

ABSTRACT

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 GEOGRAPHIES OF PAIN: BODILY
 REPRESENTATIONS IN CARIBBEAN
 WOMEN'S ART

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 Definitely, this dissertation's central intellectual and political aims are rooted in a guiding principle of Caribbean womanhood; and, with black women's bodies located at the center, the goal of this study is to provide new alternatives to understanding "writing the body" by looking to Caribbean women's cultural products as sites of theory formation. The artists and the works selected for this study demonstrate an awareness of the need for a re-evaluation of the metaphor of writing the body which takes into account the specificities of race, ethnicity and nationality. To that end, this study focuses on texts and performances by Caribbean women in order to examine the development of a Caribbean feminist

consciousness and its ability to not only convey but also legitimate Caribbean female perspectives and experiences.

Dionne Brand, Edwidge Danticat, Marion Hall, Joan Riley and Myriam Warner-Vieyra provide us with an opportunity to trace the processes through which Caribbean women artists write their own bodies and how those bodies can be used to explore larger issues around identity, geography and history. In the music and performances of Marion Hall this project looks closely at the intricacies that comprise women's sexuality, sexual autonomy and sexual identity beyond their objectification as sexual objects for men. In Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, Riley's *The Unbelonging* and Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, the study examines the metropolis as a source of contamination that forces us to recognize madness as a socio-cultural and historical construct with gender specific consequences. Finally, the study concludes with Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*, where it investigates literary representations of the female body as a representative text that disrupts the official narrative and brings forth a uniquely female historical subjectivity.

CARTOGRAPHIC MEMORIES AND GEOGRAPHIES OF PAIN:
BODILY REPRESENTATIONS IN CARIBBEAN WOMEN'S ART

By

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Dedication

For my grandmother, Rosie Lee Wright.

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I would like to thank the following people for their continuous love, commitment and support during the process of writing this dissertation, throughout my graduate career and throughout my life: The entire Wallace family, but especially my mother, Mary; my grandfather, Moses; my sisters, Karyn, Felicia, Lisa and Tanya; and my brothers, Carl, Larry, Michael and Ricky. I also wish to thank all my friends, colleagues and mentors, but especially: Merle Collins, Carmen Coustaut, Tanya Shields, Psyche Williams and Marvourneen Dolor. In addition, I wish to acknowledge and thank: A.Lynn Bolles, Elsa Barkley Brown, Miriam DeCostas-Willis, Desi de Valle, Gladys Marie Fry, Adisa Griffith, Gia Harewood, Muata Kamdibe, Meghan Kirksey, Randi Gray Kristensen, Marilee Lindemann, Acklyn Lynch, Martha Nell Smith, Bob Mondello, Andre Plummer, Eugene Robinson, Tammy Sanders, Carlos Schorder, April Shemak, Stan Shemak, Bonnie Thornton-Dill, and Mary Helen Washington. A special note of gratitude to my Advisory Committee members: Prof. Collins, Prof. Barkley-Brown, Prof. Bolles, Prof. Lindemann and Prof. Robinson. I would also like to recognize the following programs: the Africana Studies

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An Introduction: The Race From Theory

This project, "Cartographic Memories and Geographies of Pain: Bodily Representations in Caribbean Women's Art," aims at an analysis of how African Caribbean artists represent themselves and other Caribbean women. More specifically, it examines the way Caribbean women artists read women's bodies and how they have been shaped by a particular Caribbean identity, geography and history. I will consciously privilege artistic expressions by foregrounding the works of these artists and of theorists who refer specifically to a Caribbean and/or African Diasporan experience, subsequently moving to a consideration of global theories and how these might apply to this specific Caribbean and African Diasporan experience.

It is important to note that while Caribbean women are not exclusively of African heritage, I have chosen, because of an interest in the African Diaspora, to privilege African Caribbean women. It is to be expected that some of my observations may be relevant also to

Caribbean women of Asian, European, or other origin, but the reach of this project is limited by its concern with the Caribbean in so far as it represents part of an African Diasporan experience. Because, to my knowledge, those whom I here refer to as African Caribbean women do not generally use the term to refer to themselves and because my concern with representations of the body leads to a heightened sensitivity about words used to describe the body, I will use the term African Caribbean interchangeably with black, which I believe to be more representative of Caribbean usage.

I do, however, recognize the historical and linguistic problems inherent in such usage:

The term 'black' has always been a problematic one, the main problem being its emergence within the modernist era as an oppositional term for white and the differential meanings that it has had in different contexts.... The argument about the term 'black' has been echoed in the Caribbean as well. Well into the 1980s [people] questioned the use of the term 'black' to refer to Caribbean people of Indian ancestry. They too argued that 'black' had a meaning and relevance to people of African descent that it did not have for Indians and so was a hegemonic concept that denied the specificity of the Indian Caribbean experience.¹

¹ Rhoda Roddock, "Conceptualizing 'Difference' in Caribbean Feminist Theory." IN *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001) 199-200

The Caribbean and its people are fragmented and heterogeneous, thus making difference as important as sameness in (racial) identity formations. Consequently, identities largely become questions about representations and visibility. While I am not arguing for the silencing of some in order to allow others to speak, I do acknowledge that black women's voices are given greater attention here.

In this project, my use of the term black might be understood with reference to Kamau Brathwaite's use of the term Creole. He defines creolization as the "forced acculturation of Africans to European norms and behaviours, the inadvertent assimilation of Europeans to African norms and the unconscious and reciprocal interculturalization of one to the other²." As I contribute to attempts of many theorists to deal with the Caribbean experience of colonization and slavery from an anti-imperialist standpoint, it is appropriate to apply the term black as a way to emphasize a people's struggle to legitimize African cultures, histories, languages and lifestyles in the Caribbean. African people inhabit the Caribbean largely because of the Atlantic Slave Trade and

² Kamau Brathwaite *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean* (Mona, Jamaica : Savacou Publications, 1974) 11

its aftermath. The black woman's body had a specific place in that history. Finally, we must keep in mind that black, Caribbean women are formed by definitions of Africanness but are not wholly determined by it.

Although it is probably often assumed that identities are internally developed, they are largely externally constructed and then applied. Identities are stories we tell ourselves, and others, about ourselves. These narratives change with each historical moment and within each specific context based on the ways in which we process and experience them. My experiences in Jamaica reflect these narrative shifts. As an African American woman, my body carried with it its own markers: in Kingston my light brown skin and nationality afforded me particular preferences that were denied darker, Jamaican women; however, in Negril my body elicited different responses ranging from anger to rejection. These varied responses shaped and reshaped my identity and influenced my perception and reception of my own body.

Location coupled with one's experiences, or positionality, are important factors in the construction

of this project³. Unlike what I understand to be the case with Caribbean feminisms, my assumptions about and understandings of women did not primarily grow out of a resistance to Western hegemony and instead grew out of the discourses on essentialism, sexism and the female body. The relationship between and attitudes toward race, class and gender in the Caribbean are often constructed differently from those in the United States. Additionally, issues of ethnicity are also central to Caribbean feminist discourses but are not pervasive in the United States.

Rhoda Reddock argues that these differences are part of the reason "the black feminist critique of the United States . . . did not find an echo in the Caribbean⁴." These differences have their foundations in the socio-historical specificity of each region. While strategic generalizations are sometimes necessary, differences must be acknowledged. In the spirit of strategic generalizations, resistance to various oppressions remains a commonality among most global black women. The experience of oppression seems to elicit a similar

³ Susan Sniader Lanser introduces the idea of positionality that is the notion that one's personal history, experiences and identities (race, gender, sexuality, etc.) play a major role in the ways in which we interpret literature. I expand this idea to include the ways in which we approach other arts as well.

⁴ Reddock 201

response from these women: a desire to speak to and for themselves.

It is important that this study be reliant on Caribbean women's voices because it is within these voices that we will unearth a different understanding of black Caribbean female experiences. Not only are the women artists, but also their cultural products, regarded critically as sites of interrogation as well as works of creativity and imagination. I look to the artists themselves to see what notions about the body they put forth from their own societies and from their own bodies.

Others have touched upon the work that I am attempting to do. Many writers have written on the body and investigated black women's materiality. However, the role of art and the voices of the artists in the formation of theories about black women's bodies are absent from the discourse. We have theorized and continue to theorize about these voices, but I must ask if we have truly heard them? This is what makes this project unique—it listens to the voices. From the voices it takes its cue in formulating a theory that adequately speaks to black Caribbean bodies.

Feminists' Discourses: Positionality and Living the Body:

The title of this chapter, "The Race From Theory," is inspired by Caribbean-American, feminist theorist Barbara Christian who truly exemplifies the merging of theory and praxis within a Diasporan context⁵. Barbara Christian's works are useful in that they articulate a relocation of theory from academia to the community. In her seminal text "The Race For Theory," Christian asks:

[W]hat of black women writers? No phantoms, no bristling—not even a mention. Few of us knew they wrote: fewer of us cared. In fact, who even perceived of us, as late as the early 1970s, as writers, artists, thinkers? Why should any one want to know what we thought or imagined? What could we tell others, far less show them, that they did not already know?⁶

The point is precisely this: the value associated with art, namely literature, directly affects our treatment of that art. Given black women's struggle for autonomy and equality, it is not surprising that their art is largely under-appreciated and undervalued.

Christian continues:

I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the

⁵ Born in St.Thomas (in the US Virgin Islands), Christian became one of the leading foremothers on African American theories. Her position as a Caribbean-American (in cultural as well as national terms) as well as her role as a public intellectual is useful to this project.

⁶ Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory" *Feminist Studies* 14.1 (1988) (67-79) 8

noun) is often in narrative form, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assault on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanity?⁷

Historically, these stories have gone untold. My first contribution to the discourse on Caribbean women's bodies will be to examine some of those narrativized theories in order to bridge the gap between art, theory and praxis. Consequently the project will consider, in conjunction with the artistic works, the narrative theories of Caribbean feminisms, African American feminisms since they can also shed light on the African Diaspora experience, and, in limited capacity, for comparative purposes, French feminisms. This method will lead to an uncovering of a different theoretical approach I call Caribbean feminist consciousness.⁸ Caribbean feminist consciousness works within the conceptual community from which it emerged by remaining grounded in those specific historical experiences.

Although this project privileges the voices of black, Caribbean women theorists, it does call upon other Caribbean theorists like Evelyn O'Callaghan (who is

⁷ Christian 12

⁸ Caribbean feminist consciousness recognizes the simultaneous existence of multiple identities (nationality, class, gender, race, sexuality, etc.) coupled with one's cultural specificity and the important role these elements play in shaping one's identity, community and worldview.

European-Caribbean) and Patricia Mohammed (who is Indian-Caribbean) and Hilary Beckles (who is male) because they too have made important contributions regarding Caribbean feminisms. Reading the body of the theorists may be an unusual approach, since race is often an undeclared, secret factor contributing to the perspectives of theorists. However, I find it useful to take my cue from some Caribbean theorists themselves (such as Evelyn O'Callaghan), who write about themes like the white Caribbean woman writer, suggesting that race may be a factor in both the writing and perception of the work.

Mohammed's work on Caribbean feminist theories highlights the complexities of its very existence and usage. The use of the term "feminist" in a Caribbean context can be problematic: "Where the word is used, as it must be, for a thing has to be named, it has to be constantly defined in context" while retaining its relevancy.⁹ Black, women artists' cultural products provide the context from which we can theorize. This helps us to avoid such pitfalls as inappropriately applying other feminisms to Caribbean women, or losing

⁹ Patricia Mohammed, "Toward Indigenous Feminist Theorizing in the Caribbean" *Feminist Review* 59.1 (1998): 23

their cultural specificity. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert emphasizes the importance of difference when she argues:

The insular factors affecting the development of feminist movements in the region--the indivisibility of gender relations from race and class, the intricate connections between sexual mores, skin pigmentation, and class mobility, the poverty and political repression that have left women's bodies exposed to abuse and exploitation--seem alien to European [and] American feminist thought.¹⁰

In my development, race and class-consciousness as feminist issues were secondary to gender awareness. Although issues of poverty and "colorism" have always been present in African American communities, they were a late addition to American feminist movements. Furthermore, there are three key factors of difference that have helped shape the Caribbean that were less a factor in the US which we must acknowledge: (1) the systematic concubinage and subsequent privileging of 'brown' people during slavery in the Caribbean; (2) the development of the Nation State in conjunction with notions of emancipation; and (3) the growth of gendered discourses rather than feminists ones.¹¹ In addition to these insular factors, differences in class, ethnic,

¹⁰ Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "Decolonizing Feminism: The Home-Grown Roots of Caribbean Women's Movements" *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 7

¹¹ Please consult the works of Verene Shepherd, Eudine Barriteau, Christine Barrow, and Hilary Beckles.

cultural, and linguistic dynamics between Caribbean women themselves must also be considered.

Rhoda Reddock argues that an understanding of difference between African Caribbean and Indian Caribbean women has greatly contributed to her historical research on Caribbean women:

In other words, it was impossible to know myself if I did not know my Other/s. In conceptualizing a theory of difference for the Caribbean, therefore, it is not enough simply to celebrate diversity. We need to isolate the ways in which the constructed differences have contributed to how we have conceptualized ourselves. Difference in the Caribbean therefore can be a mechanism for showing interconnectedness.¹²

Reddock's emphasis on difference as a means for interconnection is of singular importance in this project. It has helped me to conceptualize Caribbean women across cultural as well as geographical boundaries.

Christian warns that when "theory is not rooted in praxis, it becomes prescriptive, exclusive, elitish".¹³ Theorizing from Caribbean women's cultural experiences and expressions is crucial to understanding their ways of knowing and being in the world.

¹² Reddock 208

¹³ Christian 18

Feminists' Discourse: Writing the Body Beyond the
Metaphor:

Ultimately we must ask ourselves:

First off, the basic theoretical question: Can the body be a source of self-knowledge? Does female sexuality exist prior to or in spite of social experience? Do women in fact experience their bodies purely or essentially, outside the damaging acculturation so sharply analyzed by women in France and elsewhere?¹⁴

Assuming that black women's options for theorizing are only inscribed within the physical body devoid of their social context would be a mistake. Hilary Beckles argues that black women in the West have been theorizing since their days of enslavement:

Enslaved black women, however, presented slave society with its principal feminist opposition. Oppressed by the gender orders of black and white communities, and with little room to manoeuver to acquire respectability necessary to secure a platform for public advocacy, slave women were undoubtedly the most exploited group... They developed integrated systems of thought and actions that countered efforts to morally and politically legitimize their enslavement.¹⁵

Although they may not call it such, a principle feminist opposition can be found in the works of Caribbean women artists I explore here. Therefore, writing the body cannot be mere metaphor. O'Callaghan persuasively

¹⁴ Ann Rosiland Jones, "Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of L'écriture Feminine" *Feminist Studies* (7, 1981) 253

¹⁵ Hilary Beckles Historicizing Slavery in West Indian Feminisms." *Feminist Review* 59(1998) : 45

combines the elements of theory and praxis in her analysis of a Grace Nichols novel:

There is...throughout Nichols writing, an emphasis on the body so persuasively argued for by Irigaray and other French feminist scholars. This is not to say that Nichols's fiction 'writes the body' in quite the way that Cixous suggests in her formulation of *écriture féminine*; although one *could* make a case for this text, in common with other West Indian fictions by women, being read for a kind of 'semiotic' patterning as a force *within* normal discourse. That is one which is concerned with the bodily and material qualities of language, with the creative excess rather than precise meaning, with fluidity, plurality, diffusion, sensuousness, open-endedness and, of course, playfulness.¹⁶

My second contribution to the discourse on Caribbean feminism will be to write the body beyond metaphor. This process is at the crux of my exploration of Caribbean women artists' representations of the body. Chicana-American feminist Cherríe Moraga's theory of the flesh makes similar claims. Theory of the flesh addresses the "physical realities of (the) lives (of women of color)—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity."¹⁷ For black women, this necessity is survival. In going beyond the metaphor, I will make

¹⁶ Evelyn O'Callaghan *Woman Version* (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1993) 97

¹⁷ Paula M.L. Moya, "Postmodernism, 'Realism' and The Politics of Identity: Cherríe Moraga and Chicana Feminism." *IN Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 23

selective use of French feminists' theory of writing the body. *Écriture féminine* is helpful only in so far as it introduces the idea of writing the body. However, its inadequate treatment of the social body limits its usefulness.

French feminist Luce Irigaray privileges the biological body (its breast, womb, and vagina); however, she largely avoids the skin, which is the ultimate signifier in Western society. Although three major contributors to *écriture féminine* (Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous) appropriate global black bodies in order to illustrate French (white), female oppression, race largely remains unexplored in their writings. Cixous goes so far as to claim that the "dark continent" is no longer the continent of Africa but the vagina of French women. This metaphor does not translate to black women's experience of the body:

White European or Caucasian standards of beauty were considered superior to African and Caribbean standards of beauty. It is not surprising, therefore, that the prettiest Black woman was considered 'ugly' just because her skin tone was not brown or light and she did not have long, straight hair... Most of the writers in the period of slavery wrote uncomplimentary things about black-skinned women.¹⁸

¹⁸ Verene Shepherd, *Women in Caribbean History* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1999) 59

Black women's bodies in the Caribbean were constantly subjected to these types of attacks. Their literal bodies were not their own and this historical fact is beyond metaphor. Caribbean critic Denise de Caires Narain argues, "the focus on the body seems to be driven by a desire to read the native body as a space somehow uncontaminated by colonialism..."¹⁹ Black women's bodies have been marked by enslavement and colonialism and any significant reading of this body has to acknowledge this fact.

Moreover, Julia Kristeva's examination of pleasure, or *jouissance*, is also devoid of any cultural specificity.²⁰ Kristeva's primary argument (that pleasure is free from male dominance or influence) is never explored in a social context; it deprives men the opportunity to overcome phallogentrism; and denies women as possible sexual partners for other women. Nevertheless, I find value in the idea of double-pleasure and think it useful in moving the discussion beyond narratives of victimization and into narratives of triumph and joy.

¹⁹ Denise deCaires Narain. "Body Talk: Writing and Speaking the Body in the Texts of Caribbean Women Writers," *Caribbean Portraits: Essays on Gender Ideologies and Identities*, ed. Christine Barrow (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishing, 1998):258

²⁰ *Jouissance* comes from the French verb *jouir*, which means both to enjoy and to have an orgasm.

Much has been written about black women reclaiming their body's sexual pleasure. These writings, however, are largely focused on heterosexuality. Lesbianism remains glaringly absent. If women's writing "makes a political point of incorporating the marginal, the peripheral, the apparently irrelevant, such ... narratives shed light on the variety of female experiences," then an exploration of various sexualities must be included.²¹ As a result, my final contribution to the discourse on Caribbean feminisms will be to fill in the space that lesbian voices should occupy.

In this effort I call up O'Callaghan's notion of "in-betweenity" which she defines as an ambivalent positioning in relation to racial, class or even gender [and sexual] identity."²² The works of Dionne Brand are also extensively used here. Her writings on the black, Caribbean lesbian body are important to this study. Brand argues, "The politics of the body, the female sexual body, is closed or open only to the taken-for-granted."²³ The assumption of heterosexual means the

²¹ O'Callaghan 13

²² O'Callaghan introduces this idea in both *Woman Version* and " 'Compulsory Heterotextuality' and Textual/Sexual Alternatives in Selected Texts by West Indian Women Writers" *Caribbean Portraits: Essays on Gender Ideologies and Identities* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998) 294-319

²³ Dionne Brand *Bread Out of Stone* (Canada: Vintage, 1998) 28

lesbian body must fight for recognition, space and to be heard.

To expand and contextualize the discourse on the lesbian body, I draw upon the works of Christine Barrow, whose discussions on gender and class help to shed light on the invisibility of female sexual expressions and Kamala Kempadoo, whose work on Caribbean sexuality provide historical insight. In conjunction with these scholars, Eudine Barriteau's work aptly explores the role of the postcolonial legacy of Enlightenment in the construction of the Caribbean (sexual) body.²⁴ This period is important as it sets the stage for the modern Caribbean woman.

So what does it mean, ultimately, for Caribbean women artists to write their bodies? Hélène Cixous argues that,

It is impossible to *define* a feminine praxis of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this praxis can never be theorized, enclosed, coded--which doesn't mean it doesn't exist.²⁵

The impossibility of such a definition is based upon the fact that how and what women write are specific to

²⁴ Bariteau "Theorizing Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean." *Feminist Review* 59 (1998) 194.

²⁵ Hélène Cixous. "The Laugh of the Medusa" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 1.41 (1976):883

not only their conditions and experiences, but also the subject matter that they (or the publishing houses) deem valuable enough to be written about. Rather than defining a feminine praxis of writing, this study looks to the artists for their own definitions of the body.

Where I diverge from Cixous²⁶, in my perception, is in the belief that the praxis has been theorized, enclosed and coded; we simply have been looking in the wrong place. Narain writes: "black women's body [may] be read as a coded surface where body language signifies what is forbidden to be stated openly."²⁷ In order to understand the story, one must read the body as its author wrote it.

A Place of Their Own: The Yard and Female Subjectivity

In this project I am looking to two genres (novels and music), as epistemic sites that will inform and shape a Caribbean feminist consciousness. The reasons I have chosen these genres are both practical (their appropriateness for this study; availability of the text) and person (importance of hearing traditionally silenced

²⁶ Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. 1.41 (1976): 875-893.

²⁷ Denise deCaires Narain "Body Talk: Writing and Speaking the Body in the Texts of Caribbean Women Writers." IN *Caribbean Portraits: Essays on Gender Ideologies and Identities* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1998) 260.

voices). The voices that emanate from these texts illustrate the full depth and complexity of Caribbean women's experiences.

There are two things that have to be a natural part of this study: Creole and the yard. These two tropes help set the parameters for the study. Creole is important not only as a form of communication, but also as a subversive response to those structures and institutions that deftly seek to silence, restrict and restrain Caribbean women. My use of the yard is employed as a means to excavate various meanings from and about Caribbean women's cultural products. An understanding of the yard offers greater insight into Caribbean feminisms and theory formation.

Barry Chevannes defines the yard (or yaad) as a

central reference point of self definition among the African-Caribbean peoples. Long before the dream of freedom became the act of emancipation, the yard was personalized space, set apart from nakedness of the plantation...²⁸

The yard, both historically and contemporarily, represents a sacred, private, unencumbered space of Caribbean culture.²⁹ Through the development of the yard,

²⁸ Barry Chevannes, "Jamaican Diasporic Identity: The Metaphor of Yaad." *Nation Dance: Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 2001) 130

²⁹ Contemporary yards are the results of spatial reconfigurations of the city when the affluent people moved away and the poor moved in to replace them. Chevannes states, the "typical urban ghetto is a

enslaved Africans were able to claim their own space, and retain some semblance of their material reality and communal structures. Spiritually, it represents a kind of Ethiopianism, a return to (an idealized) Africa, which we see in the works of Edwidge Danticat, Lady Saw and Myriam Warner-Vierya. Finally, metaphorically, the yard has become a symbol for home for Caribbean people living outside the region. The works of Joan Riley and Dionne Brand are important in conveying the absence or longing which leads to an emphasis on the yard. For those in the region, as exemplified by Lady Saw, it remains a literal home as well as an identity:

The two most socially significant characteristics of the tenement yard are its ritualized privacy and its cooperation. As private space, the yard is enclosed from public view and commerce. Its gates are closed, and none but the most familiar may push and enter without calling or knocking, seeking permission.³⁰

I am knocking at the gates, seeking permission to enter their yards and learn what they have to teach.

Chevannes argues that women are the "guardians of the enculturating privacy of the yard, home."³¹ Although his depiction of women's roles is a bit romanticized, the

criss-crossing and interweaving of access streets, lanes, and footpaths to yards separated from the outside view by zinc fences. The yards are called tenement yards." Chevannes 131

³⁰ Chevannes 131

³¹ Chevannes 123

yard as a site of Caribbean feminist theory formation and the black woman as mother, guardian, griot and “transmitter of the cultural values of the art and artifice of survival” and celebration is a concern for this project.³² In the yard, women share scant resources, co-parent one another’s children and protect against attacks from forces outside the yard. In this space a “lineage identity” is but one branch of many in a Caribbean feminist consciousness.³³

Caribbean feminist consciousness develops in places like the yard and reflects the ways in which women negotiate the everyday, that is, the ways in which they theorize. The yard is the location where survival skills are developed and learned; however, it is also the place where love abounds, relationships are forged and dreams are nurtured. Like African American feminist Alice Walker and her theory of Womanism³⁴, Caribbean feminist consciousness rejects a separatist position and is concerned with the well being of the entire community.

The yard is not only central in black, Caribbean communities, but also in Caribbean history. The yard

³² Chevannes 130

³³ Lineage identity is the overseeing of birth, growth and development during life and death of members of the community by the women. In turn, women are respected as teachers and healers. In essence, this lineage is an elevated form of mothering and nurturing.

³⁴ Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens* (New York: Harvest, 1983) xi

becomes a history book that documents the people's past from slavery to the post-independent present. The yard's existence allows us to transverse this history through Caribbean women's cultural products since they are the keepers of the gates.

A Language of Their Own: Creole and Female Subjectivity:

Since these narratives are largely told in Creole, a discussion of Creole is important. Caribbean women's poetic language cannot be limited to the physiological when writing against a history of enslavement and the vestiges of that history. Out of this context comes what I call epistemologies of the unconscious: that is, ideas or information that arrive from nontraditional places (kitchens, yards, churches, dreams, etc.) and these places are significant in the lives of black women. Once the knowledge is unearthed, it is often communicated through Creole.

The fight to legitimate Creole languages has been an integral part of Caribbean feminist consciousness. Susanne Muhleisen argues that African-Caribbean women writers "are displaying the most versatility and are open

to transgressing genre boundaries.”³⁵ Not only do they transgress genre boundaries (as some of the writers like Dionne Brand are poets as well as novelists), they also transgress linguistic boundaries: Brand often makes use of Creole, especially when creating a voice for her female characters; Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat uses American English but also interjects Kréyol into writings; while Lady Saw, a Jamaican Dancehall performer, sings mostly in Jamaican patois.

These writings are prime examples of revolutionary poetics that disrupts and defies. While the writers celebrate the female body, that celebration comes out of a particular historical context that reflects their lived reality. Allison Easton argues that Creole is a

language that our foremothers and forefathers struggled to create and we're saying it's valid, vibrant language. So it may be that it is through already existing languages that women can be articulated, and not just through semiotic gaps, silences, contradictions and disruptions within the symbolic order.³⁶

There is striking continuity between the creation of Creole and the development of a black Caribbean identity that speaks to the symbolic and historical past. This continuity also contributes to the cultural markers of

³⁵ Susanne Muhleisen, “Encoding the Voice: Caribbean Women Writing and Creole.” IN *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writing* (London: Whiting and Birch, 1996) 178

³⁶ Allison Easton, “The Body as History and ‘Writing the Body:’ The example of Grace Nichols.” *Journal of Gender Studies* (3.1, 1994) 59

Caribbeanness that I distinguish in the works of the previously mentioned Caribbean women artists.

The writers' primary use of Creole is simply to communicate in a language with which they are comfortable. A useful side effect is that through its usage, Creole becomes a form of renegade speech. Renegade speech³⁷ is a coded language available only to members of that (oppressed) community whose objective is to disrupt, challenge and transgress the established order. Creole has been at the center of class struggles for many Caribbean communities and continues to be a form of resistance against imperialist languages that denounce it as inferior due to its oral foundation. At least this is often the pretense put forward because all languages have an oral history. The rejection is largely due to its relatively new existence and the fact that it is a language developed by formerly enslaved communities and other marginalized communities who are at the bottom of the social ladder.

Some artists' use of renegade speech may be completely free of political implications and used simply because the artists find its usage most effective for

³⁷ bell hooks. *Teaching to Transgress*. (New York: Routledge, 1994) 167

what they wish to convey. Narain argues against constructing a binary with clear classist overtones:

a neat binary is then set up where Creole is associated with authentic Caribbeanness, with Africa, with the spoken/the lived, with the folk, with polyphony and open-endedness while Standard English is associated with the printed text, with the elite, with institutions of power, with Europe and patriarchy.³⁸

It is clear that this binary and its implications of illegitimacy are very problematic. This project does not argue for the legitimacy of Creole and operates under the assumption that its value is inherent in its existence. Instead, it focuses on an examination of Creole within a broader theoretical framework on women's cultural practices and products:

It is crucial, however, to realize that it is also women who are most frequently associated with the oral, which may, on the one hand, point to their strong ties in the oral culture as preservers and perpetuators of indigenous traditions through folk tales, legends, riddles and songs.... But it may on the other hand, also point to the traditional exclusion of women from the domains of public power, especially under colonial rule which granted women no official space at all for any affirmative participation in the political process.³⁹

Black women's use of Creole not only keeps those traditions alive, but also clarifies their condition and shapes the critical discourse. People do not speak a

³⁸ deCaires Narain 257

³⁹ Muhleisen 32

particular language because of their race; they speak a language because they are socialized to do so. Consequently, Creole not only reflects a particular socialization, but also the emotional and cultural depths of those experiences.

In Chapter one, "*Mi naa lock mi mout': Sexual Politics and the Politics of Sex*" Lady Saw's body complicates notions of sexuality by challenging as well as engaging the pleasures of patriarchy. In other words, I look closely at the intricacies that comprise women's sexuality and sexual identity beyond their objectification as sexual objects for men. I first explore Lady Saw's body as an instrument that simultaneously inscribes as well as resists traditional notions of sexism. I then move onto an examination of the yard (or yaad, as I use them interchangeably), as a site of theory formation; and conclude with an argument that establishes Lady Saw as a public intellectual and community griot. My project then moves from identity to geography, where chapter two engages Caribbean women's quest for home and health.

In Chapter two, "*Body and Soil: Migration, Madness and the Metropolis*," I tackle Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* and Edwidge

Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and the authors' treatment of madness. I illustrate the authors' ability to not only reconstitute but also contest discourses on madness. These writers challenge the categorization of madness and its application to black women's bodies. Instead of reading madness as a mental illness, this chapter relocates madness to the geography and explores what I call environmental madness. Environmental madness looks at the metropolis as a source of contamination that forces us to recognize madness as a social, cultural, historical, racial and geographic construction with gender specific consequences. Similar gender specific consequences are addressed in chapter three.

In chapter three, "Body-Marks and the Making of Her-I-land," I posit that Dionne Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*, and Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*, present scarred female bodies that are inscribed with multiple narratives that speak to several significant moments in Caribbean history. These women's bodies become testimonials to the US Invasion of Grenada, Trinidad's Black Power Movement, and the Dominican Republic's 1937 Massacre of Haitians. In essence, I read their female characters as history books that disrupt the official

narrative and bring forth a uniquely female historical subjectivity.

Definitely, this dissertation's central intellectual and political aims are rooted in a guiding principle of Caribbean womanhood; and, with black women's bodies located at the center, engages debates that have their origins in the sexual politics of slavery, (neo)colonialism, and nationalism. The study traces the processes through which Caribbean women artists write their own bodies; then it moves to an analysis of how those bodies create theories that can be used to explore larger issues around identity, geography and history. I aim for provocative analyses when addressing the means by which the artists ask us to think differently about Caribbean women's bodies; however, this project merely scratches the surface of this vital intellectual and political endeavor.

Questions of race, class, nationality, sex, sexuality and gender, coupled with the authors' desires to create a new Caribbean feminist consciousness located in their artistic space of literature and music, leads to a reading of these sites as sites of struggle as well as sites of success. By engaging such complexities, I hope to envision a more realized way of dissecting, imagining

and enacting black women's bodies that goes beyond tales of oppression. I hope this project will be a productive and important contribution to Caribbean women's literature, feminist theories and global black women's scholarship.

Chapter One: 'Mi naa lock mi mout': Sexual Politics and the Politics of Sex

Marion Hall is best known as Lady Saw, the queen of dancehall culture and music. Her influence extends beyond Jamaica, and reaches across the Atlantic Ocean into the UK and the US. Her lyrical styles, sense of fashion and political outspokenness has influenced many Hip-Hop and Pop cultural artists such as Lil' Kim and Gwen Steffani. Since her debut in 1994, Hall has won numerous awards, garnered much acclaim and sold millions of records. Her latest CD, *Strip Tease*, was very successful in Jamaica as well as the United States, where she gained unprecedented success and recognition, unlike most female dancehall artists. Her career and life, however, have not been free of controversy.

Hall grew up poor in the small town of Galina, St. Mary, Jamaica. As a teenager she relocated to Kingston where she worked as a higgler, selling roadside fruit, and as a sewer in the Freezone⁴⁰. Hall's career in

⁴⁰ The Freezone is an area located just outside the city limits of Kingston, Jamaica. During its height in the 1990s, it housed such US companies as Tommy Hilfiger, Hanes, and Brooks Brothers. Do to the North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, these companies were not subjected to Jamaican laws and often exploited their primarily female labor base. Stephanie Black's film *Life and Debt* as

well as Mimi Sheller's text *Consuming the Caribbean* details the history and effects of free trade in the Caribbean. Full citation of these texts are listed in the bibliography.

dancehall began, legend has it, one random night when she performed at a local sound system and wowed the audience with her lyrical prowess, thus gaining entry into the male dominated field of dancehall. Therefore, the politics of subjugation is present at the start of her musical career and remains ever-present. As a result, her working class background has greatly influenced her art. Many of her songs echo the hardships working class Jamaicans endure while living on the margins of society. Her topics range from domestic abuse, to government corruption, to the AIDS pandemic. Hall, through the persona of Lady Saw, becomes the voice of an oppressed people; she refuses to suffer in silence and in so doing holds the perpetrators of the abuse accountable.

In addition to addressing social issues, Hall also addresses personal issues, namely women's right to sexual autonomy. Because of her explicit lyrics, Hall, hereafter referred to as Lady Saw, has been subjected to fines, censorship, banishment from public performances and radio play, as well as many other legal charges including that of indecency. Jamaican politicians and socialites alike have attacked her body as too sexual and accused her of promoting slackness, or sexual promiscuity. In other words, they viewed her as a threat

not only to Jamaican society, but also to Jamaican womanhood. I, however, argue that Lady Saw's reclamation of the black female sexual body is an act of empowerment. To that end, Lady Saw's inclusion in this project represents a counter-aesthetic⁴¹, which is the use of the visual to challenge racist, sexist and classist assumptions about black women's body, as well as a counter-narrative, that is the creation of new discourses for the same purpose. Lady Saw's inclusion in a comparative literature project also challenges notions of literature that would reserve the title exclusively for written aesthetics and applies the notion what Ngugi wa Thiongo refers to as "orature"—the oral experience associated with certain types of poetic performances—is worthy of examination in this space.

From the Streets to the Studios: Dancehall History, Culture and Music: An Overview:

Dancehall culture has a vastly complex history in Jamaican society. Dancehall music is a derivative of Reggae, which developed in the 1960s as a cultural expression that challenged the dominant socio-political

⁴¹ Janell Hobson. *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture*. (Routledge: New York, 2005) 72

system. Scholars of Jamaican culture, such as Carolyn Cooper, Stuart Hall, Linton Kwesi Johnson and, most recently, Norman Stolzoff, have all argued that what we have come to know as Reggae and dancehall has always existed in African-Jamaican culture and, in fact, has its roots in slavery. Dancehall has become more than a cultural phenomenon, it is an identity. Hall states,

No cultural identity is produced out of thin air. It is produced out of those historical experiences, those cultural traditions, those lost and marginal languages, those marginalized experiences, those peoples and histories that remain unwritten. Those are the specific roots of identity.⁴²

Reggae was the voice of the disenfranchised, the disillusioned and the discontented. This voice is echoed in dancehall.

Today dancehall culture is largely viewed as low culture belonging to the working class masses at best, vulgar and violent at worse. Patricia Mohammed posits,

Our material bodies—whether outwardly biologically male or female—our race or ethnic group, the colour of our skin and the class we typify within a particular culture constantly inform and mediate our social experiences and influence how we express our masculinity and

⁴² Stuart Hall, “negotiating Caribbean Identities” IN *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader* (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2001) 37

femininity, as well as the expectations by others of our masculinity and femininity⁴³.

Mohammed's words speak to the long standing conflict between dancehall proprietors and the Jamaican elite. Since the 1980s the clash has intensified, as has the role of gender and sexuality in the discourse on dancehall culture.⁴⁴ Carolyn Cooper notes that, "Lady Saw's brilliant lyrics, reinforced by her compelling body language, articulate a potent message about sexuality, gender politics and the power struggle for the right to public space in Jamaica."⁴⁵

The claiming of public space is a crucial feature of dancehall culture. The first act of claiming public space came about through the development of sound systems, which resulted from reduced accessibility to the local bands due to the burgeoning tourism industry⁴⁶. The masses then turned to DeeJay's (DJ) or Selectors as their primary form of entertainment. Their sound systems (which were made of record players and amplifiers located on mobile vehicles such as flatbed trucks) could easily

⁴³ Patricia Mohammed. "Unmasking Masculinity and Deconstructing Patriarchy: Problems and Possibilities within Feminist Epistemology." *Interrogating Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. University of the West Indies Press, Jamaica 2004 (ed.) Rhoda E. Reddock 39.

⁴⁴ In the 1990s, these conflicts have also played out and been well documented in Jamaica's leading newspaper *The Gleaner*.

⁴⁵ Carolyn Cooper, *Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture at Large* (Palgrave: New York, 2004) 123.

⁴⁶ Stolzoff, 41

be assembled in the yaad or on the streets for an instant, inexpensive and easily accessible party for the people⁴⁷. Dancehall eventually moved from the streets, to the studios, radio, concert arenas, clubs and, much later, television. Out of this history comes Lady Saw.

This chapter is organized around two principle ideas: the staged body and the public intellectual. The staged body refers to gendered expectations for women in both a public and private capacity. This body is measured by its ability to successfully (sexually) gratify an audience. The first part of the chapter explores the staged body through a comparison of two Lady Saw concerts. The first concert took place in Jamaica while the second occurred in the United States. Through this comparison, I complicate the notion of slackness by illustrating a complex relationship of re-inscription and resistance in Lady Saw's performances.

The second part of the work looks at Lady Saw as a public intellectual and examines her use of her body as a location for social change. To that end, I explore her identity as a yardie and her commitment to protecting and

⁴⁷ Out of the sound systems came DUB, a form of "talk-over" performed by the DJ's on the "B" side or instrumental sides of records. DUB greatly contributed to the development of Dancehall music.

advancing her community, a commitment that is often overlooked in her music.

Lady Saw encompasses the regional and historical elements of the yaad. By means of her music, she becomes a guardian of her culture, a local griot and the voice of the community. As a yardie (that is, a member of that community who becomes a native informant or an autoethnographer⁴⁸), it is her duty to tell the community's truths. She is the one who sounds the alarm when they come under attack. Her lyrics convey a message of resistance and celebration and document the people's experiences, especially the experiences of Caribbean, working class women. In fact Cooper argues, "music is far less important than lyrics in this [dancehall] genre."⁴⁹ The message is in the lyrics as well as the body. Again, through an examination of staging, this chapter complicates the relationship between Lady Saw's performance(s) and music/lyrics and her various audience(s).

⁴⁸ Irma McClaurin "Theorizing A Black Feminist Self in Anthropology: Toward an Autoethnographic Approach." *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis and Poetics*. (ed). Irma McClaurin. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 65. A concept that focuses on righting the ways in which a culture can be misrepresented and distorted by another that is outside-dominating or colonizing.

⁴⁹ Cooper. *Noises In The Blood: Orality, Gender and The "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture*. (Durham: Duke UP, 1995) 138

In Full Bloom: Rethinking the "Vulgar" Black Body:

Through an exploration of the music, performances and body, we begin our investigation of the staged body with an examination of various constructions of femininity and sexuality.⁵⁰ The following section looks closely at the complex way Lady Saw uses her body by stepping beyond the boundaries of traditional female sexual expression(s) and examines how Lady Saw's body complicates the somewhat clichéd notion of female sexuality in the national context, making it resistant and liberatory against patriarchy or other outside oppressions. As we look closely at the intricacies that constitute Caribbean women's sexuality beyond their objectification as sexual objects for men, one of the key questions this project explores is how does one understand women who use their bodies to inscribe as well as resist sexism; or rather, how to understand women who attempt to use the body to defy the use of sexism as a construct all together?

Sexuality. A contentious subject for sure, especially when the words black and female appear before it. When I initially conceived of this chapter, I

⁵⁰ Performance refers to Lady Saw's lyrical contributions to the Jamaican literary and cultural lexicon as a DJ; it also refers to Marion Halls' personification of Lady Saw as a constructed image/idea. In other words, Lady Saw is both an act and a strategy. Finally, I also drag on Judith Butler's idea of performativity to distinguish between different types of performances.

imagined a study on the ways in which black women celebrated their sensuality. I also imagined a response to the "sex education" I, at the age of fourteen, received from my mother (who is a Registered Nurse, mind you). Her lesson: "don't have sex; if you get pregnant, don't have an abortion." Now here's the rub: within this brief conversation my mother simultaneously disavowed and acknowledged my sexuality. I use this anecdote to highlight the tensions within many black communities regarding female sexual expressions. My mother's statement illustrates how black women's sexuality remains simultaneously invisible and visible. Women within the confines of the yaad (that is, their immediate communities) learn lessons of sex and sexuality from other women. Their manifestations may vary, but they are always present.

Although my focus will be the works of dancehall artist Lady Saw, I must start by stating I am not an ethnomusicologist. I do not offer (nor possess the necessary expertise to offer) a history of music production or a thorough examination of musical structures. My fields are literary and cultural studies; thus my focus is on textual analysis and the meanings

that can be gleaned from Lady Saw's lyrics and her use of the body in her performances.

The Staged Body: Sex, Power and Spectatorship:

The staged body refers to gendered expectations of women, specifically their ability to successfully (sexually) gratify an audience. For Jamaican dancehall artist Lady Saw, this gratification is sought through dance and song. Lady Saw's body and music will be the sole focus of our discussion.

Lady Saw is undeniably the queen of dancehall music and her career has spanned more than a decade. Her career, however, has also been plagued by controversy over her "provocative" performance(s) and lyrics. Rather than limiting the discussion on Lady Saw to that of a controversial figure, I posit that Lady Saw represents a complex performer whose body and lyrics defy conventional discourses on female subjugation and empowerment. Lady Saw's defiance is often overlooked or merely dismissed as slackness.⁵¹ However, her defiance is a crucial aspect of her performance and our understanding of her body; in addition, her performances serve multiple purposes.

⁵¹ The works of Carolyn Cooper, and Norman Stolzoff address Lady Saw's body in various political and cultural contexts outside of slackness, although not in these particular terms.

First and foremost, they are her primary means of income. We cannot lose sight of the fact that Lady Saw is, after all, an act.

This act may lead to self-empowerment; it may serve as a platform for change and even a refuge from ostracism, as I argue here. However, Marion Hall, Lady Saw's given name, acknowledges the fact that "Lady Saw" is a persona that she dons for specific purposes. Hall states, "Lady Saw is a act... When I'm working, you know, just love it or excuse it."⁵² Marion Hall creates an alternative reality through the character Lady Saw in order to use her body in specific ways. Mohammed writes, "Men and women experience their environment differently, and this experience itself provides the knowledge which they formulate about reality, about their life chances, about their sexuality, about themselves"⁵³. Through her performance(s) in concerts (and also in music videos), Lady Saw's body is measured and valued by its ability to be constructed, controlled and consumed by her (presumably male) audience.

While the staged body may re-inscribe its position as object/image, it also simultaneously resists being

⁵² Cooper, *Sound* 111

⁵³ Mohammed 40

constructed, controlled and consumed. Her body is intentionally ambiguous. This ambiguity (or particular space of in-betweenity), may seem contradictory to some; however, I believe it perfectly illustrates the multiple and sometimes shifting dynamics present in Lady Saw's performances, lyrics and body.

The staged body allows the male audience to receive pleasure from the act of looking (what Laura Mulvey calls scopophilia⁵⁴), and to assume ownership of that body without reprisal. The concert hall gives the illusion of privacy (the show takes place with the audience engulfed in darkness, while the stage is well lit and the performer's body is pleasingly displayed), even though the male viewer's experience of scopophilia is a shared one as hundreds if not thousands of people surround him. Nevertheless, this shared experience of voyeurism does not lessen the crowd's emotional enthusiasm, as I learnt at my first dancehall concert.

As related to me by a former colleague, something similar also occurred in Jamaica.⁵⁵ During one particular performance in Jamaica, Lady Saw brought a young man onto

⁵⁴ Laura Mulvey's *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*

⁵⁵ Personal correspondence with Dr. Krista Thompson: Dr. Thompson related this story to me during the spring semester of 2004. Dr. Thompson was a visiting Driskell Center Fellow and teaching a course, entitled Visual Culture in the Anglophone Caribbean, at the University of Maryland College Park. The concert occurred the previous summer in Kingston, Jamaica, of which Dr. Thompson is a native.

the stage and began to dance with him. The energy of this dance sent the audience into frenzy where upon they began to chant, "Fuck her! Fuck her! Fuck her!" With these two words, a shift in power occurred.

This shift removed power from Lady Saw and onto the male guest (who serves as the representative or stand-in for all males). Lady Saw, with her ability to stir the crowd through her sexually explicit lyrics and her provocative dances (grabbing her vagina, wining, and gyrating against the floor), becomes a passive (that is, re-inscribing) rather than an active (that is, resisting) object in this encounter. There are two things of note regarding Lady Saw's performance: (1) the audience's investment and expectations in the actual performance and, (2) their demands that those expectations be fulfilled. At this concert, the crowd disregarded the most important fact: Lady Saw selected this young man to join *her* on stage. It was *she* who invited him to dance and *she* initiated physical contact. In the end, she determined when *she* had been satisfied and sent him on his way. Nonetheless, the crowd did not view the male as a sexual object: he was also the active agent.

When their performance reached its climax, the crowd does not chant, "Fuck *him!*" Instead, they gave that

power to the man (or rather, to the penis) and chant "Fuck her!" As a result, a public performance (dance) is transformed into a private act (sex). The audience controls her body by limiting its meaning; they constructed it as a sexual object and consume it in order to satisfy their own sexual appetites. Instinctively, or, rather, due to social conditioning which appears instinctive, the crowd reorders the scene, ensuring that Lady Saw performs the role ascribed to women within the larger society.

Lost in all of this, is the possibility that Lady Saw may find pleasure in this exercise and within her own body. Her exhibitionism is not merely for the men, but also herself as well as other women. Carolyn Cooper argues that:

The pleasure that men and women share in sexual relationships of mutual trust can be acknowledged as therapeutic, not exploitative. Self-righteous critics of the sexualized representation of women in Jamaican dancehall culture, who claim to speak unequivocally on behalf of "oppressed" women, often fail to acknowledge the pleasure that women themselves consciously take in the salacious lyrics of both male and female DJs who affirm the sexual power of women.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Carolyn Cooper (Sound Clash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture At Large Palgrave: New York 2004)
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This is not to say that female (sexual) exploitation does not exist. Of course it does. However, what can be gleaned from Cooper's comments is the defiant joy women experience in exhibiting their bodies. These bodies are not presented as an offering for the male gaze, but instead becomes a counter-narrative whose aesthetics are challenging as well as arousing. As the viewer looks on, the "object" looks back, unflinching.

Lady Saw concedes a great deal of pleasure can be found in these performances. There is a certain level of courage exhibited by her performances as they ultimately challenge middle-class ethics and values as well as Rasta-influenced notions of culture.⁵⁷ Opal Palmer Adisa states, "Women were restricted in their actions and were not allowed to go to movies, clubs, or soccer matches unescorted without gaining an unsavory reputation. The distinction was clearly made between a 'lady'—quietly spoken and submissive—and a 'woman,' who makes her own decisions, speaks her mind and so was termed 'loose',⁵⁸." The fact that Marion Hall incorporates the term 'lady' into her alias (Lady Saw), yet engages in 'womanish'

⁵⁷ In addition to Cooper's work, Norman C. Stolzoff's work details Rastafarian history in the development of Reggae, Ragga and Dancehall music and culture.

⁵⁸ Opal Palmer Adisa, "I Will Raise the Alarm: Contemporary Cross-cultural Sites of Racism and Sexism" IN *Moving Beyond Boundaries Volume 1: international Dimensions of Black Women's Writing* (New York: NYU Press, 1995) 22

behaviors bespeaks a clever critique on Jamaican society. Paula Morgan speaks to the complexities involved in challenging gender stratification:

The process of dismantling stereotypes and cultural paradigms is intricate and takes generations to come to fruition. Especially in a multiethnic Caribbean framework, the interlocking impact of gender, ethnicity and class makes the task of defining a female identity infinitely more complex....⁵⁹

Lady Saw refuses to be constrained by accusations of slackness (that is immoral and unsavory sexual behaviors). The restrictions placed on her body (via charges filed against her, being banned from various events, denied radio play and enduring various forms of public denouncement by Jamaican politicians and members of its elite class), highlight the ideological differences between competing value systems in Jamaican culture. Lady Saw uses her body in a way that middle-class Jamaicans are unwilling or unable to do. Although the re-inscription of Lady Saw as sex object is easily seen and criticized, Lady Saw as resistor to that very same construction is often ignored.

Therefore, I reject the assumption of bodily detachment which can be associated with Lady Saw's

⁵⁹ Paula Morgan. "Under Women's Eyes: Literary Constructs of Afro-Caribbean Masculinity," IN *Interrogating Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. (ed.) Rhoda E. Reddock. (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004) 291

performances. Lady Saw's jouissance, or pleasure, is clearly a part of her female experience. This experience comes from her body but is also learned from other women. Speaking on the subject of learned behaviors, Dionne Brand asks,

Didn't we take in their [women's] sweetness, their skinniness, their voluptuousness, their ample arms, their bone-sharp adroitness, their incandescent darkness; the texture of their skin, its plumminess, its pliancy; their angularity, their style when dancing, their stride across a piece of yard that sets the yard off, their shake as they sense the earth under their feet, their rock, the way they take music in their shoulder, the way they pause and then shimmy and let it roll? Didn't we take in their meaning?⁶⁰

Brand locates the sweetness of the body within a female-centered context. This pleasure is not limited to the women from whom it emanates, but is also carried out by other women in the community. Taking in these women's meanings involve taking in the pleasure as well as the power of that sexuality. Lady Saw claims her jouissance not only by finding pleasure in her performance (singing and dancing) and in her body (touching and gyrating), but also by controlling when, where and how she expresses

⁶⁰ Brand 28

that sexual self. She manipulates the audience's reception of her body even as it appropriates that body.⁶¹

In a recent concert in San Francisco, Lady Saw's performance is strikingly different. The most notable difference is her wardrobe. Instead of her usual hyper-feminine attire and aggressive, sexually charged performance, Lady Saw performs a type of drag⁶². Drawing upon Judith Butler's notion of performance and performativity, I define drag, in this particular case and for this particular moment, as a performance by one who intentionally obscures or makes ambiguous one's biological sex through the manipulation of societal gender constructs and people's gendered expectations for both political and personal (or pleasurable) reasons.

Lady Saw engages the "gender order" which is a "turbulent, dynamic process that moves the analysis beyond static gender-role theory and reductionist concepts of patriarchy."⁶³ Lady Saw's manipulation begins with her dress; her clothing consists of traditional male

⁶¹ This fact is especially relevant today as Lady Saw's latest single "I Got Your Man," from her *Strip Tease* CD was intentionally designed for American audiences as a conscious attempt to crossover into the US markets. This conscious crossover attempt reiterates the various ways Lady Saw's body and music continues to be consumed.

⁶² Lady Saw inverts traditional drag performances where biological males appropriate gendered male dress and behaviors for both political and entertainment purposes. This form of drag is known as Drag Queens. Biological women now use this practice and are known as Drag Kings.

⁶³ Hilary Beckles. "Black Masculinity in Caribbean Slavery." IN *Interrogating Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*. (ed.) Rhoda E. Reddock (Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2004) 227

dancehall gear: tennis shoes, baggy jeans, a white skully,⁶⁴ sunglasses and very little make-up. This costume blurs her gender classification and prevents the audience from identifying her in the way they had become accustomed to, thus changing her relationship with the crowd; this shift also signifies a change in her persona outside her Jamaican context.

Her initial behaviors do little to expose this (mis)identification: she paces the stage, talks to the crowd, "pimp-walks" and grabs her crotch—all male signifiers. For the men in the audience, she is no longer a sexually desired object and instead becomes someone with whom they can identify rather than objectify. This signifyin' continues for more than half the performance. The drag performance forces the crowd to renegotiate her body in order to have their sexual desires and expectations met.

There are several issues to consider regarding this performance: first, Lady Saw requires this renegotiation from an American as opposed to Jamaican audience. This out-of-character performance parallels her out-of-context status. Second, there is a performative, not physical,

⁶⁴ A small, well-fitted hat made of nylon material that snugly fits over the head, also known as a do-rag. Typically worn by young, urban men of color. This is significant, as Lady Saw is known for her wild, colorful and every changing hairstyle.

distance between Lady Saw and the audience. Given the intimacy of the venue (a small concert hall as opposed to a large outdoor stage), and the proximity of the crowd (the audience is right up against the stage with no buffers in terms of barricades or distance; although the stage is slightly elevated), it is surprising that no one is invited onto the stage to become a part of the performance. There is singing, but little dancing and even less audience interaction.

Unlike her performance in Jamaica, her song selections are void of any political meaning, while her songs on "slackness" are performed with modest enthusiasm. Third, only after she has removed some of her clothing (she concludes the performance in a black-lace bra), does her body language, as well as the crowd's response, change. This shift in attitude is illustrated through the shining of a laser beam onto Lady Saw's body and highlights the crowd's newly found excitement. Lady Saw's response is to point to her vagina, where the light is promptly placed—much to the audience's glee.

The light on her genitalia is like an assault weapon's infrared laser. An image of shooting, rather than stabbing, out her meat is invoked (stab out the meat is a metaphor for vigorous intercourse and also the title

of one of her most popular songs). The imaginary gun serves as a substitute penis and the laser beam becomes yet another "Fuck her!" chant. Like the young man she invites onto the stage at the Jamaican concert, Lady Saw invites the laser to "penetrate" her private parts. Although the audience may not acknowledge it, Lady Saw remains in control of her sexuality.

Yes, the US audience's reception and expectation of her body is similar to the Jamaican audience's, however, this audience does not gain unencumbered entry, as do the Jamaican masses. It appears Lady Saw does not trust the US audience to recognize and understand the nuances of her slackness. Outside Jamaica, her voice is muted, even absent. She fails to speak to, with or for these people in the way that she does her yardies.

Perhaps this silence is due to the fact that working class Jamaicans' lived realities do not necessarily function as global signifiers of exile or oppression because they are soundly rooted in Jamaica's postcolonial history⁶⁵. The Yardies' particular history of postcolonial oppression and post-independence rejection (as they are largely defined outside of Jamaican middle-

⁶⁵ Rastafarism and Ethiopianism certainly challenge this notion, as do some of the works by Lady Saw. But largely speaking, Jamaica represents a global Caribbeanness (culture, language, and shared regional identity) rather than a global Africanness.

class society), also affects Lady Saw's performance in that her body language can be read by those who speak the language—the US audience does not. In any case, Lady Saw still gives them a performance that involves the same principles of control and consumption; however, her role as community griot seems to be truncated. The dynamics of this U.S. performance clearly suggest that Lady Saw is conscious of being an artist for and of her community.

Sex and the Private Sphere: Lady Saw as Fantasy:

The staged body's reception changes once it moves from the public sphere of the concert stage to the private sphere of the home via music videos. In the private sphere, the viewer has total control and does not wait to be invited in. The pleasure in looking is never interrupted and, unlike the concert hall, is not necessarily shared with others. The environment does not limit his behaviors, making him completely free to act out his fantasy. The video becomes the ultimate fantasy for the male viewer in that the pleasure it gives coupled with the fact that he is watching the video in the privacy of his own home, adds a level of intimacy and satisfaction that he cannot obtain at the concert.

In Lady Saw's music video, "I Got Your Man," the visuals are directed at the men, while the lyrics address the women. The song opens:

Girl when you call mi phone just say
what's on your mind
Don't call then hang up
I'm not into that
You want mi to tell you something
Let mi tell you something

Your man he told me that he's tired of the
shit you got
He took one hit and said my good shit
keeps him coming back
He likes it tight and said your shit is
just a little slack
I've got your man and you can't do any
thing about it

The man has only to wait to be "gotten" by Lady Saw, who will save him from the sexual boredom or incompetence of his current female lover. The unapologetic "tightness" of her "shit" is without question. This tightness has two primary meanings: it is a reference to

her appeal and superiority as a woman (as in the Hip-Hop saying: "my shit is tight." That "shit" may include her lyrics, sex, intellect, looks, car, clothes, et cetera). In addition, it is also a reference to her sexual region and the literal or figurative tightness of her vagina that has the ability to give superior sexual pleasure (as opposed to the slackness or incompetence of her competitor). "I Got Your Man" takes the position of attacking instead of instructing women. Consequently, Lady Saw makes the men allies and the women adversaries. This video is a case in point.

The video opens with Lady Saw stopping at a red light, next to a parked car. A heterosexual couple is in the midst of an argument and just as Lady Saw's about to pull away, she tosses a business card out of the car window into the man's hand. The business card reads "Good Food" and lists a phone number. Even more fantastic is the fact that the girlfriend is oblivious to this exchange. Now, no one watching this video believes there is any type of nutrition involved. Food as metaphor for sex is a reoccurring theme in Lady Saw's works.⁶⁶ Carolyn Cooper explains,

⁶⁶ Again, Lady Saw's most notably use can be found in the song "Stab Out Mi Meat."

The penis functions as a metaphorical dagger stabbing pleasure into and out of the woman... Furthermore, the startling imagery of stabbing meat, whether in or out, is decidedly not sadomasochism but rather underscores the traditional association between food and sex in Caribbean culture. The vivid image is an accurate representation of the way in which meat is seasoned in Caribbean cookery: it is literally pricked and the spices inserted.⁶⁷

In the "Good Food" diner the metaphor continues as the women are the chefs, their dancing serves as an appetizer (as well as a form of foreplay) and their bodies are the entrée (consumption is illustrated by the men kissing and caressing the women). In essence, they finally get to dine.

Cooking (read: sexuality) is a skill Lady Saw would have learned in the yaad. Dionne Brand posits,

Often when we talk about the wonderful Caribbean women in our lives, their valour, their emotional strength, their psychic endurance overwhelm our texts so much that we forget that apart from learning the elegant art of survival from them, we also learn in their gestures the fine art of sensuality, the fleshy art of pleasure and desire. The women who taught us these are strewn across our landscape as the women who taught us to struggle against hardship.⁶⁸

Brand's comments reaffirm Caribbean women's existence beyond struggle and oppression. Her words are a reminder

⁶⁷Cooper, *Sound* 100

⁶⁸Brand, 27-28

of the intricate, and intimate, relationships black women have with one another. Sexuality, sensuality and pleasure are all critical elements in survival and celebration.

Although Lady Saw may have learned lessons of love from other women, she doesn't hesitate to use them against women as well. Lady Saw taunts: "You may think he is coming back to you but I doubt it / Don't make no sense you can even call him and try to work out it / Cuz I've got your man and you can't do anything about it⁶⁹." In a song like "I Got Your Man" there are certain reiterations of the importance of "getting" a man, even if it is someone else's man. The attitude of the song is a far cry from the sisterhood that Brand talks about. However, one must admit that "man-stealing" or, rather, the importance of having a male lover even at the cost of one's integrity, is a lesson women learn from both men and women in a male dominant society. Thus not all of the messages, implied or explicit, are positive ones. These lessons reflect the complexities found in heterosexual romantic unions and the expectations of heterosexuality placed on women.

⁶⁹ Lady Saw "I Got Your Man" Strip Tease CD

With most of her performances, Lady Saw challenges the discourse on female sexual expressions; however, she does not challenge the supposition of heterosexuality. Yes, she asserts herself and uses her body in ways most women do not; and with this she challenges patriarchy. Nonetheless, her challenges are primarily located within a dialogue that normalizes heterosexuality because she largely operates from a heterosexual position. That is not to say that we can only read her from a position of heterosexuality or heteronormativity.⁷⁰

Hitherto, the argument I have constructed here promotes a hetero-binary as I have established the viewers (those who find Lady Saw sexually desirable) as male and the listeners (those who find power in her voice) as female. But it is not far fetched to assume that some women find Lady Saw's hyper-feminine body sexually desirable and some men find her hardcore lyrics intriguing. Yet homosexuality is largely absent from this and many other discourses on dancehall culture (unless one is addressing homophobia mostly directed at gay men and expressed by male dancehall artists).

⁷⁰ There is a difference in my use of these two terms: heterosexuality is used to describe the two different biological sexes who engage in penetrative sex with one another; heteronormativity is the assumption that everyone does, should or will be made to fit into the category of heterosexuality.

Let me be clear: I am *not* arguing that Lady Saw is a practicing or latent lesbian. However, there is something to be said regarding gender ambiguity, female intimate relationship (whether or not they are sexual), "queer" sexualities and Lady Saw's performances. I believe Lady Saw's role as a public intellectual speaks to those intimate female relationships as well as heterosexual romantic encounters. Moreover, Lady Saw's performance is an occasion for alternative readings of sexual empowerment.

Narratives of Gender Ambiguity and "Queer" Sexualities:

Lady Saw's San Francisco concert is a prime example of "queering" sexuality at work. During the performance Lady Saw intentionally obscures her biological sex through both her appearance and her body language. As I established earlier, Lady Saw is dressed in a deliberately masculine fashion: baggy jeans that hide her curvy physique; an oversized jean jacket, which obscures her breast; and a skully, that gives the illusion of a bald head rather than her trademark long blond weave. Thus, this "drag" performance allows for alternative erotic experiences. She simultaneously denies

(hetero)male sexual gratification while engaging in (homo)erotic play; her sexual ambiguity is appealing because it opens the door for non-heterosexuals to find pleasure in her performance. The blurring of sexual as well as gender boundaries creates a shift in power away from the audience and onto Lady Saw regarding who has access to her body as an object of pleasure.

Thus far I have argued that Lady Saw's power lies in her biological sex and feminine gender; however, her appropriation of masculinity is also a powerful attempt to challenge the binary gender system complex. Eudine Barriteau defines gender as "a complex system of personal and social relations through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to, or are allocated, status, power and material resources within society."⁷¹ Manipulating gender roles is not merely a form of play-acting. Instead, it serves as a reminder as to how socially constructed ideas about gender are played out in people's everyday lives.

In the San Francisco concert Lady Saw is only penetrated when she removes some of the masculine clothing and her body is exposed as female and her gender

⁷¹ Eudine Barriteau. "Theorizing Gender Systems and the Project of Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean." *Feminist Review*. 59 (1998): 188.

performance becomes that of femininity; thus reiterating very traditional notions of passive female heterosexuality. However, as long as she performs under the guise of masculinity, there are no chants of "Fuck her!" and no laser/penis penetration. Thus power is not located in the male biology itself, rather in the social (read gender) perception of maleness. Consequently, Lady Saw "queers" the expectation of a congruent biology/gender performance and operates in a no-woman's land of in-betweenity.

On the other hand, this concert takes place in San Francisco, which has a largely gay constituency, thus changing the target audience. Given this fact, the act of penetration, in conjunction with Lady Saw's "drag," takes on a different meaning. For gay men, it may allow them to share in the heterosexual male power evoked with the "Fuck her!" chant. Because they are the possessors of the penis, penetration as power is always an option. For lesbian women, it creates an opportunity for desire as well as identification. In other words, women who find pleasure in looking at other women's bodies are made satisfied by her strip tease; for those women who

identify as dom or aggressive⁷², they are able to distinguish Lady Saw's confident and assertive sexual position.

As I continue to examine the parameters of these "queer" constructs, I wish to focus my attention on lesbianism. Although most women in the Caribbean do not use the term lesbian to define their sexual relationships with other women, I find it useful as an umbrella term to explore the diversity of women's homosexual as well as homosocial experiences. I do recognize that taking this position means I must tread lightly on dangerous ground; however, given the complex nature of sexuality, I find it useful to venture into this largely unexamined territory.

In the Caribbean, lesbianism is a recently used term and an even more recent identity; however, same-sex loving behavior is not a recent phenomenon. Principally, lesbianism is used to define women who engage in sex with other women. However, others, like the late Caribbean-American artist Audre Lorde's use of the term Zami (a term generally used in some Eastern Caribbean islands), African American theorist Alice Walker's notion of

⁷² The term dom was used in the early to mid 1990s to describe black lesbian women who were dominant in their (public) sexual behavior and also preferred a masculine gender; in the late 1990s throughout the first decade of the 21st Century, the term aggressive has been used to describe or define such women. It should be noted that most of these women, however, do not consider themselves transgendered.

womanism, Caribbean writer Makeda Silveira's examination of the term Man Royal, and Caucasian American queer theorist Adrienne Rich's redefinition of lesbian, have broadened its definition to include a range of woman-identified cultural experiences.⁷³ I am particularly struck by Rich's idea of a lesbian continuum:

I mean the term lesbian continuum to include a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman identified experience, not just the fact that a woman has had or consciously desire genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support... we began to grasp breadths of female history⁷⁴.

The continuum creates room for multiplicity and serves as a useful tool for examining not only individual female experiences, but also those collective female experiences and histories⁷⁵.

Each of these terms, Zami, womanist, Man Royal, and lesbian, emphasize women's co-operative and intimate

⁷³ Please See Lorde's text *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, Walker's text *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* and Silveira's article "Man Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians," and Rich's article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," for a fuller discussion on the complexities of lesbian identities.

⁷⁴ Adrienne Rich. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." IN *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. (ed.) Henry Abelove, Michele Barale & David M. Halperin (Routledge, New York 1993) 239

⁷⁵ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn makes similar claims regarding Caribbean women's historical interdependence in her article "Through an African Feminist Theoretical Lens: Viewing Caribbean Women's History Cross-Culturally." IN *Engendering History*

relationship while acknowledging the fact that these relationships may but need not be sexual. Walker's womanism highlights this point. Walker explains a womanist as "a black feminist or feminist of color who enacts willful, courageous behaviors. Responsible. In charge. Serious."⁷⁶ In essence, she is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire (black) people, a commitment that is expressed through Lady Saw's position as a public intellectual. Lady Saw is certainly responsible, as we shall see with her *Songs of Wuk*; also, she is in charge, as illustrated by her transgressively defiant sexuality; and we must take her seriously because she possesses the power to create true to life social change.

In addition, a womanist is also a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, and who appreciates and prefers women's culture, emotional flexibility and strength. Although Walker's statement is somewhat idealistic with some echoes of biological determinism, I find that Lady Saw's creative works greatly contribute to and shows appreciation for women's cultures, experiences and relationships. In this way

⁷⁶ Alice Walker. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*. (Harcourt-Brace and Company: New York 1984)

Lady Saw embodies those woman-identified relations and for this reason I place her on Rich's lesbian continuum.

Such woman-identified relations are further complicated by the fact that, as argued by Kamala Kempadoo, "Sex, love, and desire thus emerge in Caribbean accounts as variable in meanings and value, some of which coincide with and produce hegemonic heterosexual regimes, and others offering a counterhegemonic interpretation."⁷⁷ Lady Saw's sexuality can be seen as counterhegemonic in three ways: first, historically, because she invokes a female past of collectivity; second, politically, because she locates her discussion on sexuality squarely in the public, not private, arena; and, lastly, sexually, because she brings pleasure to herself as well as other women.

Kempadoo argues for the relocation of

...Caribbean sexuality as an exclusively ideological or cultural construct to one that is materially constituted or embodied. By this, I am not referring to sexuality as anatomical differences of the sexes or to a biological sexual drive located in a naturally sexed body, but rather to the ways in which sexual desires and passions are lived through, experienced, and refashioned by bodies of flesh and blood. The 'lived body' and 'embodies subjectivity' then are of relevance, for it is with these ideas that the physical body becomes more than

⁷⁷ Kamala Kempadoo. *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race, and Sexual Labor* (Routledge: New York, 2004) 44.

an entity that is inscribed or marked by discourse, or is seen to exist as fixed or presocial natural condition, but is conceptualized as an organism that actively responds to charge and contingency, that is self-organizing and a self-actualizing agent, constantly in process of transformation and development.⁷⁸

Lady Saw has the ability to code switch, that is, to move in and out of drag in order to fit a particular situation. Though not inherently switching her identity inwardly, she is performing in such a way as to entice all aspects of her body. She appears to satisfy heterosexual urges even as she is homo-erotically charged.

Nonetheless, Lady Saw's sexuality remains rooted in her material reality. Her code switching is contingent not just on her material condition but also within her desires for self-actualization. Her manipulations of sexuality and gender make plain the idea that sexuality is always in process and that those processes are ever changing. In the end, Lady Saw's self-reflexive sexuality demonstrates the power that can be found in unresolved contradictions and diversity.

⁷⁸ Kempadoo. 41

Wake the Town and Tell the People: Lady Saw as Public
Intellectual:

Lady Saw's music is both personal and political. She becomes a guardian of her culture and a local griot. Thomas A. Hale argues that the roles of the griot are not limited to the traditional roles of historian and genealogist, but also include that of advisor, spokesperson, mediator, teacher and warrior⁷⁹. Lady Saw embodies all of these qualities, as she is the voice of the community; she is the one who sounds the alarm when they come under attack and it is her duty to tell the community's truths. Her lyrics convey a message of resistance and celebration and document the people's experiences, especially the experiences of Caribbean, working class women. Lady Saw's lyrics (mostly written in Creole) are a coded language, or what bell hooks calls renegade speech, which is to be deciphered and consumed by members of the yaad.

Like Dionne Brand, Barry Chevannes gives special attention to women's roles in the yaad. Much like the griots, they are teachers, lovers, mothers, guardians and givers of justice. Because of her working class

⁷⁹ Hale address these roles in great details in his chapter "A Job Description for Griots," from his book *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1998)

background, Lady Saw has firsthand knowledge of this sacred space. She uses her identity as a yardie to speak to their lived reality. She challenges a political system that largely ignores their needs and questions a social system that has adopted and enforced outdated Victorian notions of womanhood onto bodies that are both unable and unwilling to meet those standards. Lady Saw's ability to spit hot fire, that is, her strong skills as a DJ/MC and lyricist, enable her to speak to and for the Jamaican underclass. She takes the voices of the yaad and brings them to the world.

In her investigation of Lady Saw's music, Jamaican cultural critic Carolyn Cooper is "very much interested in what 'primary texts' can tell us about how artistes/performers in dancehall consciously elaborate the meaning of their work."⁸⁰ Lady Saw's primary texts (her lyrics) elaborate the meanings of her works by challenging those systems and institutions she finds oppressive. To that end, I have identified two types of songs that illustrate Lady Saw's power as a griot and public intellectual: Songs of Wuk and Songs of Protest.

Songs of Wuk is an apt descriptor that guards against a reduction of Lady Saw's lyrics into an overly

⁸⁰ Cooper *Sound* 112

simplified discourse on sexual acts. These songs, like all intimate relationships, encompass the emotional spectrum; they address pleasure, respect, love, intimacy, sorrow, companionship, loss, compassion, betrayal and, yes, sex. Songs of Wuk include songs about sexual exploits as well as songs about emotional closeness and obstacles faced in maintaining a monogamous union. Lady Saw's "Healing," a duet with dancehall artist Beenie Man, is a prime example of the interlocking emotional layers that make up relationships. The song is playful, colorful and celebratory of love. While explicit in its desires, the song is also full of tenderness:

Beenie Man:

Lady Saw (wah) don't yu worry yu self cause mi
nah chaw

Yu know man a bad man a outlaw

Yu are the girl who brought the joy in my world

Oh Saw this is possible, a woulda wuk yu even
if yu cripple

Could a blind yu coulda deaf or could a
handicap too

Ah love the woman whey inside a yu (but true)

American English:

Lady Saw there is no need to worry I won't
bite⁸¹
You know I am a bad man, an outlaw
But you are the girl who's brought joy to my
world
Lady Saw this love is possible, and I would
love you even if you were disabled, blind,
deaf or had any other form of disability
I truly love the woman you are inside

Beenie Man and Lady Saw have appeared in (Jamaican) court for their "bad words." Yet, here words of tenderness are spoken and they illustrate the suitor's commitment to his ladylove. Unlike other dancehall lyrics that boast of bedroom bullies (selfishly, aggressive male sexual behaviors), the suitor's metaphors are witty and his words are comforting. Sexually explicit language is common in dancehall music, but so is tenderness and devotion; unfortunately, these themes receive little to no attention in discourses on dancehall music and culture. Beenie Man's presence on this track gives Lady Saw's message even more force by showing that

⁸¹ The verb "Chaw" is an act of chewing; that which is chewed; something to eat. Of course, there's an alternative interpretation that would translate the line to mean, "I won't perform oral sex on you." Given Reggae and Dancehall male artists' anti-cunnilingus position, I find this interpretation very plausible.

expressions of love and tenderness are not just women's responsibility.

Lady Saw's Songs of Wuk further address the complex relationship between sex and power. Her challenge to patriarchy and the assumption that men are the rightful owners of power in Jamaican society are not couched in traditional (Western) forms of feminist resistance. In fact, Lady Saw often blurs the lines between reproducing woman as sexual object and resisting this idea. She occupies the space in-between and finds power in both positions. Lady Saw's strategy may be atypical, nonetheless, it remains an effective form of opposition. Lady Saw is a magician, and her greatest tricks are those involving illusions. She circumvents traditional heterosexual relationships by giving a mirage of submission.

In her songs "Wuk With You," "Straight Work," and "Good Wuk" Lady Saw promotes the fallacy that male sexual dominance prevails; in actuality, she covertly co-ops power and changes the dynamics of their sexual relationship. In "Wuk With You," Lady Saw states: "Me a gal no hid mi feelins / Yu see from mi sumthin / A mi wan it, I just ask it and I get it / Let mi have it, / Mi say!" (American English: I am a woman who doesn't hide

her feelings / If I want something, I just ask and I get it / Let me have it, / I say!). The act of asking, rather than demanding, sexual pleasure, places the power (or at least the illusion of power) in the hands of the man. Lady Saw's usage of requests (i.e.: gimme a chance, make me your owner, and gimme de vibe), displays her ability to manipulate the space in between dominance and submission. She uses the man's sexual expectations of himself as the sexual aggressor to maneuver herself into a position of power.

She usurps the male through the act of flattery as detailed in the song "Good Wuk." Lady Saw announces the type of man she is looking for: "Now Lady Saw is looking for a strong black stallion / Yu see if yu think yu fit fo' de position / why yu no come over inna me camp... Any style yu wan it, bwoy yu goin' get it." (American English: Lady Saw is looking for a sexually strong man / If you think you can fill the position / Why don't you come over to my place / I can give it to you any way you want it, boy). In addition to his endurance, the potential lover must also be able to perform her favorite sexual positions (wheelbarrows and handcarts). Her sex

is not for the weak (no sissy, no funny man⁸²), the overly aggressive (no Tarzan), or the diseased (boy make sure you clean before you come afta mi shop). By the end of the song a subtle change has occurred. Lady Saw uses dominance that is couched in flattery; the male lover will only be accepted if he can do the job. The potential lover may see this flattery as a challenge, view it as acknowledgement of his superior skills, or accept it as part of his masculine duties. Regardless of which position he takes, it is Lady Saw who must be satisfied; after all, if you do not fit the position, you need not apply.

Lady Saw's position as a sexual object only works if she *agrees* to be a sexual object. In this space of in-betweenity, Lady Saw's role of sexual object is mitigated by her role as sexual agent. This dithering continues in "Straight Work:"

See me a wuk yu til yur knees dem numb / Inna
any position til yu done/ But if yu tell me fi
bow and go down, punk
Yu a go sample mi (gun shots)

⁸² Although this chapter does not fully address it, I am aware of the long running discourse on homophobia in Dancehall music and culture as both a rhetorical technique used as a form of bravado; as well as its larger political (and personal) consequences due to its ability to insight violence against gays.

American English:

I will work you until your legs go numb

In any position until you cum

But if you tell me to bow and perform oral sex

You will feel my wrath (she fires gun shots)

The language here is suggestive of submission, however, her concerns for her reputation, as well as her health, prevent her from performing what she considers an unsavory sex act.

This is a difficult line to tow because it seems to re-enforce the dichotomous relationship between the "purity" of being a lady and the "looseness" associated with being a woman. However, Lady Saw resolves this tension by refusing to be limited by these two options; instead, she determines what is acceptable sexual behaviors based on her own socio-cultural context and not that of the Jamaican elite class. Kempadoo agrees that sex and sexuality are not devoid of power and meanings:

I assume that social and cultural constructions of sexual meanings and identities and the ways in which specific communities structure sexual practices are conditioned by other factors: that 'whom one is permitted to have sex with, in what ways, under what circumstances and with what specific outcomes are never random: such

possibilities are defined through explicit and implicit rules imposed by the sexual cultures of specific communities and the underlying power relations⁸³.

Although the man offers to reciprocate (“Gimme de six me a owe you de nine”: If you perform oral sex, then I’ll reciprocate), Lady Saw still refuses perhaps because the offer is coached in terms of a debt to be repaid later; or because male pleasure is defined as immediate, whereas the female’s gratification is often delayed⁸⁴. Another possibility is that this refusal of fellatio is a response to male DJ’s who constantly disparage cunnilingus. This play, Cooper argues, is all part of the dancehall performance:

Despite the recurring protestations in the lyrics of the DJs that they do not bow—that is engage in oral sex—one instinctively knows that they are protesting too much. There is a thin line between pub(1)ic discourse and private pleasure/duty.⁸⁵

Lady Saw’s lyrics publicly instruct on private matters. For her female listeners, the body as sexual object is transformed into a body of sexual power. Yet not all Songs of Wuk are about a willing and faithful lover. In “Give Me The Reason,” Lady Saw presents a

⁸³ Kempadoo, 29

⁸⁴ Here Lady Saw evokes the sexual position “69,” which is simultaneous oral sex.

⁸⁵ Cooper, *Sound* 100

soulful ballad that addresses the pain one feels when rejected. Her lament is both personal and universal as it speaks to and for all women who find themselves in this predicament. The song has no explicit sexual lyrics; instead it focuses on the lack of respect exhibited by her partner. In essence, it is a typical song of lost love.

Lady Saw's music extends beyond the personal arena of sex and sexuality. Following in the true heritage of Reggae, her Songs of Protest are a response to the personal attacks that have been levied against her body and her community. Lady Saw's "What is Slackness," "Heads of Government," and "Condom," depict the ongoing discussion on Jamaican morality. Her songs highlight the betrayal her people have suffered at the hands of the Nation-State. In addition they offer an opportunity for an interrogation of gender and class relations within the local discourse that may deepen our understanding of woman's perception of self and other contemporary problems.

In "What is Slackness," Lady Saw, as Carolyn Cooper explains,

interrogates conceptions of slackness that limit the meaning of the word to the private domain of individual sexual transgression. She

deconstructs slackness, offering a provocative redefinition that expands the denotative range of the word to include the many failures of the state to fulfill its obligations to the citizenry.⁸⁶

She holds the state accountable for the socio-economic problems that afflict her community. In this way she becomes the keeper of the gate, the one who protects the yard from the attacks of outside forces. Lady Saw asks,

Want to know what slackness is?

I'll be witness to dat

Unu come off mi back.

Nuff more tings out there want deal with

An unu naa see dat

Society a blame Lady Saw fi di system dem
create

When culture did a clap

Dem never let mi through the gate

As mi say "sex" dem waan fi jump pon mi case

But take the beam outa yu eye

Before yu chat inna mi face

Cause slackness is

When the road waan fi fix

Slackness when government break them promise

⁸⁶ Cooper, *Sound* 112

Slackness is when politician issue out gun
And let the two party a shot them one another
down

American English:

Do you want to know what slackness is?

Let me be the witness

You all just get off my back

There are lots of other issues to be dealt with

And you all are not seeing that

Society is blaming Lady Saw

For the system they have created

When culture was all the rage

They wouldn't let me through the gate

I just have to say "sex" and they want to jump
on my case

But take the beam out of your eye

Before daring to say anything to me

Because Slackness is roads needing to be fixed

Slackness is the government breaking its
promises

Slackness is politicians issuing guns

And letting Party supporters shoot each other⁸⁷

Lady Saw performs a social, rather than musical, form of Dub⁸⁸ where she remixes the critique on her body into a new critique on her detractors. The depth of concern and the severity of these issues make Lady Saw's bad words pale in comparison. The government's failure to maintain and improve the Jamaican infrastructure and curb corruption is the greater crime.⁸⁹ Her sense of righteous indignation at being unjustly persecuted is matched only by her anger at the politicians' hypocrisy. Not only does she redefine and relocate slackness, she also reclaims and refashions the discourse on ethics. Her critique of the politicians' lack of values continues in "Heads of Government."

Racial politics and class biases coupled with the government's refusal to help, cause many Jamaicans to give into the pressures of poverty and oppression and turn to crime as a means of survival: "Black and white dem a fight / Just due to de racism but / When two of dem

⁸⁷ Cooper, *Sound* 113

⁸⁸ Dub is where a DJ would remix a record by manipulating the vocals and arrangement of the song. In addition, many artists would record their own lyrics on the B-Side of an album, thus creating a new text by merging her original lyrics with an instrumental version of a profession recording. In fact, it is not uncommon for Dancehall artists to cover other records, nor is it unusual for several artists to release original lyrics over the same "original" melody. Creation and recreation is an important aspect of Dancehall culture.

⁸⁹ Here Lady Saw makes a not-so-subtle reference to Jamaican politicians' alliance with violent criminals and gangs for their mutual benefit.

fight / White always win / Government why don't yu do something / Give a helping hand / Some blessing."

Dancehall becomes the voice of the people; it is their explosion against the government's lack of compassion, its willful blindness, unchecked arrogance and incomprehensible inability to "give de poor people a break." As a result, slackness is not a product of the people behaving badly, but a government failing miserably. While the Jamaican middle-class may view dancehall music and culture as a place devoid of morals, Lady Saw (as well as members of the yaad), become the country's moral compass.

Lady Saw's protest is not limited to governmental corruption but includes other socio-political issues like health care. The song "Condom" does not take issue with women's sexual expressions instead it promotes sexual responsibility. While the word AIDS is never uttered, given the high infection rate of AIDS among Caribbean populations, the implication is clear.

Lady Saw's openness regarding the steps taken to maintain her health adds a new dimension to her personae as a "sex machine." Speaking frankly about condom usage, pap smears and medical check-ups, her lyrics take her

female listeners out of the bedroom and into the doctor's
office:

Some critics say that I am a sex machine
Me no know about that
This I will reveal
If my man don't put on him rubbers
Him nah be able fi tell the Saw thanks
When it come to me health, I'm serious
Take me pap smear, mi usual check-up
Then everything fall back in line
If him nah wear no condom
Him nah get no bligh

American English:

Some critics say that I am a sex machine
I don't know about that
This I will tell you
If my man won't use a condom
He won't be able to tell Lady Saw thank you
I am serious when it comes to my health
I get my pap smear and my regular check-up
Then everything falls back in line
If he doesn't want to wear a condom
Then he doesn't get any sex

This song serves not only to answer her critics, but also to educate her female listeners. Lady Saw continues by informing women of the many "tricks" men employ to avoid condom usage. By exposing men's sex secrets, Lady Saw gives women the tools, not just the knowledge but also the sensible know-how, of safer sex practices. This message, a call for responsible sex practices, illustrates Lady Saw's awareness of the dangers that threaten her community as well as her commitment to protect that community.

Through her performances and music, Lady Saw forces us to be constantly attentive to the ways in which she complicates women's roles in the public and private sphere. In fact, she challenges our assumptions and requires that we rethink our concept of feminist resistance. Her artistic expressions and theoretical concerns are with the experience of women who do not, and will not conform to middle class notions of sexuality. When we listen, we are able to set out in new directions that allow for new strategies and contributions to the discourses on Caribbean women.

Chapter Two: Body and Soil: Migration, Madness and the Metropolis

In 2002 the French returned the remains of Sartjie Baartman back to her native country, South Africa. After nearly two hundred years in the metropolis of Paris, she was finally going home. There were many political implications surrounding this return, the least of which was the empowering of a formerly disempowered people. During this time, various meanings of liberation and black female power were also being associated with Baartmans' body; yet, her return brought up a different set of questions for me.

Having spent time in Paris in 2001, I understood the importance of her remains being returned, however my questions were not about her death: I wanted to know how Baartman lived. What was her material reality during her four-year stay in the metropolises of London and Paris? How was her blackness perceived and received by Europeans *while* she was alive? Was her subsequent death a direct result of her environment(s)? In other words, did the cities of London and Paris literally make her sick?

When I posed these questions, two new issues arose: first, was I re-objectifying Baartman's body?; and second, was I erasing or ignoring Caribbean women whose bodies were also objectified and exploited in similar fashion as Baartman? In her study on Baartman, Janell Hobson has been prompted to

caution against reobjectifying Baartman. After all, if the woman behind the icon of the Hottentot Venus was eclipsed in nineteenth-century popular culture, she stands to be erased once again as her mythic role of "Mother nation" and "Martyr of all Black Female Martyrs" are imagined in collective narratives.⁹⁰

This study is not an attempt to speak for Baartman, neither is it an attempt to speak for Caribbean women, for that matter. Nor do I wish to make her a Martyr. Instead I am seeking a discussion on black women's bodies—the social body, the gendered body and the sexual body—that allows for the recognition of the fact that black women's bodies in Africa and the Caribbean have been shaped by European ideologies without "reinscribing a discourse of negativity and hypersexuality onto the bodies of women of color."⁹¹

⁹⁰ Janell Hobson. *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture*. (Routledge: New York 2005) 59

⁹¹ Kamala Kempadoo. *Sexing the Caribbean: Gender Race and Sexual Labor*. ((Routledge New York 2004) 26

The second question regarding Caribbean women proved equally as challenging. Through the works of Rhoda Reddock and others, it is clear that enslaved black women were often exploited, even placed on urban markets as prostitutes. To my knowledge, however, there is no one singular woman who stands as the Caribbean "Venus." Through my search for her, I realized that I did not need one. The truth remains that those same European ideologies regarding African female bodies were also present in the Caribbean. Kempadoo explains:

Womanhood among the colonized represented uninhibited, unbridled sensuality and sexual pleasure for the colonizer. Exoticism in its various expressions brought legitimacy to Western rule and is distinguished from other forms of racisms by fostering the illusion of an admiration for, delight in and attraction to the Other, while positioning the Other as inferior and suitable for domination.⁹²

Representations of Black women's bodies are often divorced from their cultural specificity and we are frequently left with incomplete pictures of their lives. Through Caribbean women's literature, this chapter will explore representations of black women's bodies in relation to their fictional geographies in hopes of garnering larger meanings about Caribbean women's lives.

⁹² Kempadoo 36

The Madness of Metaphors and Metropolises:

Bella Brodzki argues that the Caribbean, as a physical locale, has an important relationship to the "triangle de traite."⁹³ The triangle de traite is a variation on the traditional definition of the African Diaspora that consists of Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas. Instead, Brodzki defines the triangle as Africa, the West and the Metropolis, as they represent "sites of longing" which have left their imprints on Caribbean literature as a whole, but especially on writings by women."⁹⁴ In the fictional works of Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Joan Riley and Edwidge Danticat, I explore these sites not only as sites of longing in that they represent a desire for something lost, but also as places of infestation that adversely affect the protagonists.

Borrowing from Rachael Blau DuPlessis, who coined the phrase "writing beyond the ending" to define the "array of narrative strategies invented or deployed by female writers of the twentieth century explicitly to

⁹³ Brodzki's triangle is largely an Anglophone characterization. In Latin America, the Caribbean is often constructed as part of the Americas. The shifting borders of the Americas, illustrated by the physical locations of Caribbean nations like Surinam and Guyana, as well as the geo-political alignment of other nations like the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico with countries in North America, makes it possible for us to expand our intellectual terrain and examine these geographies as part of a larger cultural matrix.

⁹⁴ Bella Brodzki. "Reading/Writing Women in Myriam Warner-Vieyr's *Jultane*." Brodzki uses the metropolis to define major cities or urban areas in Europe and the Americas in relation to the African diaspora. I also use this basic definition but also explore the metropolises on the continent of Africa and in the Caribbean. Thus my diasporic triangle include the traditional Diaspora of Africa, the Caribbean and the Americas with urban cities occupying a special status.

delegitimize romance plots and narratives,"⁹⁵ I write beyond the myth and assert that migration to the metropolis is not the answer to that longing Brodzki so aptly articulates.

Usually the black female body is investigated as the location of infection. As a result, the theories applied and the solutions offered primarily focus on the woman as an embodiment of illness rather than reading her illness as a response to the environment. In this study, I look to the land in order to redefine and rearticulate ideas about madness, especially as it applies to black women.

My use of the word environment, as well as geography, refers not only to the land but also to the people, their customs, traditions, and discourses. All of these elements comprise an environment that women often find hostile and alienating. Accordingly, madness does not emanate merely from the land; instead it comes from the various social apparatuses that establish not only cultural expectations of women, but also the discourses that determine our understanding of those expectations.

While I recognize that madness is a psychological state, I am interested in expanding the discussion to

⁹⁵ Clement 80, author's emphasis

include geographic locations as well. Therefore, this study makes no attempt to take a scientific approach in understanding and exploring the real causes and effects of madness on black female bodies. Although this investigation may inform our understanding of reality, this is a study based on an examination of fiction. Besides, any scientific exploration would be beyond the scope of this project. Instead, it uses a basic, medical definition of insanity in order to explore literary representations of madness on figurative black female bodies so as to challenge the appropriateness of its application, and, to a certain extent, its very definition.

I use the basic premise of madness--the inability to adapt or accept reality, a withdrawal from the world and the disassociation of self; as well as behavioral abnormalities such as extreme violence, paranoia, and hallucinations--to illustrate the detrimental effects of the "triangle de traite" on black women's bodies. Consequently, I am interested in pursuing the idea of the literary madwoman as social metaphor⁹⁶ that speaks to the daily ills and dangers black women's bodies encounter from their environment. These are what Françoise

⁹⁶ I am borrowing this idea from Evelyn O'Callaghan

Lionette calls geographies of pain. Geographies of pain are the "production of a specifically female literary vision," where female writers address the issues of pain, visibility and identity. In so doing Caribbean women authors write, "with meticulous attention to realistic detail, and the paradoxical desire to communicate, in the most honest way possible, the radically subjective, and thus generally incommunicable, experience of pain... the characters are being denied the most elementary form of recognition and visibility."⁹⁷

This chapter is interested in exploring the dissonance and similarities among the representations of this pain in Caribbean women's literature. As it explores the various meanings of this pain, it casts suspicion on madness as an ideological invention whose purpose is to contain and control women's bodies. This position is reflected in a poem which comments on the Caribbean migratory experience in Britain. The final stanza of Caribbean poet Merle Collins' "Schizophrenia," reads, "The host ventriloquists wonder/If Blacks are prone to /schizophrenia/ But sometimes/ schizophrenia, for those who find no 'footprints on life's solemn main/

⁹⁷ Françoise Lionette. *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, and Identity*. (Ithaca, New York: 1995): 137

is really just a way/of making sure of living.”⁹⁸ The poem calls into question the labeling of these bodies as mad, and draws our attention to the strategies they use in order to survive in a hostile environment. Collins’ words not only are profound, but also draw attention to attitudes, and perhaps realities, where “madness” becomes a viable option for other Caribbean bodies in the metropolis.

To that end, the chapter examines the female characters’ responses to their environments and looks to reconstitute madness in two ways: environmental and strategic. Thus my use of the term environmental madness refers to the various oppressions (racism, sexism, xenophobia and classism) and their detrimental effects on Caribbean women’s bodies. Furthermore, my use of the term “mad” or “madness” refers to the strategies women employ in order to secure their own safety and survival in a hostile world; my definition of “madness” comes directly from the fiction and follows shortly.

Mad Black Bodies in White Lands:

Theorist Evelyn O’Callaghan argues that, “so much of the literature on mental illness seemed to me to be

⁹⁸ Merle Collins. “Schizophrenia.” *Rotten Pomerack* (Verigo London 1992) 67

oriented towards a European or North American context."⁹⁹ This context fails to acknowledge that in different societies and cultures "illness can [be] present in different ways and result from widely varying causes. Hence much of the theory seemed curiously distanced from a West Indian application."¹⁰⁰ Baartman stands as one example of black women's bodies being "curiously distant" from their socio-cultural context. Her body, like the bodies of Caribbean women, is used to promote European ideas regarding sexuality and other ideologies of morality.

These bodies are reconstituted to ensure they serve as examples of abnormalities according to European (colonial and Victorian) ideologies. Caribbean writers Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Joan Riley, and Edwidge Danticat's respective novels illustrate what happens when those bodies rebel. Warner-Vieyra, *Juletane*, Riley, *The Unbelonging*, and Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, subvert the idea of madness by removing it from black women's bodies and relocating it to the geography in order to comment on the socio-cultural, political and sexual

⁹⁹ O'Callaghan 91

¹⁰⁰ O'Callaghan 91

discourses that alienate these characters and designate them as mad.

Ronald Littlewood posits that, "culture does not only shape illness as an experience, but shapes the very way we *conceive* of illness..."¹⁰¹ When we keep in mind the cultural differences, representations and interpretations of various illnesses, we recognize the fact that what may be considered problematic behavior in one society, could be perfectly acceptable in another. Therefore, the idea of madness representing one's ability to function in a socially or culturally acceptable manner is historically, racially, culturally, environmentally and gender specific.

Therefore, my definition of "madness" is one that comes from the texts themselves. The novels characterize madness as any action, overt or otherwise, against an environment that limits the physical mobility, sexual expressions, socio-economic independence and spiritual growth of black women. This chapter's analysis is grounded in this definition. Madness, therefore, is not read as a sign of maladjustment, but as a "manifestation of [women's] repressed desire to challenge a social order

¹⁰¹ Ronald Littlewood 92

in which they feel [or are treated as] inadequate¹⁰².” “Madness” challenges the ideological tenets of black women’s deviance which continue to inform contemporary articulations on Caribbean women’s bodies. Warner-Vieyra, Riley and Danticat re-articulate those tenets in their respective works.

Warner Vieyra’s text addresses a double migration; her protagonist, Juletane, migrates from the Caribbean to the city of Paris and then an unspecified African urban center. This migration differs from that explored by the other authors in that Warner-Vieyra’s novel includes a rare examination of the “madness” of an African metropolis on a diasporic female body. Riley’s novel follows Hyacinth’s migration from Jamaica to the metropolis of London, where the coldness of the climate is matched by the coldness of its people. Finally, Danticat introduces us to Sophia, a young Haitian girl who is forced to negotiate the madness of New York. In addition to the previously stated reasons, I selected these texts because they not only represent three different geographic areas, but also because they span a generation. What does it mean for black women to know

¹⁰² Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi 135

that this problem, that is, the problem of "the mad black woman," continues to plague us today?

Migration and Madness: Life in the Metropolis:

One purpose of a journey from the Caribbean or Africa to the Metropolis or, conversely, from the Metropolis to the Caribbean or Africa, is to correct a rupture that has been created. As a result, the journey along the triangle includes a physical relocation: sometimes to the continent of Africa, at other times back to the Caribbean, *but always* with a stop in the Metropolis. Juletane experiences such a rupture at birth when her mother dies during labor and once again at age ten, when her father passes. At this time she is forced to leave her francophone Caribbean home for the Metropolis of Paris. The opening lines of the text foreshadow Juletane's future:

They say a removal is as bad as a fire. That's not quite true. After a removal you can prune, choose to keep or throw out, uncover long forgotten objects, which may prove to be much more interesting than they seemed years before. After a fire, what is found in the ashes is almost never of any use.¹⁰³

Juletane's life becomes one removal after another. She attempts to uncover herself, choosing which parts to keep

¹⁰³ Myriam Warner-Vieyra. *Juletane* (New York : Heinemann, 1987) 1

and which to throw out. Ultimately, she realizes what she has interpreted as a removal soon becomes a fire where she fights against being consumed. In an attempt to not be consumed by the fire, Juletane finds stability in the one constant she has looked to all of her adult life: Africa. Africa becomes not only a representation of home, but also a symbol of hope and a target for her longings.

This vision of Africa is in stark contrast to her reality in the city of Paris where she is confined and disconnected. Warner-Vieyra describes the room as small with no window, ugly, damp, dark, and heavy¹⁰⁴. Within her tiny room Juletane has virtually no access to the outside world; the lack of a window exacerbates her sense of alienation and confinement. The room is reminiscent of an institution rather than a home. Her world, void of possibilities, is alien, almost unbearable, and offers no stimulation. At no time does she join her peers in the streets of the metropolis or engage the city in any significant way.

The room, heavy with its own darkness, is a reflection of Juletane's life. She questions her own self worth, doubts her physical beauty and describes her

¹⁰⁴ Warner-Vieyra 7

own existence as being weighed down: "I was really alone. I had nowhere to go to exchange ideas, simple pleasantries, which fill up the time...¹⁰⁵". Despite spending twelve years in the metropolis of Paris, Juletane feels a perpetual sense of estrangement and finds the city unpleasant at best, at other times it is outright hostile. In stark contrast to a lively and active childhood in the Caribbean, her world in the metropolis consists of school, a small two-bedroom flat and her godmother. This disaffection continues in adulthood as she moves from one small place to another, never occupying more than a single room during her entire adult life.

As an adult, it would stand to reason that she would possess some control over her living conditions; however, she fails to challenge and often seems to re-enforce her own estrangement from the city. However I posit that this withdrawal from society is deliberate and necessary. Her anger resonates through her refusal to fully participate in society which defines her outsider. Thus we are presented with an antagonistic environment that oppresses her humanity and stifles her growth. Moreover,

¹⁰⁵ Warner-Vieyra 7-8

we can read Juletane's overt action of withdrawal as an act of "madness" that protects her from this hostility.

Thoughts of Africa become a way to counter these feelings of displacement. Through this fictional character, Warner-Vieyra paints a cautionary picture for those diasporic people of African descent trapped in the triangle seeking a return "home." It is true that Juletane also did not have a sense of belonging to the Caribbean island from which she had traveled, but Elizabeth Wilson¹⁰⁶ cautions against viewing Africa as the mythical signifier of a lost, and therefore recoverable, past without acknowledging the improbability, if not impossibility, of success. Juletane's refusal to acknowledge the geographic and cultural differences between herself and Africa/Africans leads to numerous futile attempts at reconciliation, starting with the transference of these feelings onto an African man, Mamadou.

Mamadou's body represents an awaiting kinship, one Juletane is anxious to claim. This kinship is consummated by Juletane's willingness to give her body to Mamadou:

¹⁰⁶ In her examination of the works of Maryse Conde, Wilson argues that Africa is an unstatidfactory mythical homeland. Please see Elizabeth Wilson. "'Le voyage et l'espaces clos:' Island and Journey as Metaphor..." IN *Out of the Kumbia: Cribbean Women and Literature*. (Trenton: African World Press, 1990).

One would have thought he was seeing me for the first time. He examined me shamelessly from head to toe. My friends thought me pretty, perhaps I was. I had no idea. I hoped Mamadou's careful scrutiny would be positive. I had a finely chiseled, oval face, a well portioned body for my medium height. My long, thick hair was neither frizzy nor too curly. I wore my hair in braids, one on either side of my head, coiled over my ears. According to certain people, this hairdo made me look like the type of ingénue who hardly exists anymore these days.¹⁰⁷

In Paris, Mamadou, a male migrant body, determines the female migrant body's worth. His approving gaze casts judgment on her body; and, if he finds it pleasing, then she has access to her idealized Africa. If he rejects her, she is left with nothing. In this environment Mamadou's gender power is enough to allow him to retain his autonomy; whereas Juletane's very existence is dependent not only on whether or not Mamadou sees her, but also on whether or not he *likes* what he sees. As a result, she is left at his mercy. Thus I wonder, where does Mamadou get his authority? What does her body say to him and what are the discourses that have influenced his interpretation of beauty? What standards of beauty does he measure her by? What social and cultural expectations does he carry with him? Juletane's body,

¹⁰⁷ Warner-Vieyra 7

and the bodies of other black women, becomes the arena over which men fight to establish their cultural and political dominance. Because Juletane views herself as an African-in-waiting, she acquiesces to Mamadou without hesitation.

Juletane's lack of bodily knowledge speaks to her socio-cultural and personal naiveté. However, this naiveté appears a bit artificial. The fact that Juletane refers to herself as an ingénue, the type that hardly exists any more, is interesting, to say the least. This reference to and comparison of herself to a Mid-Nineteenth Century French archetype of a young innocent and unworldly woman highlights her own lack of innocence and unworldliness. She is intelligent enough to recognize that her lack of "worldly" refinement maybe an asset toward obtaining her goal--Africa. Moreover, while her inability to discern her own beauty and worth reveals the indifference, or, rather, the detachment she experiences within herself, she is also aware that her physical beauty is powerful enough to cause Mamadou to act; after all an ingénue is also an actor who puts on a performance.

Finally, the trope of the ingénue becomes problematic when applied to black women's bodies. First

because centuries-old European discourses define her as the antithesis of beauty, at best she would be labeled as exotic and/or erotic. Secondly, I do not find it troubling that Juletane sees value and power in her own physical beauty; what is troubling is the fact that she yields that power to Mamadou. Erroneously, her primary concern is whether or not he finds her valuable; however, she fails to recognize the consequences of his acceptance. Mamadou, through his own masculinist discourse, inscribes his right to ownership through his claim of discursive, sexual and material power over Juletane's body. Warner-Viera illustrates the complex power structures of race, gender, and beauty when played out in the metropolis. Although Juletane is successful in navigating her way through Paris and using her own form of "madness" to survive, she is not as successful in Africa.

Juletane's Return: Cleansing and Contamination:

Upon arriving in Africa, Juletane soon realizes that it is not and cannot be her home. In fact, before she reaches the shores of Africa, Juletane is established as an outsider, an intruder, and an illegitimate daughter in what is to become an alien country with unacceptable

social customs¹⁰⁸. Juletane's emotional, psychological and cultural investment in Mamadou blinds her to the reality of him as a poor husband and Africa as a foreign land. Juletane states: "I thought I had found in Mamadou the family I missed, so I did not love him only as a lover, a husband. I transferred to him all the filial affection which was overflowing in me as well."¹⁰⁹ She mistakenly identifies Mamadou as her cultural savior; he is the one who will establish her place in the world and cleanse her of the contamination of Paris. As we shall see when Hyacinth returns to Jamaica, geographies of pain are not limited to Western metropolises. Juletane's experiences in an unspecified African city reveal the same threat of environmental madness that we saw in Paris.

Unlike in Paris, the reality of the African metropolis as another alien land is slow to materialize, therefore, Juletane remains vulnerable. Her failure to see herself as part of any geographical landscape or of having any personal Caribbean history leads to misguided attempts to adopt Africa as her home; therefore her journey toward an African initiation becomes one of

¹⁰⁸ Elaine Campbell 136

¹⁰⁹ Warner-Vieyra 15

alienation. Warner-Vieyra argues that Juletane's "claim to know nothing of the colonized context erases her Caribbean heritage. She cannot recognize the origin of her separation from Africa, the Middle Passage."¹¹⁰ As a result, she inaccurately presupposes that her blackness is enough to gain entry into this community. Given that the French deemed her skin as the ultimate marker of otherness, she deduces that Africans will read it conversely and she will be welcomed home as a long lost daughter.

Adele King claims black women's desire to connect with Africa as a mythical mother is an exercise in vain:

The black man from the Diaspora who goes to Africa is perhaps seeking a return not only to roots but to maternal warmth, looking for a mother to replace the Guadeloupe... which seems unsatisfactory. But... a woman, in order to mature, must settle accounts with her own mother--a mother who in these novels is absent or unsatisfactory; a mother, if equated with the mother island, who is too passive, too ill defined. For a woman that mother cannot be, metaphorically, Africa¹¹¹.

Warner-Vieyra's anti-metaphor forces us to rethink the role of Africa in Caribbean women's literature. Given that this part of the novel is set in the metropolis of an unspecified francophone African nation,

¹¹⁰ Wiley 455

¹¹¹ King 102

a binary of black versus white, or Caribbean versus European, does not work. Instead, the novel encourages us to analyze the ways in which masculine power discourses have been adopted by black people and what it means when they are readily reproduced or unwittingly internalized. Consequently, the novel also requires the reader to confront Mamadou and his role in Juletane's subjugation.

Race, hitherto, has been the ultimate signifier. This changes once Juletane leaves the metropolis of Paris and enters Africa. Race becomes secondary to other bodily markers, like nationality and class, which are used to categorize, contain and define Juletane as a contaminated other. Her adopted African community labels her as a "toubabesse," which means both foreigner and white woman. In lieu of race, whiteness represents her nationality, based on the assumption that she is French; and her class, as there is also an assumption of wealth associated with Juletane's body. In this African context, whiteness becomes divorced from race and associated with the geography; for this community, a Western body *is* a white body.

Adele King argues that Juletane lacks a "history [and] her access to the 'Other' in the figure of the

African Mamadou constitutes both an opening up to a wider social, cultural world and a return to the motherland."¹¹² Yet in this scene Juletane retires her selective amnesia, which she used as a covert form of "madness" in order to survive in Paris, and offers a worldly understanding of the situation. Here, on the continent, Juletane very quickly and coherently recalls her history. Warner-Vieyra writes:

She [her co-wife Ndeye] was quite simply identifying me with the white wives of colonials. She was even stripping me of my identity as a black woman. My forefathers had paid dearly for my right to be black, spilling blood and giving their sweat in hopeless revolts to enrich the soil of the Americas so that I might be born free and proud to be black¹¹³.

Therefore, Juletane does recognize her history and the various meanings her blackness embodies. The one meaning it does not carry with it in Africa, is acceptance. Her acknowledgement of her history maybe selective, but her understanding of what it means is always very clear. Her understanding of the African metropolis, however, is not as coherent. Instead, the Africans not only reject her as a woman, but also as a

¹¹² King 67

¹¹³ Warner-Vieyra 42-43

black woman. Juletane is doubly Othered as her Caribbean identity is completely ignored and her African heritage erased.

While Juletane rejects the label of *toubabesse*, paradoxically, it is her Western "bourgeois up-bringing" that limits her ability to interact with the African community.¹¹⁴ Her experiences in this metropolis mirror those she had in Paris. Her material world consists of a small, dark room, with one tiny window that faces the courtyard. The same emotional and physical isolation she experienced in Paris is repeated here. Through this window Juletane watches but does not engage the world. The window becomes a psychic mirror where she hopes to see herself reflected. Although she is looking at other black bodies, their skin color is not enough to establish familiarity and close the cultural and historical gap. This room, akin to the one in Paris, conjures up images of imprisonment.

A problematic polygamous marriage, a failed pregnancy and family rejection, coupled with difficult social expectations and limitations, force Juletane to employ strategies of "madness" in order to survive. She will not conform to unfamiliar and unacceptable customs

¹¹⁴ Warner-Vieyra 40

of an unwelcoming environment. Her room becomes an escape from her geography of pain and a haven from Mamadou's emotional abuse as well as his sexual advances.

Despite the fact that Juletane claims not to know her own beauty, she does know that Mamadou deems her body desirable. In retaliation for his abandonment, his lies regarding his polygamy and the hostility of the environment, Juelane exerts power in the one arena she can—through her body. She withholds sex thereby denying him access to her body. She cuts off her hair, a symbol of her beauty, thus changing her physical appearance in order to make her self less appealing, both visually and sexually. Moreover, she refuses to wear clothing while moving about the courtyard, thus exposing her nude body to the rest of the family. She turns her body into a weapon where it becomes an affront to their cultural sensibilities; while at the same time, it is exposing the raw pain that she is experiencing.

Juletane's nakedness forces them to see her blackness in a way they previously refused. This act of transgression is more than an attempt to flout cultural norms. Her femaleness also represents a threat to all established orders—sexual, social, and political. These

acts may appear strange; however, I posit that they are strategic. Juletane uses these "mad" actions to draw attention to her plight as well as resist this environment.

The community reads Juletane's behavior as problematic and a sign of insanity; Juletane, on the other hand, knows very well she is sane:

Here, they call me 'the mad woman', not very original. What do they know about madness? What if mad people weren't mad? What if certain types of behavior which simple, ordinary people call madness, were just wisdom, a reflection of the clear-sighted hypersensitivity of a pure, upright soul plunged into a real or imaginary affective void. To me, I am the most lucid person in the house.¹¹⁵

By opting out of her new community, Juletane solidifies her stance against the madness of this environment. She differentiates the madness that is projected onto her and that is located in her surroundings from the "mad" acts she must employ in order to survive. The metropolis in Africa is a "selfish world that crushes [Juletane] carelessly."¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the constant intrusion of a reality that marks Juletane's difference as a Caribbean

¹¹⁵ Warner-Vieyra 72

¹¹⁶ Warner-Vieyra 75

person in an African context reveals Africa to be an unobtainable illusion.¹¹⁷

Warner-Vieyra's novel challenges Wilson's stance that, "unlike male-authored Caribbean fiction, the quest in women's writing usually ends in withdrawal and isolation and/or flight and evasion, rather than confrontation."¹¹⁸ Juletane's refusal to participate in or submit to unacceptable customs and conditions are just as effective as physical or verbal resistance and therefore can be read as a type of confrontation. Instead of limiting our interpretations of women's rebellion to masculinist terms (read: violent or aggressive behaviors), we should read them with an awareness of gender and power differences. The tools available to black women do not always permit an overt act of aggression.

This difference is illustrated by our protagonists, Juletane, Hyacinth and Sophia's, lack of access to various forms of power—economic, political, socio-cultural and physical—thereby revealing a need to look elsewhere for an understanding of black women's resistance. But if we did wish to privilege acts of

¹¹⁷ Wiley 453

¹¹⁸ Warner-Vieyra 45

violence as the ultimate form of resistance, Warner-Vieyra presents those moments as well: Juletane poisons the three young children of Mamadou and Awa (Mamadou's first wife), which leads to Awa's violent suicide; and she pours hot oil onto the face of the third wife, causing major injury. I find it interesting that these violent actions are carried out using basic household items such as food and cooking oil, which adds another female dimension to "mad" acts of resistance.

The novel creates a space for black women's bodies to become active agents through the introduction of new interpretations of madness and alternative ways to seize and exercise power. Although she does not call it such, Linda M. Clement recognizes the effects of what I call environmental madness when she states, "Rebellious female characters, alas, activate the '*dysphoric*' ending of retirement, a nunnery, death, suicide or insanity--*she* either fits into the male system of values as good wife and mother or, considered unfit, she is ousted."¹¹⁹ This failure, that is woman's inability or refusal to fulfill unacceptable cultural ideologies, results in an "incarceration and deracinement, confinement and tragic uprootedness, movement, displacement and rootlessness"

¹¹⁹ Clement 80

and does not allow for the probability of any alternatives¹²⁰.

Although Warner-Vieyra's novel ends with Juletane being committed to a psychiatric ward, at no point does she lose her lucidity. In fact, Warner-Vieyra seems to reinforce it through the male doctor who informs Juletane that she is not ill, but simply responding to a hostile environment. The doctor's diagnosis reflects the fact that males are also aware of environmental madness and its effects on women's bodies.

The novel, *Juletane*, as well as Riley's *The Unbelonging* and Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, respond to the lack of alternative possibilities by deploying "madness" as a necessary form of autonomy; and, through this deployment, a revolt against the attacks on black women's bodies symbolizes a lucid form of resistance.

It's a Small, Cruel World: Hyacinth in the Metropolis:

Similar to Warner-Vieyra's introduction of Juletane, Riley introduces Hyacinth through her various environments: her father's house, the elementary school and the university's dormitory room. In Hyacinth we see constant "geographies of pain" beginning with her arrival

¹²⁰ Clement 46 author's emphasis

in London where she is reunited with her father. Moments after arriving, Hyacinth realizes life in London will not be easy: "There was a sea of white faces everywhere, all hostile. She had known they hated her, and she felt small, and lost and afraid, and ashamed..."¹²¹ Hyacinth's first encounter with the metropolis envisages the abuse and hostility she will endure in her new nation. She is rejected, scorned and taunted before she makes it out of the airport and into the city. Unlike her memories of life in Jamaica, life in London becomes unbearable and all attempts to reconcile her self to this geography fail. Her body's blackness is a marker that whites read as deviant, stricken, brutish, hypersexual, untrustworthy and undesirable.

Hyacinth's first attempt at reconciliation is to reject her own black body as the hostile stares and intense hatred cause not only self doubt, but also self loathing: She was ashamed "of her plaited hair as she looked enviously at the smooth straightness of theirs. She had always wanted long hair, would have given anything for it, and she wished with all her might that her prayers would be answered and she would become like

¹²¹ Riley 13

them."¹²² Her blackness is an inescapable fact that marks her as an unwanted intruder.

Contrastingly, in Jamaica her body is accepted and no one questions her beauty or self worth. Prior to her experiences in London, Jamaica is always nurturing, protective and supportive. Although she is coming from a geography of joy, pain awaits her in London. Hyacinth's perception of herself completely changes and this change is so drastic one must conclude that her new environment causes it. The environment dictates her emotional, psychological and physical perceptions of herself and the world. Consequently, these perceptions influence her reactions and behaviors in the metropolis.

After leaving the airport, she arrives at her father's house only to find it "dead" and lacking in liveliness, which she identifies with her neighbors' homes. Much like Juletane's experiences in Paris, Hyacinth is left isolated and alienated in this metropolis. Her future environments will not only prove to be hostile, but also dangerous. She, like Juletane, must call on her own form of "madness" in order to survive the environmental madness she will encounter.

¹²² Riley 13

Once in the home, Hyacinth's body is redefined in terms of the needs and wants of others.

In the context of the metropolis, her body comes to represent free labor: her stepmother is in need of a nanny and maid, so Hyacinth is forced to cook, clean and look after her two younger step-brothers. Her childhood is not only cut short due to the physical demands and abuses inflicted by her stepmother, but also to the physical and sexual abuse committed by her father. The father views Hyacinth's prepubescent body as a controllable and accessible sexual object. With the onset of puberty, Hyacinth's father insists on showing her "some of the things not to let men do." His constant acts of abuse—watching her bathe, touching her body, exposing his "lump" and making lewd comments—lead to confusion, shame and rejection. As she develops physically, her father's advances grow more frequent, violent and severe.

For most children, home represents a safe haven; but for Hyacinth in London, home becomes a site of environmental madness. When examining the sexual and physical abuse Hyacinth suffers, I wondered if Riley intended to show the readers the effects of the metropolis on black male bodies. Some critics, like

Melba Wilson, have argued that Riley breaks the silence on a dangerous subject that remains taboo in most black communities—and I agree. Nonetheless, the father's abuse toward Hyacinth, as loathsome as it is, represents the only power he possesses in the metropolis. He is part of the working class and has no economic power and his immigrant status limits his political power. The only power he retains is gender, which he expresses by molesting his daughter and beating his wife. Hyacinth's response is to use covert (bedwetting) and overt (running away) forms of resistance in order to put an end to the abuse and to escape this hostile environment.

The fact that black people in London, as opposed to her home of Jamaica, commit these abuses further calls into question the effects of the metropolis on black bodies. Although this reading may appear somewhat romanticized, I do think Riley's representation of incest not only draws our attention to the abuse, but also the circumstances around that abuse. Unable to protect herself against her father's advances, her stepmother's verbal abuse and the general hostility of the city, Hyacinth comes to despise all that her body represents: its blackness, its femaleness, its Caribbean-ness and its presumed ugliness.

Just as her father's house comes to represent the loss of childhood innocence, the elementary school also becomes a site of loss: namely, the loss of her Caribbean identity. This school's environment—its courtyards, hallways and classrooms—causes her physical and emotional pain; this pain. In an attempt to erase her blackness, Hyacinth spends most of her time against the large brick wall in the courtyard, trying to remain inconspicuous, or hiding in the shadows of the hallways, hoping to disappear.

The coldness of the brick wall, the darkness of the shadows and the claustrophobic nature of the hallways illustrate Hyacinth's constant state of confinement and alienation. Although she attempts to re-construct these places as safe havens, in reality, they are spaces of danger. Much like her experience at the airport, Hyacinth immediately recognizes her black body as a liability. Her fellow students attack her verbally, with vicious racial slurs, and physically, through sadistic attacks by her biracial classmate, Margaret White. Born to a white mother and black father, Margaret is adopted by a family who is white in both name and race. Unable to rid herself of her own blackness, Margaret harasses Hyacinth. Constant taunts of "nigger" and "wog"

remind Hyacinth that she does not belong. The fact that these assaults are carried out by a bi-racial girl illustrates not only the fact that racism is present in white British society, but also the internalization of that racism by its black population. Mrs. Mullens, a white teacher who witnesses the abuse but fails to help, reinforces Hyacinth's sense of unbelonging when she screams: "You blacks had better learn that you are in our country now!"¹²³ One of the ironies present here is the fact that Hyacinth, as a person of African descent, comes from a former British commonwealth, Jamaica, and is a descendent of people they formerly enslaved and later colonized and subjugated. In essence, it is the British who have a long history of invading other people's countries.

Mrs. Mullens, as well as Hyacinth, recognize that blackness is not merely about race, that there are larger social implications surrounding Hyacinth's body. She carries with her centuries of social stigma surrounding her blackness. Her body is stained by the cultural discourses developed by Europeans that make it impossible for Hyacinth to evade the legacy of slavery, colonization and racism. Mrs. Mullens embodies those negative beliefs

¹²³ Riley 17

and Margaret White represents the appropriation of those beliefs by non-whites. White resents her own black blood and attacks Hyacinth in an attempt to cleanse herself of this black stain. Through Nineteenth Century "medical" discourses, blacks were proven to be "inherently different... a separate (and needless to say, lower) race, as different from Europeans as the proverbial orangutang."¹²⁴

Rarely is Hyacinth viewed as a human being with aspirations and possibilities; instead she is viewed as a problem, an unwanted presence. The metropolis of London has proven to be a site of sheer madness where she cannot comprehend why her blackness is the source of such ridicule; however, what is apparent is the need to reject, or, failing that, to despise, that body in order to survive. Hyacinth's act of self-hatred reiterates the psychological toll the metropolis takes on her body. Although this strategy fails later on, at this juncture it becomes an effective survival mechanism.

Geographic displacement often manifests itself in terms of psychological disassociation by the women from their sense of themselves and their actual bodies.

¹²⁴ Sander L. Gilman "Black Bodies / White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Art, Medicine and Literature." IN *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, (ed) Henry Lewis Gates Jr. (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986) 235

Although she is physically in London, Hyacinth is denied full access to the city. This form of permanent exile, argues Willey, leads to (a perceived) madness. But this madness is not a mental illness; rather, Hyacinth suffers from a madness that originates from her geography, not from her body. The university dormitory room, where she now resides, further exacerbates the situation: "it was a drab, miserable place [with] soiled grey walls and dirt encrusted carpet... She had scrubbed the room from top to bottom, but it still felt dirty, looked grey and neglected, [with] a permanent chill."¹²⁵ Try as she might, she cannot get the room clean; it, like her perception of herself, remains stained.

To escape this reality Hyacinth conjures up Jamaica. During the night she returns to Jamaica through her dreams: a Jamaica that not only represents a return home, but also protection from the harsh realities of London. During a state of unconsciousness, completely separate from her physical body, Hyacinth finds safety and comfort. The daytime, on the other hand, brought cold, fear and a constant maddening itch¹²⁶. Only through the act of disassociation, where she psychologically leaves

¹²⁵ Riley 95

¹²⁶ Riley 38

her body, is she safe. Safety was something now associated with a Jamaica that became more enduring yet still unreachable, except in her dreams:

The three of them were in their secret place again and the sound of laughter rose through the sweet-scented bushes from where they lay. Hyacinth felt the lazy warmth of the early afternoon air wrap her in well-being as she lay back in the cool grass, listening idly to the conversation. It was safe in this little green cave...¹²⁷

In this dream, Hyacinth feels a sense of emotional and physical reassurance. Here her body is re-contextualized and actualized; she is welcomed, nurtured and wanted. The dream takes place outdoors, and this environment stands in direct contrast to London. Riley highlights Jamaica's natural beauty: the smell of the sea, grassy hills, blooming flowers and, most importantly, the brightness of the sun. In London, we are presented with concrete, small confining indoor spaces and grey skies. Hyacinth's vision of the Jamaican landscape—including its sounds and smells—represents her most pellucid moment. In Jamaica there is life to be lived; in London, there is only survival.

Moments of liveliness manifest themselves physically as each time she dreams of Jamaica, she wakes to dampened

¹²⁷ Riley 9

sheets. While bed-wetting brings the ire of her father, it brings calm to Hyacinth. The white European doctor (charged with curing this problem), views Hyacinth's bed-wetting as indicative of her inability to control her own body. He is not the first white doctor to misread a black female body. The wet sheets do not signify a loss of bodily control, but are a direct and successful attempt at retaining control over her physical body in a hostile environment.

The bed-wetting not only signals her transition from Jamaica back to London, but also serves as a deterrent to her pedophile father. The dream of returning to Jamaica serves as a defense mechanism and becomes a way for Hyacinth to retain her cultural identity and, most importantly, regain control over her body. Bedwetting is seen as normal behavior for small children, but certainly as abnormal for adolescent girls. Hyacinth is greatly traumatized in London; her response to this trauma is the maddening behavior of bedwetting. Given that she cannot obtain psychological relief from her pain, she seeks a physical release an attempt to address the alienation she is experiencing.

Anne Elizabeth Willey posits that, the "Afro-Caribbean population is stuck between the lost land of

Africa and the unreachable land of Europe."¹²⁸ The result is a constant state of suspension, belonging neither to the country they are from nor the country at which they arrived. They become "ships of fools," set adrift and disconnected. But Hyacinth proves herself to not be one of these ships; she maybe "mad" but she is not crazy. Unlike Juletane who views the Caribbean as a neither world and is completely disconnected, Hyacinth, for now, retains her connection to Jamaica. She longs for home and views it as crucial to her physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing; conversely, the root of all her pain is in the metropolis of London.

Because they suffer the same fate, Hyacinth is encouraged by other diasporic people to preserve this romanticized vision of Jamaica. Again we are presented with the far-reaching effects of environmental madness on global black bodies, regardless of gender, ethnicity and national identities. Although Hyacinth recognizes the madness of London, what she fails to guard against is its long-term effects on her body. The real tragedy of her experiences in London is that she internalizes their beliefs regarding blackness as a form of deviance and Otherness. When Hyacinth finally returns to Jamaica, she

¹²⁸ Wiley 451

unwittingly reproduces those discourses on blackness and project them onto her fellow Jamaicans. Hyacinth fails to recognize Jamaica because her decade in the Metropolis has contaminated and alienated her from her homeland. Thus she becomes psychologically traumatized.

Hyacinth's Return: On Being Alien in a Familiar Country:

Hyacinth's return to Jamaica is eerily similar to her arrival in London: "She was painfully aware of the eyes peering from the other shacks, the hostility all around her, shapes circling suspiciously, out of sight, yet glimpsed out of the corner of her eye."¹²⁹ Although she experiences the same feelings of alienation and hostility, the reason behind this treatment differs. She is not mistreated because of the blackness of her skin. Instead, she is viewed with skepticism because her Jamaican community recognizes the fact that her body has been compromised in London. Only upon her return to Jamaica, and subsequent rejection by Jamaicans, does she come to appreciate the affects of the madness of England.

Hyacinth views Jamaicans through the same discriminatory lens by which she was viewed by the British. She brings the discourse of inferiority to

¹²⁹ Riley 137

Kingston. Riley writes, "Her mind screamed rejection of the wooden shack, refused the ragged familiarity of the splintered door. She stood hesitant, disappointment a physical blow."¹³⁰ She reads the ragged familiarity of her childhood home with the same disdain with which the British treated her black body. Before she encounters her fellow Jamaicans, Hyacinth has already passed judgment on their Blackness, their Jamaican-ness. As a result, she discards them and in turn, she discards herself. The reality of the Jamaica she once knew—the Jamaica of her childhood and the Jamaica in her dreams—no longer exists. Even more to the point, the Hyacinth who had left Jamaica is not the same Hyacinth who has returned.

Riley's novel continues to raise questions regarding Caribbean women's relationship to power and discourse. In other words, how are they able to retain their culture, history and autonomy yet still gain access to systems of power (e.g. economic or political) and institutions of power (e.g. universities or churches) that will allow them full participation in society? For example, Hyacinth's inability to recognize her family and friends and their subsequent awkward and hostile

¹³⁰ Riley 137

encounters show what can happen when black women adopt Eurocentric ideologies. Hyacinth attributes her negative feelings toward Jamaica to the violence and poverty that now engulf her country; but it is not the people's material reality that is the problem. The true hindrance to her reintegration into Jamaican society and culture is the fact that she suffers from the effects of trauma due to life in London. Riley's ironic ending reminds us of the insidious nature of racism, sexism, classism, and xenophobia and their elemental effects on the individual psyche. Hyacinth employed numerous forms of "mad" behaviors in order to survive in the metropolis; but ultimately her body could not withstand the contamination.

Her aunt and neighbors accuse her of putting on airs, rejecting her family and abandoning her heritage. Hyacinth's refusal to acknowledge any memories of her family and friends, coupled with her adoption of a British accent and rejection of Jamaican Creole does little to assuage their fears or counter their accusations. The feeling of belonging Hyacinth anticipates does not materialize. Instead she is told:

Go back whe yu come fram. We noh like farigners ina J.A.' Each word, like a knife wounded, stabbed and

ripped inside her. Where did they expect her to go? Why did everyone reject her? She wanted to shout that she was sorry, that the whole thing was just a horrible mistake. Maybe she would wake up now. Surely she should have done already? 'Go back where you come from.' The words whirled about inside her head. How many times had she heard that since coming to Jamaica or was it since she had gone to England? She felt rejected, unbelonging. Where was the acceptance she had dreamt about, the going home in triumph...? She felt exposed, her blackness ugly and rejected even among her own kind... She remembered England as a child, the beatings, the jeers. 'Go back where you belong,' they had said, and then she had thought she knew where that was. But if it was not Jamaica, where did she belong?¹³¹

The transition from London to Kingston proves to be a slippery one for Hyacinth. Hyacinth is, in effect, environmentally mad due to the trauma she suffered in London. The novel ends with her asking more questions than finding answers. At this time she becomes one of the many "ships of fools," not because she is seeking Africa, but because she has lost the Caribbean. Hyacinth is left in a quandary: she is too Jamaican for the British and too British for Jamaicans. Riley offers no happy ending resulting in triumph over tribulation. The constant disavowal of her humanity in London and her inability to retain her Jamaican identity causes us to reflect on the pervasiveness of these geographies of pain. In this tale, Riley offers us insight into the

¹³¹ Riley 142

effects of the environment on the individual psyche, but does not provide a cure.

Mothers' Memories and Daughters' Bodies: The Body as Landscape:

Danticat's novel takes a unique position on "madness" and the metropolis. In this story, Danticat's representations of environmental madness are largely located within Martine, the mother of our protagonist Sophia. Unlike Riley and Warner-Vieyra who gives us moments where black bodies are part of the hostile landscape, for Danticat, Martine's body serves as a conduit for the hostility and unacceptable customs Sophia must rally against. In the city of New York, Sophia becomes an extension of her mother's geographies of pain.

The metropolis, as depicted in Haitian American writer Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, symbolizes the continuation of female pain endured by the Cacos women. Similar to the previous protagonists, Juletane and Hyacinth, Sophia is forced to leave her native country of Haiti and travel to the metropolis of New York. Reminiscent of London and Paris, New York signifies loss, pain and failure; Sophia arrives there whole, but ends up fragmented.

In many ways, Danticat's novel is a traditional female bildungsroman in that it details a young girl's coming of age. Danticat adamantly reminds the reader of Sophia's material reality and her struggle to integrate into the environment. In order to ground herself, Sophia must turn away from the metropolis and look to her body as its own landscape; a landscape that is in the process of becoming. However, because of her connection to her mother, this proves difficult.

Yet in other ways, the coming of age narrative is non-traditional in that it follows the mother's parallel journey of pain. Martine, a victim of rape, must also come to terms with her own body, its landscape and the environmental madness she suffers. To that end, the remainder of this chapter will explore these two bodies as being contaminated souls that seek to cleanse themselves, much in the same way that Juletane and Hyacinth did, in an attempt at becoming complete. Therefore, Sophia must use her own acts of "madness" to fight on two fronts: her own body as well as her mother's.

Sophia, as a child of rape, becomes a constant reminder that women, as her Aunt Atie states while pounding her fist on her breast and stomach, have no

control over their bodies.¹³² All of Martine's attempts to reclaim her body, most notably her numerous attempts at abortion, fail. By destroying the fetus, Martine not only hopes to destroy the memories, but also prevent future injury to yet another black woman's body; these unsuccessful attempts are acts of self-preservation. Unable to retain control over her body, Martine leaves Sophia behind in Haiti, and migrates to her own personal paradise, New York.

The metropolis is where Martine's abused Caribbean body can be reborn. Unlike Hyacinth, who has fond childhood memories of her Caribbean home, for Martine, Haiti is yet another geography of pain. Not only is there political unrest, random violence and killings by the Tonton Macoutes, but also, and more importantly for Martine, sexual violence against women. Like Juletane's experiences in the African metropolis, Haiti also has its own environmental madness. For women, sexual assaults mark their bodies as vulnerable, powerless and always accessible.

New York is where Martine remakes herself: she obtains an education; dates outside her class and escapes the nightmare of being raped, at least for a time. She

¹³² Danticat 20

states, "In Haiti... it would not be possible for someone like Marc [a wealthy mulatto from the elite class in Haiti] to love someone like me. He is from a very upstanding family. His grandfather was a French man."¹³³ Martine's fascination with assimilating into American society represents the possibility of transcending not only racial and class boundaries, but also the limitations of her body. Martine, like Juletane, erroneously looks for that transcendence in a man. Perhaps she feels that if one man can violate her and take away her sense of wholeness, than another man can restore it. In her quest for restoration, she transfers her conflicting feelings regarding sex onto Sophia.

Through a temporary rejection of Victorian ideals on sexual purity, Martine redefines her sexuality and desirability within an American context. In the United States her body has new value and it would appear she has indeed escaped to her own personal promised land. However, it becomes painfully clear that these narratives travel with her from Haiti to the US, and that America has its own similar treatise regarding black women's bodies. Martine's respite proves to be false; she cannot

¹³³ Edwidge Danticat *Breath Eyes Memory* (New York, Penguin Books 1999): 59

escape her own body and Sophia's arrival is a reminder of this fact.

Whilst it appears that Martine has escaped "the externally imposed second skin of misconception and misrepresentation"¹³⁴ in the metropolis of New York, Martine's constant use of fade cream to lighten the skin on her face tell us differently¹³⁵. In spite of her claims to racial and class mobility, Martine reproduces notions of bodily value being based on one's proximity to whiteness in terms of color (hence the cream), and customs (her ability to speak impeccable French).

Sophia's body confronts the myths of the metropolis. Martine is able to shed the misconceptions and misrepresentations of her skin only because she applies them to her daughter. Unable to distinguish between herself and her daughter, Martine misidentifies Sophia's body as bearing the same scars, literal and metaphorical, that mark her. The hatred and loathing she feels toward her own breast and vagina is projected onto her daughter. This hatred manifests itself in the way of a "test" designed to protect Sophia's "purity."

¹³⁴ Kimberly Wallace-Sanders. *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture* (Naa Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002):4

¹³⁵ Danticat 59

These tests involve a physical examination of her vagina and hymen—much like the examination European women would undergo before marrying into the British royal family. Martine's fixation on Sophia's body soon turns to obsession; by controlling Sophia's sexual body, Martine attempts to purify herself:

As she tested me, to distract me, she told me, 'The *Marassas* were two inseparable lovers. They were the same person, duplicated in two. They looked the same, talked the same, walked the same. When they laughed, they even laughed the same and when they cried, their tears were identical'.¹³⁶

Martine's constant attempts to be Sophia's shadow or twin illustrate her inability to separate her own body from that of her daughters. Vévé A. Clark explains the meanings of the *marasa*. She states,

Marasa is derived from creation myths among the Fon/Ewe in Ancient Dahomey (present-day Benin) which are non-patriarchal in character. *Marasa* is the Haitian version of Mawu (female)—Lisa (male) whose divine powers emanate from non-gender-specific being, Nananbuluku.¹³⁷

The tests are a misguided attempt by Martine to reclaim power over her body. By thinking of herself as Sophia's twin Martine not only seeks to undo the rape, but also

¹³⁶ Danticat 84

¹³⁷ Vévé Clark. "Developing Diaspora Literacy and *Marasa* Consciousness." IN *Comparative American Identities*. (ed.) Hortense J. Spillers (Routledge New York 1991) 43

remake herself in the image of her daughter. Her controlling behaviors reflect her attempts to be omnipresent in Sophia's life; it seems the earthly body carries too much pain and Martine adopts a god-like position instead. Accordingly, instead of a Christian notion of the Immaculate Conception, she looks to Vodun and Nananbuluku sources for her child. In essence, Martine becomes Sophia's mother/daughter/sister/lover.

Chancy gives further insight when she states:

Martine, who wants to make sure that Sophia remains sexually 'whole,' persists in describing her acts of sexual abuse in terms of spiritual 'twinning' of souls. Presented as a ritual enacted between mother and daughter through generations, the 'testing' that scars Sophia for life is a product of the suppression of female sexuality and the codification of women's bodies as vessels for male gratification in marriage. The Cacos perpetuate this ritual, although none of the women in the family has ever married.¹³⁸

When the grandmother Ife is asked why Haitian women conducted the test, her only response is that her mother did it to her, and her grandmother also did it to her mother. Therefore, the testing becomes not only a Haitian tradition passed down from generation to generation, but also a damaging part of the Cacos' family

¹³⁸ Chancy 121

legacy. The tests are a collective memory the Cacos women share which speaks to a history of violence and violation: Martine is raped, Sophia is violated and Aunt Atie is sexually abused by her father. In an ironic twist, these tests are designed to help the women remain pure and secure husbands, yet Martine and her sisters never marry and all the Cacos women end up wounded. The presence of an intact hymen does nothing to protect the women from these attacks.

The tests represent outdated and impractical colonial values that are not appropriate for Sophia, or the other Cacos women for that matter, and are incompatible with their bodies. Through ideologies and discourses established in Europe, the "encounter had already taken place in parlors and reading rooms on English [and French] soil, assuring that colonists would arrive with a battery of assumptions and predispositions about race, femininity, sexuality and civilization."¹³⁹ As Sander Gilman argues, black bodies are the antithesis of European sexual mores and beauty.¹⁴⁰

By maintaining Victorian notions of purity, the test inflicts humiliation upon the Cacos women and serves no

¹³⁹ Jennifer L. Morgan. " 'Some Could Suckle Over Their Shoulders:' Male Travelers, Female Bodies, and the Gendering of Racial Ideology, 1500-1770" IN *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002): 37-65

¹⁴⁰ Gilman 231

other purpose than to control and restrict their bodies. Whenever Sophia leaves her mother's New York apartment, she must submit to one of these tests as payment to regain entry. As we saw with Hyacinth, the environmental madness extends from the public sphere of the city and into the private sphere of the home.

In order to break free of these restrictions and from her mother, Sophia breaks her hymen:

My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet. I took the pestle and the bloody sheet and stuffed them into a bag. It was gone, the veil that always held my mother's fingers back every time she *tested* me.¹⁴¹

Although the act of breaking the hymen causes physical pain and, later, sexual discomfort, it also results in liberation. Once the hymen is broken, there is nothing left for the mother to protect and the "twining" ceases. This act of "madness" becomes Sophia's most successful strategy of survival. Martine later admits that the one good thing to come out of the rape was that it made the testing stop. The fact that the tests are considered a greater violation of the body than rape highlights their horrors. Sophia is left to deal with the physical and psychological scars these tests

¹⁴¹ Danticat 88 Author's emphasis

have caused. Like her mother's nightmares of being raped, she cannot escape her own nightmares of breaking her hymen. Like Hyacinth, she also comes to hate her body. This hatred also seems to be a family legacy as Martine ends her life and the life of her unborn child by stabbing her self in the stomach. Martine carried with her the scars from the environmental madness she suffered in Haiti. Unfortunately, she could not escape her illness in New York. The metropolis does not represent a haven from the pains of life, instead it creates its own wounds.

Sophia Speaks: Ancestral Language and the City:

When Sophia arrives in New York, her mother introduces her to the city: they visit a salon, shop at an open-air market and have dinner at a Haitian restaurant. Unlike Hyacinth and Juletane, whose experiences in the metropolis are immediately negative and confining, Sophia seems undaunted by New York and eager to assimilate. The presence of Haitian foods and people also gives a false impression of warmth and familiarity. The openness of being outdoors coupled with unfettered mobility creates a first impression of freedom

and prosperity—quite unlike Hyacinth's experience at the airport.

Nonetheless, these experiences do not erase the fact that within the city, there remain hardships and obstacles. For example, Sophia's environments are limited to small bedrooms and places that deal with illnesses—hospitals, convalescence homes and the bedrooms of bedridden elderly people. Ironically, Martine is charged with caring for and healing these bodies, yet she is unable to care for herself and inflicts physical, emotional and sexual abuse upon her child. These places are prophetic, foreshadowing the geographies of pain that is to come. In addition, Sophia fears attending school and being taunted by children who chant: "You have HBO: Haitian Body Odor." Beyond this schoolyard taunt lies an even greater threat: AIDS. Sophia recognizes that her body has been constructed as contaminated and contagious due to the US government's inclusion of Haitians as a high risk group: "Many of the American kids even accused Haitians of having AIDS because they heard on television that only the "Four Hs" got AIDS—Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals, and Haitians."¹⁴² Sophia, like our other protagonists, must contend with being

¹⁴² Danticat 51

"Othered;" not only is she different, she is also diseased. To mark herself as belonging, Sophia, who cannot change her skin, changes her tongue.

She desires to speak English, dislikes attending a bilingual high school and although she detests processed American food, she prepares and consumes it, rather than Haitian dishes. To a large extent, she too has bought into the meta-language of race that locates her body outside the American body and the white body. Therefore, in order to fit into the landscape that will transform her Haitian body into an American one, Sophia must reject her mother-tongue—Creole. Her Haitian accent is a clear sign of unbelonging. When speaking with her friend Joseph, he notices an accent. Sophia's response: "Oh please, say a small one.... After six years in this country, I was tired of having people detect my accent. I wanted to sound completely American."¹⁴³ As stated earlier, Hyacinth also had a similar exchange with Diaspora people, African and Caribbean students in London.

One collective diasporic response to environmental madness is racial unity, as Joseph quickly erases the assumption that language, culture or nationality will be

¹⁴³ Danticat 72

a barrier between himself and Sophia. Through their skin he creates a place of belonging and replies: "I am not American... I am African American. The African. It means that you and I, we are already part of each other."¹⁴⁴ He reads and then rewrites her body in a way that recontextualizes it in an ancestral rather than physical return to Africa.

Joseph's pan-African world-view situates Sophia's body within a diasporic context, not an American one. Rather than dismiss her tongue, he claims it as part of his own history. Her black body is no longer a trope for degeneracy, instead it signals a communal body based exclusively on their African ancestry. Her tongue, nevertheless, identifies her not only as black but also as Caribbean, complicating Joseph's pan-African perspective. Although he creates space for Sophia to belong, he privileges her race over her nationality. Because Joseph is not from the Caribbean he is located outside a Creole reality.¹⁴⁵ A Creole reality is the cultural make up of African-Caribbean communities that are located *within* the Caribbean region; thus he is

¹⁴⁴ Danticant 59

¹⁴⁵ Percy C. Hintzen . "Race and Creole Ethnicity in the Caribbean." In *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture* (ed.) Verene A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards (Kingston, Ian Randle Press 2002) 99

unable to read her body in its Caribbean context.

Although Joseph is an outsider, I believe Creole, which is hybrid by nature, allows space for him to enter; and in so doing reiterates a diasporic Creole reality—one that may include other black bodies as well as Caribbean people no longer located in the region.

Joseph's Pan-African perspective is preceded by a Pan-Haitian history in the United States. As early as 1859 Haitian Secretary of State F.E. DuBois offered passage and land to all African-Americans wishing to migrate.¹⁴⁶ This aspect of black American and Haitian history illustrates the fact that African American-Haitian connections are not new and the migratory process has not been unidirectional.

Nineteenth Century Haiti had positioned itself as an answer to African American cultural neurosis, much like the metropolis of Paris, London and New York positioned themselves as Twentieth Century lands of opportunities. Black bodies in the West have a well-documented history of pain tied directly to the land (be it sugarcane, cotton, rice or tobacco fields), thus giving greater

¹⁴⁶ In the 1860's the plan was brought to fruition with large numbers of formerly enslaved black Americans being transported to Haiti. The program had little success as most of the new migrants returned to the States within a year due to a lack of support and infrastructure in Haiti. While there was some "support" from white separatist groups for the relocation of newly freed African Americans to Haiti, unlike many back to Africa movements, it was not dominated by them and, in fact, garnered greater support from blacks than many back to Africa movements.

credence to Joseph's claim that they are one in the same. The newly established Republic of Haiti became a place where newly freed African Americans could belong. This possibility, albeit more symbolic than real, indoctrinated black Americans into a Creole reality. Because of this shared history, Joseph becomes a gateway for Sophia's return to the Caribbean.

Sophia's Return: They Will Know Me By My Tongue

To counter the pain she experiences in New York, like Hyacinth, Sophia turns to her memories of the Haitian landscape. She conjures yellow Daffodils, the smell of the sea air, dirt roads and her aunt's small home in order to find comfort. This reprieve, however, proves unfulfilling and thus necessitates a literal return. The place that was the cause of her Mother's pain is the only place Sophia can find joy. She, like her mother, attempts to escape one geography of pain in exchange for a perceived promised land. Like Juletane and Hyacinth discovered, however, it is difficult to escape the effects of contamination. Consequently, Sophia returns to Haiti bearing the marks of environmental madness and her years in the metropolis.

During the taxi ride from the airport, Sophia reestablishes herself as Haitian. Although the taxi driver misidentifies her body as American, her language, Creole, is unmistakably Haitian. Instead of Creole being viewed as a marker of her outsider status, it becomes a means for her to regain entry into her Haitian community and her Haitian self. The taxi driver comments on how well she speaks Creole and the following exchange takes place: Sophia states, "This is not my first trip to [Haiti]. I was born here." The driver responds, "People who have been away from Haiti fewer years than you, they return and pretend they speak no Creole."¹⁴⁷

The "people" are those Haitians located in the Caribbean Diaspora and commonly referred to as Dyaspora. The Dyaspora, according to Edwidge Danticat, are people with their feet planted in both worlds [Haiti and the US]; [h]owever, [they] are not saying good-bye to a country, but to a notion that as 'Dyaspora' [they] do not own it and it does not own them."¹⁴⁸ Therefore, when the driver asks, "Is [Creole] so easy to forget?" he is really speaking of Haiti. Sophia replies, "Some people

¹⁴⁷ Danticat 95

¹⁴⁸ Danticat *The Butterfly's Way* (New York: Soho Press, 2001) xv

need to forget... I need to remember."¹⁴⁹ This act of remembering serves as a catalyst for healing.

By returning to Haiti, Sophia re-appropriates "vital social, physical, and psychological territories previously occupied or foreclosed."¹⁵⁰ She accomplishes this in three major ways: first, she reclaims her Haitian heritage; second, she reclaims her body by confronting the source of the tests; and finally, she exorcises her demons by returning to the place where her mother was raped.

Sophia's choice of language crosses class and national barriers as the taxi driver assumes she is an outsider or someone belonging to the upper-class based on her Americanization--that is, her form of dress, her arrival from the States and, most importantly, her US passport. Rosser writes that Creole is "a category that sublimates differences--of ethnicity as well as of gender and of class."¹⁵¹ Just as Creole sublimates these differences, it also highlights other similarities such as race. Creole bridged the gap between Sophia and Joseph and it now regenerates a link between Sophia and Haiti.

¹⁴⁹ Danticat 95

¹⁵⁰ Rosser 478

¹⁵¹ Rosser 481

While in Haiti, Sophia confronts her own body, as it is here that we learn she suffers from bulimia. Each time she has sex with her husband, she binges and purges. This illness can be seen as another act of "madness" used in an attempt to protect herself against the physical and mental pain of sex. Although misguided and problematic, rejecting the food becomes the only way she can purify her body after Joseph has contaminated it via sex. The conflation of food, sex and pain speaks to a deeper interaction between Sophia's body and environmental madness. Her initial response to the US is total assimilation, but as her mother's abuse increases and her position as outsider is established, Sophia rejects all things New York: food, schools, sex.

By regurgitating, she is able to free her body of this waste. At the same time, her weight loss reflects a literal disappearing. She, like our other protagonists, wishes to erase herself from the landscape. Failing this, she flees to Haiti. In Haiti she acknowledges her illness and even prepares an elaborate meal. In this way she begins her healing process, a process that cannot take place in New York. Through a renewed commitment to eating and a rejection of the test, Sophia begins to repair both her physical and sexual self. Therefore, the

next step in her healing process is to confront the Cacos women about the tests.

Sophia says of the tests, "I call it humiliation... I hate my body. I am ashamed to show it to anybody, including my husband. Sometimes I feel like I should be off somewhere by myself. That is why I am here."¹⁵²

Although the grandmother apologizes for the pain she may have caused by passing on this legacy,¹⁵³ the confrontation is a psychological healing rather than a physical one. Through a forceful rejection of the tests Sophia ends the cycle and saves her daughter, Brigitte, from the same fate. The final step in her healing process takes place on a subsequent visit to Haiti.

Sophia returns to bury her mother and visits the site where she was conceived:

There were only a few men working in the cane fields. I ran through the field, attacking the cane. I took off my shoes and began to beat a cane stalk. I pounded it until it began to lean over my shoulder. I pushed over the cane stalk. It snapped back, striking my shoulder. I pulled at it, yanking it from the ground. My palm was bleeding. The cane cutters stared at me as though I was possessed. The funeral crowd was now standing between stalks, watching me beat and pound the cane. My grandmother held back the priest as he tried to come for me. ...my grandmother shouted... 'Ou libéré?' Tante Atie

¹⁵² Danticat 123

¹⁵³ Danticat 164

echoed her cry, her voice quivering with her sobs. 'Ou libéré!' ¹⁵⁴

Where the grandmother asks a question, the Aunt provides the answer: Sophia is finally free. We may consider her behavior strange acts of grief, but I read Sophia's actions as a final step in reclaiming her body. By beating the cane, Sophia erases her mother's pain due to the rape; she comes to terms with being a child of rape; and most importantly, she reverses the twinning, thereby freeing herself as well as her mother.

To conclude, it would, of course, be completely inaccurate to say that these literary representations have changed the discourse surrounding black bodies. What I have attempted to do is to show how the texts challenge traditional discourses of culture, aesthetics and values that are inappropriately applied to or unwittingly appropriated by black bodies. Warner-Vierya, Riley and Danticat have created a little space for those of us who regularly encounter geographies of pain. Their literary imaginings create possibilities for moving beyond ideological boundaries, away from diseased environments and past the "madness".

¹⁵⁴ Danticat 233

*Chapter Three: Body-Marks and Historical
Recreation in Caribbean Women's Literature*

And you know if I was a book I would sell
Cuz every curve on my body got a story to tell...
Don't need to be dressed; I'm fresh to the flesh
(*"My Mic Sounds Nice"* from *Hot, Cool and Vicious*, 1986)

The words that appear as a caption to this chapter are the lyrics of a song written by an American female rap duo named Salt-N-Peppa. The song, released during the mid-1980s, came at a time when black men dominated the genre of Hip-Hop. Thus Salt-N-Peppa's presence on the Hip-Hop scene, and subsequent success, shocked, challenged and changed the American musical industry. To date, public speaking, even public speaking by members of marginalized communities like African American communities, had been a largely male endeavor. Therefore, the stories that were told were male stories; and out of these stories came a history that was, well, his story.

Consequently, Salt-N-Peppa used their bodies, literally and figuratively, to open the door for other black, female voices to be heard. These women not only injected themselves into the discourse, but also changed

that discourse by adding their voices and perspectives to the stories that were being told. In chronicling their own narratives—narratives that were written on every curve of their bodies—they confidently boasted that these narratives were fresh (that is new, exciting and complicated) and would sell (they were economically as well as culturally and historically valuable). I choose these words as the opening for this chapter because they, like the Caribbean women writers found here, effectively articulate what June Jordan calls a furious intelligence coupled with hopeful tenderness.¹⁵⁵

This is my intellectual reason. Personally, I selected these lines because this song represents one of my earliest introductions to black feminism. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, music can be an effective form of protest and empowerment. In my personal experiences, before there were theories, jargon and analysis, there was Salt-N-Peppa. These women spoke to and empowered a generation of little black girls. I remember asking myself, "What kind of stories does my body have to tell?" Although I do not recall the answer, in retrospect, I thank Salt-N-Peppa for encouraging me to

¹⁵⁵ June Jordan made this comment when speaking on the works of African American feminist bell hooks in *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (Henry Holt and Company, New York 1995)

ask the question and to seek out those bodily narratives and explore just how "fresh to the flesh" they truly are.

If the black female body has been metaphorically consumed, as I suggested in the last chapter; then the history of that consumption, along with other Caribbean female histories, can be re-imagined and re-told on those very bodies. This chapter addresses the re-imagining and re-telling of Caribbean histories in the works of Dionne Brand and Edwidge Danticat. The historical moments I speak of are: Trinidad's Black Power Movement and the Massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. These writers creatively use the black female body as a historical text upon which to interject and reconstruct specific historical moments. Using the body as our principal metaphor, the chapter opens with a discussion on body marks and their importance in understanding Caribbean histories. It then analyzes how these histories lead to the manifestation of political and personal revolutions; finally, it explores the possibilities this approach offers to not only further our understanding of Caribbean female histories, but also to challenge what is considered the official story and how that story is told.

Flesh in Texts: The Makings of a Caribbean Female

History:

Black women's bodies and their marks (scars, scratches, blemishes, and other bodily imperfections) can be viewed as multi-layered texts that give testimony to a particular historical moment from a uniquely female position.¹⁵⁶ By the term uniquely female position, I mean the authors engage in what Barbara Christian calls creative dialogue, where they insist on addressing sexual and gendered differences in their rehabilitation of these specific Caribbean historical moments.¹⁵⁷

Furthermore, they speak from "a multiple and complex social, historical, and cultural positionality which, in effect, constitutes black female subjectivity and enter into a dialectic of identity with those aspects of self shared with others;" or, rather, they engage in what I prefer to call a collective individuality¹⁵⁸. By collective individuality I mean that both Brand and Danticat tell the story of an individual woman; however,

¹⁵⁶The historical moments I speak of are: US invasion of Grenada; Trinidad's Black Power Movement of 1970s; the Massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic in 1937

¹⁵⁷ Brand and Danticat are not the only Caribbean writers to fictionalize these histories. Grenadian poet and novelist Merle Collins' 1987 novel *Angel* addresses the US invasion of Grenada and its aftermath; while Haitian writer Rene Philocette, who is male, fictionalizes the 1937 massacre in his novel, *Massacre River*.

¹⁵⁸ Mae Gwendolyn Henderson. "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialects, and the Black Woman Writers Literary Tradition," IN *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women*. (ed.) Cheryl A. Wall Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 1989: 19.

these individual stories reflect a shared history with complex layers of truths that speak specifically to the collective role of black women in Caribbean history. Women's bodies are historicized and foregrounded not only in terms of their locations, but also by their very selection as a topic of discourse about Caribbean history. Brand and Danticat do not construct Caribbean women solely from imagination; they are the embodiment of a real history of survival.

Through their writings, Brand and Danticat challenge the construction of the official story. By creating literary testimonials, their literary work expands the traditional definition of testimonial in two ways: first, they are works of fiction; and second, while the authors are members of the marginalized communities they write about, their location (Brand is in Canada and Danticat in the United States) complicates their representations of these moments because they no longer occupy the marginal space they write about. Even so their literature speaks on behalf of those who are from those spaces and those who continue to inhabit them. Their histories become a collective female history; their plight reflects the larger plight of other black women; and their triumph is celebrated as a communal triumph. In order to do this,

the authors fictionalize key historical moments in order to privilege a female perspective.

The historical moments this chapter will explore are Brand's representation of the US invasion of Grenada in 1983 coupled with Trinidad's Black Power Movement during the 1970s; and Danticat's representation of the 1937 Massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. These events are seminal moments in Caribbean history. The marks located on their characters' bodies not only announce the existence of these key Caribbean historical moments, but also establish these bodies as non-scribal texts imbued with historical importance. Although I recognize that these are works of fiction, I read the bodies as independently imbued with multiple narratives that go beyond the fictional story being told.

The multiple narratives suggested by these writers' presentations encourage us to expand our notion of Caribbean history and its effects in ways we may not have previously encountered or even considered, thus providing alternative entry into those moments.

The Body Beautiful and Bitter Cane: Revolutionary Acts I:

Brand's novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, is a tale of revolution, not just political revolution but also sexual revolution. The novel has two storylines: one narrative takes place in an unspecified Caribbean country during a time of political unrest in 1986; most of the action is set in the sugarcane fields in the countryside. The second tale is set in Toronto between 1973 and 1986, where similar protests against racism and classism are taking place. These two storylines come together through Brand's blurring of the 1983 US invasion of Grenada and the 1970s struggles of Trinidad's Black Power Movement into one historical moment. Although Brand does not specify a country or a movement, the novel does offer clues (such as the names of towns, streets or specific events) which imply a direct connection to Grenada and Trinidad.

Brand's lack of national specificity persuades us to go beyond geographical boundaries and chronological time. The creation of imagined space frees the writer to make more comprehensive reference to a collective condition. The conflation of these two revolutionary movements allows for a Pan-Caribbean reading of history and leads to the creation of a poly-revolutionary tale; a tale that

is told through a narrative of testimony, romance and revolution. In Brand's novel, one woman finds meaning not only in the politics of the day, but also, and most importantly, in other women.

Grenada was greatly influenced by Cuba and the history of its revolution; along with its philosophical agreement regarding Cuba's Marxist principles on class liberation, Grenada also adopted a very similarly male-driven approach to revolutionary activities. Brand's text goes against the masculinist, heterosexual normativity implicitly upheld by Caribbean revolutions and creates a space for women sexually interacting with other women. In outlining this story, Brand challenges the assumption of a male-dominated revolutionary movement.

In addition, Brand confronts the limitations placed on women as "sisters in arms" as well as rejects the notion of heterosexuality as the only legitimate sexual expression. She asserts same sex female relationships as not only viable but also valid. Brand's novel deliberately claims two very popular Caribbean socio-political movements as sites for discussion of women's sexual politics. So even as Brand addresses the real histories of these revolutions, she also presents them

allegorically, through her character Verlia, in order to posit an alternative vision not only of the revolutions but also their lasting legacies.

The personal revolution of Verlia, coupled with her political activism, defies our understanding of revolutionary warfare and its place in black women's lives. Verlia simultaneously narrates this poly-revolution in actions related to her love of women. By foregrounding an issue that would at best be subterranean in the discourse of Caribbean revolutions, Brand allows Verlia to offer an alternative reading on the history of Caribbean and other global black liberation movements. For Verlia, black women loving black women is *the* revolutionary act.¹⁵⁹ Her political activity cannot be separated from her intimate relationships with women, specifically her relationships with Elizete and Abena.

Johanna X.K. Gravey argues, "Black women must strive to make space for their own bodies in this enemy territory¹⁶⁰." Often the enemy territory is defined as being a place outside their native land. However, in her novel Brand locates this hostility in Verlia's unspecified Caribbean nation. Brand demystifies, de-

¹⁵⁹ At this end of his 1989 documentary film, *Tongues Untied*, Marlon Riggs makes this comment regarding black gay men.

¹⁶⁰ Johanna X.K. Gravey. "'The Place She Miss': Exile, Memory, and Resistance in Dionne Brand's Fiction." 489.

romanticizes and humanizes Caribbean revolutionary histories by exposing the challenges black women faced not only from outside hostilities, but also from the "enemy" within—sexism. As a result, her book speaks in two voices: one addressing Caribbean women and the other addressing us, contemporary readers. The text becomes poly-historic and optimistic, writing to a future generation of Caribbean people who might be more attuned to reading about women loving women, moving between past and present, and exploring those parallel histories that make up the Caribbean.

Brand's language is not overtly romantic, nor is it clouded with the type of harsh, that is, masculinist and prescriptive, rhetoric commonly associated with global black power movements. Instead, she combines the lyricism of poetry, with the rhythms of everyday reality and couches her love of country and her love for women in a language that speaks to both, attaining what might be described as a revolutionary lyricism. Verlia's poly-revolution is beautifully illustrated through Brand's unique literary style.

Bridging the Body to Another Place: Revolutionary

Lyricism and the Grace of Verlia:

The novel opens with a single word: Grace. The reader soon discovers it is not the grace of God, but the grace of a woman—Verlia, often called Verl. The grace she offers however is not spiritual salvation, but physical respite. Brand writes:

A woman can be a bridge, limber and living, breathless, because she don't know where the bridge might lead, she don't need no assurances except that it would lead out with certainty, no assurances except the arch and disappearance. At the end it might be the uptake of air, the chasm of what she don't know, the sweep and soar of sheself unhandled, making sheself a way to cross over. A woman can be a bridge from these bodies whipping cane.¹⁶¹

That woman is Verlia. Returning to her unspecified Caribbean nation, Verlia's body becomes a bridge, an escape route from the suffering sugarcane fields and, for Elizete, a gateway to love. Verlia is the arch offering passage into disappearance; Elizete crosses that bridge.

Elizete's crossing of the bridge is significant because she is the key figure in Verlia's poly-revolution. Elizete is both a worker in the sugarcane fields and Verlia's lover. In fact, their first encounter takes place in the fields. Taking in her body

¹⁶¹ Brand 16

visually, and later sexually, Elizete associates Verlia's body with sugarcane. She describes it as hot, cool, wet and sweet, sweet like sugar; consuming her is "like thieving sugar," dangerous yet irresistible. It is ironic that Verlia's body is associated with the pleasure of sugar cane when it is the pain of sugarcane that has brought her to the fields. Yet this irony is where the political and the personal (read sexual) revolutions collide.

Although the inescapable pain of the sugarcane is a constant reminder of the need for resistance, Elizete's evocation of the sugarcane also foreshadows the pleasure she will encounter during her first sexual encounter with Verlia. Verlia's love of women and country is written on Elizete's body:

[Elizete] doesn't think of the scars on her legs, she doesn't hide them, she doesn't think of Verlia touching them, pressing the soft hollows of her feet, she doesn't hide them as she had from Verlia. She doesn't want to remember the morning waking up and finding Verlia touching them. She doesn't want to remember the look in Verlia's eyes, of pity. How she hated that look and understood it, how she pulled her legs away, how she said 'No!', how Verlia looked as if she did not know what she had done¹⁶².

Brand fuses sexual pleasure with the realities of physical pain: Elizete's hands are callused from the

¹⁶² Brand 54

constant use of the machete; her back aches as a result of repeated bending and lifting; her legs are scarred from the sharp blades of grass; and her feet are blistered and cracked. Similarly, other women, like Elizete's mother and her father's mistress, also suffered physical pain and scarring due to the cane fields. In this way, Brand confronts the privileging of men as the sole sufferers of pain and the rightful owners of resistance.

Elizete's refusal to hide her scarred legs and damaged feet illustrates her connection to Verlia as both a lover and a comrade. Her initial response of "No!" is transformed into acceptance and recognition of the connection between her body marks and the revolution. Thus, Elizete's body is the one Verlia sexually craves and desires to protect. Their touching and lovemaking are not just personal acts, but also political action and recognition of a woman's worth.

Brand's language, her revolutionary lyricism, conveys this coupling of pain with pleasure and of the personal with the political. She writes:

Seduction. Lies about what was truly done to make love. So hard that when it was done she could not call it love, the work of it. Love was too simple and smooth and not a good enough name for it. Coarse like a bolt of crocus

sacking full of its load of coconuts for mattress ticking. I lay down on that prickly bed with Verlia after we tease it and pull apart the brown rough flex of living, fluff it up and fill the sack with all of we self and what else we had to say. What we had to say wasn't much but it was plenty... I wouldn't call nothing that we do love because love too simple. All the soft-legged oil, all the nakedness brushing, all the sup of neck and arms and breasts. All that touching. Nothing simple about it. All that opening like breaking bones.¹⁶³

Brand's terminology of love does not rely on notions of romanticism. In fact, she rejects romanticism by locating it squarely in a heterosexual context of seduction. Which is presented as a male privilege that is used to "promise things that will never happen not because he is lying but because they are within his possibilities in the world."¹⁶⁴ The lack of promises due to an absence of possibilities speaks to Brand's interest in telling a female history.

By reclaiming space within these histories, namely through the black power movements, Verlia continues to declare her love of country and women. For example, Verlia tells Elizete, "I don't believe in seduction. If you're coming you come with your head clear. Seduction is a thing between a man and a woman. There is no seduction

¹⁶³ Brand 78

¹⁶⁴ Brand 72

between women. This is harder."¹⁶⁵ Verlia's unapologetic transgression of heteronormative behaviors and prescribed gender roles illustrates her desire for a "space within and outside the confines of men... Taking space, then, means moving out into areas not allowed. It is as well the transgressing of restricted spaces, particularly the racialized gendered space confinements."¹⁶⁶ Verlia enters two restricted spaces, the revolutionary movement and the bed of a woman.

She takes the words of Che Guevara, that the revolution is rooted in a deep sense of love, and modifies their meaning. Yes, the revolution is rooted in love, but it is a parallel, often unspoken love that resonates throughout this novel. Thus the conflation of lesbianism and revolution becomes its own distinctive female history. It is a deliberate tactic to appropriate and alter male notions of revolution, and to insert the often-repressed agenda of women who show their love of their country and of themselves in ways not mediated by male authority.

Elizete's body becomes a counter-narrative that challenges the absence of women from the official story

¹⁶⁵ Brand 74

¹⁶⁶ Carole Boyce Davies. "Carnivalised Caribbean Female Bodies: Taking Space / Making Space." *Thamyris* 5.2 (Autumn 1998) 340

regarding Grenadian resistance against invasion and Trinidad's black power movement. Victoria Pasley agrees when she states:

The language of the black power movement is particularly interesting. Black power advocates used a very masculine language that focused almost exclusively on the Black Man. Even if Black Power leaders felt the need to focus on recruiting men, it is interesting why they did so in gendered language. They equated the lack of power with the denial of manhood, thus tying masculinity to power.¹⁶⁷

The privileging of males and their rights to liberation is not limited to the Caribbean. Similar forms of sexism and exclusions were occurring in the United States during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement and the 1970s Black Power Movement. The works of Gloria T. Hull and Angela Davis speak to this problem. Hull writes,

The movement, though ostensibly for the liberation of the black race, was in word and deed for the liberation of the black male. Race was extremely sexualized in the rhetoric of the movement. Freedom was equated with manhood and the freedom of blacks with the redemption of black masculinity. Take, for example, the assumption that racism is more harmful to black men than it is to black women because the real tragedy of racism is the loss of manhood; this assumption illustrates both an acceptance of masculinity defined within the context of patriarchy as well as a disregard for the human

¹⁶⁷ Victoria Pasley. "The Black Power Movement in Trinidad: An Exploration of Gender and Cultural Changes and the Development of a Feminist Consciousness." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13.1 2001 [no pagination]

need for integrity and liberty felt by both men and women.¹⁶⁸

It should be noted that largely when women's contributions were acknowledged, they were acknowledged as sisters doing a valuable service for the brothers; or they were praised for engaging in revolutionary male behaviors. Thereby power and liberation were constantly defined in masculine terms. Since women were viewed as powerless, by definition their womanhood could not be linked with a loss of power. While black women's oppression could be seen in conjunction with black male's oppression, it did not exist outside of it and certainly not on par with it. Additionally, Hull and Davis argue that one objective of masculinist liberation discourses was to control women's sexuality. Consequently, male liberation also involved unfettered access to female bodies.¹⁶⁹ Brand, through her creation of a lesbian relationship, deny men this power. As an alternative, she locates both liberation and love within the female body.

Elizete's damaged body, specifically her feet,

¹⁶⁸ Gloria T. Hull. *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (Feminist Press, New York 1982) 14

¹⁶⁹The works of Davis (*Women, Culture and Politics, Women, Race and Class*), Gloria T. Hull (*...But Some of Us Are Brave*), and bell hooks (*Yearning: race, gender and cultural politics* and *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*) all address sexual control, manipulation and violence against by black perpetrated by black males under the guise of "revolution."

represents women's lack of mobility and possibility: their feet were so damaged they literally could not walk away. Subsequently, wherever they went, they carried with them the history of the sugarcane. The women spent a lifetime toiling in the fields and their bodies had the marks to prove it. Elizete, along with the other women, is equally as battered as the men she labors beside yet male revolutionaries regard her need for liberation as being secondary to theirs. Narratives of women as liberators are largely unwritten or unnoticed because they are not the stories of brandishing the gun, but walking with feet and hands callused from gripping the machete and back bruised from bending to cut cane in order to provide daily sustenance. The text suggests that women understand each other's pain, each other's love and know that they are not given credit for all they endure.

Despite this attempt at erasure, and control, women were active participants in the movement and "were among the activists who went into poor communities handing out pamphlets encouraging people to join the marches¹⁷⁰". Furthermore, women held discussions, comprised a significant number of the marchers and spoke during

¹⁷⁰ Pasley 27

demonstrations. They also provided food, secretarial assistance and participated in armed struggle.¹⁷¹ Brand's protagonist Verlia engages in all of these revolutionary activities: she gives speeches and organizes the older workers; she distributes pamphlets and recruits new members; she is just as comfortable making coffee and breakfast as she is participating in violent clandestine operations. Pasley writes of one Trinidadian black power organization where women were not reduced to domestic servants. She writes,

Women participated in the armed struggle and NUFF fighter Beverly Jones who was killed in action became a popular heroine among mostly young supports of the movement. Women fought equally alongside the men in guerilla warfare, camping out in the bush, and tracking. They were not assigned traditional roles of cooking and caring. The fighters shared these activities among themselves. It does not seem that they discussed the 'woman problem' at length, but neither did they question the ability of women fighters.¹⁷²

Jones' role in the revolution is clearly one of equality and respect; yet this kind of acknowledgement and opportunity was the exception rather than the rule.

Even so, Jones' martyrdom remains couched in a masculinist discourse of male liberation because women

¹⁷¹ Pasley 30

¹⁷² Pasley 32

were encouraged to fight for full male participation in society, rather than equal participation for all. The justification for this position can be found in the erasure of gender equity as part of masculinist discourses and the privileging of race and class as the primary obstacles toward liberation. Through characters like Verlia and Elizete, Brand highlights the intersectional nature of and illustrates the direct and indirect ways in which maleness and masculine notions of rebellion are privileged. Quintessentially, Verlia becomes a testament to the women in the movement. She embodies that history and shows that women not only participated but also performed vital roles in the revolution.

Brand's critique is not limited to women's exclusion from the larger society and the privileging of male power. She also confronts the sexual and physical subjugation of black women at the hands of black men.

Brand writes of Elizete's welcoming of Verlia:

Verl came along I see my chance out of what ordinary, out of the plenty day when all it have for a woman to do is to lie down and let some man beat against she body, and work cane and chop up she foot and make children and choke on the dryness on she chest and have only

one road in and the same road out and know that she tied to the ground and can never lift up.¹⁷³

Elizete's political awareness coincides with her sexual awakening. Elizete's body is reduced to property when forced to marry an abusive and neglectful man. The crossing of Verlia's bridge means an opening up of possibilities for Elizete. In Verlia, she finds a gateway to her own autonomy; in Elizete, Verlia sees the revolution. When Verlia and Elizete "first met she thought she was going to change this country woman into a revolutionary like her," however, Elizete's revolution began long before the first shots were ever fired.¹⁷⁴ In this moment of realization, Brand's novel shifts from a gender to a class based analysis. Through Elizete, Brand makes it clear that all women's bodies, not just those that are wealthy, formally educated or who have gone a'foreign, are sites of knowledge.

First, Elizete challenges Verlia's assumption that knowledge is the property of the middle class; in addition, she questions the supposition of power with the urban while viewing the rural (as exemplified by her reference to Elizete as a country woman), as being

¹⁷³ Brand 4

¹⁷⁴ Brand 202

powerless, or in need of rescue. Finally, Verlia's presumption that she will turn Elizete into a revolutionary denies Elizete's own revolutionary powers as a working class, rural woman. Verlia, ironically, inscribes a prescriptive feminist discourse that runs the risk of promoting the same form of subjugation we find in masculinist discourse. Thus Verlia comes to realize her own limitations and is taught by someone closer to the story of the land. In this way Brand reinscribes the women's bodies into the revolution, only this time Elizete, and not Verlia, is the conduit. Nonetheless, Elizete and Verlia's bodies remain different chapters of the same text; their body language may differ, but the story is the same.

When Elizete looks at Verlia's body, she sees a body free of marks that would indicate a lifetime of toiling in the field. Her hands are soft, her tongue speaks soft sweetness, her legs are smooth like the sea and her body smells like flowers. At first glance, Verlia's body may appear out of place; however, Elizete recognizes much of herself in Verlia. Elizete states, "She looked like the young in me. The not beaten down and bruised, the not pounded between my legs, the not lost my mother, the not raped, not tired. She looked like me fresh, fresh.... A

woman can be a bridge..."¹⁷⁵ The stark contrast between the two women's bodies implies Verlia's body has not been battered and that her personal narrative is free of the discourse of oppression. That is not the case. Verlia's body is also battered, just in a different way. Right now I draw your attention to this contrast between the two women's bodies in order to show the possibilities that are located within Verlia.

Verlia's body is both a revolutionary tool for liberation and a reminder of what that liberation can mean for black women. Consequently, Verlia is not just a bridge for the living, but also a passageway for the spirits. Brand states, "the spirits call she and make their display in she."¹⁷⁶ In essence, she becomes a witness to the past and her body is transformed and transferred by the ancestors. Verlia's body bridges time and place; she is the link between past, present and future. When looking out over the sugarcane fields, Verlia's eyes recollect a history of black power movements, not just that of the 1970s and 1980s. Within Verlia the presence of the slave uprisings and subsequent Maroon communities, the Caribbean Arts Movement, the Pan-

¹⁷⁵ Brand 15-16

¹⁷⁶ Brand 15

African Movement, and the Trade Unionist Movements, become one continuous history. The most lucid historical moment that Verlia visualizes is that of slavery.

As Verlia looks out at the land, she sees the enslaved Africans labor. As if in accordance with that vision, her eyes become a cutlass and she cuts down the cane with each glance; each cut of the cane stalk is an act of rebellion, an act of avenging grace. In conjunction with the ancestors, she conjures those bodies buried in the fields. These bodies have fertilized the soil and now support the same sugarcane that killed them: "We navel string bury here... and we mother and we father and everybody before them... and what we get, one barrack room and credit in the store he thief this place in the first place."¹⁷⁷ Verlia's vision is certainly optimistic, as she claims agency for women. However, her body is a reminder that Caribbean people's connection to the sugarcane goes beyond metaphor; their bodies became a literal part of the cane.

This exacting past encapsulates Grenadian history where "... the bodies of lynched slaves scattered across canefields that have since gone to bush, leaving no

¹⁷⁷ Brand 14

trace."¹⁷⁸ Verlia's body calls attention to this past, thus making what was once invisible and forgotten, visible and remembered.

In this state of possession, her finite body does not limit her, and she exists in another place that is "less confining, less pinned down, less tortuous, less fleshy to tell the truth."¹⁷⁹ It is clear that in Brand's literary vision, Verlia does not live for herself; she comes to embody a collective Caribbean experience. The paradox is that Verlia must escape the flesh in order to participate in this experience of possession; nonetheless, the flesh is the historical map that others may read, and follow because it communicates these moments in history. The body is always the primary means of testimony and to lose the flesh is to lose that history.

Migratory Transactions: The Collective "I" in Her-I-Land:

Verlia vacillates between representing herself as an individual, merging into another specific black female individual, like Elizete, or acting as a representative for global Caribbean women. In so doing, Brand's novel speaks to and invokes a collective female Caribbean

¹⁷⁸ Jenny Sharpe. "The Original Paradise." *Transition* 62(1993): 54

¹⁷⁹ Brand 127

experience. Much like the Rastafarian's use of the term "I and I" to mean we or us, Brand rearticulates the individual woman, Verlia, into a collective woman (Verlia and Elizete; Verlia and the migrant women; and Verlia and Abena). Brand's protagonist always operates as part of a collective; every revolutionary act is couched in terms of her intimate relationships with the women in her community. The reader is constantly reminded that this is not a story about one woman, but about many. Thus Brand envisions a female collective "I" and transforms Verlia into a hybridized Caribbean woman. Verlia becomes a hybridized woman not because she embodies a cross-cultural or multiethnic identity; instead, Brand constructs a transhistoric and transatlantic (that is, migratory) body that speaks to and for countless Caribbean women.

Following the story of migration, which is an inescapable part of the Caribbean experience, especially those of women who often travel first to make a way for their families, Verlia's voice becomes the collective outcry we see present in Brand's novel. Brand writes of these migratory women:

These women, our mothers, a whole generation of them, left us. They went to England or America or Canada or some big city as fast as their wit

could get them there because they were women and all they had to live on was their wit since nobody considered them whole people... In fact, it could have been any city, London, Glasgow, New York...¹⁸⁰

These migratory women's attempts to make themselves whole are disrupted by the racism of their new country. As a result, a legacy of abuse is passed from generation to generation. The migratory women's bodies are evidence of a history of pain: their swollen hands, their bent backs, their sore muscles, their assaulted souls, and their raped bodies, are just as battered as those in the sugarcane fields; they too are "twisted to suit the stride" of others. These migratory women and the battered female bodies of the sugarcane fields come together as a form of strategic homogenization that unlocks a shared notion of revolution. Verlia, through her own migratory experience, becomes one of these women.

The women, who come from various Caribbean nations, do not merge for the purpose of creating a singular, uniformed Caribbean history; instead, Brand highlights the link between Caribbean nations in order to illustrate a shared history of experiences that can be used to speak to many different Caribbean people and create a unified

¹⁸⁰ Brand 230; 159

sense of belonging. Verlia becomes a transcendent revolutionary figure that moves between islands, and, in many cases, the world. By locating herself in different regions and cultures, Verlia brings together parallel rebellions that produce a theory, that is a framework for how we live and understand our lives, which is rooted in praxis. In this way, she is able to create her-I-land.

I borrow the concept of her-I-land from Garvey, who argues that Brand's migratory women attempt to claim their own space in a new location by establishing home—what she calls, her-I-land. I take this notion and read it not only as an attempt to claim space in their new location, but also as recognition that somewhere else can never be home. Veronica M. Gregg asks,

If we are to take responsibility for trying to work out the meaning of our collective identity, we must bring to the surface the hard questions that fester beneath our analyses and responses, and which so often derail our best intentions: What precisely is at stake?¹⁸¹

The novel's response to the question, "What is at stake?" in establishing a collective Caribbean identity is Caribbean women's lives, knowledge and histories. Black women's bodies are firmly situated in the obscure areas

¹⁸¹ Veronica M. Gregg. "Yuh Know Bout Coo-Coo? Where Yuh Know Bout Coo-Coo?: Language Representation, Creolisation and Confusion in 'Indian Cuisine'." IN *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourse in Caribbean Culture* (eds.) Verene A. Shepherd and Glen L. Richards (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2002): 155

of Caribbean histories as their lives and contributions have only recently begun to be studied, explored and included. Non-fiction texts like Lucille Mathurin Mair's seminal text, *The Rebel Woman in the British West Indies During Slavery* and Verene A. Shepherd's book *Women in Caribbean History* serve as reminders that Caribbean women have and continue to fight to write long standing wrongs by bringing women's bodies and voices to the fore.

Brand and Danticat are the recipients of these attempts and add their voices to the chorus. Brand's concern for the obscure and everyday areas of Caribbean women's lives gives importance to the women and their contributions to those histories. Without these perspectives, that collective identity is singular (male) and incomplete. Through Verlia and the creation of her-I-land, a different narrative on migration and revolution is told. Before Verlia arrives in Canada, she is forced to erase certain markers of blackness beginning with the straightening of her hair. In an attempt to project an image that counters that of "another-country-boukie-come-to-town," Verlia must shed the "trouble of her skin." The expectation is that she will

lie back and then lie every morning when she wakes up, dresses, pretends that they are going out into this town peaceably and unafraid.

Preparing to take nods at their own unspoken Blackness, smile deferentially and disprove every day, by their quietness, the town's judgment on their blackened souls.¹⁸²

Instead of silence, Verlia chooses to let her blackness speak; her first act of rebellion is to cut her permed hair. Her second act of speaking blackness is to join Toronto's black power movement. These acts signal a refusal to support the lie and an unwillingness to become a silent accomplice to their own oppression. In effect, the making of her-I-land is an attempt to maintain her Caribbean self. The image of Verlia's black body as an isolated island in a sea of whiteness is prevalent throughout the text. Through the seeking out of other diasporic peoples, the same blackness that alienates her now protects her.

Akin to her relationship with Elizete, Verlia reenvisions her-I-land through her lesbian relationship with Abena, who is also involved in the revolution. When Verlia asks, "What can I do," to help the cause, Abena's response is "Welcome sister." With these words, Abena not only invites her to enter the revolution, but also to enter her body. Verlia describes Abena as the "now face of someone smiling, the now warmth of the hand, the now

¹⁸² Brand 141

mouth she has an unusual need to kiss...¹⁸³." Once again Brand commingles the political revolution with Verlia's personal revolution. This relationship parallels her lesbian relationship with Elizete and once again reiterates the intersecting nature of these two revolutions.

This shift in political circumstances and the evolution of Verlia's consciousness constituted a new mind-set that contradicted the status quo. It is this context of rebellion that, ultimately, allows for the maintenance of her-I-land. Essentially, her-I-land becomes a space where black women's bodies not only can be free of battery, or serve as a place to launch counter attacks, but also a place of healing, comfort and conquest. The act of rebellion is not limited to violent retaliations against attacks, but also a refusal to succumb to those attacks. Verlia's greatest act of rebellion is her ability to maintain her humanity against such odds.

Verlia arrives in Canada and feels like a solitary black island being swallowed by a sea of whiteness. Once she connects with her diasporic community, this isolated island is transformed into her-I-land. On this "island,"

¹⁸³ Brand 168

she finds comfort, support and resistance to oppression. Finally, through her relationship with Abena, her-I-land becomes a space of love where women's bodies are valued. Her-I-land is literal, spiritual and psychological. It defies geographic limitations because its basis is internal; subsequently, wherever she goes, she takes her-I-land with her. In short, her-I-land is a place of rejuvenation and recreation.

The Water, The Women, The Revolution: Revisiting the Ancestors:

I argued in Chapter Two that representations of water in Caribbean literature often symbolize a return to Africa. This type of representation is not present in Brand's novel. The water represents a gateway to an African ancestry only in so far as the ancestors provide an opportunity for the women to create a better world for themselves in the Caribbean; subsequently, it does not serve as a passageway to a lost home. For Verlia, home is always the Caribbean. The water (Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea and numerous rivers) provides another means by which the women may articulate various meanings of these historical moments.

Through an interrogation of the waters, Brand plunges deep into the inner consciousnesses of Verlia in her retelling of Caribbean histories. In the previous section I posited that the ancestors possess Verlia and through this possession she is able to convey a continuous Caribbean history that speaks to black women's lives under various forms of repressions. Through the water, the ancestor Adela once again possesses her.

Adela represents the history of the Middle Passage and becomes the ultimate revolutionary voice: "She could not hold onto the turquoise sea what bring she here. Everything pour out of she eyes in a dry, dry river. Everything turn to lime and sharp bones, and she didn't catch sheself until was she true name slipping away."¹⁸⁴ The lime and sharp bones conjures images of those dead African bodies on the bottom of the ocean and sea, whose bones, or, rather polyps, contribute to the organic carbon that creates lime and coral reefs. Therefore, these ocean bodies occupy simultaneously a numinous and corporal state. This state is embodied by Adela, as she becomes a daughter of the ocean waters.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Brand 22

¹⁸⁵ The phrase, daughter of the ocean waters, is borrowed from Grace Nichols poem, *i is a long memomried woman*.

The daughters of the ocean waters are African women lost to the ocean during their journey from Africa to the Caribbean. They are reminiscent of the Daughters of Dahomey, who were great African women warriors from the Kingdom of Mali. These women comprised the majority of the military and were rumored to be better soldiers than their male counterparts. For years these women fought, with varying degrees of success, against European invasions. As late as the 1890s they battled their enemies and maintained their kingdom. Thus, African women have a long and storied revolutionary history; a history which they brought with them from the continent to the Caribbean.

In keeping with that tradition of resistance, Adela summons rivers' paths that her descendants may follow; not back to Africa, but toward the future in an attempt to squeeze "water from a stone, [and] steel your Black woman self to bear the street, hope for another century, make something that can last... The trick is to squeeze life out of this very difficult existence."¹⁸⁶ This trick becomes the ultimate form of conjuring because the deck is stacked against their very survival. This is the legacy of Adela. Verlia and Elizete bespeak this legacy.

¹⁸⁶ Brand 22

They then pick it up and "carry the sack into the sea."¹⁸⁷

In so doing, the women not only become part of this history, they also become the makers of history. This act of carrying sorrow and freedom touches on a deeper history than the one that is currently being created in the novel. It takes us beyond the story and into the real because these ocean bodies are inescapably present.

An example of reading beyond the fiction can be found in Verlia's final act of rebellion. Verlia is driven off a cliff, under heavy gunfire, and into the sea by the invading (US) military. In this scene Brand invokes early Grenadian history where in "1652, forty Caribs, the native inhabitants of Grenada, leapt from a cliff into the sea rather than be taken captive by the French soldiers who were pursuing them. The place [is] known as Le Morne des Sauteurs or Leaper's Hill."¹⁸⁸ It also refers to Operation Urgent Fury, the 1983 US invasion and bombing of Grenada. Here Brand not only conflates two historical moments, but also joins two oppressed groups (Amerindians and Africans). Such coalescing reiterates a historical and Pan-Caribbean

¹⁸⁷ Brand 77

¹⁸⁸ Sharpe 48

resistance by people of color against colonial and imperial oppressions.

This particular form of death becomes Verlia's final act of resistance, yet what is poignant about this death is that it is repeated throughout the Caribbean. For example, Danticat replicates this image of death in her novel *The Farming of Bones*, while many Haitians being driven off or choosing to jump off a cliff, in the Dominican Republic, rather than die at the hands of the dictator Trujillo's soldiers. The inclusion of these events in the novels promotes Eduard Glissant's view of Pan-Caribbean history.

Glissant argues that,

The implosion of Caribbean history (of the converging histories of our peoples) relieves us of the linear, hierarchical vision of a single History that would run its unique course. It is not this History that has roared around the edge of the Caribbean, but actually a question of the subterranean convergence of our histories. The depths are not only the abyss of neurosis but primarily the site of multiple converging paths.¹⁸⁹

Glissant asks us to look at the parallels between the past (the ancestors, the dead), the present (ourselves, the living), and the future (the unborn, future generations), in order to explore the "dimensions of the

¹⁸⁹ Eduard Glissant. *Caribbean Discourse* 68

unexplorable." These dimensions consist of the dead African bodies located at the bottom of the water—be it the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, or Massacre River—and our collective responses to their presence.

When Verlia enters the water, she encounters those African bodies such as the "131 sick Africans, who were thrown overboard the *Zong* slave ship so that the owners could collect insurance."¹⁹⁰ These underwater bodies (or what Glissant calls transversality) represent a converging Caribbean history and the makings of an unified (Black) consciousness among Caribbean people. By entering this water Verlia is initiated into a new consciousness; and out of this consciousness comes Danticat's Amabelle.

Broken Bodies and Burdensome Cane: History, Nation and Race in Hispaniola:

Edwidge Danticat's novel, *The Farming of Bones*, continues the tradition of literary historicism because she, like Brand, creates a character that becomes a historical text that gives testimony to a significant historical Caribbean moment, the 1937 Massacre. The

¹⁹⁰ Sharpe 54

novel is set in the early 20th Century on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola; most of the action takes place in the Dominican Republic but the story concludes in Haiti.

The novel begins with a young Amabelle standing at a crossroads. The loss of her parents (they drown in the river), coupled with the loss of her country (she is unable to return home), causes her to be twice-orphaned. Stranded in the Dominican Republic, Amabelle is caught in a neither world where she is trapped between two lands, two people, two cultures and two languages. Danticat expresses this unbelonging when she writes, "They say we're an orphaned people. They say we are the burnt crud at the bottom of the pot. They say some people don't belong anywhere and that's us."¹⁹¹ The novel follows Amabelle as she wrestles with such overwhelming losses and her struggle to survive the 1937 Massacre under the Trujillo regime.

While staring at the river in disbelief, Amabelle is approached by Papi, an older Dominican man of Spanish descent who asks to whom does she belong? Amabelle's response is to point to her chest and say "Myself." With this action, Amabelle acknowledges the loss of her family and lays claim to her Haitian body as her own. However,

¹⁹¹ Danticat 56

her body is completely co-opted by the Dominican Papi. Like so many Haitian bodies before, Amabelle's body is encrypted with a history of race that Papi reads in a particular way. When Papi takes her from the riverbank, he literally possesses her and completely disregards her claim to her own body. There is no attempt to locate her extended family or to return her to her own country. Instead, she remains in the Dominican Republic, as Papi's servant.

Amabelle's blackness immediately places her in a subservient position where her body is only as valuable as the labor it produces. Her subjugated position is reiterated when Amabelle is forced to call Papi's daughter Señorita, even though they are of comparable age. Given the Dominican Republic's history of viewing Haitian bodies as objects, not subjects, there is no possibility that a young Amabelle would be categorized in any other way.

Haitian bodies are predetermined in a Dominican context: the darkness of their skin is the determining marker that signals their inferiority, undesirability and foreignness. The darker Haitians, those who wear their African heritage on their flesh, at best are viewed as a necessary evil needed to work the sugar plantations; at

worst, they are completely devalued as human beings by their slightly fairer Dominican neighbors, who lay claim to Spain, not Africa, as their motherland. This denial of Africa reflects a long practice of whitening and a devaluing of blackness in the Dominican Republic. Thus, Amabelle Désir, daughter of Antoine Désir and Irelle Pradelle of Haiti, becomes Amabelle of the Dominican Republic; a transformation that is as bloody as it is compulsory.

After a successful escape from Trujillo's slaughter, Amabelle states, "Now my flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament."¹⁹² Although Amabelle's scars are a direct result of the 1937 Massacre, this "marred testament" is a multilayered text with many chapters. Her body conveys a continuous and complex history that chronicles approximately 60-years of Dominican aggression, violence, antagonism and hostility against Haitian bodies; most of which has its origins in sugarcane.

A complete historical analysis would be beyond the scope of this chapter; however, it is necessary to contextualize Danticat's novel and give a brief overview. Although, beginning in 1822, Toussaint L'Ouverture's two-

¹⁹² Danticat 227

decade long annexation of Spanish Santo Domingo (later renamed the Dominican Republic in 1844), created tensions between the two nations, deeper (and more deadly) problems started with sugarcane. The Dominican Republic was the first country in the Americas to plant and harvest sugarcane. The Dominican Republic's willingness and Haiti's prohibition on selling land to foreign investors resulted in larger, more modernized sugar plantations in the Dominican Republic and a complete absence of them in Haiti¹⁹³.

With ample opportunities to pursue more profitable and less exploitative work, coupled with their ability to negotiate beneficial working conditions and pay, many Dominicans refused to work the sugar plantations for poor wages. The initial response to the shortage of Dominican workers was to import workers from the West Indies, who not only were paid less, but also had no power and thus were easier to control. By the end of the 19th Century, Haitians almost exclusively worked the sugarcane plantations:

...Importing immigrants as seasonal cane workers gave sugar estate owners several advantages—not just lower wages but increased control over the labor supply and greater ease of maintaining

¹⁹³ See Samuel Martinez's "From Hidden Hand to Heavy Hand: Sugar, the State, and Migrant Labor in Haiti and the Dominican Republic." IN *Latin American Research Review* 34.1 (1999): 57-84

worker discipline... Migrant recruitment and resettlement remained basically private activities under the control of the sugar companies.¹⁹⁴

With no protection from the Dominican government, restricted mobility and no means to establish unions, migrant workers were literally at the mercy of the plantation estate owners. It should also be noted that the US occupation of the Dominican Republic (1915-1924), and Haiti (1916-1934), played a major role in establishing sugar plantations and maintaining the seasonal workers system. US president Franklin D. Roosevelt's ironically named "Good Neighbor Policy" did very little to create good neighbors.¹⁹⁵ However, with the advent of the Great Depression in 1929, the sugar industry all but collapsed and Dominicans began to devise ways to expel Haitian workers and Haitian "citizens" from their country:

Throughout the 1930s, therefore, Dominicans had been seeking ways to send the Haitians packing. In July 1937, a new law forced foreigners to register with migration officials. Later that summer, Dominican authorities deported eight

¹⁹⁴ Martinez 62

¹⁹⁵ F.D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy was a massive public relations effort where the US made no official or public criticism of Trujillo and the massacre. In exchange, The D.R. would accept 100,000 Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. Trujillo later reneged on this promise and only a few hundred Jews were allowed into the D.R., where Trujillo hoped they would help "whiten" the race. Through this agreement, the DR was recontextualized as the "good neighbor" and the US would continue to profit from American owned sugar companies located there. This is discussed in greater detail in *The Good Neighbor* 128

thousand Haitians who did not have proper papers.¹⁹⁶

Danticat fictionalizes this shift in labor and location when Amabelle states, "Since I was a child, the canefields have grown. Mills have become larger and there are more cutters staying after the harvest. This is our future¹⁹⁷." Perhaps Amabelle did not envision such a deadly future, however, by the time we reached 1937, the table was set for such an atrocity.¹⁹⁸

El Corte: Travay tè pouzo¹⁹⁹: Reading Haitian Bodies as Sugarcane:

El Corte: the harvest; the cutting; the chopping; the mowing down. It goes by many names; but they all convey one meaning—death. There are various estimates regarding the death toll for the Haitians murder in the Dominican Republic ranging from 12,000 to 17,000; however, Dominican historian Bernardo Vega places that number at 35,000. What the machetes' could not immediately accomplish, infected wounds, starvation and displacement did; thousands died weeks after the October

¹⁹⁶ Michele Wucker . *Why The Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*. 47
Additionally, most Haitians born in the Dominican Republic was denied birth certificates and others forms of documentation and were not viewed as citizens.

¹⁹⁷ Danticat 151

¹⁹⁸ It can be argued that Toussaint's annexation of the Dominican Republic was the true beginning of strained race relations.

¹⁹⁹ Literal translation: the farming of bones

massacre had (officially) come to an end. Danticat's novel tells the story of the victims as well as the survivors. One such survivor is Amabelle's lover, Sabastien Onius.

Unlike Verlia who meets her lover Elizete in the sugarcane field, it is unclear where and when Amabelle and Sebastien came to be lovers. However, akin to Verlia's engagement with Elizete's body, Amabelle also contrasts Sabastien's body to sugarcane. She states,

He is lavishly handsome by the dim light of my castor oil lamp, even though the cane stalks have ripped apart most of the skin on his shiny black face, leaving him with crisscrossed scars. His arms are as wide as one of my bare thighs. They are steel, hardened by four years of sugarcane harvests. ...[he has] bowl-shaped hands, where the palms have lost their lifelines to the machetes that cut the cane... I can smell his sweat, which is as thick as sugarcane juice when he's worked too much.²⁰⁰

These writers' equating of the body with the sugarcane is reminiscent of Grace Nichols' similar embodiment in her seminal text *I Is A Long Memoried Woman* and speaks to the importance of the sugarcane in shaping a Caribbean feminist consciousness. Sugarcane's ironic position as a life sustaining as well as life destroying element is an

²⁰⁰ Danticat 1; 3

excellent metaphor to illustrate the competing and often conflicting aspects of Caribbean people's lives.

Sabastein's life, just like the lives of so many Haitians, is dictated by the sugarcane harvest. Not only is he tied to the cane economically, but also mentally, as it is an overwhelming part of his reality. Within the first three pages of the novel, we know more about Sabastein's relationship to the sugarcane than we know about his relationship with Amabelle. Although Danticat uses a male body to convey this aspect of Haitian history, we are aware of the fact that many women shared Sabastien's fate. Furthermore, the novel's opening sentence is "His name is Sebastien Onius," and we soon learn that Amabelle is our narrator. Thus, it is her perspective, a woman's perspective, on Sabastein's body that is being shared. Her voice coupled with his body illustrates the overarching effect of sugarcane on the lives of all Haitians regardless of gender and regardless of occupation.

How incongruous that tens of thousands of Haitians were chopped down like so much sugar by the Dominican machetes; yet, those that remained on the sugar plantations were not murdered. Protected by the mill owners, they represented the majority of the survivors.

This fact reaffirms the idea that Haitian bodies are only valued in terms of their labor. The massacre served as a stark reminder to Haitian people that their place in Dominican society was limited to the sugarcane fields and anyone who ventured off the plantation would pay with their life.

Once the survivors made their way to Haiti, after the call for justice, came the call for the pen: "the group charged the station looking for someone to write their names in a book, and to take their story to President Vincent. They wanted a civilian face to concede that what they had witnessed and lived through did truly happen."²⁰¹ Recorded history becomes a form of validation. The Haitian survivors recognize the power of recorded history and insist on being a part of the official story. However, that opportunity is denied and they are forced to face a different type of death: death of their history and the memory of the massacre.

Danticat writes,

As the morning went on, the waiting group became larger, so much so that when I pulled myself up and looked behind me, I could not see where the road ended and the faces began.... In the afternoon, food vendors arrived and people shared their tales, as if to practice for their real audience with the government official. The

²⁰¹ Danticat 236

man next to me had walked seventy kilometers to avoid the crowds in his own town. Another woman had come from even farther away. Others were planning to go to Port-au-Prince, which fewer survivors had yet reached.²⁰²

Many were denied the opportunity to tell their story, and even fewer would receive the monetary compensation that was promised.²⁰³ However, Danticat resists privileging scribal history as the authentic voice. Instead, she challenges the official story: "You tell the story, and then it's retold as they wish, written in words you do not understand, in a language that is theirs, and not yours²⁰⁴." French, the official language of Haiti, could never speak to the horrors of the events because it, like Spanish, is detached from the people. The recording of the official history becomes a form of linguistic terrorism.

In this way the official history, as opposed to the people's histories, seek to restrain and maintain an account that does not accurately reflect the Haitian survivors' experiences; nor does it express those experiences in the language of the people, Kreyól. Therefore, the survivors are triply silenced: first, by

²⁰² Danticat 232

²⁰³ Rather than acknowledge guilt or allow an international investigation, Trujillo opted to provide monetary compensation to the Haitian government with the condition that he would not admit guilt. The amount paid was approximately 34 US dollar per dead Haitian (estimated at 15,000 deaths).

²⁰⁴ Danticat 246

the physical terrorism they experienced in the Dominican Republic, second, by President Vincent's lack of response and, finally, by the government's decision to record the narratives in French.²⁰⁵

Although Kreyól became an official language of Haiti in 1987 (Article 5 of the Haitian Constitution), this status exists mostly in theory rather than practice. Over ninety percent of the population speaks Kreyól, yet newspapers, street signs, law books, and all official documents such as birth certificates, are written in French. The privileging of French two hundred years after emancipation illustrates Haiti's remaining regard for French as a language while viewing Kreyól as a dialect or vernacular. This privileging is largely upheld by the Haitian, often Mulatto, elite and represents the ongoing class and racial power struggles of that nation.²⁰⁶ Thus it would stand to reason that in 1937, the priests and government officials who were responsible for recording these narratives would do so in French.

Although today Kreyól is a scribal as well as oral language with officialized spellings and has become

²⁰⁵ The notion of linguistic imperialism is greatly influenced by the works of Jamaica Kincaid and Susan Lanser.

²⁰⁶ Please see Michael DeGraff's "Kreyól Ayisyen or Haitian Creole ('Creole French')" in *Comparative Creole Syntax* ed. John Holm and Peter Patrick (Battlebridge Publications. London 2002)

partially standardized, this was not the case in 1937. Therefore, Kreyól was not viewed as a language worthy of official recognition. This negative attitude toward Kreyól was projected onto the Haitian bodies that spoke this language. Because these narratives were not recorded in Kreyól, they ran the risk of losing not only their historical specificity but also their authority. Recording these stories in French divorces them from the bodies that are telling the stories and transforms them into something else.

The survivors may not be in possession of the official language; however, what they do possess is more powerful than the written word: the body. Their bodies and the marks they bear cannot be denied. Upon reaching home, the people "recognize us without knowing us. We were *those* people. The nearly dead, the ones who had escaped."²⁰⁷ The survivors were walking testaments to the slaughter, and that history is told with each step they take; as they made their way from the border city of Ouanaminthe to the interior of Haiti, the people knew their stories just by looking at their bodies.

²⁰⁷ Danticat 220

It can be argued that within the limitations of Danticat's own migratory experiences, she tries to give the story back to the people who wrote it by returning the focus to the body as a written testament. For this reason she favors body language over written language. The chances for misinterpreting or misreading of the text are greatly reduced because it is "written" in the language of the people.

Amabelle affirms this body language by stating, "The past is more like flesh than air; our stories testimonials like the ones never heard by the justice of the peace or the Generalissimo himself."²⁰⁸ This is the true essence of theory of the flesh; these bodies' physical realities of their skin color, their land, their longings, all unify to create a politic born out of necessity.²⁰⁹ Theory of the flesh is not limited to the physical body; it also plays a role in Amabelle's connection to the spiritual world.

Man Rapadou, the widowed mother of Sebastien who poisoned her husband for collaborating with the Yankis, states,

Those who die young, they are cheated... 'Not cheated out of life, because life is a penance,

²⁰⁸ Danticat 281

²⁰⁹ Moraga 23

but the young, they're cheated because they don't know it's coming. They don't have time to move closer, to return home. When you know you're going to die, you try to be near the bones of your own people. You don't even think you have bones when you're young, even when you break them, you don't believe you have them. But when you're old, they start reminding you they're there. They start turning to dust on you, even as you're walking here and there, going from place to place.²¹⁰

Danticat's bones operates much like Brand's water, it serves as a spiritual connection to the ancestors. This is best illustrated by Amabelle's wish that her deceased lover Sebastien could follow her like dust on the air. However, his death in the Dominican Republic prevents this because his bones are suspended in a space of permanent exile. In lieu of one individual representing a gateway to the supernatural world, Danticat uses the bones of all dead Haitians. Despite this fact, access to the ancestors remains predicated on their geographic location at the time of death. The massacre does not simply interrupt their material lives, but also disrupts their spiritual lives. Thus the bones take on an alternative form of Haitian nationalism.

The Haitians who died in the Dominican Republic experience an enduring exile due to the fact that they are separated from their land and the living Haitians do

²¹⁰ Danticat 242

not have access to their bones. In Danticat's novel the bridge to the ancestor is disrupted rather than reinforced. It is poignant that even in death borders between these two people are relentlessly reinforced.

Kout Kouto: The Neck, The People and The Parsley:

In Haiti, the massacre was known as kout kouto, the stabbing. That is because the Dominicans' primary means of murder were through hangings and severing the neck with machetes, all in the name of creating a façade where the massacre could be blamed on angry Dominican farmers:

...The soldiers mainly used machetes, to convey the impression that local civilians had murdered the Haitians in their midst, although in some instances they were not so careful about appearances: they killed one group of Haitians in a courtyard between government buildings in the city of Santiago, and forced more than a thousand others off the pier at the port of Montecristi to drown. Many of the survivors who fled across the border to Haiti had seen their entire families murdered, the adults hacked to death with machetes or strangled, the children dashed against rocks or tree trunks.²¹¹

Danticat reminds us of this history while producing a counter-narrative that speaks not only to the horrors of

²¹¹ Eric Paul Roorda. *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945*. (Durham: Duke University Press) 1998: 131.

this act, but also to the body's magnificent ability to endure. She writes,

...said the man... 'It is no different, the flesh, than fruit or anything that rots. It's not magic, not holy. It can shrink, burn, and like amber it can melt in fire. It is nothing we are nothing.' The woman with the rope burns engraved on her neck asked if she could have my food. I nodded and went back to sleep.²¹²

The rope burns on the woman's neck counters the man's lamentation. The severing of the head from the body is not only an attempt to kill the body but also to separate it from its history.

The woman with the rope burns on her neck becomes another scarred map that others may use to trace the origins of this history. Therein lies the magic of these bodies. They are vulnerable and subjected to death, like all living things. Nevertheless, if we look carefully at the bodies we see that they conjure the same trick as Adela: they are capable of squeezing a life out of this hardship. The fact that the man who is speaking survived by hiding among cadavers speaks to the magic of the body in both life and death.

The people on the island of Hispaniola are separated by the Artibonite River, which runs west along the Cordillera Central mountain range in the Dominican

²¹² Danticat 213

Republic; it then curves south and runs parallel to the highway which divides the island between east and west; finally, it ends in Haiti, where it empties into the Gulf of Gonaives. Wucker states that, "The Artibonite River links the two countries. The Massacre River, and the terrible events that occurred in 1937 along the border formed by its waters, separates them²¹³." Florence Ramond Journey describes the Haitian-Dominican border as "an imaginary line traced almost randomly, having evolved as a result of various conquests. The river is a significant physical sign that is continually crossed, which establishes the border as a space in constant evolution."²¹⁴ The river is merely one body of water but carries with it two very different meanings. *The Farming of Bones* speaks to the constant territorial and racial shifts taking place along the border.

Danticat writes, "On this island, you walk too far and people speak a different language. Their own words reveal who belongs on what side."²¹⁵ This was true only if you "walked too far." Despite the constant reiteration of borders, Haitians and Dominicans often

²¹³ Wucker 27

²¹⁴ Florence Ramond Journey. "Exile and Relation to the Mother/Land in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath Eyes Memory* and *The Farming of Bones*"

²¹⁵ Danticat 304

mixed, thus illustrating the constant evolution of both borders and people:

The Dominican nationalism produced by Trujillo emphasized Hispanic culture and demonized Haitian, African-derived culture. This ideology focused on Haiti's nineteenth century invasion and occupation of the eastern half of the island, and associated Dominican independence with the recurring effort to drive out Haitians. ...evidence of Dominican nationality remained less discernible in the west, where many inhabitants spoke Haitian Creole, practiced the African religions of Vodun and Santeria, and circulated the Haitian gourde... Trujillo's frontier policy was to change the racial and cultural composition of the area to more closely resemble the self-consciously Hispanic population farther east²¹⁶.

This "self-consciously Hispanic" notion of nationalism would come to have dire consequences for darker Dominicans who could not "prove" their racial purity. After giving birth to fraternal twins, Señora Valencia, Papi's daughter, looks at her daughter's brown skin and asks, "Amabelle do you think my daughter will always be the color she is now?... My poor love, what if she is mistaken for one of your people²¹⁷?" It is not merely superficial, Eurocentric notions of beauty that drive Señora Valencia's concerns. She is well aware of how Haitian bodies (or bodies that are perceived to be

²¹⁶ Roorda 129

²¹⁷ Danticat 12

Haitian) are treated in the Dominican Republic, after all, she was with Papi when they took Amabelle from the river.

The survival of her daughter and the death of her son, its lighter, male twin, stand as a larger metaphor for the whitening of the Dominican Republic. Danticat challenges Señora Valencia's position as the original or only mother of the Dominican Republic. The baby's dark body rebuffs all attempts to deny a history of blackness:

'She has a little charcoal behind the ears, that one,' Doctor Javier boldly told Señora Valencia as he lifted her daughter from the water. 'It must be from her father's family,' Papi interjected, his fingertips caressing the skin of his sun-scorched white face. 'My daughter was born in the capital of this country. Her mother was of pure Spanish blood. She can trace her family to the Conquistadores, the line of El Almirante, Cristobal Colón. And I, myself, was born near a seaport in Valencia, Spain.'²¹⁸

Papi's defense of his daughter's racial purity is a futile attempt to position Spain as the ultimate mother. Papi's granddaughter counters this attempt a second time by not only being born "black" but also defying death. Señora Valencia prematurely gives birth to the twins, yet it is only the darker female that survives. The twins' births foreshadows the impending massacre as well as the

²¹⁸ Danticat 18

Haitian will to survive; while simultaneously laying claim to Africa rather than Spain as past and future mother. The circumstance surrounding the birth further demonstrates the tensions between the two nations. The daughter was born with a caul over her face and the umbilical cord wrapped around her neck; yet the son was born relatively healthy without complication. The doctor speculates that the boy tried to strangle his darker twin sister; however, it is the weaker, darker daughter who lives and the stronger, lighter son who dies. The twins represent the codependent yet antagonistic nature of the relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Through the twins, Danticat comments on the privileges of race, as well as color and class.

The male child, who has lighter skin, is seen as the eventual and rightful heir to the country, while his darker sister is devalued and disempowered based solely on her color and sex—her nationality and her racial purity is called into question. However, she, like Haiti, withstands the assaults and assumes her place as future mother of the people. In essence, the family's attempt to promote Spain and deny Africa fails. The daughter's skin color, regardless of her nationality, and subsequent rejection by the father, symbolizes the

Dominican Republic's rejection of their own darker people.

Many darker Dominicans were mistaken for Haitians and were butchered during the massacre; their deaths had less to do with their language and more to do with their flesh. Haitians born in the Dominican Republic were often denied birth certificates and full rights of citizenship. Therefore, the massacre was as much about color and race as it was about (fascist) notions of nationhood and nationality. Like some Latin American countries such as Brazil, the Dominican Republic attempted to rid itself of blackness.²¹⁹ Although more than a few traces of Africa could be found in the Dominican Republic, there remained a continual disavowal of blackness and a violent attempt to extricate it. This attempt reached new heights in 1937. Danticat demonstrates this extraction by directly inserting her female protagonist into the historical moment where Amabelle enters "the darkness of parsley."

If there is a singular representation of the 1937 Massacre it is parsley. In the novel, Amabelle recounts parsley's uses: as a common household good: parsley is

²¹⁹Please see Howard Winant. "Rethinking Race in Brazil." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24.1 (February 1992): 173-192, which explores the history of racial formation in Brazil and their deliberate "whitening" of their population.

used to season food, as a bath cleanser, and a balm for ailments; and it serves as a purifier for the body. Parsley is plentiful, it grows everywhere on the island of Hispaniola and is easily available. In addition, because of its abundance, it is also inexpensive. However, parsley soon comes to represent something else: death.

Danticat writes, "Many had heard rumors of groups of Haitians being killed in the night because they could not manage to trill their "r" and utter a throaty "j" to ask for parsley, to say perejil.... [Her] people did not trill their *r* the way we do, or pronounce the jota²²⁰." Politics of nationhood, identity and belonging all converge in this single spice. Dominicans imbued parsley with a notion of racial purity and nationhood; in turn, the ability to pronounce this word served as an easy way to "cleave" the country. What they could not do with miscegenation, they sought to accomplish through language. Paradoxically, the Haitians had committed a similar act against the French in 1804, after gaining independence.

²²⁰ Danticat 114

By declaration of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the French who remained in Haiti were to be killed. Some French attempted to pass as Kreyól; however, Dessalines required a test: they had to sing a song in Kreyól. Those who could not were killed. One hundred thirty-three years later, Haitians were murdered for failing a similar test.²²¹ Using language as a means to decipher who belonged and who did not, is not a new idea on the island of Hispaniola. Parsley, rather than a song, was the Dominicans' instrument of choice. The major difference, of course, is that the Haitians were at war with the French, and the Dominicans committed acts of murder. Nonetheless, language became a tool of oppression.

Language, like the fraternal twins and the two nations on the island of Hispaniola, mirrors each side in this text. Even though the words are similar (Spanish perejil, French pésil, and Kreyól pési), and all derive from Latin, parsley became the ultimate marker of a "true" Dominican. However, if the color of one's skin proved too dark or did not match the perception of race and nationhood, regardless of what the tongue said, one could fall victim to the slaughter. As mentioned

²²¹ For a more detailed discussion, see Michelle Wucker's *Why the Cocks Fight*, "Chapter Two: Massacre River."

previously, many darker Dominicans were mistaken as Haitians and were attacked. Danticat writes, "'Calmate, hombre,' mumbled the Dominican. He was black like the nun who came to re-dress his wounds. He'd been mistaken for one of us and had received a machete blow across the back of his neck. There were many like him in the room, I was told."²²² Although his tongue spoke the language that should have saved his life, his skin color spoke an opposing language and this language of color is the voice the attackers heard.²²³

The Kreyól tongue may speak of the horrors committed and the Kreyól tongue may reflect ownership by laying claim to the land of Haiti; however, the Kreyól tongue may never lay claim to the Dominican Republic: "'To them we are always foreigners, even if our granmeme's granmemes were born in this country,' a man responded in Kreyól, which we most often spoke—instead of Spanish—among ourselves. 'This makes it easier for them to push us out when they want to'."²²⁴ Language becomes another

²²² Danticat 217

²²³ Danticat's novel focuses on black Dominicans of Haitian decent and thus my analysis is primarily about them. However, there exists a sizable black population in the Dominican Republic whose ancestry does not go through Haiti. Give the D.R. policy on racial formation and identification, most of these people do not identify as black and instead use different racial categories or categories of color to "explain" or erase their African ancestry. However, they do continue to face discrimination and are often marginalized.

²²⁴ Danticat, 69

signifier of territory, not just in terms of land but also in terms of the body.

Danticat uses Kreyól as a means to articulate the emotional and cultural depths of this Haitian experience.²²⁵ With the Dominican's obsession with erasing everything African, it is not surprising that they would deny the inadvertent assimilation and interculturalization of their own Caribbean existence, of which Haitians body and their Kreyól language is a constant reminder. While Kreyól serves as their primary form of communication, it also confronts those Dominicans who seek to annihilate them. Danticat writes of another genocide victim, Odette: "With her parting breath, she mouthed in Kreyól "pési...", no effort to say 'perejil' as if pleading for her life. ...a provocation, a challenge, a dare. To the devil with your... words. You ask for perejil, I give you more."²²⁶

Odette's pési transgresses all the arbitrary boundaries that have been constructed. With one word, Odette's renegade speech challenges the very notion of Dominican nationality. Rather than succumb to linguistic terrorism, she fights for the language her foremothers

²²⁵ In the introduction I stated that Brathwaite defines Creole as a forced acculturation of Africans to European norms and behaviors, and an inadvertent assimilation of Europeans to African norms. This created an unconscious and reciprocal interculturalization of the two cultures.

²²⁶ Danticat 203

and forefathers struggled to create. Albeit we are talking about parsley, pési is not perejil, and the difference lies between life and death.

Through the forceful eating of parsley, a vicious beating and the temporary inability to say perejil, Danticat recuperates the past and reimagines this historical moment on Amabelle's body. What follows is her encounter with an angry Dominican mob as she attempts to navigate her way through the border town of Dajabón and cross over into Haiti:

'Tell us what this is,' one said. 'Que diga perejil.' At that moment I did believe that had I wanted to, I could ask 'Perejil...,' even though the trill of the *r* and the precision of the *j* was sometimes too burdensome a joining for my tongue... Our jaws were pried open and parsley stuffed into our mouths. My eyes watering, I chewed and swallowed as quickly as I could, but not nearly as fast as they were forcing the handfuls into my mouth.²²⁷

Unlike Odette's pési, Amabelle's silence verifies what her black flesh has already signified—she is Haitian.

Her nationality coupled with her race signaled all of those markers that Papi identified when he took her from the river. He turned her into a servant; they attempt to turn her into a corpse. Two very different results are desired, yes; however, the motivation to

²²⁷ Danticat 193

subdue her remains the same: race. This subjugation is violently stated through the beating:

The pain was like a stab from a knife or an ice pick, but when I reached down I felt no blood... I screamed, thinking I was going to die... My ears ringing; I tried to cover my head with my hands. My whole body was numbing; my mouth filled with blood. I tried to swallow the sharp bitter parsley bubbling in my throat.²²⁸

This vicious beating can be read as an attempt by the Dominicans to beat the Haitian out of Amabelle; however, I interpret the beating as an act of resurrection where the Haitian is beaten *back into* her. The thrashing becomes a death sentence for Amabelle the servant, while Amabelle Désir is reborn. Although her body is greatly battered, (her jaw is dislocated, her knees are seriously damaged and her legs are badly scarred), she is able to reclaim it as her own. She no longer belongs to the Dominican Republic, Papi, his daughter or even the mob that attacks her.

By escaping, she avoids becoming another lost soul whose bones are permanently exiled; she becomes her parents' daughter once again—a daughter of Haiti. Her Haitian body is reinitiated when Man Rapadou feeds her soup as if she were a baby. This small act of humanity

²²⁸ Danticat 194

reestablishes not only Amabelle's identity as a Haitian, but also her connection with Haiti as her mother country and, finally, her home.

The Water, The Woman, The End:

Massacre River gets its name from a seventeenth century battle between French and Spanish colonizers who were fighting for control of the island of Hispaniola. At this site, the French and Spaniards slaughtered each other to the point that the river became red with blood—thus the name, Massacre River.²²⁹ The river continues to live up to its name with the 1937 murders of Haitian people on Dominican soil.

Although bodies of water are mentioned less than a dozen times in the entire novel, the fact that major events occur around bodies of water gives it greater importance. For instance, the text opens with the drowning of Amabelle's parents; Amabelle and Sebastien consummate their relationship behind a waterfall; the climax of their escape from the Dominican Republic ends with Odette's death in the river; and the text concludes with Amabelle's return to Massacre River. It is with the

²²⁹ See Michelle Wucker's *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*. (Hill and Wang: New York 2000)

final image of the water and Amabelle's body that I am most concerned.

Jurney argues that we can read the novel's ending in two ways: Amabelle's death represents a return to her origins, to the death of the mother; or the water represents a new birth. I offer three interpretations of the novel's ending. First, I ultimately read Amabelle's return to the river as an act of spiritual cleansing and rest, not death. Danticat writes, "I looked to my dreams for softness, for a gentler embrace, for relief from the fear of mudslides and blood bubbling out of the riverbed, where it is said the dead add their tears to the river flow.... I was looking for the dawn."²³⁰ Amabelle's tears are not tears of sadness or pain; they are simply her indoctrination into a willful rest. Amabelle cannot remove her skin, so that history will also be with her.

However, by returning to the river and immersing herself in the water she enters a spiritual place that frees her of the burden she carries along with this history. The novel supports this interpretation when Danticat writes: "The slaughter is the only thing that is mine enough to pass on. All I want to do is find a place to lay it down now, a safe nest where it will neither be

²³⁰ Danticat 310

scattered by the winds, nor remain forever buried beneath the sod. I just need to lay it down sometimes."²³¹ The river becomes that place.

Grace Nichols explains, in discussing her collection of poetry, *I Is A Long Memoried Woman*, that her text was a psychic journey inspired by a dream she had of a young girl swimming in the Atlantic Ocean. The girl was spewing the water with millions of flowers in an attempt to cleanse the present and future of the horrors of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Nichols writes, "...even in dreams I will submerge / myself swimming like one possessed / back and forth across that course / strewing it with sweet smelling / flowers/ one for everyone who made the journey."²³² Submerging herself in the river, Amabelle's body becomes an amalgamation of time, space and people.

Like the young girl in Nichols' dream who honors the Africans that died in the Middle Passage, Amabelle honors those Haitians who did not make it across the river safely. Amabelle's act of cleansing frees future generations of that pain; the memory remains, but the water washes away the weight of that burden. Returning to the water is an attempt to make whole that which was

²³¹ Danticat 266

²³² Nichols 9

broken and what better place to heal than by returning to the source of the original rupture. Instead of flowers, she offers herself.

My second interpretation is that Massacre River is a nontraditional location where knowledge is gained and communicated through the language of the unconscious. Like Nichols, Amabelle gains greater insight and understanding through her dream. This knowledge is expressed when Amabelle remarks, "There is such a cord between desperate women that when I looked at them I knew what each one was hoping for even before their whispers brushed past my ears."²³³ They, like Amabelle, were seeking peace. These women, like Brand's collective women, communicate through their bodies because words alone cannot convey the depths of their experiences. Amabelle is finally able to answer these women once she returns to the river.

This form of communication, the language of the unconscious, represents a movement from individual bodies to a communal one. Amabelle recognizes her own fragmented self and the need for other women. After her mother's death, Amabelle dreams that she "will never be a whole woman." Her mother responds, "You will be well

²³³ Danticat 169

again. I know this to be true."²³⁴ This truth comes forth through the unconscious language of the dream and leads to my final interpretation: Amabelle's return to the river represents an act of reconciliation between her own body, the bodies of other women and the massacre. Thus, the river, women's bodies and the dreams all represent epistemologies of the unconscious where knowledge is gained in non-traditional places and in unexpected ways.

Amabelle's body is part of a larger collective, and her return to Massacre River is a way for her to secure her place in this women's history. The water takes her back to her mother, to Odette and to all the women who lost their lives. The coalescing of the women's bodies is the final chapter in the collective narrative that Danticat has created; and Amabelle, like Verlia, becomes another chapter in the book of Caribbean female history. In the end, they all find the dawn.

The Texts Talk (To One Another):

Dionne Brand and Edwidge Danticat create texts that not only speak to their readers, but also talk to each other. Through fictionalizing Caribbean histories, the texts weave a Pan-Caribbean narrative that retells those

²³⁴ Danticat 208

histories in terms that go beyond factual events. The historical events become characters in these novels and are given the same depth and complexities as the people the authors create. While some may take issue with Brand's conflating two historical moments from different time periods and different locations, I feel that she weaves a rich tapestry which challenges her readers to look more closely at the people as active agents creating history rather than passive subjects upon whom history happens. In this way, Trinidad's Black Power Movement not only foreshadows the revolution and subsequent US invasion of Grenada, but also becomes an extension of that history. When we add Danticat's text to this historical mix, we see that the invasions of the island of Hispaniola, which precedes the invasion of Grenada by forty-six years, have eerily similar circumstances and objectives surrounding their existence.

The texts also talk to each other through the construction of woman as collective. Rather than promoting a homogenized black woman, all black women become a *mélange* of one another. Their individual experiences are understood in the context of the larger female community. We retain the soci-cultural and historical specificity, yet, we are able to build bridges

and develop shared understandings of these specificities. Both Brand and Danticat create characters whose wholeness or sense of belonging is predicated on their connection with and understanding of other black women. What is interesting and unique about these authors is that they locate the knowledge needed to gain such an understanding in non-traditional places (i.e. within a lesbian relationship, sugarcane fields or bodies of waters), thus creating new possibilities for not only understanding women's experiences but also exploring those experiences.

Finally, the texts speak to each other through their insistence on not only a black female subjectivity but also a black female humanity where their characters are given an honored place as part of the human world. Neither author makes any pretense toward creating a universal woman. Instead, the characters' hardships become secondary to their lives as women. Both Verlia and Amabelle experience joy, love, pain and, finally, death/rest. Yet those experiences never lose their specificity because Brand and Danticat maintain a delicate balance between creating a Caribbean woman and an *everyday* woman who is precise without being inaccessible.

Through an examination of these characters' body marks, this chapter hoped to open the door for alternative possibilities and places to find testimonies. Through the formation of these female bodies and their polyhistoric narratives, both Brand and Danticat do more than just give voice to these women; they give flesh.

Conclusion: AngriAnna's Sojourn

The Caribbean, female body has been the most significant metaphor in this project. This undertaking came from a desire to interpret Caribbean literature and culture in order to read these bodies as tangible expressions imbued with narratives about Caribbean identities, geographies and histories. Art and culture allow for an investigation that helps the reader to better understand historical truths. At the beginning of the 21st Century, it is much more difficult to imagine that there remains a need for black women to (re)claim their bodies. However, this need remains urgent not only because it involves the reclamation of self, but also because those bodies can be claimed as epistemological sites, spaces and terrains from which forms of resistance can be imagined and enacted.

Most important to this project are the voices that come from the creative works of Caribbean women writers and performers. To that end, this study engaged fictive representations of the body and examined the ability of their works of fiction to not only convey but also to legitimate Caribbean female perspectives and experiences.

This study has focused on texts and performances by Caribbean women in order to view the development of a Caribbean feminist consciousness through the lenses of race, class, gender, nationality and sexuality. It has concentrated on how literature expresses the complexities that encompass black Caribbean women's bodies and the struggles they engage in for agency and autonomy. Dionne Brand, Edwidge Danticat, Marion Hall, Joan Riley and Myriam Warner-Vieyra provide us with an opportunity to examine how these issues allow women to take control over their social, political, sexual and cultural bodies.

These artists and the works selected for this study demonstrate an awareness of the need for a re-evaluation of the metaphor of writing the body which takes into account various socio-historical and cultural specificities. The artists carve out space for communicating their counter-narratives via the fictive bodies they create. These counter-narratives are recognized, rather than declared, and dependent upon the reader's acceptance of them as such. Through their reconstitution of the black, Caribbean, female body as text and tool, these artists participate in the cultural work of transmitting and re-envisioning stories that create common ground between black women by claiming a

shared past, reconstituting their present and imagining an integrated future.

Their cultural products remind us that the body is always in the process of becoming and an important part of that becoming is recognizing and examining the body as corporeal and discursive terrain where there exists the possibility for the formation of power and agency. In so doing, these artists lay claim to the black female body's place in the pantheon of human experiences. As a result, recognizing my own insights and subjective approaches was critical in the formation of this project; such recognition highlights the importance of the body as a site of knowledge.

Significant to this project is a critical appreciation of Caribbean literature coupled with a clear recognition of a specifically Caribbean way of experiencing the world. When traveling to various Caribbean nations, I somehow develop a nickname: AngriAnna. I am unsure in which nation the name originated or when I started answering to it, but somehow it stuck. This name accurately reflected my responses to various Caribbean environments. As a result, I started a journal, called "The Adventures of AngriAnna," which chronicled those experiences.

In all of AngriAnna's adventures, skin color remained the one constant. The following examples highlight a few of those experiences: In Jamaica I had the "privilege" of being a brownin'; in the Dominican Republic I was called Morena; in Puerto Rico, I was Negrita and Morena, alternatively; while in Belize I was admonished for having dreadlocks and ruining or wasting my skin color; in Martinique I was largely ignored; and in Saint Martin, I had several black men literally push me aside to get to my two white friends. Independently, these encounters do not say much, but taken together, they speak to a larger discourse on how black women's bodies are evaluated and valued. In response, these black women artists use their creative works to illustrate a shared human experience that stands in opposition to the subjugation and ghettoization of black women's bodies and its dehumanizing effects.

I began this project analyzing literary representations of the body from a French feminist position on writing the body, coupled with a Black American feminist standpoint; however, I soon realized that, to do justice to Caribbean literature and the experiences of Caribbean women, I needed to go beyond both a Western framework and a black framework which did

not speak specifically to Caribbean culture and Caribbean experiences of the world. What makes this project unique is the theoretical structure I employ, which looks to Caribbean artists' creative expressions as the vital location for theory formation. To that end, I used a theoretical framework focusing on a notion of a Caribbean feminist consciousness. Through literature and culture, I read the body as a multifaceted allegory that represents a landscape, which presents an opportunity for the uncovering, analyzing and articulating of Caribbean women's histories.

My use of Caribbean feminist consciousness looks to the women's creative works and recognizes them as narrativized theory and as such representing the primary site of knowledge; second, it is grounded in an ideological belief in the value of quotidian experiences; and finally, it appreciates the role of nation and nationality in developing an understanding of Caribbean women's lives. Caribbean feminist consciousness separates itself from Black feminist theory and *Écriture Feminine* because it embraces the specificity of and has a direct link not only to the body but also to the texts.

The guiding questions for this project on literary representations of Caribbean women's bodies are: In what

ways may we understand contemporary Caribbean culture and history through an examination of the literary representations of the female body? How does literature help us to understand ways in which Caribbean women relate to the body? What do narratives of the body tell us about history when we read them devoid of a prescribed external feminist application? Finally, how does literature help us to understand what it means for black women to internalize traditional notions of the black, female body and, perhaps, uncritically reproduce discourses that limit, undermine and disempower them? Exploring these questions has required a thorough investigation of Caribbean women's literary representations of the female body. The five authors chosen for this study provided a unique opportunity to explore these issues.

Brand transverses her protagonist Elizete's body in her novel *In Another Place, Not Here*. She addresses the challenge of including sexual discourses as part of political and revolutionary discourses, particularly those discourses which can be written on and read from lesbian bodies. Concurrently, Danticat re-images the history of Haitian genocide on the body of her orphaned protagonist Amabelle, in *The Farming of Bones*. As a

Massacre survivor, her body becomes a living, historical testament not only to the horrors of that event, but also to the ambivalence with which the world, including the Caribbean, views black, Haitian bodies. In addition, Marion Hall's performance and embodiment of the persona Lady Saw represents a communal response to the narrowly defined notions of womanhood and citizenship in Jamaica, as well as expand our understanding of literature as a genre. Hall's body ruptures the discourse that defines working class bodies, as well as sexually explicit bodies, outside Jamaican culture and politics. In essence, Lady Saw carves out a space in the yaad from which to launch a challenge against essentialist perceptions regarding nationality, class and sexuality and those who can lay claim to a "true" Jamaican identity.

Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memories*, and Riley's *The Unbelonging* make explicit black women's rites of passage through the migration experience that serves as an attempt to reconnect personal and historical pasts. This is where I explored how the effects of that physical journey are mapped onto Sophia and Hyacinth's bodies, respectively. A similar migratory experience is explored in Warner-Vieyra's novel *Juletane*. However, instead of

migrating to a metropolis in the West, Juletane went to Africa. In addition to reconciling the personal and the historical, Juletane's body also maps a longing for the recognition of a diasporic body's rightful claim to the source, Africa. This aspect of the study explored the ways in which this return to the source required a different mapping of the body; a mapping that mandated a reexamination of notions of madness.

A consequence of such mapping is that Lady Saw's laments against an ineffective Jamaican government become Sophie's cries against Victorian ideals of sexual purity; these elements are then echoed in Elizete's rejection of prescribed notions of heteronormativity and Juletane's refusal to succumb to unacceptable social expectations. All five artists have focused on the struggle to revive communal memories and strategies of confrontation through a re-writing and re-reading of Caribbean women's bodies.

Other Caribbean women artists whose works lend themselves to re-writing and re-reading the body are Michelle Cliff, Merle Collins, Maryse Conde, Allison Hines, Jamaica Kincaid, Nancy Morejón, Grace Nichols, M. Nourbese Philip, and Frances Anne Solomon. Re-writing and re-reading the body is not limited to black Caribbean artists, however. Many non-black Caribbean women

artists, such as Jean Rhys and Cristina Garcia, have also made contributions.

The examination of black, Caribbean women's creative texts provides space for the discovery of an alternative lens through which to interpret the experiences of Caribbean women. Through the lens of literature and culture, we are afforded an opportunity to question current discourses that pass as truths and challenge traditional ways of arriving at those truths. Fictive representations of Caribbean women's bodies permit us to engage in a type of border crossing, interpreting literature and culture and approaching an understanding of cultural attitudes.

Gaining access to the works of female graphic artists has been the primary barrier to a more comprehensive realization of this project. This was not altogether surprising. However, the absence of and limited access to some creative works required a re/envisioning of the project. Another challenge has been the creation of a framework that sufficiently addressed representations of Caribbean women's bodies in a Caribbean context. My exploration of various Western and Caribbean forms of feminisms was an exercise in patience. It seemed each theory offered something, but

none of them fully addressed my concerns. Once I turned to the text, this problem was somewhat resolved. However, the texts themselves presented an additional problem. A text-based theory runs the danger of being too specific and creates issues surrounding its viability and tendency toward essentialism.

A more personal challenge was the constant reassessing of my own position as "outsider." I am very much aware of my Western, and often privileged, position, yet I was unprepared for its constant interjection as I considered approaches to this project. There was always a temptation to consider my own responses to race and culture in the Caribbean, specifically because of Caribbean responses to my body. Therefore, keeping the focus on Caribbean women's bodies and not my own provided even greater insight into the praxis side of my theories of the flesh. Finally, the most compelling challenge was clarifying what I wanted my readers to take from this study.

So where does this lead us? Generally, when asked about my project, I found a response such as "It's about representations of the body" to be sufficient. However, what I wish to do is make the reader reflect on literary representations of the body—its image, concepts, theories

and understandings—in such a way as to become uncomfortable; such spaces of discomfort often present the greatest opportunities for action. In other words, it is only when we are daring enough to leave the comforts of our well established knowledge base and seek out alternative, often non-traditional, spaces for learning that we are challenged and from that challenge comes growth.

There are many avenues which remain open here, thus I can not offer a predictable outcome. However, my ultimate goal for this project is to contribute to the development of theories of the flesh that are rooted in praxis; this can only be accomplished by engaging those artists who are often overlooked or unavailable because they, and the cultural products they produce, are the ones who have transformed and continue to transform broader meanings of the body in the Caribbean. In other words, I endeavor to advance the project by gaining access to those elusive voices produced within Caribbean culture so that they may join in concert with the voices presented here. Like all the works of these artists, this project has been intended to offer an approach to reading black Caribbean women's representations of the black female body in such a way as to promote reflection

and change. These artists present women who embrace as well as celebrate their bodies on their own terms.

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