisters to present their Haitian identity in the midst of diaspora. That the memory is less than a few generations old also suggests a closer relation to the experiences at the beginning of the novel than a chronological narrative would allow.¹⁶ When, in “Caroline’s Wedding,” Gracina and her mother go to Mass a special call for prayer and sympathy is made for a young refugee who drowned herself with her dead baby after having given birth to it only a few days before (167). The description is the same as that recounted by the young man to his lover in the first story,

¹⁶ There are nine chapters that could suggest through their juxtaposition and intertextuality five or six generations of mothers and daughters struggling with the cruelties of Haiti and the uncertainties of exile in the U.S.

“Children of the Sea” (26). With the realization at the end of the novel that the events of these stories are somehow contemporaneous is disconcerting to the chronological narrative. But this effect demonstrates that within the transnational imaginary, chronologies do not need to develop linearly, neither do they need to begin in the past and progress towards the future. This makes it possible to assert a fluidity of time necessary for a sustainable identity in relation with the past or future.

Nostalgia and Vision

The necessity of a fluid chronology, or relation with the past and future, is demonstrated in the experience of characters in Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker*. In this novel, the characters engage in either a nostalgic or envisioned representation of the past and future. Because of these representations, as characters attempt to construct their present identities rooted in the past and future they find themselves fettered rather than aided by the past. This happens because their rooted identities privilege the past and future over the present. The present is viewed as a moment of realization for the past, a culmination of events and histories that are the direct reactants responsible for producing the present. And so the past is privileged for the present’s indebtedness to it. The present is also viewed as a moment of embarkment for the future, the stable mooring from which the lofty expectations of the future can be achieved. This privileging of the past and future will be referred to below as nostalgia and vision.

Unfortunately, national and religious paradigms have the tendency to not only privilege nostalgia and vision, but to venerate them in such a way as to exact harsh socio-cultural penalties for actions and ideologies that disrupt the present’s relation to them. An individual in the U.S. who disagrees with his/her nation’s expansive vision of the free

world, a Dominican unwilling to support *Trujillismo* during the regime, or a Haitian opposing the *noiriste* commendation of black achievement are identified as unpatriotic or disloyal and exiled from either the nation or society. Because nostalgia and vision thus stricture the present it loses much of the flexibility of present living that promotes change and identity in relation. Because nostalgia and vision are themselves static, fixed representations of the past and future, they also severely limit the ability to relate within them. This causes problems with any attempt to identify in relation with a past, for example, that does not recognize the possibility of multiple representations of the past. In Danticat's novel, this restricts characters who attempt to identify in relation to the past and future, to the lives of parents and extended family. This restriction occurs because characters attempt to follow examples from the past that are fragmented or static and do not provide adequate patterns of with which to identify in the dynamism of the present.

Ka Bienaimé, the daughter of Haitian immigrants living in the United States, presents herself at the beginning of the novel in a police station where she is trying to get help locating her father:

I was born and raised in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, and have never ever been to my parent's birthplace. Still, I answer "Haiti" because it is one more thing I've always longed to have in common with my parents. (2)

The irony of this *mal du pays* is two-fold. First, Ka recognizes the impossibility of tracing her identifying origins to Haiti at the same time she asserts a connection with her parents and Haiti that she does not have. Second, the identity Ka has constructed in relation with Haiti is based on the sensational reports of U.S. journalism and the Haitians in her community that have fled the island to escape maltreatment. In this position, Ka's

identity is connected to these various reports as is her representation of her parents' history who have not made visible efforts to correct her. However, even though Ka's identity is in relation to multiple sources, the stories that she hears are all about the torture, cruelty, and fear endured by Haitians at the hands of the Dew Breakers—men who would come early in the morning to apprehend suspected dissidents in their homes.

But in reality, Ka's parents do not share this same nostalgic memory of Haiti. Ka's father was himself a Dew Breaker, one of the men responsible for imprisoning political insurgents in Casernes or Fort Dimanche. One military order resulted in his being attacked by a prisoner, receiving a large wound to the face for having underestimated his captive's desperation. The prisoner was mercilessly shot by the enraged officer who in turn was thrown out of the prison for having disobeyed orders not to kill the man. That night, outside the prison at Casernes in downtown Port-au-Prince, Ka's parents literally run into each other. The man is in shock from the pain of his wound and the woman in pain from the shock from news that her brother has been arrested. The interim is left to oblivion, but together they flee to the United States to escape the shame and misery of the past. Having begun their new life in the U.S., they avoid referencing the past and never talk about the truth to their daughter. The emphasis placed on this story, this recollection of Haiti, stands in stark contrast to the stories Ka has heard and with which her identity is rooted. Without thought for the complexity of Haiti during the Duvalier regimes, Ka has gotten caught up in the cruelty of the military police, their inhumanity and depravity. When she finally learns the truth about her father and mother she is distraught, not only because she cannot imagine how her mother would marry her

father, but because now she must readjust her identity in relation to accept the love she has and sees for her father with the hatred she feels for the Dew Breaker.

In the short story, “The Book of Miracles,” Ka’s family attends a Christmas Eve mass where Ka thinks she sees the chief officer of a Haitian death squad who had fled to New York. The mother, Anne, watches her daughter “fuming, shifting in her seat and mumbling under her breath” and feels a sense of pride for her daughters “righteous displeasure” (80). The man in question resembles Emmanuel Constant, a man accused of 5,000 acts of murder, rape, and torture. He had been sentenced *in absentia* for crimes against the Haitian people and would have suffered more than a hateful glance if his identity were uncovered amidst the Haitian worshipers. The mere possibility irritates both Ka and her mother with less than a profile of the man’s face available to view. After having taken communion, the mother walks back to her pew and stops to stare at the man. Of course it is not Constant, but a fellow Haitian who begins to think that maybe he knows this woman from somewhere who is trying to make the connection—but there is none to be made.

As Anne returns to her family and assures them that the man is someone else, a sense of relief lessens the tension. But a certain anxiety remains for the reader who recognizes in Anne, the potential for change; the realization of one of her miracles that would allow her to relate to the man other than through the gossip from Haiti. In Anne’s musings, it is possible to see the author’s attempt at opening a space of relation in the imaginary of her character’s mind. In the instant it takes Anne to question her response to a man who may or may not be Constant, she runs the gamut of possibilities that have shaped the man’s identity:

Would she spit in his face or embrace him, acknowledging a kinship of shame and guilt that she'd inherited by marrying her husband? How would she even know whether Constant felt any guilt or shame? What if he'd come to this Mass to flaunt his freedom? To taunt those who'd been affected by his crimes? What if he didn't even see it that way? What if he considered himself innocent? Innocent enough to go anywhere he pleased? What right did she have to judge him? As a devout Catholic and the wife of a man like her husband, she didn't have the same freedom to condemn as her daughter did. (81)

In this moment, as Anne presents herself as a devout Catholic but also complicit with her husband's crimes, she recognizes another way to relate to a Haitian traitor she has never seen and only known through secondhand sources. In her own guilt, she cannot see herself free to condemn the man in the same way that her daughter might. And yet, Ka's condemnation of the man was fueled by the same view of the past that motivated her misrepresentation of her father. "I don't really know what happened. I wasn't there," Ka admits (86). But this admittance does not quite account for her readiness to misrepresent one man for another's actions, even if she never planned on confronting him. It is her mother, not Ka, who considers the multiple elements that might have shaped Constant's identity. At this point chronologically, Ka has not yet been told her parents' story and has not had, nor seen any reason, to suspect the fixity of the past.

And so, later in her life when she decides to create a sculpture embodying the suffering of a Haitian prisoner she uses her father as her model. Ka sculpts a mahogany figure of her father, a representation of how she imagines him in prison. In her art, Ka has

captured the essence of the pain and distress of those who suffered so much at the hands of fellow Haitians. But when Ka and her father travel together to bring the sculpture to an interested purchaser, the father destroys the sculpture. The night before they are to present it to an affluent Haitian family, he throws it into a lake where the natural cracks Ka had kept in the sculpture for their symbolic value take in the water, eventually splitting the wood in pieces. Ka's sculpture acts as a stand-in for Ka's confidence in her parents, her connection with Haiti, and her identity in relation to their opposing stories. Ka's identity is unable to negotiate the veneration she has long felt for her father and her imagining of his painful past with the truth of her father's complicity in making that past so painful for other Haitians. The sculpture is weakened by the cracks left in the wood for aesthetic purposes just as Ka's identity is weakened by the fragments of her father's past left unconsidered in a nostalgic representation.

Another story in *The Dew Breaker* narrates the struggle of a young man, Dany, whose vision of the future was abruptly stripped from him. When six years old, his parents were shot to death and their home burned to the ground by the military police. His Aunt Estina was blinded by the fire and sent her young nephew to New York to be as far away from his parents' killers as possible. A life with friends and extended family in the Haitian mountains was lost to him with his immigration to the U.S. In the attempt to escape the past, however, Dany found that the past was affecting his visions of the future. When Dany goes to the local barber to see about a basement room for rent he recognizes his parents' murderer. "He took the empty room in the barber's basement. He couldn't sleep for months, spending his weekends in nightclubs to pass the time" (106). Dany would return on a regular basis to get his haircut done with the expectation that the barber

would recognize him. The anger that he felt left him with little thought than entertaining plans for revenge on behalf of his parents, his aunt, and the life that “one single person had been given the power to destroy” (107). Dany even ventures up to the barber’s bedroom one night when the mother and daughter are away; but the fear of being wrong, of killing the wrong man and destroying the life of another child restrains him.

But while Dany finds himself incapable of fulfilling what has been his vision of the future ever since recognizing his parents’ murderer, he cannot imagine a future outside of that vision either. So he returns to Haiti expecting to receive support from his aunt, to be told that it was his responsibility and right to avenge his family. Unfortunately, in much the same way that Ka was forced to affiliate herself with her family via secondhand experiences and histories, Dany had had to define his destiny with the influence of the Haitian community in New York. Much of his view of the future must be based on the feelings of regret, hatred, and revenge that color most histories of Haiti. But when he arrives at his aunt’s village he finds himself thrown in together with a community that has gone on living since the Duvalier regime and whose stories are more familiar and reflective. Old acquaintances come to catch up; a fellow Haitian expatriate that had returned to the village talks with Dany to keep up his English; a young woman from the village even catches Dany’s eye. In all this present living and with his aunt’s unwillingness to return to the past, Dany finds his vision once again clouded. When his aunt suddenly dies, the only counsel left to him concerning his future dealing with the past resides in a disheartened apology. Sorry for not having let Dany share what he came to say, Estina says, “It’s like walking up these mountains and losing something precious halfway. For you, it would be no problem walking back to find it because you’re still

young and strong, but for me it would take a lot more time and effort” (109). Neither an affirmation nor renunciation of Dany’s duty to the memory of his parents, Estina’s response leaves Dany as unsure as before. With the help of the Haitian burial ceremony, the kindness of villagers, and the time spent in mourning; it may be possible for Dany to learn in imagining how his aunt had come to live a meaningful life, how to envision such a life for himself.

Most importantly, this possibility asserts itself through a return to the island and a return to the past because it forces Dany to acknowledge the fluidity of his future. His aunt, the village, and Haiti itself has moved onward while Dany has remained in a kind of relational stasis—unable to adjust in the present because his vision of the future urges him along a path he cannot take. The mourning ceremony for his aunt emphasizes—and Dany himself realizes this—a time not only to grieve but also to give up the pain caused by death and suffering. In a way, Estina’s death is the one last thing she can do for her nephew to give him the opportunity for change. Her death provides a locus for the past, present, and future in Dany’s lived experience, a moment of relation that restores the fluidity necessary for an identity in relation. For once, he has the opportunity of dealing directly with his pain and his familial responsibilities. He does not have to rely on the image of his suffering aunt that he had kept alive in New York, because the villagers have so much to share about his aunt’s life of happiness and progression. He does not have to return to New York and avenge his parents because he has seen that his aunt had found a way to make better use of her future. The attentions of the young Haitian woman and the talkative Haitian American also help him to begin to imagine a future of companionship and healing he had not thought possible.

Another character, however, who is unable to take advantage of such a moment of relation, convinces herself that her past is literally still with her—that the prison guard who abused her in Haiti has been following her ever since she came to the United States. Beatrice Saint Fort in “The Bridal Seamstress” takes part in a short interview with a Haitian American intern, Aline. During the interview, Beatrice shows a healthy amount of pride in her coffee and her dresses. Her self-assuredness, even as a Haitian in exile, stands in stark contrast with the young Haitian American. One is a young college student focusing on an uncertain future, the other, as a retiring seamstress is more than certain of her past. In fact, Beatrice cannot let go of the past for more than psychological reasons. To keep her business going she maintains a list of her former clients and sends them announcements when she moves from place to place. These moves are made in direct consequence of her past as well. Beatrice is convinced that, even at the time of her interview, the old Haitian prison guard is living on her street. While taking a brief walk with her interviewer, she points out his house and relates her experience. But when Aline goes to the house to investigate, she finds out that no one has lived there for years and that the owner is a woman who moved back to Columbia. She returns to tell Beatrice that she has no need to worry, only to have the old woman respond that its vacancy is not surprising. She is convinced that that is where the guard lives, always following her and living in empty houses to avoid being captured by the police. She is haunted by ghosts from the past that are even more detrimental than those of Dany and Ka because they don’t allow her the possibility of living in the present. There is no one in her life to upset her representations of the past, to challenge them as being too fixed and irrelevant. Even the emptiness of the house fits within her constructions.

Aline, who is only just beginning to “[imagine] that people like Beatrice exist, men and women whose tremendous agonies [fill] every blank spaces in their lives,” is unable to sufficiently bring Beatrice into the present (137). Her own insecurities make it too difficult for her to be able to help Beatrice out of hers. The story ends with both of them sitting and waiting for some time to pass, aesthetically to “see how the green ash leaves looked slowly falling from the tall tree in the very ordinary golden light of dusk” (138). But, in the context of our discussion, the two find themselves inactive, trapped in a typically nostalgic ending. There is an important difference between the two however. For Aline, the uncertainty she feels about her future helps keep it open, dynamic, in relation. She may be passing time momentarily, but the impetus she has to write stories and make the effort to reconsider her future will motivate her to make changes. But Beatrice, whose vision of the future is deeply rooted in her memory of the past, will move again without leaving any cards or forwarding addresses as she has done in the past. And, perhaps, she will be able to feel more at ease in a new place and community to distract her as she lives out the rest of her life. But it is just as likely that she will move to a new home only to discover yet another empty house on her block where her aggressor watches and waits for her. Beatrice’s vision of the future lacks the uncertainty necessary for her to relate within it and find a way out of the cycle she has lived her whole life.

The *Dew Breaker* ends with a return to the story of the Dew Breaker himself, Ka’s father who remains unnamed, and her mother Anne. It is not until this last story that the reader learns the full details (at least as much as Danticat feels to include) of Ka’s parents’ meeting. We learn how the father got the scar that shames him and more of Anne’s epilepsy. We learn enough as a reader to feel, perhaps, some different sentiment

for the two than when the first story ends with Ka trying to piece together the fragments of a story she cannot comprehend.”Manman, how do you love him?” is all that Ka can ask (24). What possible explanation can there be for the willing union of a horrid murderer and the sister of his last victim? But more important than an explanation from her mother is Ka’s recognition that her parents do love each other, despite the past. She asks, “How?” and not “Do?” The difference signifies a willingness on Ka’s part to accept a perspective, a vision of love and revision of the past with which she cannot identify. However, it should be understood that this inability is not permanent, nor is it solely Ka’s fault. Many times Ka had tried to get her parents to talk about the past. She consulted a variety of sources to be able to represent their history when that attempt failed. But because none of those representations were themselves open to relation, Ka’s identity and relationship with her parents was affected.

When Ka’s father explains his actions and history to his daughter he declares that despite the violence of the past, in the present he is still her father, still the husband of her mother. He promises that he would never do such atrocities in the present. And assuming this promise has more to do with an inner conviction than from a geo-political distancing (being out of Haiti he cannot kill for the government anymore), Ka believes that “maybe [her] father was wrong in his own representation of his former life, that maybe his past offered more choices than being either hunter or prey” (24). She recognizes, although her father does not, an opportunity to change what her father presents as his identity and how he represents the past. She begins to see her father, too, as a man who suffered at the hands of other Haitians, caught in a situation that offered him the choice of being hunter or prey but not both at the same time. He was the man who killed his wife’s brother, but

he was also the man thrown out of prison and threatened himself for not obeying an order. In some sense, the brother had fallen prey to the Dew Breaker's rage and his life was over. But Ka's father in many ways was still prey to the past, living in secret, unable to make friends for fear of recognition, caught between the life he lived and the one he was trying to create.

Above, Ka's sculpture was seen as a symbol of Ka's identity and the weakness imposed upon it by a nostalgic representation of the past. But unlike the statue that could not be saved from its watery grave, Ka's identity seems to be well on the mend. Her understanding of the past has been challenged and modified, her relationship with her parents brought into closer relation as they communicate, and her future lies open in her present living in relation. In providing the impetus that moved Ka and her family in such a moment of relation, Ka's art has achieved more than a mere commemoration of a singular history. It has made it possible for Ka to begin to relate within a transnational imaginary where she is able to negotiate both histories (that of her Haitian neighbors and of her parents) while remaining Haitian and her parents' daughter. As Ka, Dany, and Beatrice's stories demonstrate, living in diaspora without the freedom to envision a new future and imagine a fluid past is difficult. It is difficult because it requires individuals to relate to so many different cultures and histories without having the ability to relate to them all without the kind of simplification that nation, nostalgia, and vision provide. But as Danticat's narrative also demonstrates, life in diaspora is also replete with opportunities that bring the question of identity and relation to the forefront of the individual's attention. The key is to take advantage of those unsettling moments of

relation rather than return to the seeming security of an identity rooted in static representations and misrepresentations of history.

Claiming History

In her postscript to *In the Time of the Butterflies* and in the acknowledgements of *In the Name of Salomé*, Julia Alvarez asserts that her novels are more concerned with literature than they are with historical representation—especially the static, hegemonic history discussed above. “This is not biography or historical portraiture or even a record of all I learned, but a work of the imagination” (*Salomé* 357). Whether or not one is convinced that Alvarez’s renunciation of biographical or historical intent is genuine, such statements acknowledge the juxtaposition of history and the imagination in her novel. In the context of the transnational imaginary, however, the boundaries between history and imagination are blurred by Alvarez’s characters who do more than present themselves and their history. As the main character of *In the Name of Salomé*, Camila, narrates her and her mother’s history she learns how to appreciate the necessity of constructing identity in relation. Within her narrative she reveals an identity struggling to root itself in a fragmented past while trying to relate in the present. Of course, she runs into the same kinds of setbacks as the characters discussed in the previous chapter. But as she creates a historical narrative based on the multiple perspectives provided by her family papers, that history is opened up for her in ways that it had not when she was growing up. Before she leaves for Cuba, she divides her family’s papers into two trunks—one that will go to an official archive of her mother and another that she will keep for herself. In this way she lays claim to one history while not quite rejecting the other.

As the third process of present living, this claim to history is different than the proclaiming or disclaiming of history that has been resisted in the discussion of nation

and its historical appropriations. Camila's claim recognizes her representation of history as a choice and does not keep her from relating it to other histories. Within her narrative, numerous family members and associates share the personal memories of Salomé. But when it comes down to sorting the papers, even though they "should all go to the archives . . . let the true story be told," Camila has her assistant Nancy label one trunk 'Archives' and put her own name on the other (44). The implication is that Camila is momentarily contributing to the national history of her mother by not sharing those papers that would complicate the national representation of the national poetess. But as her narrative retraces a long history of misrepresenting her mother, Camila has decided to claim the history that will help her identify in relation with her mother in order to live like her rather than be the static representation of her mother that she had held onto for many years.

As Camila and her assistant Nancy go through the Henríquez family papers, the reader learns more about the history of the family in a chiasmic narrative construction. The first and last chapters bear the same title, as do the corresponding pairs (e.g. second and penultimate, third and antepenultimate, etc.). This structure mirrors the narrative *reçit* that begins with Salomé's earliest memories coupled with Camila's decisions for retirement and that ends with Salomé's death and Camila's childhood. In this way the visual structure of the narrative demonstrates a relationship with history that is less teleological than histories that begin in the past and trace events toward their realization in the present. This narrative structure also brings out an important element of historical relation that traditional chronologies belie: its constructedness and relation to either Salomé's or Camila's narrative. While alternating chapter titles are in either Spanish or

English, they are identical (within the chiasmus) to one another and ultimately resolve into one cohesive story. The chapters relating to Salomé's narrative thread are in Spanish and Camila's in English but this distinction is not necessary to separate them within the novel.¹⁷ But the visible distinctions between chapters are important to the revision of the relation between the present and its history. They signify the possibility of union of the past and present for individuals divided among disparate cultural backgrounds and histories. More traditional chronologies trace multiple branches or histories separately and then compare them together. In *Salomé*, however, the chronology is combined and interdependent just as Camila and Salomé's histories are combined and interdependent in Camila's construction of her identity in relation. In the prologue, while Camila and her friend Marion are driving the long miles to Florida, Camila explains that to answer the 'whys' of her life she has to start with her mother (*Salomé* 7-8). For Camila, her mother embodies the past to such an extent that it is in the telling of Salomé's story that Camila's comes to light.

Multiple readings of *In the Name of Salomé* tackle this complex narrative structure in order to articulate the effect of history on its characters. At some point, these articles take up the novel's epilogue because it stands out in Camila's narrative for its location, first-person narration, and articulation of Camila's relationship with her mother. In an article in which she attempts to demonstrate Alvarez's self-representation in an exploration of "the impact of the mother figure on the daughter's process of identity definition" (54), Julee Tate sees Camila's coming into her own narrative voice in the

¹⁷ Alvarez accomplishes this by writing Salomé's chapters in the first person, ostensibly because the information is garnered from Camila's trunks of family papers. The chapters regarding Camila are written in the third person, presumably by the assistant or another narrator (perhaps her friend Marion) with whom Camila has shared her story.

epilogue as an achievement of self-actualization, a resolution of “Camila’s issues of boundary confusion with her mother” (58). But if this ‘achievement of self-actualization’ is meant to describe Camila’s successful reconstruction of boundaries between herself and her mother, too many events in the epilogue suggest otherwise. The epilogue begins with Camila adamantly demanding that her tombstone be redone with her full name (333-335), Salomé Camila, even though she had made it a practice of not using her first name, “considering it an honor she had not earned” (37). The final image of Camila finds her having returned to the Santo Domingo, teaching a young man to read just as her mother had done for Tivisita almost a century before. Rather than achieve self-actualization, Camila has even more literally fallen into her mother’s footsteps by taking on her name and actions. The consummation of the novel, then, cannot be seen as a simple reassertion of boundaries between the history and identities of Salomé and Camila. In the context of a transnational imaginary where such boundaries are problematic to identities in relation and symptomatic of rooted identities there needs to be a more dynamic assessment of this structurally and narratively important moment.

Trenton Hickman hits upon a more likely estimation of Alvarez’s project and its emergence in her narrative structure. Hickman argues that *In the Name of Salomé* is an example of Alvarez’s crafting of “a commemorative fiction—or a ‘commemorafiction’—that reminds us of its artifice even as it asks us to respect, commemorate, and emulate” the achievements of Alvarez’s characters (103). In this light, Camila becomes the representative of a hemispheric American finally able to come to an understanding of herself through the process of hagiographic commemoration. For Hickman, a primary function of the novel plays out “Camila’s coming to terms with, honoring, and finally

emulating Salomé's life" (112). Because of this, the prologue and epilogue become 'before-and-after glimpses' of Camila as she undergoes this process. Hickman's reading of the epilogue is more in line with the evidences that Camila has drawn closer to her mother rather than further away. While no longer concerned with *being* her mother (45, 331), Camila has found contentment in *being like* her.

But in the current discussion it is important to move a step beyond the simple recognition that by the epilogue Camila has succeeded in emulating her mother. As her narrative reveals, Camila has been trying all throughout her voice to emulate Salomé. She has attempted writing poetry, she tries to fall in love and begin a family, she takes care of her father, and she even consults her mother's poetry as a bibliomantic guide. "These days she is feeling so unsettled that she has started consulting her mother's poems. But the game is getting out of hand," Camila reveals shortly before her depart from Poughkeepsie [31]. But it is not 'getting out of hand' simply because, as Camila's doctor explains, "[Camila is] engaged in magical thinking" [31]. More than anything, Camila's lifelong attempts to emulate her mother are unyielding because the image of her mother that she attempts to emulate itself is fruitless. The identity of her mother that Camila has rooted herself in is for a long time too much based on the static memories she has of her. During the epilogue as Camila reminisces upon her infatuation with Domingo she realizes that he was merely a proxy for the artist and the "Africa in his skin—the things that connected [Camila] to [her] mother, not to him" (349). Camila writes her own poems in the hopes of contributing to the cause of "helping build our America" the same way her mother had defended *la patria* (124-5). However, in these attempts Camila was unsuccessful and even at the end of her life she recognizes even her lack of children to

send into the future as a failure and perhaps another role of her mother's which she has been unable to emulate (351).

And yet Tate and Hickman both see the epilogue as the successful negotiation of these and other obstacles to Camila's stable relation to the past. This is only possible if the events of Camila's life are reorganized into a chronology that positions the events in Camila's life in an emulative journey that culminates in the glimpses offered by the prologue and epilogue. Of course these readings are important and they do help trace a process that lead to Camila's achievement of a stable identity and relation with her mother. But they ignore the narrative structure of the novel that places the bulk of its attention on Camila's failure to achieve stability in her life and that traces Camila's history back to the point when her identity was itself the most unstable.¹⁸ More than as a rhetorical technique to highlight the complete turnaround Camila has made in her life, the structural juxtaposition of the last chapter and the epilogue functions to stress that same narrative structure; to emphasize the fact that the only way that the events of the epilogue could/would follow from the events of the last chapter is through making the decision to present them in that way. Hickman's term 'commemorafiction' and his emphasis on Camila's practice of hagiographic commemoration come closest to the realization that the narrative structure, as complicated as it is, may be more important to a reading of *In the Name of Salomé* than the story being told.

The narrative structure's manipulation of history is important because it is through the narrative process that Camila is able to relate to the history of her mother and

¹⁸ The final words of the last chapter, in response to her father's searching cry for Salomé Camila are "Here we are" (331). Camila, hiding in a broiler room of a ship and close to asphyxiation, thinks of her mother's absence as only momentarily and still closely identifies with her even though she recognizes her mother's absence.

her own life without being lost in them. As Camila frees herself somewhat from her family's paper archives by sorting them, she begins to realize that many of those papers contain stories of her past she has never known that challenge her representation of history. When she then puts them together in her own narrative she claims all of these elements of her history and positions herself more stably in relation to the past. In order to accomplish this task, however, requires a number of changes to that relation to the past and her own representations of history.

The first of these changes requires an attitude adjustment towards the past. As made mention to above, a third level of meaning for the term present living plays off the word 'present' as a gift of kindness or a commemoration. This type of present living requires a different appreciation of the past than that felt by disillusioned modernists and historically marginalized self-interest groups. Camila has to make the change from willing an exorcism of her familial ghosts to being a willing guardian of ancestral memory. Rather than the guilt-ridden, ideologically saturated, and hegemonic History held in derision by postmodernism, present living assumes the past as a source of socio-cultural and political experience more malleable than malicious. Salomé's narrative provides numerous examples of such historical manipulation. Her narrative begins:

The story of my life starts with the story of my country, as I was born six years after independence, a sickly child, not expected to live. But by the time I was six, I was in better health than my country, for la patria had already suffered eleven changes of government, I, on the other hand, had only endured one major change; my mother had left my father. [13]

With this beginning, Alvarez's character recognizes a significant amount of history that occurred previous to her birth and of which, as the national poetess, she will become a part. She does not begin, "A long time ago, on an island far away, in a country newly free, I was born." The story of her life and the story of her country are contingent, the operative conjunction being 'with' rather than 'in', 'on', or 'during'. The significance of this difference is manifold. It suggests that although the Dominican Republic won independence six years previously, its story, as told by Salomé, begins only with the cognizance of Salomé to relate it. In the imaginary paradigm of her narrative, not only are their births concurrent but comparative. Salomé observes her improving health in contrast to that of *la patria* and despite the government's claims recognizes its ailing. In a childlike innocence appropriate for the six-year-old narrating voice, Salomé's interpretation of history accommodates her experience even as it acknowledges the possibility of other interpretations.

This possibility is shown even more so in the account of March 18, 1861, when the president of the republic announces the restoration of Spanish colonial control. While Salomé's narrative details the events of the day, the socio-political implications are sublimated by the child's subjectivity. She feels the unrest of the crowd and recalls a personal experience with the president that has earned her own dislike for him. She hears the president's speech and sees the raising of the Spanish flag, but without political understanding. As she waves her own Dominican flag, brought to participate in the fanfare of the presidential order, her mother angrily breaks it in two without Salomé's comprehension. Of course, the reader who has been given enough information between the lines of the child's narrative grasps the disappointment of the crowd and frustration of

the mother with the loss of Dominican political independence. But for Salomé the Spanish flag, “yellow and red means that now all Dominicans will be friends again and husbands and wives will live together, and children will have their fathers around all the time” (29-30). Not simply a demonstration of Alvarez’s writing ability or Salomé’s natural storytelling ability, such a narration makes the reader aware of the subjectivity of this historical account at the same time that she privileges Salomé’s narrative by giving the familial tensions more attention than the political ones.

These two examples demonstrate ways in which the narrative manipulates history, allowing it to maintain key elements of historical integrity while at the same time creating alternative histories from textual archives and cultural artifacts.¹⁹ “What these things mean, only the dead can tell. But they are details of Salomé’s story that increasingly connect [Camila’s] mother’s life to her own” (45). While these details have a single historical relevancy, their significance to the present must be made in the present, created in commemoration of what the past has handed down rather than derived from some intrinsic sense of antique value or cultural worth. By simply bringing the past forward in a “fixed linearity of time” it would be impossible for Camila to have any relationship with her mother—not only did she die, but she and her poetry were appropriated by national rhetoric (*Poetics* 47). Similarly, Alvarez and Danticat would find it nearly as

¹⁹ In the second chapter of *In the Name of Salomé*, Camila goes through a couple of trunks given to her by her brother that contain the family papers: “Every night she pores over her mother’s box: notes to her children; a sachet with dried purplish flowers; a catechism book, *catón cristiano*, with a little girl’s handwriting on the back cover; silly poems from someone named Nísidas; a lock of hair; a baby tooth tied up in handkerchief; a small Dominican flag her mother must have sewn herself, its stick snapped off, no doubt from the weight of the other packets upon it” (45). In addition to Camila’s postulating as to why the Dominican flag was broken, Salomé’s narrative provides yet another example of historical malleability. Not that there does not exist a true event that may account for its existence, but that in its present living its history is also open to relation.

difficult to imagine a Dominican Republic or Haiti without feelings of horror and frustration after centuries of slavery, revolution, and national despotism.

However, by reaching back towards the past, taking the initiative and unburdening themselves of the biased histories that have been adopted by their respective countries and their new nation of residence, these authors arrive at something more. Their openness to the past, the willingness to investigate without privileging or proscribing sources, allows for a truer (albeit sometimes unsubstantiated) construction of the past that more closely echoes the past as lived by generations of Haitians and Dominicans. As described by Hickman, “Alvarez desires characters who are simultaneously ‘true’ to the ‘real’ Mirabals and Henríquez Ureñas but also who are products of fiction that isn’t ‘history’ but anchored in what Alvarez calls the ‘facts’ of her research” (105). It is the fictional element of her characterization that provides freedom to reinterpret the past and the desire for accuracy and credibility that create a process worthy of emulation.

The second change required before Camila can make the decision to reassume her full name involves a reconsideration of her roots. Even though Camila was raised in a large family, made even larger by her father’s remarriage, she maintains a very narrow sense of ancestry—especially in consideration of her Latino heritage that considers immediate family in a broader sense than Anglo-American cultures. Whether because of her many years living in the United States, her atypical connection to her mother, or simply as a way for Alvarez to minimize her number of characters; Camila focuses mainly on her mother, father, and brothers Pedro and Max. Even Salomé’s narrative thread only adds her parents, sister, and aunt to a rather bare family tree. There is of

course the occasional cousin or step-sibling, but in the minds of Salomé and Camila links to the past rely mainly on filial ties.²⁰

But in reality, such a linkage is highly problematic for Salomé and Camila. By the end of the first chapter, it has been made painfully clear that although much can be imagined, structured, and hoped for in the narrative space she creates, death retains its limits. On the last page of the first chapter, Salomé mulls over the realization that neither of her parents can explain to her what *la patria* is to her. It troubles her so much that she resolves in the last sentence: “I will have to figure out my own answers so that someday if I have a daughter I will know how to answer any question that she might put to me” (30). Following the blank spaces between chapters, Camila’s narrative begins:

She would like to ask her mother, “What should I do now?” But she has never had that luxury: a mother to turn to at difficult moments in her life, a hand on her brow, a soothing voice in her ear. [31]

Despite the numerous letters, poems, and stories Camila has from and about her mother the two are irreparably separated by death. In the finality of that state, even as Camila ages and approaches her own death she remains separated from her mother by over seventy-five years. All the attempts at identification that Camila makes directly towards her mother are frustrated by that fact.

These frustrations have much to do with Edouard Glissant’s analysis of identity in his *Poetics of Relation* wherein he identifies the detrimental characteristics of an identity that relies upon filial or diachronic transmission. Glissant describes this as a root identity and observes the following characteristics of such an identity:

²⁰ By filial ties I intimate the rooted, genealogical construction of history that conflicts with a more relational or rhizomatic approach as discussed in the introduction.

It is founded in the distant past—vision, a myth of the creation of the world.

It is sanctified by the hidden violence of filiation.

It is ratified by a claim to legitimacy that fosters a notion of entitlement.

It is preserved through projection and as a discursive knowledge. (143)

Camila struggles with her identity for so long because of the persistence of her desire to construct an identity rooted in her mother. As Camila ages the past becomes more and more distant to her. As she grows up, her mother becomes more and more a figure of legend that makes it even more difficult for Camila to be able to relate to her. Her Aunt Ramona, the guardian of Salomé's memory, teaches Camila when still a child "to make the sign of the cross, and to recite, 'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit of Salomé, my mother'" (318). She is also told of how Salomé, when dying from tuberculosis and pregnancy hears the cry of the daughter she thought was lost, "struggled back up out of the darkness to meet her" (313). Ramona goes as far as to tell a fifteen year old Camila, "That's why even with the doctors' prognosis, she got better. She lived for three more years. She lived those years for you" (294). These stories make of Camila's birth a miracle and of her mother a legend because although chronically ill she remained strong enough to birth a child and willed herself to live three years afterwards. For a daughter unable to find fulfillment in heterosexual love and isolated from the majority of her family for most of her life, it is impossible for Camila to identify with such a woman who breathed and died for her family. During much of her life she lives in reflection and regret of past opportunities to be mother and wife.

What Camila does remember of her mother is clouded by the violence of her illness and the distress of having to leave the Dominican Republic before she fully understands that her mother has gone somewhere she cannot follow. As Camila grows older she further protects (or to use Glissant's term, sanctifies) her relationships with her mother. When, during one of her visits, Ramona and Camila are discussing Salomé; Tivista interrupts and instead of being invited to share in the intimacy of the moment is rebuffed by the firm aunt. Annoyed that "she feels a stirring of affection that she does not want to feel", Camila decides that such a feeling "would amount to betraying [her] mother" (283). As a teenager at home alone with the Tivista's children, Camila feels uncomfortable as though she did not belong in Francisco and Tivista's family. She allows the fact that her mother gave birth to her a strong claim to legitimacy that is fostered by her aunt's estimation of Francisco and his fidelity towards Salomé.

As long as the family remains silent, Camila is able to maintain her rooted identity, rationalize her dislike for Tivista, and continue believing the stories she has projected onto the past. But when she comes across the numerous letters that her father has been in the habit of using as bookmarks, her hold on the past is broken and the sanctity of her relationship with her mother threatened. These letters reveal to her, as they have already done so for the reader, her father's infidelity in France, her mother's penname, and caused her to question the hasty marriage of her father and Tivista. But the real blow comes when Ramona reveals the attachment that Camila had to Tivista as a child and the desire Salomé had had to let Tivista stay even after she suspected Francisco of infidelity. This final revelation makes Camila's relationship to her mother even more difficult. Ramona explains, "It was a bad labor, as you can imagine. Your mother, your

father, even I—we all thought you were dead. Tivista saved your life” (294). This admission makes it even more difficult for Camila to maintain her hold on her mother because, in a literal sense, it signifies that both Salomé and Tivista were responsible for giving her life. That singular gift that connected Camila to her mother, that guaranteed the legitimacy of her full name, Salomé Camila, was with this surprising news to be shared with her stepmother.

Unable to negotiate this identity crisis, Camila refocuses her attention on the physicality of her mother and those traits which she does share exclusively with Salomé. Even though her attempts to hold onto this rooted identity have been frustrated time and again, Camila maintains its legitimacy throughout her life. Of course, who is going to question whether or not Salomé is really Camila’s mother. After all, Camila is genetically Salomé’s offspring; she has the same physical characteristics to the point of emulating her mother’s cough. But the truth, at least in Alvarez’s narrative, is that Camila’s unwillingness or inability to reconsider her identity construction avoids some truth of her past. And even though one might concede that this remains Camila’s prerogative, doing so has two detrimental results. One, it affects her relationship with Tivista to the point that she cannot foster the healthy—perhaps even owed—bond between the two. Two, it preserves an inaccurate connection with both her past and her mother that will continue to plague Camila throughout her life. Even more tragically, it prevents Camila from ever truly approaching the loss of her mother and accepting Salomé’s actions that might have provided Camila with, if not a surrogate mother, at least someone who knew Salomé more intimately than anyone else in her final years.

While this moment in Camila's life provided the chance to reconsider her attachment to her mother and refusal of anyone else to substitute her, the adolescent was unable to seize that opportunity. But for Camila, the retired Spanish teacher, who narrates the story, it seems to be a central theme. The narrator reveals Camila's ambivalent feelings toward Tivista and suggests moments when she might have been able to reconsider her relation with Tivista and her mother. But, whether because of Aunt Mon's presence or adolescent peevishness Camila does not seize the opportunity and therefore misses the opportunity to fill in part of the fragmented history surrounding her absent mother.

It could be argued that Salomé, knowing that she would not live long enough to leave much of an impression upon her daughter, hoped to provide Camila with as many people around her as she grew to help her come to know of her through others in relation. Glissant's description of such an identity of relation observes:

It is linked not to a creation but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures [communities and individuals].

It is produced in a network of Relation rather than the fixed rigidity of filiation.

It does not devise any legitimacy as its guarantee of entitlement.

It gives-on-and-with rather than grasps. (143)

As is recognizable in the previous examples, Alvarez's narrative structure has placed Camila in an identifying past or present community replete with the contradictory experience and networks of relation that frustrate her hold on a root identity. But she, like many of Alvarez's readers is not prepared to make the change that could provide what

Valérie Loichot asserts “as the only constructive escape from narrow family, plantation, and national units” (195). Camila is unable to confront the differences preserved within her genealogical identity and refuses to adopt herself into an identity of relation. Because of this rejection of a role “that consolidates the formation of groups not built on biological lines of transmission,” Camila continues to struggle with her identity until the end of her life (195).

However, there is a moment in the epilogue when Camila appears to have found her way outside of the rigidity of a rooted identity. Perhaps because she has just recently been talking to her niece within the intimate trust of a daughter asking her mother, “What should I do now?” or because she is walking among the graves of many others whose fate she will soon share; Camila finds herself thinking of her work in Cuba as a teacher. She laments that she has no children of her own to carry on the work in the future. But then corrects herself, “Not true! My Nancy in Poughkeepsie, my coffee sorters in Sierra Maestra, my Belkys, my Lupe, my Elsa in Santo Domingo—my own and not my own—the way it is for all us childless mothers who help raise the young” (349). In this moment it seems possible that Camila has found strength in recognizing the importance and validity of her relationships with those whom she has taught. Her relationship with Rodolfo and familiarity with her nieces also suggest a greater openness towards her extended family than she had allowed when younger. By placing greater importance on relationships with others in addition to Salomé, Pibín, and Marion; Camila begins to live in the present and identify herself more in relation with those around her. This is far different than when she was younger and thought of herself as Salomé’s daughter more than in connection with anyone else. It is difficult to define something at length without

being able to rely on other objects or properties with which to compare it. With less and less people in her life with whom she related, Camila necessarily found it harder to construct her own identity. But in the extension of familial ties from filial roots, Camila realized the diagram made by her assistant Nancy as a part of her identity. No longer just a ‘curious moment for the next tenant to ponder,’ her extended family tree provides other identities with which to relate and from which to distinguish herself (6).

But perhaps the most important element of Camila’s reversal of character—her change from a root identity to one of relation—is evidenced by a semiotic and ideological reversal. Throughout the majority of her life Camila has always avoided being called by her first given name because of a feeling that it is a right that must be earned. Rodolfo even recalls that “Papancho said [Camila] used to get annoyed with him when he called [her] Salomé Camila. [She’d] go hide” (334). At the same time, Camila admits a longing that would send her wandering through whatever space she was living in at the time in a futile, physical displacement symbolic of her search for her absent mother (335). But when Rodolfo suggests that she could be buried with her mother, Camila’s response is both ironic and humorous: “An eternity of visitors! What could be worse than that? As for being with Mamá, I learned how to be with her as an absence all my life. Why change things on me now?” (337). But even as she has accepted the irreparable separation between her and her mother, Camila insists upon having her full name engraved on her grave marker.

Through this reversal, Camila has shown a change not in her relationship with her mother but the terms and conditions by which she identifies with her. After finally accepting the whole of her history and that of her mother’s, she is no longer traumatized

by her mother's absence. Whereas the biological link that connected mother to daughter was a single, tenuous thread; the combination of texts, stories, and individuals that surround Salomé provide a veritable web of support for Camila. With this newfound assurance she again claims that which has always connected her with her mother, the name of Salomé. When she takes advantage of that network of relation in the construction of her narrative, she achieves a stability in her identity long absent in her life.

Camila describes this experience as an experiment with different coping strategies. "I learned her story. I put it side by side with my own. I wove our lives together as strong as a rope and with it I pulled myself out of the pit of depression and self-doubt" (335). In this third realization or change, Camila is empowered by the imaginary space of her narrative. Much as her name provides a powerful, semiotic link to her mother and an important aspect of her identity; language in poetry, epistle, and narrative structure a network of relation that provides meaning to a life ungrounded in identity. In a manner that Patrick Corcoran relates to the practice of *bricolage*, *In the Name of Salomé* is like "the cobbling together of disparate elements to create a new way for inhabiting a specific landscape and meet specific challenges, not least that of connecting the past to the present (192). Like the cobbler's stones which amount to very little in and of themselves, the power of narration lies in its ability to pave a path between destinations, origins, individuals and identities. Camila's earlier attempts to connect with her mother failed because the mother she was searching for did not exist. For one, Salomé was dead and so physically unattainable. But two, the representation of her mother that Camila relied upon to construct her identity and live her life was also evasive. Time and again throughout her life, Camila learned things about her mother that could have made it possible to escape

the dangers of fixed representations of the past as had Danticat's characters Ka and Dany. Instead she continued trying to pattern her life after those aspects of her mother's history that she could not emulate.

But through the narrative process, she comes to realize all those moments of relation in her life that, though upsetting, could have allowed her the possibility of reconnecting with her mother in ways other than the directness for which she longed. The most obvious sign that Camila has loosened her hold on that longing is her decision, right before taking her trip to the Dominican Republic, to have the archives in Havana pick up her "trunk of Mamá's papers" (336). The family papers that had provided her with numerous histories within which to relate to her mother and even made it obvious to Camila the possibility of presenting two different histories were no longer necessary for Camila to possess. Her narrative, her claiming of history, had made it possible to finally live in the present without being restricted by the past. In Santo Domingo her step-brother, Rodolfo, attempts to persuade Camila to stay with him rather than return to Cuba. He claims, "Just the thought of you all alone there—it would kill me, Camila, it really would" (337). And then, in a gesturing mimicking that of his fathers, "He put his hand on his chest, that old gesture of Papancho's, threatening to punish filial disobedience with a paterfamilias heart attack" (337). But Camila does not give in to this attempt to restrict herself within the bonds of filial fidelity. More than an assertion of authority over her younger step-brother, her resistance recognizes the gesture in a context of restrictive historicity, the past attempting to influence her in the present. However, she is no longer the Camila of Poughkeepsie who had assumed that "only the dead can tell" the meaning of the historical artifacts and memories that continue into the present. Camila has learned

that the “real revolution could only be won by the imagination” and that when a newly literate student “picked up a book and read with hunger pleasure . . . we were one step closer to the patria we all wanted” (347).

The importance and privilege that Camila places on the imagination is a result of her experience with the narrative process that has freed her from an identity rooted in the past and empowered her to fully engage in present living. Through narration she was able to imagine and accept an association with the numerous, disparate elements of her past that she had previously shunned and ignored in order to maintain an identity rooted in her mother. Her imagination made it possible to eventually accept the transference of history without proscription or privileging. She might claim some elements over others in order to maintain her identity in relation, but not as a way of precluding their interconnectedness or tendency to disrupt rootedness.

Camila’s narrative, as it deals with her experience in the United States, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, relies on the transnational imaginary within which all of the novels discussed above have been inscribed. These novels engage the complexities of the experience of Haitians and Dominicans in diaspora in order to represent characters that are real to that experience. In the process of portraying these characters, Alvarez and Danticat demonstrate the process of identity in relation that is itself becoming the lived reality of the twenty-first century. As populations from once colonized nations continue to pour into the European and American countries that grew prosperous in their imperialism, the experience of the Caribbean becomes more apparent in the experience of nations like the United States. An increase in cross-cultural associations has already created socio-political rifts and cultural misrepresentations. With the technology and

socio-economic interdependence of globalization, these same cross-cultural encounters are occurring on an intimate level even without the mediating affects of national governments. These changes affect the way individuals relate within their community, nation, and the world. They make it impossible for identity to root itself in filial or national histories and maintain legitimacy without aggression and violence. They contribute to a feeling of insecurity as individuals attempt to negotiate an identity in relation while living in a national paradigm itself still rooted in its particularities. But a gradual paradigm shift into a transnational imaginary will help restructure individuals' relation with the world. It will allow them to identify outside of national and ethnic identities in order to claim cultural affiliations dynamic histories that promote identity in relation. Alvarez and Danticat's novels, rather than offer a guide to global bliss, simply provide a transnational perspective and practical application of present living that can bring us one step closer to a global outlook with which we can all relate.

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