Beyond the *Bildungsroman*: Feminist Negotiations of the African Diaspora

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vorgelegt von
Kathrin Rond

aus Hilden

Betreuerin und Erstgutachterin: Prof. Dr. Susan Winnett
Zweitgutachterin: Prof. Dr. Soelve I. Curdts

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D 61

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Abstract

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Author: Kathrin Rond

Mapping the development of a canon of explicitly feminist and transnational African diasporic literature in a U.S. context, this dissertation examines how the works of Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid, Edwidge Danticat and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie[1] deliberately set out to modify or even completely transform the concept of a global African diaspora and challenge the reader to consider the possible political consequences of these transformations, especially with regard to possible alliances between traditionally distinct groups. It demonstrates that each author's contribution to this ongoing reconceptualization can best be analyzed and interpreted by reading their novels as rhizomatically connected and in dialogue with one another. I suggest that, even though Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari did not have female diasporic experiences in mind when they first formulated their ideas, rhizomatic structures and rhizomatic thinking are needed for two reasons: They enable one to productively engage with novels that challenge traditional distinctions between 'national literature' and 'diaspora literature' as well as between 'African American' and 'postcolonial literature.' And they allow one to combine and adapt approaches taken from different fields and develop a theoretical and interpretative framework that accounts for the specific characteristics and nuances of the emerging canon of African diaspora literature in a U.S. context. Paul Gilroy's notion of a "determinedly non-traditional tradition" (Gilroy 1996: 22) aptly describes the kind of tradition and canon that the novels discussed in this study establish, since these novels consciously destabilize and thereby politicize notions of individual and national identity and belonging.

This dissertation has no stake in redefining the *Bildungsroman*. Rather the concept of the *Bildungsroman* is employed as a heuristic tool that enables one to group together and compare each author's 'female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman*' in order to then analyze how and why the negotiation of the African diaspora concept in feminist and transnational terms begun in the female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* can be continued in an appropriately and sufficiently complex manner only by leaving the *Bildungsroman* genre behind and turning to what I have termed the African diaspora novel. Discursively maintaining but simultaneously modifying key insights regarding the African diaspora, these novels do not represent a singular, normative African diaspora experience. Foregrounding the political potentialities of being or conceiving of oneself as diasporized, their representations of life in the African diaspora underscore the heterogeneity and asymmetries of these experiences, while simultaneously seeking to reveal and establish commonalities and continuities within a shared experiential and imaginative field. Their dual trajectory also allows the novels to explore the limits of the comparability of experiences as well as the limits of relationality based on 'race' and gender. Since the alliances sought and established in these novels do not rely on essentialist conceptions of identity and belonging, they problematize earlier conceptualizations of the African diaspora along generational family lines or as an essentialist family formation in which diasporic Africans were commonly represented as having been ripped from 'Mother Africa.' Emphasizing their (feminist) investments in the transformation of the present and the future, these novels demonstrate that in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries the concept of a global African diaspora retains relevance and viability only if it finds ways to also accommodate those diaspora experiences that cannot easily be accounted for within what Michelle Wright describes as the "Middle Passage epistemology" (Wright 2015: 14). This dissertation shows that rather than merely exploring how gender inflects diaspora experiences, the novels under discussion advocate that transnational feminism offers additional possibilities to form new alliances within the African diaspora.

I argue that the imperfections of the African diaspora concept can also be regarded as its most significant strengths. Unwieldy, contested and ultimately without a fixed definition, the stand-in 'umbrella term' African diaspora functions as a 'performative' term whose ambivalence and indeterminacy draw attention to its own constructedness and openness. The novels under discussion call on those who use it to keep asking those difficult questions about belonging, exclusion and applicability.

[1] The dissertation discusses the following novels at length: Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) and *The Fisher King* (2000); Kincaid's *Lucy* (1990) and *Mr. Potter* (2002); Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and *The Dew Breaker* (2004) and Adichie's *Americanah* (2013).

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

In parenthetical citations, the titles of the seven major novels discussed in this study are abbreviated as follows:

BGB	*Brown Girl, Brownstones*
FK	*The Fisher King*
L	*Lucy*
MP	*Mr. Potter*
BEM	*Breath, Eyes, Memory*
TDB	*The Dew Breaker*
A	*Americanah*

1 Introduction

There are quite a few histories of America that tell its story and that of its continent as one of successive waves of immigration.[1] This approach proves particularly useful and relatively unproblematic if one wishes to shed light on the continuous reconstruction of 'white' America by waves of European immigrants whose skin color and western cultural heritage did not seriously challenge the traditional construction of 'white' America.[2] However, it does not and cannot adequately incorporate the history of black people in America, who were forced to cross the Atlantic against their will and arrived in a country that regarded them as chattel instead of as fellow human beings. After the close of the transatlantic slave trade, the numbers of the African American population in the U.S. remained relatively stable.[3] It was only after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 that significant numbers of foreign-born people of African descent were allowed to immigrate to the United States. Especially noticeable among those who altered the composition of the African diaspora in the United States were women coming from the newly independent former colonies of the British Empire in the Caribbean. The 1970s saw the beginning of an ongoing influx of immigrants from African countries that has further diversified America's black population and has in turn required that the concept of the African diaspora become more heterogeneous, multi-dimensional and multi-directional.[4]

In recent years the concept of diaspora has significantly gained in scholarly popularity. Unfortunately, the proliferation of interest in the topic in academic writing has not necessarily led to a clearer definition of the concept.[5] Since diasporic experiences are just too manifold to be subsumed under one universal definition, it is difficult to find a formulation that strikes a balance between including too many or too few groups of migrants. One of the often quoted, broader definitions of the African diaspora concept as

[1] If you look at it in even more global terms, the story of humanity is one of constant movement and migration.
[2] For a thorough analysis of this phenomenon, see Guglielmo (2003).
[3] All demographic data in this paragraph is taken from chapter five of Berlin (2010), esp. pp. 202-208.
[4] Of course, immigrants of African descent are not the only ethnic group which has immigrated to the United States, but recent research by Lee and Bean (2007) suggests that due to the large numbers of 'non-white' people currently residing in or immigrating to America, American society is in the process of reinventing its color line. Intermarriage and inhabitants who identify as multi-racial make the white/non-white paradigm seem more and more anachronistic, instead the color line is reinvented along the lines of non-black/black, once again singling out black people.
[5] For a good overview of this development, see Mayer (2005: 8-14).

formulated by historian Joseph Harris provides a first, sufficiently sophisticated idea of the most essential components of the concept:[6]

> The African diaspora concept subsumes the following: the global dispersion (voluntary and involuntary) of Africans throughout history; the emergence of a cultural identity abroad based on origin and social condition; and the psychological or physical return to the homeland, Africa. Thus viewed, the African diaspora assumes the character of a dynamic, continuous, and complex phenomenon stretching across time, geography, class, and gender. (Harris 1993: 3-4)

My understanding of the African diaspora as heterogeneous, multi-dimensional and multi-directional is indebted to Paul Gilroy's 1993 work on black Atlantic culture, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Unlike Gilroy, who focuses on presenting a genealogy of male black writers of the black Atlantic, I am interested in examining the different ways in which women writers utilize the concept of African diaspora in their works and at the same time reshape it to do justice to women's experiences and their (cultural) contributions. Unlike Gilroy, all these writers, but especially Nigerian-born Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, wish to engage with Africa and/or African cultural production, survivals/creolizations in cultural practice not only on the level of the imagination but also on that of lived realities. It is due to these and other conceptual differences between Gilroy's work and that of the writers discussed in this dissertation that I have chosen to frame my project as an investigation of African diaspora texts and their writers rather than Black Atlantic texts and writers.

This dissertation explores how literary representations of life in the diaspora written by black diasporic women writers from the Caribbean and Africa – specifically Nigeria – negotiate questions of race, nationality, gender and the ethics of representation in explicitly U.S.-American contexts. Paule Marshall (*1929), Jamaica Kincaid (*1949), Edwidge Danticat (*1969) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*1977) deliberately set out to modify or even completely transform the concept of (a global) African diaspora and challenge readers to consider the possible political consequences of these transformations, especially with regard to possible alliances between traditionally distinct groups. Although these authors and their texts may at first glance appear only tenuously connected, their connections are, in fact, strong and multiple, and they all regard themselves as participating in the process of reshaping the canon not only of Africana or African American literature

[6] I will provide more detailed information on how the concept of the African diaspora has developed in section 1.1.

but that of American literature They are also connected through their involvement in academia and by their frequent and well-placed demonstrations of public support for each other's work. It has become easier to recognize their connections across the borders of national canons, due to a general increase and diversification in diaspora studies within literary criticism. But the most important factor in their successful creation of a recognizable tradition of a feminist African diaspora literature within a U.S.-American cultural context is the fact that between them they have created a body of literature that is best understood if read in dialogue because it was created that way. By looking at two texts by each author, first a(n ethnic) *Bildungsroman* and then what I have termed an African diaspora novel,[7] this dissertation will show how diasporic women writers of African descent have reshaped the *Bildungsroman* tradition in individual but comparable ways in order to represent a very unique set of experiences connected to becoming independent women of color. It will also argue that in order to present a more complete picture of the African diaspora at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, they have needed to find different narrative strategies and create the new subgenre of American immigration literature that I have termed the African diaspora novel.

Due to the undeniable heterogeneity of a set of texts that challenge traditional distinctions between 'national literature' and 'diaspora literature' as well as between 'African American' and 'postcolonial literature,' I have found it necessary to combine and adapt approaches taken from different fields and develop a theoretical and interpretative framework that accounts for the specific characteristics and nuances of the emerging canon of African diaspora literature in a U.S. context. Since the African diaspora has largely been theorized in essentialist and masculine terms, my emphasis on the multiplicity of black women's experiences in the African diaspora must be understood as an attempt to counter more general and therefore more exclusive conceptions of the African diaspora in terms of the selection both of writers and of texts.

[7] As my analysis in chapter five will show, Adichie's novel, *Americanah* (2013), is a hybrid novel that combines features of the female-male (double) *Bildungsroman* with features of the African diaspora novel. The term 'female-male (double) *Bildungsroman*' is adapted from Charlotte Goodman's description of the "male-female double *Bildungsroman*" (Goodman1983: 30).

1.1 The African Diaspora in a Rhizomatic Mode

The notion of the "rhizome," as originally introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in 1976, has proved helpful in thinking about and mapping both the different ways in and the different levels on which the texts and their writers are connected. It can also be employed to identify and compare "those structures of feeling that might be termed the inner dialectics of diaspora identification" (Gilroy 1993: 23) represented and negotiated in the texts. Furthermore it offers an opportunity to both identify and interpret moments of intertextuality[8] in and among the texts examined in this dissertation as well as between the feminist canon of African diaspora literature and writers outside of this canon, such as James Baldwin, Gertrude Stein and Jacques Roumain.[9] Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on six principles that characterize the rhizome:

> 1. and 2. Principles of connection and heterogeneity: […] any point of a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. […]
>
> 3. Principle of multiplicity: it is only when the multiple is effectively treated as a substantive, 'multiplicity,' that it ceases to have any relation to the One; […]
>
> 4. Principle of a signifying rupture: a rhizome may be broken, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines; […]
>
> 5. and 6. Principle of cartography and decalcomania: a rhizome is not amenable to any structural or generative model; … [it is] a map and not a tracing. (Deleuze and Guattari 1981: 7, 8, 9, 12)

Since Deleuze and Guattari's model abjures hierarchies, vertical progress narratives and any notion of pure origin or single roots, it offers an especially apt way of describing and

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[8] Patrick O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis characterize intertextuality as 'boundary-crossing,' which in the process "creates crises, aporiae, ideology wherever it goes – for as inherent in the nature of signs, the intertextual relation generates the deferral and rewriting of 'parent' texts" (O'Donnell and Davis 1998: xiv). In doing so, "[i]ntertextuality challenges those systems of signification which allow us to mark off the formal terrains of 'literary period,' 'genre,' 'author,' 'subject,' 'nation,' 'text'" (O'Donnell and Davis 1998: xiv). Intertextuality also "signals an anxiety and an indeterminancy regarding authorial, readerly, or textual identity, the relation of present culture to past, or the function of writing within certain historical and political frameworks" (O'Donnell and Davis 1998: xiii).

[9] Focusing on *The Purple Hibiscus* and *Half a Yellow Sun* respectively, Heather Hewett (2005) and Elleke Boehmer (2009) have shown that Adichie's earlier novels are intertextually connected Chinua Achebe's seminal novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958). Since these novels can be read as making a conscious effort to rewrite and revise Achebe's novel, Adichie's earlier novels demonstrate that she "is directly engaged with the Nigerian literary canon and is furthermore making a case for her inclusion in it" (Hewett 2005; 78). Whereas in her earlier novels moments of intertextuality with other texts from the African diaspora(s) play a secondary role, *Americanah* creates moments of intertextuality with African American texts, particularly with feminist ones, in order to explore the possibilities of a transnational feminist literary and critical canon.

analyzing a heterogeneous set of feminist texts that also challenge patriarchal, racial and class hierarchies, promote horizontal over vertical relations and, at the very least, question the value of roots and traditional ideas of national and cultural rootedness.

It is surprising that the political potential of the ideas expressed by Deleuze and Guattari has not provoked a broader, more significant response among Anglo-American scholars and especially among feminists seeking to express solidarity and cooperation transnationally. Among the prominent critics working in the vast field of African diaspora studies, Édouard Glissant and Paul Gilroy have perhaps most influentially adapted the idea of the rhizome for their works. While Glissant critiques but ultimately builds on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome in both *Caribbean Discourse* (1990)[10] and *Poetics of Relation* (1997)[11], Gilroy only footnotes them as inspiration for his construction of the Black Atlantic as "rhizomorphic" (4, 28, 229 footnote 69).

Glissant explicitly indicates his intention to adapt and extend rhizomatic thought and explains why Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome attracts him:

> The notion of the rhizome maintains […] the idea of rootedness but challenges that of a totalitarian root. Rhizomatic thought is the principle behind what I call the Poetics of Relation, in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other. (Glissant 1997: 11)

Glissant's model describes diasporic formations as they emerged both in the Caribbean and world-wide. It distinguishes "errantry" ("*errance*"), sometimes also translated as 'wandering,' from exile (Glissant 1997: 20, 211).[12] While errantry has the potential to affirm identities as 'relational identities,' exile potentially erodes them (Glissant 1997: 20). Like other progressive models of diaspora, Glissant's "errantry-inflected" paradigm accommodates both the notion of originary trauma and the creative and transformative potentialities of cultural contact and creolization (Murdoch 2012: 34).

Among literary critics, it is particularly those who work on francophone Caribbean literature and those who conceive of and examine Caribbean literature as national literature(s) or as existing within a Pan-Caribbean framework who mention Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome. These critics primarily examine how it has been adopted

[10] Originally published as *Le Discours antillais* in 1981.
[11] Originally published as *Poétique de la Relation* in 1990.
[12] Betsy Wing, who translated *Poetics of Relation* form French into English, explains that "*[e]rrance* for Glissant, while not aimed like an arrow's trajectory, nor circular and repetitive like the nomad's, is not idle roaming, but includes a sense of sacred motivation" (Glissant 1997: 211). For further information on semantic difference between the French '*errance*' and its English translation as 'errantry,' see also Glissant (1997: xvi-xvi).

and transformed by Glissant in his analysis of 'Caribbeanness.'[13] Since the group of diasporic feminist writers discussed in this dissertation includes one second-generation Barbadian-American writer, one writer from a former British colony now living in the U.S., a Haitian-born American citizen whom, in Rubén Rumbaut's terminology, one would describe as "1.5-generation American" (Rumbaut 2002: 48),[14] and a Nigerian-born writer who considers herself Nigerian (Igbo) but divides her time between the U.S. and Nigeria, I necessarily seek to explore a more heterogeneous terrain than those critics. Even if, as some critics allege, he may have done so incompletely or imperfectly, to my mind, Glissant has already answered the question of how and why rhizomatic structures and thinking are part and parcel of the Caribbean, (francophone) Caribbean literature and 'Caribbeanness' (wherever it may be found). My analysis frees rhizomatic thinking of its (exclusive) geographical, cultural and linguistic ties to the (francophone) Caribbean in order to discern how feminist writers have transformed and reconfigured the representation of the African diaspora in the later 20th and the early 21st century. While these explicitly feminist representations and (re-)negotiations of a different African diaspora have initially been targeted at U.S. readers and have, in fact, not only found their way onto numerous bookshelves but also onto syllabi in different departments at different U.S. institutions, they have also found readers and critics on a global scale. In order to map and not to lose sight of the many different trajectories involved in the feminist reconfiguration of the representation of the African diaspora, rhizomatic structures and rhizomatic thinking are needed. I suggest that even though Deleuze and Guattari did not have female diasporic experiences in mind when they first formulated their idea, and neither Gilroy nor Glissant paid any particular attention to these experiences, the idea of the rhizome itself is malleable enough to accommodate female experiences and respond to the political agendas of diasporic feminist writers who, in their individual ways, recognize and advocate for the need of transnational solidarity and cooperation.

That is not to say that Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, dating from the mid-1970s, are entirely unproblematic and can easily and uncritically be transplanted into the 21st century. Caren Kaplan identifies key problems with the formulation when she points out that as a metaphor for politics the rhizome, while "resistant to and undermining the nation state," romanticizes displacement and is dangerously ahistorical (Kaplan 1996: 87; 87-88).

[13] See DeFerrari (2007) and Ferly (2012).

[14] Sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut has been studying immigration since the mid-1970s. His influential definition, of the 1.5 generation immigrants as those who settle into the receiving society after reaching school age but before reaching puberty is now widely used. See, for example, Rumbaut, "Severed or Sustained Attachments?" (2002).

Moreover, she argues, the call to "'form a rhizome, increase your territory by deterritorialization' is, in fact, a call for reterritorialization that *colonizes,* appropriates, even raids *other spaces*" (Kaplan 1996: 89; italics in the original).[15]

The shortcomings Kaplan identifies are expressly not the aspects of the rhizome or rhizomatic thinking that I wish to retain. Instead, like Rosi Braidotti, I want to hold on to the transformative potential inherent in the notion of the rhizome and a rhizomatic mode of thinking. Braidotti's elaboration of Deleuze and Guattari's original ideas underscores the unconventional, possibly subversive, possibly anti-patriarchal potentials of rhizomatic thought: "By extension, it is 'as if' the rhizomatic mode expressed a nonphallogocentric way of thinking: secret, lateral, spreading, as opposed to the visible, vertical ramifications of Western trees of knowledge" (Braidotti 1994: 23).[16] Like Braidotti, I choose to understand Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome as an invitation to think 'differently' – in my case, about a canon of female African diaspora literature as it has been forming in a U.S. context. Doing so will allow me to embrace the heterogeneity of the texts discussed, combine theories and approaches appropriately but necessarily eclectically, to map horizontal relationships instead of creating hierarchies, to identify moments of continuity, solidarity and coalition without withholding moments of discontinuity, confrontation and opposition.

1.2 On Genealogies and Anti-Genealogies

Any negotiation of the concept of the African diaspora requires one also to consider the multivalent notion of 'genealogy.' In the novels I discuss in this study, genealogies figure as anti-genealogies rather than as the desire to trace one's self back to a point of origin in some mythical past". In accordance with the Greek roots of the word: γενεαλογία *genealogia* from γενεά *genea*, 'generation' and λόγος *logos*, 'knowledge'

[15] Deleuze's and Guattari have also been criticized for romanticizing the notion of the nomad. Glissant's model of "errantry" can be understood as an attempt to rectify what he perceives as conceptual flaws of Deleuze's and Guattari's "Nomadolgy" (Deleuze and Guattari1981: 23). Glissant calls the non-conformist nature of the nomad's way of life/existence into question by pointing out that the trajectories of nomadism are generally either "circular" or, in the case of "invading nomadism," "arrow-like" (Glissant 1997: 12).

[16] There are also those who recognize the political potential of the image, but, like Robin Cohen, warn that the image of the rhizome, "sprad[ing] subterraneously [and] suggesting some sort of covert and unpredictable fertility" (Cohen 2015: 6) can be misused by precisely those traditional, national(ist) and patriarchal structures it seeks to destabilize and thus ultimately feed into anti-immigrant rhetoric and sentiment. I am not convinced, however, that Cohen's own, allegedly less easily misconstrued, but therefore certainly more tame and less subversive image of the "epiphyte, which [his] deep research on Wikipedia tells [him] is affixed to another plant, but is *not* a parasite and draws nutrients from air, rain and debris" (Cohen 2015: 6) could not equally fall victim to nationalist ideologists and their spin-doctors.

("genealogy, n.") this thesis maps how knowledge about life in the African diaspora is passed on in and through its representations. The African diaspora has often been conceptualized along generational family lines or as an essentialist family formation. The African continent is personified as the Mother Africa whose children were ripped from her (their continent of origin) and condemned by slavery and colonialism to an existence in the diaspora. The African diaspora community (the global community of Mother Africa's children) is often conceived of as culturally and spiritually orphaned because its connection to the Mother, the continent and cultures of origin, has been violently and painfully severed. According to this paradigm one of the primary tasks of African diasporic cultural production would be to reconnect the diasporic community to its 'continent of origin' or Mother and thereby heal it. While none of the novels discussed in this dissertation is unaware of the Mother Africa paradigm, they do not approach the question of a connection or re-connection with African culture (in their formulations often via Afro-Caribbean culture) in the essentialist terms outlined above. Yet, to some degree, they do embrace the possibilities of generational continuities and familial and relational connections across borders and oceans inherent in the Mother Africa paradigm. As a result, their careful negotiations of the political and artistic possibilities and impossibilities of a (global) African Diaspora community are purposefully incorporated in plots about non-traditional families, the joys of familial belonging and the pain of familial rifts. In order to reveal both the hazards and the opportunities these relationships involve, the novels I discuss negotiate, trace and establish but also challenge specific parts of the family genealogies they represent. Even within the same text, these careful negotiations often oscillate between the desire to establish some kind of origin or foundational narrative/mythology about the self via the family and the pointed rejection or failure of such endeavors. If, as Deleuze and Guattari maintain, "[t]he rhizome is an anti-genealogy" that "operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots" (Deleuze and Guattari 1981: 21), the rejection or failure of traditional genealogies can be read as further proof of these novels' investment in and enactment of rhizomatic thought, as they explore and significantly expand both the notion of traditional families and that of an African diaspora community.

Though ultimately different from Deleuze's and Guattari's ideas in scope and intention, Michel Foucault's work too can be useful when thinking about the kinds of genealogies the novels explore. Developed in the essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (originally published in French in 1971), Foucault's notion of genealogy can be characterized as anti-genealogical. The "patiently documentary" (Foucault 1984: 76)

method he describes is, in fact, opposed to the traditional hierarchical genealogies established by History or official national histories:

> Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people. On the contrary, to follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations -- or conversely, the complete reversals -- the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents. (Foucault 1984: 81)

Like Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault seems to favor an exploration along a horizontal plain rather than any attempt to establish a vertical "unbroken continuity." Foucault's interest in "accidents" and "false appraisals" is clearly opposed to the aims of traditional/conventional historiography, but he continues to engage the past in more programmatic ways than Deleuze and Guattari's model. He clarifies:

> Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for 'origins.' (Foucault 1984: 77)

Even though this thesis operates within a rather specific and, in comparison to Foucault's conception, narrow time frame and does not set out to do the genealogical work Foucault envisions, it is productive to combine Deleuze and Guattari's emphasis on the present moment and their orientation toward the future with Foucault's insistence on a different but sustained engagement with the past, in order to account for the various ways in which the novels I study here attempt to revive and reconfigure an African diaspora project – often by creating (anti-)genealogies – that can be both responsive to the present moment and meaningful in the future without abandoning the past or denying the significance of past events. When the novels engage with the past, they usually do so within a postcolonial and neocolonial framework. As result, their representations of history, especially in the African diaspora novels, must be characterized as rewritings of History/official history that insert narratives about women in communities and feminist perspectives into masculinist, hegemonic discourses. The rewritings also insist on a reappraisal of the significance of oral culture and myth in the writing of history.

1.3 On the Appropriateness of the African Diaspora Paradigm

Since this dissertation reads the *Bildungsromane* and African diaspora novels published by female diasporic writers as part of a new canon of feminist African diaspora literature, the emergence and the development as well as key features and advantages of the concept of the African diaspora need to be outlined at this point. As the discussion below will outline, the concept of the African diaspora is not free of 'political baggage,' Yet, it can be employed productively to analyze the set of texts this dissertation examines, since they draw attention to the constructed and provisional character of the concept of the African diaspora and exemplify how the concept of (African) diaspora itself can be successfully employed in anti-nationalist and anti-racist discourses.

In the context of current political and social upheavals in the U.S. and worldwide, new groups of readers are avidly reading Marshall's, Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's recent works and rediscovering their earlier publications. When this study was first conceived during the Obama administration, there seemed to be a broader consensus among U.S. citizens and political observers worldwide that the majority of Americans, particularly the younger generation, were ready and willing to embrace an ever more progressive stance regarding race and gender equality and immigration. Then, during Donald Trump's presidential election campaign, the apparent mainstream acceptance of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim bias as well as misogyny in the rhetoric both of the Republican candidate himself and of his supporters generated outrage as well as growing concerns among Democrats and particularly among those who would be most affected by the anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and anti-women policies envisioned by the candidate and his platform. As protest formed during the first days and weeks after Trump's election, many protesters and concerned citizens turned to literature. Novels by Marshall, Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie could frequently be found on lists of recommended reading for 'survival' and political organizing in the Trump era. Designed to be a counterweight to a Republican narrative that promises to enhance security and wealth primarily for white male Americans by excluding and discriminating against minorities and women, these reading lists promote the advantages of diversity as well as of gender and race equality. They also explicitly acknowledge America's indebtedness to the economic, social and creative contributions of immigrants.[17] Danticat and Adichie have been visible and vocal in the

[17] Walters (2017), whose recommendations for immigrant heritage week have clearly influenced by the Donald Trump's election for president, suggests reading the *Bildungsromane* by Marshall, Danticat, Adichie discussed in this study. Green (2016) makes *Americanah* her number one recommendation to 'those who

context of the Black Lives Matter movement and use their public platforms as speakers and in their articles in magazines and newspapers to shape public discourse by condemning discriminatory Republican policy proposals.[18]

The political implications of the transnational feminist African diasporic vision presented and negotiated in the writings of the authors under discussion in this study have generated conversations across political, generational, racial, ethnic and gender divides. In the face of ever new public displays of racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric and even violent action by some parts of the American Right, the need for these conversations has gained a new urgency both within and beyond the U.S. As a contribution to this conversation, this study will show that the (African) diaspora paradigm, as it is being negotiated and envisioned in the writings of Marshall, Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie, is far from being a nostalgic fantasy born solely of the need of some African Americans to redress and heal the wounds of the Middle Passage by reconnecting them to the African continent. Instead, the (African) diaspora paradigm needs to be seen as a viable attempt to accommodate and negotiate difference that simultaneously seeks to establish connections and solidarities across national borders and social divides.

Deriving from the Greek root verb -*sperein* meaning 'to scatter,' 'to spread,' or 'to disperse' and the prefix *dia-* referring to movement 'through,' the word diaspora, which first appeared in the Septuagint (a translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek), was originally used only in a very limited, specifically religious context and in reference to the

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despair of American politics.' See Green (2016) Broom (2016) and Edwards (2017) for lists containing works by either Danticat or Kincaid.

[18] Edwidge Danticat contributed the essay, "Message to My Daughters," to Jesmyn Ward's anthology *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race* (Danticat 2016). See Danticat (2014) and Danticat (2015) for Danticat's views on why (a global) BLM movement has become more necessary than ever before. See Danticat (2017) for her comment on how Haitian's have been and will be affected by changes to DACA.

Asked about the Haitian Lives Matter Movement Danticat explains: "I think the folks who have picked up the Black Lives Matter and put Haitian Lives Matter in there, it's really fitting, because what you have happening between Haiti and the Dominican Republic right now is the Dominican Republic basically, immigration-wise, went back to retroactively remove the citizenship of so many people. Many of them have been driven from the only homes they've known by intimidation or by this law, so it's a very serious problem. It's in our hemisphere, and often I think these things are tried in our backyard in a way, just in a kind of testing. So you have this happening in the Republic, and the rise of Donald Trump here, and people in Texas talking about removing birthright citizenship, so I think we have to acknowledge intersections. I think that's why the reaction from different people from different parts of the world to whatever is happening in Haiti/Dominican Republic was heartening and good to see, because more and more we have to realize that our struggles are connected and certainly, it's a shameful thing that is happening.[…] Migration is a big issue in our hemisphere. If we allow a case like that to happen where citizenship was stripped from people, we'll only get more and more states in governments doing it" (John 2017).

In addition to writing two short stories, "'The Arrangements:' A Work of Fiction" (2016) and "Janelle Asked to the Bedroom – A Micronovel" (2017), Adichie has commented on both the importance of BLM and voiced her criticism of Donald Trump and the effects of is campaign on political rhetoric in the U.S. (BBCNewsnight 2016; Channel4News 2016).

experiences of exiled Jews (Braziel and Mannur 2016: 164).[19] Since it was associated with forced dispersion and punishment in the Bible,[20] it carried predominantly negative connotations, and the Jewish people with their experience of dispersion and exile became the prototypical 'victim diaspora' (Cohen 2008: 18, 21-22).[21]

Long before the term 'African diaspora' gained traction in academic discourse, similarities between the Jewish experience and the lot of African American slaves were recognized and commented upon by African American theologians, historians and politicians as well as by musicians and writers. In addition to the obvious prevalence in African American slave songs, spirituals and gospels of characters and events from the Hebrew Bible, the ambivalent but ever-present idea of return as expressed in both Zionism and the 'back-to-Africa movement'[22] can be considered one of the key parallels between the two diaspora experiences. Following up on Brent Hayes Edwards's claim in "The Uses of Diaspora" (2001) that the notion of the African/black diaspora as analogous to the Jewish Diaspora had been present for significantly longer than the emergence of the first academic publications on the topic dating from the mid-1960s suggests (Edwards 2001: 49), Stéphane Dufoix has been able to identify occurrences of the terms or notions of Negro diaspora, black diaspora, and African diaspora in relation or analogy to the Jewish Diaspora starting as early as 1916 (Dufoix 2013: 3). Nevertheless, it was only in the second half of the twentieth century, in the context of the changes wrought by the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. as well as by decolonization and independence movements in the Caribbean and in Africa that American scholars and parts of the general public discovered the term 'African Diaspora.' As George Shepperson explains in one of the field's inaugural essays, it was used to describe "the status and prospects of persons of African descent around the world as well as at home" (Shepperson 1993: 44). In his careful analysis of the emergence of the concept and its epistemological implications, Edwards

[19] When used in this classical sense, the term is usually capitalized and used in the singular (Cohen 2008: 1).
[20] "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, […] the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, even wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life" (*King James Bible*, Deuteronomy 28: 58-66).
[21] Today both the Jewish Diaspora and the African diaspora, as well as the Armenian and the Irish diaspora are commonly categorized as victim diasporas (Cohen 2008: 4).
[22] Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832–1912) and Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) are key figures in this context. Marcus Garvey was hailed and presented himself as a 'Black or Negro Moses' intent on leading 'his people' home. The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which Garvey founded and spear-headed, attracted many supporters worldwide and is perhaps best remembered for its 'Back to Africa' and 'Africa for the Africans' slogans as well as the Black Star Line Steamship Corporation (1919-1922) (Guterl 2009: 38; Grant 2008).

emphasizes that the turn to African diaspora by academics like Shepperson and fellow historian Joseph Harris and subsequently by parts of the African American community can best be understood as resulting from the need to find an alternative to the concept of Pan-Africanism/pan-Africanism which, at that point, was considered to carry cumbersome political overtones (Edwards 2001: 49). As he explains, Pan-Africanism, refers to "a discourse of internationalism aimed generally at the cultural and political *coordination* of the interests of peoples of African descent around the world" (Edwards 2001: 46; italics in the original) or, as W.E.B. Du Bois memorably put it in 1933, "Pan-Africa means intellectual understanding and co-operation among all groups of Negro descent in order to bring about at the earliest possible time the industrial and spiritual emancipation of the Negro peoples" (Du Bois 1933: 247; quoted in Edwards 2001: 46). In order to differentiate the "clearly recognizable movement" of Pan-Africanism proper (with a capital P), which is "clearly connected to the five Pan-African congresses" and the figure of Du Bois, from a less defined political and cultural interest in Africa and African matters, Shepperson suggested that "'pan-Africanism' with a small letter" could refer not to "a clearly recognizable movement" but "rather [to] a group of movements, many very ephemeral" (Shepperson 1962: 346). Even though one can still find a differentiation between Pan-Africanism and pan-Africanism in some of the more recent literature on the topic, Shepperson's attempt to distinguish solely by means of capitalization between the specific early 20th-century political and intellectual movement on the one hand and other movements that shared some of its interests but not its form of organization on the other hand ultimately failed to secure the survival and transdisciplinary proliferation of the term, which in the eyes of many had become contested as nationalist, essentialist, Eurocentric and masculinist. Consequently, Shepperson's own turn to the concept of African diaspora in "The African Diaspora – or The African Abroad" (1966) stresses the transtemporal and transspatial nature of the concept (Shepperson 1966: 76-77), which was supposed to counteract "the isolationist, restricted spirit in African historical study" (Shepperson 1966: 91) prevalent in his day and illuminate the contributions of dispersed Africans – overseas and on the African continent – to "universal history" (Shepperson 1966: 91). Edwards elucidates the political and implications and possibilities of the turn toward diaspora and also points to some potential hazards of this move:

> The point is not that *diaspora* is apolitical but that it has none of the "overtones" that make a term like *Pan-Africanism* already contested terrain. In this sense, the turn to *diaspora* as a term of analysis allows for an account of black transnational formations that attends to their

> constitutive differences, the political stakes of the organization of the "African abroad." The accepted risk is that the term's analytic focus "fluctuates." Like *Pan-African*, it is open to ideological appropriation in a wide variety of political projects, from anticolonial activism to what has long been called "Black Zionism"—articulations of *diaspora* that collapse the term into versions of nationalism or racial essentialism. (Edwards 2001: 54; italics in the original)

As evidenced by Brubaker's warning against turning diaspora into a mere buzzword without much analytical accuracy (Brubaker 2005: 1), the shortcomings and dangers that Edwards identifies in the context of the paradigm shift described above remain valid concerns – with regard both to the general concept of diaspora and to the specific concept of the African diaspora. Nevertheless, the turn towards the concept of (African) diaspora begun in the mid-1960s has, in fact, led to a gradual reconfiguration of the theoretical and analytical frameworks, such that scholars no longer simply seek for similarities and continuities among members of the African diaspora in different parts of the world at different points in time, but rather have begun to accommodate multiplicity and address issues resulting from discontinuities and differences across the African diaspora.[23]

The proliferation of studies about the African diaspora and of those that chose to make the concept their critical, analytical lens after 1965 was, of course, also due to a growing interest in and need for general studies about the phenomenon of diaspora as migratory movement increased worldwide. In the later twentieth century, a number of social scientists and historians discovered the usefulness of the concept in describing and analyzing a variety of phenomena and experiences related to exile, displacement and migration and established an entire field of study investigating these issues: diaspora studies. In the course of this development, the term was liberated from its ties solely to the notion of victim diasporas. As other groups, such as the *Gastarbeiter* in Germany, former imperial subjects in Britain and deterritorialized communities like the Roma became recognized as different types of diaspora[24] communities, the connotations of the term 'diaspora' also underwent a gradual but significant shift. Where diaspora was once only associated with victimhood, loss, pain, the impossibility of return as well as passivity and

[23] Although she recognizes that the concept of African diaspora can be and, in fact, has been employed and adapted productively by a great number of scholars from a variety different academic fields, Tina M. Campt, for instance, cautions against the dangers of turning diaspora into "*the* requisite approach or theoretical model through which one should (or perhaps must) understand all formations of Black community, regardless of historical, geographical, or cultural context" (Campt 2004: 174; italics in the original).

[24] Conceding that hybrid forms of diasporas are common, Cohen lists five ideal types of diasporas: victim diasporas, labor diasporas, imperial diasporas, trade diasporas and deterritorialized diasporas (Cohen 2008: 18).

impotence, studies of other types of diasporas have shifted the focus to the potentials for new beginnings, the creation of hybrid identities, communities and cultures, as well as the agency of individuals living in the diaspora. In his 1991 essay, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” William Safran proposes a definition of the concept of diaspora that, though still taking the Jewish diaspora as its basis, allows for the transference of the concept onto other “expatriate minority communities” (Safran 1991: 83) According to Safran, the members of diaspora communities have several of the following six characteristics in common:

> 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (Safran 1991: 83-84)

Safran’s characterization of diaspora communities shares many of the features commonly associated with the concept of the African diaspora as it was defined from the mid-1960s onwards. While Safran’s definition of the concept of diaspora enables the inclusion of a more diverse set of diasporic communities than earlier definitions of the prototypical victim diaspora, his definition casts both the diasporic community and its (ancestral) homeland as rather monolithic and essentialist entities and the relationship between the members of the diasporic community and their (ancestral) homeland as static. As Braziel and Mannur note, Safran’s definition, like other early attempts to define diaspora in monolithic and static terms, fails to account for the heterogeneity of any given diaspora community (Braziel and Mannur 2016: 166), although, as has since become accepted, “[diaspora] does not transcend difference of race, class, gender and sexuality, nor stand alone as an epistemological or historical category of analysis” (Braziel and Mannur 2003,

5).[25] Foregrounding the significance of common cultural roots and emphasizing the need for a physical and/or psychological return to the ancestral homeland, early attempts to define the concept of the African diaspora were plagued by a similar failure to account for heterogeneity, difference and intersectionality. Safran's own discussion of the diasporic status of "black Americans," which characterizes them as the descendants of victims of involuntary dispersal and forced labor who share a "homeland myth" that "can no longer be precisely focused" (Safran 1991: 90), is a case in point. In addition, an almost exclusionary focus on the significance of the homeland myth presupposes the existence of a singular myth of an ancestral homeland, a notion which fails to accommodate the different homeland myths within a community as heterogeneous as the African diaspora. Invoking the homeland of their parents, the homeland myth of first or second-generation immigrants from the Caribbean or Africa is different from and takes on a different significance than the homeland myth of African Americans, for whom the notion of the ancestral homeland, if it is regarded as significant at all, remains highly ambivalent. Therefore, as the analyses in the subsequent chapters will show, the notion/myth of the ancestral homeland alone, while still significant in different ways and to different degrees within different texts, fails to serve as a suitable paradigm for accounting for the experiences of the diverse subgroups within the African diaspora.

Examining the special case of the Caribbean diaspora, which has emerged from a fusion of Carib-Indian, African, European, Asian, and American ('New World') cultural, social, religious and linguistic influences, Stuart Hall's 1990 essay on cultural identity and diaspora[26] must be understood as a critique of early diaspora models based primarily on the Jewish model and the idea of a return to the homeland, as it warns against the tendency to reduce, purify and homogenize. As Hall explains:

> "[…] diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return [. …] The

[25] Safran's definition has since been extended and adapted by Cohen. In the two editions of his *Global Diasporas – An Introduction* (1999 and 2008) he has added three new characteristics. His definition not only includes the common motives for migration of labor diaspora communities, trade diaspora communities and imperial diaspora communities, but also acknowledges the special creative potential of diasporic formations. Furthermore he claims that the formation of a return-home-movement is a frequent phenomenon and gives a more detailed description of how knowledge about the (ancestral) homeland is transmitted within diasporic community (Cohen 2008: 17). Even though Cohen's definition of the concept of diaspora is more sophisticated than Safran's and clearly aims to also characterize twenty-first-century diasporic formations, in the ultimate table listing his version of the "common features of diaspora" (Cohen 2008: 17) does not explain that or how gender, class, ethnicity or race impact diasporic formations - despite having discussed demands by Floya Anthias (1998) to acknowledge the significance of gender, race and class to the study of diasporic formations and to reevaluate both the formation and the political significance of transethnic solidarities developing along the lines of gender and class (Cohen 2008: 20).

[26] Quotations from the essay, which was originally published in 1990, are taken from its 1994 republication.

> diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*. (Hall 1994: 401-402; italics in the original)

Hall's understanding of diasporas as heterogeneous, diverse and ultimately hybrid formations is closely tied to his model of cultural identity. Uniting two opposed but, in fact, interrelated conceptualizations of cultural identity, Hall contends that the tensions between and the negotiation of ambiguities between similarities and differences as well as between continuities and discontinuities (Hall talks of both "discontinuities and "ruptures" [Hall 1994: 394] in this context) are defining characteristics of diasporic lives. To him, the notion that a group's common, essential cultural identity is rooted in a common history, ancestry and collective experience coexists with the insight that, since they are "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (Hall 1994: 394), cultural identities are not stable but subject to change and transformation. Hall acknowledges that the notion of a common authentic cultural identity was not only especially important to past anti- and postcolonial movements such as Négritude and Pan-Africanism, but has also remained "a powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalised peoples" (Hall 1994: 393). At the same time, he maintains that "[c]ultural identity […] is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'" and that it therefore "belongs to the future as much as to the past" (Hall 1994: 394). Hall employs Jacques Derrida's notion of "différance" (difference and deferral) (Hall 1994: 397), and borrows terms from Aimé Césaire and Leopold S. Senghor in order to define Caribbean cultural identities as the play of three dominant presences: "*Présence Africaine.*" "*Présence Européenne,*" and "the sliding term, *Présence Américaine*" (Hall 1994: 398; italics in the original). In Hall's configuration, *Présence Africaine* figures as "site of the repressed" (Hall 1994: 398). *Presénce Européenne* is the site of colonialist discourses and colonialist epistemologies (Hall 1994: 399-400), while *Présence Américaine* or the "New World" (Hall 1994: 401) presence is identified both as a site of (cultural) confrontation, "the fateful/fatal encounter […] between Africa and the West," (Hall 1994: 401) and as a site of transformations and of different processes negotiating "creolizations and assimilations and syncretisms" (Hall 1994: 400-401). Hall asserts that, as a result of the conditions of its emergence, the (Afro-) Caribbean diaspora, instead of being united by its desire to return to a mythical/ancestral homeland like the Jewish victim Diaspora, is united by a shared history and experience of forced dispersal as well as by hybridity and "the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity

and diversity" (Hall 1994: 402) As a result of increased migration from the Caribbean to the centers of former colonial or current neocolonial powers, large (Afro-)Caribbean diaspora communities in the U.S. or Europe, must be characterized as "twice diasporized" (Hall 1995: 6).[27]

As a number of scholars have observed (Chevillon 2002: 359-60; Mayer 2005: 84), Hall's exploration of heterogeneity, difference, and hybrid cultural identities that can be described as both 'rooted' and 'routed,'[28] resonates deeply with the notions presented in Gilroy's groundbreaking study *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). This historically specific examination of the role played by nineteenth- and twentieth-century black British and African American thinkers and artists in the making of a "counterculture of modernity" (Gilroy 1993: 5) is a truly transdisciplinary work, drawing on the disciplines of history, sociology, cultural studies and literary criticism. Even though neither its transnational approach to the study of African diaspora history and culture nor the term 'black Atlantic' was entirely new,[29] it was Gilroy's publication that made the paradigm of the black Atlantic popular and influential across the Humanities. While initially particularly attractive to metropolitan cultural theorists and scholars of postcolonial literature and theory, who, like Gilroy himself, are deeply suspicious of the modern nation state and its underpinning ideologies and whose works consequently focus on concepts such as syncretism, fusion and hybridity, the notion of the black Atlantic has since become a staple in the study of African diaspora history as well as in the study of its cultural and artistic production. Jonathan Elmer suggests that Gilroy's work has been so "unusually influential not through sharpening analytic concepts, but from loosening them and encouraging their recombination in new configurations" (Elmer 2005: 161).

Gilroy convincingly outlines why "the black Atlantic," conceived of as a "rhizomorphic, fractal structure of [...] transcultural, international formation" (Gilroy 1993: 4), should be viewed "as one single, complex unit of analysis" (Gilroy 1993: 15) in fields of study other than history and economics. His anti-nationalist and anti-essentialist approach to the analysis of black Atlantic culture produced on the continents and on the

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[27] Kincaid's character of Dr. Weizenger in *Mr. Potter* is constructed to serve as an example of a triply diasporized inhabitant of Antigua or the Caribbean. The character can be understood as an invitation to ponder the question who, in the wake of the worldwide upheavals of the early- and mid-twentieth century, can claim to belong anywhere.

[28] Like Hall and Gilroy before him, James Clifford (1994) also relies on the homonym 'routes' and 'roots' to challenge essentialist notions of rootedness, by foregrounding that any rootedness is the result of prior processes of travel, migration and cultural exchange via routes.

[29] Robert Farris Thompson first used the term in his 1983 publication *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. He outlines his 'black Atlantic' approach in the introduction entitled "The Rise of the Black Atlantic Visual Tradition."

islands that are central to this study has the stated aim of "produc[ing] an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (Gilroy 1993: 15) that favors 'routes' over 'roots' and employs the chronotope of the ship as "a central organizing symbol" because the image of a ship, "a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion[,]" crisscrossing the Atlantic, "immediately focus[es] attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts" (Gilroy 1993: 4). The image of the ship, which is so central to Gilroy's conceptualization of the black Atlantic, does not simply recall the passivity and impotence of – to use Hortense Spillers's influential formulation – becoming "the culturally 'unmade,' thrown in the midst of a figurative darkness that 'exposed' the [African captives'] destinies to an unknown course" (Spillers 1987: 71) from which most of the African diasporic presence in the New World and Europe originates. Instead, for Gilroy, the image of the ship can also be read as a symbol of African American, Afro-European and Afro-Caribbean countercultural agency. As his examination of the intellectual legacies of Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Delaney, Richard Wright and others demonstrates, transatlantic travel aboard ships has facilitated "various struggles towards emancipation, autonomy, and citizenship" (Gilroy 1993: 16). Gilroy's study has two aims: One the one hand, he purposefully situates those black Atlantic intellectuals whose contributions he examines simultaneously within and outside of a Western history of modernity in order to establish their status vis-à-vis their peers within a history of ideas as equal or equally significant instead of peripheral (Gilroy 1993: 48-49). His discussion of their works calls attention to the fact that Western modernity and especially the Enlightenment's narrative of progress are steeped in contradictions: Any civilizational advances of modernity must, in fact, be described as "insubstantial" or even as "pseudo-advances" (Gilroy 1993: 55), since they would have been unthinkable without the numerous, systemic instances of inhumanity that made possible and perpetuated both racial hierarchies and a myriad of resulting systems of racial oppression, of which plantation slavery was only one (Gilroy 1993: 55, 63). On the other hand, in celebrating the black Atlantic as a site of continuous, fertile transnational cultural and intellectual exchange as well as the site of a transnational fight for freedom from racially motivated discrimination and violence, Gilroy's paradigm is also designed to serve as an explicit intervention against the resurging "nationalist" and "ethnically absolute" identity discourses of the 1980s and 1990s (Gilroy 1993: 15). By drawing attention to the similarities between the exclusionary ideologies of both black nationalism and the far

Right, Gilroy can convincingly condemn nationalist and essentialist positions in all their shapes and guises (Gilroy 1993: 34) – something of which he believes existing diaspora paradigms to be ultimately less capable, perhaps even incapable (Gilroy 1996: 21).[30] The black Atlantic paradigm then allows for moments of identification and unity beyond, or even in opposition to, the nation state by combining the remembrance of a shared history of oppression across the black Atlantic due to racist violence with a celebration of the resistance against this oppression and the fight for political and cultural liberation. The discussion of the musical production of the black Atlantic in the third chapter of Gilroy's study demonstrates particularly dramatically how he favors models of cultural hybridity over those valorizing the singular authenticity of roots. He contends that "[m]usic and its rituals can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction" (Gilroy 1993: 102). In this context the notion of the "changing same" (Gilroy 1993: 106), originally introduced by LeRoi Jones, becomes important. As Gilroy explains elsewhere, "the changing same is not some invariant essence that gets enclosed in a shape-shifting exterior" (Gilroy 1996: 22). Instead, through iteration, "[t]he same is retained but not reified" and by being simultaneously "maintained and modified" it becomes a "determinedly non-traditional tradition" (Gilroy 1996: 22).[31] Gilroy's notion of a "determinedly non-traditional tradition" (Gilroy 1996: 22) aptly describes the kind of tradition and canon that the novels discussed in this study establish. Emerging and connected in a rhizomatic mode, these texts discursively maintain but simultaneously modify key insights regarding the African diaspora.

[30] Gilroy's relationship to the concept of diaspora is an ambivalent one. Although he repeatedly addresses the issue of diaspora in his work, the black Atlantic paradigm does not succeed in rendering the African diaspora paradigm obsolete. He concedes that the diaspora concept can be valuable in attempting "to specify differentiation and identity in a way which enables one to think about the issue of racial commonality outside of constricting binary frameworks" (Gilroy 1993: 120) and elsewhere even goes so far as to characterize the black Atlantic paradigm as "a supplement to existing formulations of the diaspora idea" (Gilroy 1996: 22) that "provides an invitation to move into the contested spaces between the local and the global in ways that do not privilege the modern nation state and its institutional order over the sub-national and supra-national networks and patterns of power, communication and conflict that they work to discipline, regulate and govern" (Gilroy 1996: 22). But ultimately he remains suspicious of the concept of diaspora, both in his 1993 study and in the 1996 essay, because he is unsure whether its pluralistic definition will be able to successfully eradicate the essentialist and ethnically absolutist ideas originally connected to the concept (Gilroy 1996: 21). As a result, he does not consider the concept of diaspora to be invested with the same political potentials that Edwards ascribes to it in "The Uses of Diaspora" (2001).

[31] See also Gilroy (1993: 198).

The blind spots in Gilroy's study have been identified and dissected in numerous scholarly articles.[32] Here I will address only those shortcomings that contributed to my decision to favor the concept of the African diaspora over the paradigm of the black Atlantic in this study. Even though Gilroy's more recent work has become slightly more aware of and responsive to the contributions of women to black Atlantic culture, his 1993 study's privileging of the male intellectuals of the black Atlantic tradition makes one wonder why exactly, in a study invested in tracing a counterculture, he did not deem it necessary to include the decidedly not insignificant contributions of female intellectuals and artists to the black Atlantic tradition. To some degree, this dissertation, like Samantha Pinto's 2013 study, *Difficult Diasporas: The Transnational Feminist Aesthetic of the Black Atlantic*,[33] came into being and took shape as a response to the failure of Gilroy's otherwise alluring transnational and transdisciplinary reconfigurations of a field of study to give space to female black Atlantic contributions and experiences. Unlike Pinto's study, which seeks to remedy the silences of the original paradigm by focusing on the generically diverse transnational and feminist works of black Atlantic female poets and novelists, my study deliberately chooses an African diasporic framework in order to address not only the masculinist bias of Gilroy's original paradigm, but also its Anglo-American bias. Even though allegedly invested in encouraging transnational cultural and intellectual processes of exchange, Gilroy's study diminishes the crucial role of the Caribbean in the exchanges of people, goods, cultural production and ideas across the black Atlantic. He does not fully acknowledge the islands' cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and artistic heterogeneity and their complex intellectual histories. One can even argue that his study avoids any real engagement with the African continent and the contributions of its intellectuals to the black Atlantic. Since this dissertation investigates the literary oeuvres of diasporic feminist writers from the Anglophone Caribbean, the Francophone Caribbean and Nigeria (West Africa), which have both been created and are best understood as emerging and existing in vertical/non-hierarchical, rhizomatic relation to one another, the black Atlantic paradigm with its Anglo-American bias does not seem to be adequate. While the writers discussed in this dissertation share many of Gilroy's concerns about the dangers and failures of the

[32] See, for instance, Gikandi (1996) and Dayan (1996). Highlighting the example of Haitian migrants/refuges, Dayan notes that "Gilroy's Middle Passage stops short of its evolution into the new middle passage of those who do not choose to leave their homes in celebration of 'nomadism,' but are forced out because of dire economic facts and political terrors […]" (Dayan 1996: 13).

[33] Pinto characterizes her study as emerging from her dissatisfaction with Gilroy's silences regarding women's contributions "Encountering Gilroy's model was an exercise in critical desire and alienation — how could I not appreciate the transnational turn that complicated definitions of blackness beyond America's borders? How, too, could I not notice the near silence on women's writing and cultural expressions that haunts the text's new and sweeping conceptualization of the field" (Pinto 2013: 6).

modern nation state model as well as suspicions of "ethnically absolutist" notions of identity and belonging, their desire to maintain strong ties to and truly engage with precisely those geographical locations that Gilroy relegates to the sidelines as well as their status as diasporic feminist writers and activists does not satisfactorily align with the paradigm of black Atlantic.

More recent attempts to arrive at a more inclusive definition of the black Atlantic do not solve these issues either. Peter Erickson's relatively successful rephrasing of the key characteristics of the black Atlantic may serve as an example of a definition that, while not altogether apolitical, has lost some of Gilroy's original precision:[34]

> The Black Atlantic is both a *literal* and a *metaphorical place*. As a *geographical zone*, it is the body of water bounded by Europe, Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean. As a *political location*, it marks the *historical site* of the Middle Passage, the triangular routes of the slave trade. As a *cultural arena*, it represents the *imaginative space* over which artistic passages and exchanges have crisscrossed and flourished" (Erickson 2009: 58, emphasis mine).

Although Erikson addresses the key elements of Gilroy's paradigm, he does little to redress the shortcomings of Gilroy's initial formulation outlined above. His silence on the question of gender and failure to fully rectify the "hemispheric limitations" (Edwards 2001: 63) of Gilroy's model have led Edwards to ask provocatively about the existence of a "black Pacific" (Edwards 2001: 63) and Colin A. Palmer to wonder whether, if there is a black Atlantic, there should also be also be its opposite, a "White Atlantic" (Palmer 2000:31). In addition, Erickson's omission of any explicit reference to diasporic formations points to other unresolved issues of the black Atlantic paradigm. Even more than Gilroy's original formulations, Erickson's definition of the black Atlantic creates the impression that the paradigm is, above all, suitable for an investigation of the past. While for Gilroy, the black Atlantic incorporates the collective memory of the atrocities of the Middle Passage as well as the fight for freedom from slavery, racist violence, and racial discrimination, there is a tendency in black Atlantic scholarship to overemphasize both the originary and the unifying potentialities of the Middle Passage. The adherence to what Michelle Wright has termed the "Middle Passage epistemology" (Wright 2015: 14)[35] makes it difficult to

[34] In other cases, Gilroy's original political motivation, the interventionist impetus of his work, has been lost almost completely.

[35] According to Wright, the Middle Passage epistemology, which she characterizes as a "linear progress narrative" (Wright 2015: 26) and comes to criticize and to deem lacking, "negotiates the complexity of the origins of Blackness in the West by stressing the process of being ripped from one existence and brutally

account for all those events, narratives and ideas in an African diasporic context that do not originate in the Middle Passage. For instance, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's African diaspora novel *Americanah* cannot very satisfactorily be connected via the Middle Passage to the African diaspora canon my study maps. In Danticat's case such a maneuver seems more manageable, but, as with Adichie, her relationship to the other authors and texts becomes much clearer if one turns from the historical past to the more recent past, or even better toward the questions of whether or how different subgroups of the African diaspora are connected across national borders in the present and can continue to be thus connected in the future. Although both Marshall and Kincaid explicitly and repeatedly refer to the Middle Passage in their works their remembrance or commemoration of a shared originary trauma that is transmitted transgenerationally through culture takes different forms. These differences then allow them to answer the question of what it means to be or conceive of oneself as part of the African diaspora both in the present moment and in the future very differently. For all of these authors, being oriented toward the present moment and invested in the future of the African diaspora results from their status as diasporic women writers in a U.S. context. Thus an African diaspora framework seems more appropriate than a black Atlantic framework for studying their works.

The imperfections of the African diaspora concept, which to some will always weaken or even disqualify it, can also be regarded as its most significant strengths. Unwieldy, contested and ultimately without a fixed definition, the stand-in 'umbrella term' African diaspora functions as a 'performative' term whose ambivalence and indeterminacy draw attention to its own constructedness and openness. Ideally, this should remind those who use it to keep asking those difficult questions about belonging, exclusion and applicability.

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thrust into another; it forces us to question the very heart and intention of white Western democratic discourses by presenting centuries of the moral and ethical corruption of chattel slavery and the equally corrupt logic that attended its constant justification; it belies those anti-Black discourses of African inferiority by presenting an endless fountain of thinkers, warriors, scientists, politicians, activists, artists, and entrepreneurs who achieved far more than the supposedly superior white majority" (Wright 2015: 14). She observes that the Middle Passage epistemology ultimately tends to erase all those identities and narratives that "do not fit a heteronormative masculine definition of Black progress" (Wright 2015: 27). Wright differentiates between a Middle Passage epistemology and a World War II/postwar epistemology, which, although still in part relying on the Middle Passage epistemology to orient its readings of the 'now' of objects, texts and phenomena, cannot be characterized as a linear progress narrative and should instead be visually "represented as a circle with many arrows pointing outward in all directions" (Wright 2015: 20). This visualization indicates the tendency of the postwar epistemology to "focu[s] always on the changing and multidimensional ways in which individuals constitute Blackness in any given moment" (Wright 2015: 178, note 19).

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1.4 From Female Ethnic *Bildungsromane* to African Diaspora Novels

Any attempt to define the term *Bildungsroman* runs the risk of rehashing entrenched controversies about the relative usefulness or uselessness of a term that has been used to describe both a very select number of European canonical texts and all prose texts depicting an individual's struggle to gain self-knowledge and to find his or her place in society.[36] Obviously, neither position does justice to the phenomenon of the *Bildungsroman*, which continues to evolve because the genre is both durable and surprisingly malleable. It is precisely the combination of tradition, rigidity and authority on the one hand and invention, permissiveness and subversive potential on the other hand that continues to inspire contemporary authors to explore the possibilities of the genre and participate in a process of perpetuation and re-writing that continues to make the *Bildungsroman* one of the most important and influential subgenres in the novel-writing tradition. Unsurprisingly, even Franco Moretti, who claims that the genre of the European *Bildungsroman*, as he defines it, came to its natural end when "a phase of Western socialization" which "the European *Bildungsroman* had both represented and contributed to" ended (Moretti 1987: 244), must somewhat grudgingly concede that the genre remains an important "conceptual horizon" (Moretti 1987: 14) for texts that to him are decidedly "*not Bildungsroman[e]*" (Moretti 1987: 15, italics in the original), but which many others, myself included, simply consider different kinds of *Bildungsromane*. It is self-evident that the contemporary *Bildungsromane* by Marshall, Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie that revolve around non-white diasporic *Bildungsheldinnen* differ significantly from early prototypical novels of the genre such as Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795/96),[37] which "emerged from the particular historical and intellectual circumstances of eighteenth-century Germany" (Abel et al. 1983: 5). Following Swales' proposal, I use

[36] For an overview the most important definitional controversies including scholarly attempts to differentiate between the special case of the German *Bildungsroman*, the English or European *Bildungsroman* and the *Entwicklungsroman,* see Hardin (1991). See also Martini (1991). Pin-chia Feng's demand to open up the term '(female ethnic) *Bildungsroman*' to include "any writing by an ethnic woman about identity formation of ethnic women, whether fictional or autobiographical in form" (Feng 1997: 15) exemplifies a tendency to blur genre designations even when it is not necessary.

[37] It was Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1941), who first put forth this idea in his discussion of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and Hölderlin's *Hyperion* in his 1906 study *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*. Dilthey writes: "Von dem Wilhelm Meister und dem Hesperus ab stellen sie alle den Jüngling jener Tage dar; wie er in glücklicher Dämmerung in das Leben eintritt, nach verwandten Seelen sucht, der Freundschaft begegnet und der Liebe, wie er nun aber mit den harten Realitäten der Welt in Kampf gerät und so unter mannigfachen Lebenserfahrungen heranreift, sich selber findet und seiner Aufgabe in der Welt gewiß wird" (Dilthey 1910: 293; qtd. in Mahoney 1991: 98 FN 3). Dilthey's publication also helped immensely to popularize the term *Bildungsroman* (Hardin 1991: xiv). For a translation into English, see: Dilthey, Wilhelm. *Poetry and Experience.* Ed. and trans. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985.

the term '*Bildungsroman*' "as a heuristic tool which makes possible the comparison of a number of texts" (Swales 1978: 161) that narrate a protagonist's physical, intellectual and emotional growth into adulthood.[38] Consequently, even though the readings presented in the subsequent chapters will analyze how and why the male-dominated *Bildungsroman* tradition is re-conceptualized in explicitly female (in some cases even feminist) as well as in ethnic or even in African diasporic terms, this study has no stake in redefining the term 'female ethnic *Bildungsroman*.' Instead, when it addresses questions of genre formation, it focuses on the question of why the negotiation of the African diaspora concept in feminist and transnational terms that Marshall, Kincaid, and Danticat begin in their female ethnic *Bildungsromane* can be continued in an appropriately and sufficiently complex manner only by leaving the *Bildungsroman* genre behind and turning to or inventing the African diaspora novel. Adichie's novel *Americanah*, is a special case in this regard, since, as my analysis in chapter five will show, it is a hybrid novel that combines features of the 'female-male (double) *Bildungsroman*' with features of the African diaspora novel.[39]

The reconceptualization of the male-dominated *Bildungsroman* tradition in explicitly female and ethnic terms represents an important step toward creating the new subgenre of the African diaspora novel. A brief and highly selective overview of key moments and debates in the relatively long and complex history of the *Bildungsroman* will illustrate how and to what effect the authors discussed in this dissertation reconceptualize the male-dominated *Bildungsroman* tradition and construct their own female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* before moving on to the new subgenre of the African diaspora novel.

Scholarly discussion of what makes *Bildungsromane* about and by immigrant, ethnic or 'minority' writers such as Marshall, Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie different from those *Bildungsromane* written by non-immigrant, non-minority writers generally employs the term 'ethnic *Bildungsroman*.' Only recently has the term 'diasporic *Bildungsroman*' entered the discussion. Neither of these terms adequately describes all four *Bildungsromane* under discussion. Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, which, when published in 1959, was one of the first female 'ethnic' *Bildungsromane* in American literature, falls relatively easily into the category, which accommodates both narratives

[38] The editors of *The Voyage In* similarly observe that since"[it] has become a tradition among critics of the *Bildungsroman* to expand the concept of the genre: first beyond the German prototypes, then beyond historical circumscription, now beyond the notion of *Bildung* as male and beyond the form of the developmental plot as a linear, foregrounded narrative structure. [Their] reformation participates in a critical tradition by transforming a recognized historical and theoretical genre into a more flexible category whose validity lies in its usefulness as a conceptual tool" (Abel et al. 1983: 13-14).

[39] Adichie's debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), takes the form of a much more conventional contemporary female *Bildungsroman* set in post-independence Nigeria.

written by and about U.S. citizens who are considered 'ethnic minorities' (African American literature used to be considered 'ethnic literature') and narratives written by and about recent immigrants to the U.S. The category of the 'ethnic' *Bildungsroman* fits Kincaid's, Danticat's and especially Adichie's *Bildungsromane* decidedly less well, although both Danticat's and Kincaid's novels have frequently been characterized as ethnic *Bildungsromane* in the scholarly literature. My uneasiness about the term's relative inadequacy in describing the *Bildungsromane* by Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie is indicated by the frequent use of parentheses around the word 'ethnic' in this study. I have, however chosen to refer to all *Bildungsromane* under discussion in this study as female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane*, because I hope that this designation will help to differentiate clearly between each author's early *Bildungsroman* and her subsequent African diaspora novel. Of course, the fact that the term fits Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's novels so relatively badly also indicates that these authors have had to reconfigure the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* to a much greater degree than Marshall in order to be able to tell their protagonists' stories and simultaneously accommodate complex negotiations of diasporic female formation, identification and disidentification within the confines of the genre.

Since the *Bildungsroman* genre flourished in the 19th century and spread throughout Western European national literatures, Moretti approaches it as a European rather than a national phenomenon and suggests that the *Bildungsroman* is the "'symbolic form' of modernity" (Moretti 1987: 5). He argues that the *Bildungsroman* took shape at a time when, due to the radical changes brought on by Europe's plunge into modernity, socialization processes became problematic instead of straightforward and predictable (Moretti 1987: 4-5). Subscribing to Enlightenment idealism's "belief in human perfectibility," "historical progress" and the "possibility of individual achievement" (Abel et al. 1983: 5),[40] early *Bildungsromane* stage socialization processes that lead to a successful social integration and thus a stabilization of the status quo, because the hero's experiential, emotional, moral and intellectual growth eventually equips him to successfully navigate the social space(s) of modernity with all their contradictions and challenges.[41] Moretti's remarks:

[40] See also Martini (1991).

[41] In *Vorlesung über die Ästhetik*, Hegel famously describes the outcome of the socialization process in the following manner: "Denn das Ende solcher Lehrjahre besteht darin, daß sich das Subjekt die Hörner abläuft, mit seinem Wünschen und Meinen sich in die bestehenden Verhältnisse und die Vernünftigkeit derselben hineinbildet, in die Verkettung der Welt eintritt und in ihr sich einen angemessenen Standpunkt erwirbt. Mag einer auch noch soviel sich mit der Welt herumgezankt haben, umhergeschoben worden sein, zuletzt

> When we remember that the *Bildungsroman* – the symbolic form that more than any other has portrayed and promoted socialization – is also the most contradictory of modern symbolic forms, we realize that in our world socialization itself first of all consists of the *interiorization of contradiction*. The next step being not to "solve" the contradiction, but rather to learn to live with it, and even transform it into a tool for survival. (Moretti 1987: 10; italics in the original).

This assessment of the underlying tensions of Western socialization processes as well as of the *Bildungsroman's* social function remains relevant even to the study of those *Bildungsromane* that fall outside the purview of his study.

As the *Bildungsroman* genre developed, the processes of formation and socialization it described became more varied and experiential, emotional and intellectual growth come to be more and more painfully gained – if gained at all. Whenever protagonists fail to achieve any significant growth, the story of their failed *Bildung* can be described as a "series of disillusionments or clashes with an inimical milieu" that "often culminate not in integration but in withdrawal, rebellion, or even suicide" (Abel et al. 1983: 6). It is only in the twentieth-century *Bildungsroman*, and particularly in its subgenre the *Künstlerroman*, that the protagonist's alienation, rootlessness and ultimate failure or unwillingness to integrate into society do not automatically result in disaster and/or death. In these novels, maintaining one's distance from others, particularly from the social elite, or being radically independent becomes not only permissible but also desirable.

Even though some scholars, such as Carol Lazarro-Weis, question the existence of "a separate female *Bildungsroman*" and view the genre designation rather as a politically or ideologically necessary invention emerging in the context of (Anglo-American) second-wave feminism (Lazarro-Weis 1990: 34), the number of studies produced as a result of the continuous critical engagement with the female *Bildungsroman* by (feminist) literary scholars since the 1970s confirm that the question of gender is, along with issues of race and class, of major importance in any discussion of the *Bildungsroman* genre today.[42]

Like the stories revolving around *Bildungshelden*, female *Bildungsromane* ultimately negotiate if and how the protagonist can find her place in society; however, both

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bekommt er meistens doch sein Mädchen und irgendeine Stellung, heiratet und wird ein Philister so gut wie die anderen auch; die Frau steht der Haushaltung vor, Kinder bleiben nicht aus, das angebetete Weib, das erst die Einzige, ein Engel war, nimmt sich ungefähr ebenso aus wie alle anderen, das Amt gibt Arbeit und Verdrießlichkeiten, die Ehe Hauskreuz, und so ist der ganze Katzenjammer der übrigen da" (Hegel 1985: Vol. 1, 567f; qtd. in Gutjahr 2007: 45).

[42] For a good introductory overview of the emergence and development of literary criticism of the female *Bildungsroman* in English, see Fluderer (1990).

this place and the route that may lead her to it differ significantly from those of the male protagonist. Although the female *Bildungsroman* has become more and more diverse in the past decades, key findings of early studies on nineteenth- and twentieth-century female *Bildungsromane* remain significant, as they point towards common tendencies that most female *Bildungsromane* still share. Examining questions of the genre's origin and definition, the editors of *The Voyage In – Fictions of Female Development* (1983) argue that the criteria according to which texts are included in or excluded from the canon of the *Bildungsroman* proper exhibit a masculinist bias[43] that excludes female narratives of *Bildung* from the canon precisely because the stories told in female *Bildungsromane* are different from those told in canonical male *Bildungsromane* (Abel et al. 1983: 7). They describe female *Bildungsromane* as characterized by a prolonged or belated development that runs a "less direct" course than that commonly found in male *Bildungsromane* (Abel et al. 1983: 7, 11). Identifying and explaining key differences between male *Bildungsromane* and selected nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels by female authors, Susan J. Rosowski proposes the terms "apprenticeship novel," and "novel of awakening" to both differentiate between and illustrate the different trajectories of narratives of male *Bildung* and female *Bildung* (Rosowski 1983: 49). She maintains that the term "novel of awakening" appropriately describes novels of female *Bildung*, because ultimately they narrate the female protagonists' "awakening to limitations" placed upon them by their families or to greater societal expectations that cannot be overcome (Rosowski 1983: 49). Even though the protagonists of Marshall's, Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's *Bildungsromane* encounter limitations due to their gender, race, class or immigrant/diasporic status, they are ultimately not stunted by them. As in Rosowski's model, these protagonists as well as their readers gain an acute awareness of why, how and by whom different limitations are placed upon them and women like them. Comparing the conventional developmental patterns of the protagonists in male and female *Bildungsromane*, Mary Anne Ferguson observes that while the male protagonist's development, even that of the alienated antihero, resembles a "spiral," taking him from humble and innocent beginnings not to an ending, but "to a new beginning on a higher plane," the female protagonist's development is "largely circular" (Ferguson 1983: 228). Female protagonists generally remain in the domestic sphere. They do not travel the world

[43] They show that Jerome Buckley's, at that time, widely accepted definition of the *Bildungsroman* systematically excludes narratives about female experiences and point out that his reading of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, which he deems to be about Tom Tulliver's *Bildung* rather than Maggie Tulliver's, is, in fact, a misreading of the novel that results from his own masculinist definition of the *Bildungsroman* (Abel et al. 1983: 7-9).

but are instead "initiated at home" so that "they may replicate the lives of their mothers" as married women (Ferguson 1983: 228). Ferguson also notes that those female protagonists who do attempt to break free of this conventional pattern of female development are usually punished by unhappiness, or even madness or death (Ferguson 1983: 228-229). Ferguson's observations are at least partly confirmed by of the plot trajectories of the novels discussed in this dissertation. While none of the protagonists in these female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* is doomed to live her life exclusively in a domestic sphere in which she does not find fulfillment, the novels' focus on family plots as well as on the presentation of the protagonists as part of and at odds with their largely female communities means that negotiations taking place in the domestic sphere remain important. These protagonists, however, also successfully enter and persevere in a public sphere whose structures are represented as at times hostile to both women and immigrants, and none of the female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* in this study presents an entirely failed process of social integration and *Bildung*. Ferguson's almost absolute distinction between the circular female and spiral male developmental patterns does not hold true for Marshall's, Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's novels. While Marshall's, Danticat's and Adichie's novels may initially appear to represent a circular female developmental pattern due to the fact that these narratives are narratives of return, they in fact represent a female variant of a spiral development. When Marshall's protagonist, Selina Boyce, sets out on a cruise to the Caribbean, she will, the reader is led to assume, also return to her parents' home island of Barbados. However, this return, which, for reasons to be explored in chapter two, is not represented in the novel, is not to be understood as an ending but as a new beginning and is therefore part of Selina's projected spiral developmental trajectory. In the course of Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory,* Sophie Caco twice returns to her childhood home in Haiti. Both times her returns are connected to important developmental moments in her life. Her second return to the island – to bury her mother – sees Sophie come into her own as an independent young woman who has grown strong enough to forgive her mother and claim part of her matrilineal heritage. Thus she clearly returns to the island on what Ferguson calls "a higher plane" (Ferguson 1983: 228). Ifemelu's return to Lagos in Part 7 of *Americanah,* too, can be characterized as part of a spiral developmental trajectory. In fact, at least with regard to travel, mobility, education and training, Ifemelu's story closely follows the conventional male *Bildungsroman* pattern. Kincaid's Lucy does not wish ever to return to the island of her birth; however, Kincaid's novels rely on a number of different narrative and intertextual strategies to stage returns

and circular movements across all of her texts. These strategies, which, as Leigh Gilmore observes, turn Kincaid's oeuvre into "an intertextual system of meanings" (Gilmore 2001: 98) with a serial character will be discussed in detail in chapter three.[44] It is self-evident that in the contemporary novels discussed in this dissertation questions of travel as well as geographical and social mobility are negotiated differently than in novels from earlier periods not only because women have gained more rights and become more mobile, but also because, as a result of increasing globalization in all areas of life in the twentieth century, global patterns of mobility have become more prominent and more diverse. Immigrants, sojourners, and diasporans like the female protagonists in Marshall's, Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane*, are at the forefront of this development.

The question of how female *Bildungsromane* end underlines the development I have been suggesting. Rachel Blau DuPlessis has examined how female authors of twentieth-century female *Bildungsromane*, "write beyond the [conventional] ending" (DuPlessis 1985: x) of marriage or death and present distinctly female patterns of *Bildung* – both with regard to plot and, in particular, with regard to form. She argues that while in nineteenth-century female *Bildungsromane*, quest (*Bildung*) and romance (love) plots produced contradictions that were usually resolved by abandoning the quest (*Bildung*) plot, twentieth-century women writers aim to present "a different set of choices" entirely (DuPlessis 1984: 3, 4). Since DuPlessis believes that "any fiction expresses ideology" (DuPlessis 1984: x), she reads the narrative transformation of nineteenth-century plots by twentieth-century authors as indicative of changes in ideology that these novels both represent and promote. According to DuPlessis, one way in which twentieth-century novelists write beyond the conventional endings familiar from nineteenth-century narratives of female development is by assigning special significance to the mother-daughter-relationship, particularly in *Künstlerromane* (DuPlessis 1985: 84-104). The representation of the mother-daughter-conflict in Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* comes closest to aligning with the patterns DuPlessis observes regarding twentieth-century female *Künstlerromane* which "reject narratives of heterosexual love and romantic thralldom" and instead represent "the filial completion of a thwarted parent's task" (DuPlessis 1984: 94). After completing her college degree, Selina, rejects love, security and marriage to become a professional dancer aboard a cruise ship. Her decision to follow

[44] In her study on trauma and testimony in autobiographies, Gilmore reads Kincaid's novels as a "serial autobiography" (Gilmore 2001: 100).

her passion and venture out into the world as an artist can be read as an action that fulfills both her parents' thwarted artistic ambitions. Her mother, Silla, is presented as a verbal virtuoso thwarted by gender, class, marriage and immigration to a country in which her accent singles her out and leaves her open to ridicule outside of the Barbadian immigrant community. Deighton, Selina's father, is portrayed as an aesthete and dreamer whose two ambitions, to gain recognition as a trumpet player and to return to Barbados a rich and respected man, are thwarted – both by circumstance and his own failure or inability to fully commit himself to a life in the U.S. Even though Selina fulfills Silla's thwarted ambitions, their conflicted relationship, which results in part from irreconcilable ideological differences regarding a (diasporic) woman's place and economic aspirations in her American host country/native land, structures the entire narrative. Kincaid's character Lucy, who aspires to be a photographer, is also presented as an 'artist-in-the-making.' However, Kincaid's female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman* does not allow for moments of re-connection and matrilineal continuity based on a mother's and a daughter's shared passion or talent for artistic creation. Instead, the novel patiently documents Lucy's attempts at self-formation by means of separation from and denial of the mother. In fact, in all female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* under discussion, the mother-daughter-relationship is best described as a volatile and multi-faceted conflict that allows for the exploration and negotiation of generational, ideological and linguistic differences. The obsessively staged and re-staged mother-daughter-conflict in Kincaid's *Lucy* illustrates these differences in a compelling manner. This conflict has been read as dramatizing the (post)colonial conflict between Britain and its (former) colonies; Moira Ferguson, one of the first scholars to comment on this fact, explains that in Kincaid's work motherhood is doubly articulated "as both colonial and biological" (Ferguson 1994: 1).[45] The mother figure in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, like mother figures in many contemporary diasporic matrilineal narratives,[46] is similarly overdetermined.

Both nineteenth- and twentieth-century female *Bildungsromane* exhibit "distinctive narrative tensions" that, as the editors of *Voyage In* attest, arise from having to realize "women's developmental tasks and goals" in a phallocentric/patriarchal society (Abel et al.

[45] In order to resolve some of the linguistic and conceptual confusion surrounding the conflation of the body of the mother with a body of land, Simone A. James Alexander proposes to distinguish between "*motherland*" or "*mother('s)land,*" as referring to the Caribbean, the land of the mother; "*Motherland(s)*," as referring to Africa and/or the Caribbean and "*mother country,*" as to referring to "dominant colonial powers" such as "England, France, or the United States" (Alexander 2001: 4).

[46] Tess Cosslett defines a matrilineal narrative as a narrative "which either tells the stories of several generations of women at once, or which shows how the identity of a central character is crucially formed by her female ancestors" (Cosslett 1996: 7).

1983: 12). Even though these tensions and conflicts are resolved or dealt with differently in the works addressed in this study than they are in those nineteenth and twentieth-century novels discussed in the essays in *The Voyage In*, many of the conventionally female developmental tasks described, like the negotiation of conflicts between "autonomy and relationship, separation and community, loyalty to women and attraction to men" (Abel et al. 1983: 12), remain challenges with which the protagonists in Marshall's, Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's *Bildungsromane* grapple. Similarly, the question of whether or at what cost the female protagonist may confront and challenge her community directly (Abel et al. 1983: 12) seems to be as at least as urgent to contemporary female non-white diasporic authors as it must have been to white nineteenth-century women authors. In addition, the question of how the female protagonist may express her sexuality and her desires (Abel et al. 1983: 12) has also lost little of its urgency for the contemporary authors discussed in this study.

Esther Kleinbord Labovitz addresses questions of access and social change in nineteenth-century female *Bildungsromane*. Aiming to explain the 'belated' emergence of the female *Bildungsroman*, she points out that the female variant of the *Bildungsroman* could come into being only after social changes that made *Bildung* both a possibility and a reality for women had occurred (Labovitz 1986; 6-7; quoted in Fuderer 1990: 2-3). The 'belated' emergence of the (female) ethnic *Bildungsroman* (as well as the genre's popularity in the postcolonial national literatures of the former British and French colonies) at a time when few European or Anglo-American writers were still drawn to the genre,[47] can partly be explained by considering issues of access to and exclusion form education, public discourse and publishing opportunities. Labovitz also states that since "the heroines of the female *Bildungsroman* challenge the very structure of society [by] raising questions of equality," the texts themselves also contribute to and promote further social changes (Labovitz 1986: 251; quoted in Japtok 2005: 27). Responding to Labovitz's findings, Martin Japtok claims that all ethnic *Bildungsromane* "challenge the 'structure of society' by 'raising questions of equality' with regard to ethnicity" (Japtok 2005: 27). He fails to mention, however, that the challenge to social structures becomes more distinct and more urgent when the ethnic *Bildungsromane* by non-white female diasporic authors, such as Marshall, Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie, demand both race and gender equality.

[47] The only variant of the *Bildungsroman* that attracted a significant number of European and Anglo-American writers and readers in the second half of the twentieth century was perhaps the Anti-*Bildungsroman*, for example John Irving's *The World According to Garp*, Günther Grass's, *Die Blechtrommel* (Braendlin 1983:75).

Bonnie Hoover Braendlin, who acknowledges the "double jeopardy [inherent] in the self-development processes of women in marginal cultures because they are both female *and* Black" (Braendlin 1983: 76; italics in the original), was one of the first scholars to study how ethnic women writers appropriate and transform the female *Bildungsroman*. She describes the emergence of a new American *Bildungsroman* written by a diverse group of "marginality-group authors" (Breandlin: 1983: 76):

> In contemporary American literature […] the *Bildungsroman* is being resuscitated, revived […] by societal outsiders, men and women of marginality groups. The *Bildungsroman* of these disenfranchised Americans – women, Blacks, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans, homosexuals – portrays the particular identity and adjustment problems of people whose sex or color renders them unacceptable to the dominant society; it expresses their struggle for individuation and a part in the American dream, which society simultaneously proffers and denies to them. (Braendlin 1983: 75)

She adds that since these new ethnic *Bildungsromane* are a means for asserting identities defined by the "societal outsiders" and their communities, the new *Bildungsromane* exhibit "a revaluation, a transvaluation, of traditional *Bildung* by new standards and perspectives" (Braendlin 1983: 75). Of the re- and transevaluations Braendlin identifies in her readings of female ethnic *Bildungsromane* by Louise Meriwether, Isabella Ríos and Alice Walker, only her observation that female *Bildung* is transvalued "through affirmation of traditional values such as family solidarity and matriarchal nurturance" (Braendlin 1983: 83) remains relevant for the novels discussed in this study. Despite the conflicted mother-daughter relationships represented in the novels by Marshall, Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie, the protagonists in these female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* continue to seek but often fail to find solidarity and nurturance within their biological, extended or chosen families.

In his study on nationalism and the *Bildungsroman* in African American and Jewish American fiction, Martin Japtok sets out to examine how ethnic "authors' conceptualizations of ethnicity affect how they use and mold their genre of choice" (Japtok 2005: 22). Japtok's study blends *Bildungsroman* and autobiography. He is not the first scholar to do so, because *Bildungsromane*, including the female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* discussed in this study, are often highly autobiographically inflected, and the autobiographical impulse, he argues, is especially prominent in ethnic *Bildungsromane*. His assessment aligns with Robert B. Stepto's observation that African American literature is "a prose literature dominated by autobiographical and *Bildungsroman* impulses" (Stepto 1979: 147; quoted in Japtok 2005: 23). Reiterating Braendlin's observations about

possibilities for self-definition offered in the ethnic *Bildungsroman*, Japtok explains that both *Bildungsromane* and autobiographies attract writers and readers because they offer counter-narratives, or at least "counter weights" to stereotypical notions and representations of ethnicity in dominant culture (Japtok 2004: 24). The "protagonist-centered writing" in both genres, he argues, allows writers to communicate authentic experiences both within and outside of their ethnic communities (Japtok 2004: 25). The desire to represent authentic experiences often requires authors of ethnic *Bildungsromane* to cast the conflicts in the novels not as personal, as do traditional (male) *Bildungsromane* (Buckley 1974: 22), but as societal (Japtok 2005: 26). It is only through this important reconfiguration of the traditional *Bildungsroman* that authors are able to explore issues such as structural racism, the dynamics of discrimination, the intersectionality of gender and race, and obstacles to integration/assimilation. Since Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's *Bildungsromane* identify and explore the emergence, effects and affects of structural inequalities and injustices in an explicitly postcolonial/neocolonial framework, their novels insist that the protagonist's individual conflict be understood as being part of or even being born of larger transnational, or even global societal conflicts. Although Marshall's *Bildungsroman*, dating from 1959, does not explicitly posit a postcolonial framework, Silla, a former British colonial subject, powerfully asserts difference along the lines of colonizers and colonized when she repeatedly categorizes World War II as "another white-man war" (*BGB* 64) in which she has no stakes. Furthermore, the intersecting set of conflicts that Selina has to solve combines and interconnects societal and individual conflicts. On the one hand, Selina's quest for *Bildung* is staged as her quest for visibility and voice that is denied to her by dominant culture because of her race and gender. On the other hand, she searches for self-knowledge as well as for an authentic form of artistic expression.

Generally, ethnic *Bildungsromane* "feature community involvement more prominently" (Japtok 2005: 27) than traditional *Bildungsromane*, which focus on representing the individual formation of the protagonist. However, one should be cautious about viewing an author's status as diasporic or ethnic as the sole reason for representing the identity formation of the individual protagonist as a process that necessitates a community's involvement, as Japtok does, since the focus on identity formation in community or as a communal endeavor can already be found in nineteenth- and twentieth-century as well as contemporary female *Bildungsromane* (Abel et.al. 1983: 12). Marshall's Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's *Bildungsromane* demonstrate that the need to

represent the protagonist as part of and at odds with her community allows the narratives to reveal the true scope of her marginalization and oppression both within her ethnic community and in a larger social context. In his study on Black British literature, Mark Stein argues that the Black British *Bildungsroman*, which he characterizes as a "novel of transformation," focuses so prominently on community because it "has a dual function: it is about the formation of its protagonist as well as the transformation of British society and cultural institutions" (Stein 2004: 22). In these novels society is not represented as a static entity; rather the texts represent how both the protagonists and the societies they live in are transformed. Stein also ascribes "a *performative function*" to these texts, which "mold" the very cultures they both describe and are inscribed by (Stein 2004: 36; italics in the original). The female ethnic Bildungsromane I discuss pay considerable attention to the representation of community structures in order not only to acknowledge existing patriarchal oppressions and racial discriminations but also to represent how these oppressive structures have been and can continue to be dismantled.

Given the Eurocentric and masculinist bias of the traditional European *Bildungsroman*, the cautionary or even dismissive attitude some postcolonial scholars exhibit when it comes to reading the works of postcolonial and diasporic authors within this framework is understandable. Maria Helena Lima perceptively articulates some of these concerns in her essay, "Imaginary Homelands in Jamaica Kincaid's Narratives of Development" (2002):

> I cannot help but continue to wonder what dangers lie in the form itself, given its central historical role in determining our notions of human identity. Since humanism's unstated goal, in both social and cultural realms, was to constitute a "center of humanity" that would function as an ideal norm and model of emulation for all peoples, what is the bildungsroman genre, recognizably one of the main carriers of humanist ideology, indeed helping to reproduce? (Lima 2002: 859)

Despite not being able to completely dispel these anxieties about the dangers of the *Bildungsroman* genre, Lima calls attention to the fact that Kincaid's reconfiguration and "rewriting" of the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* genre can also be understood as a "form of resistance" in which precisely those who tend to be marginalized by humanism's normative impetus appropriate the genre (Lima 2002: 859).

Marshall, Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie have successfully transformed and reconfigured the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* in ways that enable them to tell decidedly non-Eurocentric and non-masculinist narratives. Like Lima, I read these

reconfigurations and rewritings as acts of resistance against the tradition of the masculinist Eurocentric *Bildungsroman* and its ideological underpinnings. Despite the fact that the *Bildungsroman* can be tailored to accommodate some of the negotiations particular to narratives about female diasporic experiences, its progressive trajectory toward the resolution of conflicts as well as toward seamless integration/assimilation still determine and limit what can be negotiated in the female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman*. Lisa Lowe has written perceptively about this phenomenon in her study of Asian American cultural politics, *Immigrant Acts* (1996). She observes a tension "between the nationalist desire for resolution through representational forms and the unassimilable conflicts and particularities that cannot be represented by those forms" (Lowe 1994: 4). Drawing on examples from Western canonical literature as well as from ethnic/immigrant fiction, she argues that ethnic subjectivities can be accommodated in national(ist) representational forms such as the *Bildungsroman* only to the extent that they dispose of ethnic differences and particularities (Lowe 1994: 98-100). Marshall's, Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's turn to the African diaspora novel was prompted precisely because the *Bildungsroman*, even in its reconfigured form as female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman* fails to accommodate the nuanced negotiations of difference and particularities necessary for any valid attempt at recovery, renewal and reconfiguration of a global, (feminist) transnational African diaspora project at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Even though the term diaspora novel is occasionally used as a sort of umbrella term for different diasporic novels, no real attempt has been made to define it more precisely. The same holds true for the term 'African diaspora novel' – my own umbrella term employed in this study. So far, Monika Fludernik's essay "Imagined Communities as Imaginary Homelands: The South-Asian Diaspora in Fiction" (2003) is the only study to define and systematize subgenres of diasporic fiction. Limiting herself to narratives representing the South-Asian diaspora experience, Fludernik identifies the following four subgenres:

> 1 the novels of immigration and cultural exile that concentrate on an individual's journey of assimilation;
>
> 2 multicultural novels;
>
> 3 diaspora novels in which the collective identity of Indian migrants, expatriates and notabene second or third generation immigrants is at stake; and
>
> 4 cosmopolitan novels in which South Asian expatriates are portrayed as individuals (outside a diasporic community) and in which the process of assimilation either has been successfully completed or is not focused on the binaries of India vs. America/ Britain. In

> these novels the main South Asian protagonist is frequently married to a Westerner or person from another (non-South Asian) nationality and ethnicity. Sunetra Gupta's texts belong to this last category. (Fludernik 2003: 265)

Fludernik's discussion of the diaspora novel attempts to align elements of its plot with some of the characteristics of diasporic formations as defined by early diaspora scholars such as Safran. With regard to the novels discussed in this dissertation, however, Fludernik's subgenre differentiations seem difficult to uphold. Indeed, her definition of the diaspora novel as a novel preferably about established second-generation immigrants who "are part of a flourishing community in the host country that retains contacts with the mother country and (ideally) with South Asian [in the case of the novels under discussion read: members of the African diaspora community] across the globe," who "preserv[e] the image of an idealized homeland" and who, as a group, are "in the process of creating a self-image abroad, an imagined community of diasporic Indianness [read: 'diasporic Africanness']" (Fludernik 2003: 264) is difficult to apply to the African diaspora novels examined in this dissertation. Danticat's *The Dew Breaker* and Marshall's *The Fisher King* come closer to fitting Fludernik's categories than Adichie's *Americanah* and Kincaid's *Mr. Potter*, which could hardly be characterized as diaspora novels according to Fludernik's definition. Ultimately, attempts such as Fludernik's to design categories for these novels do little to facilitate analyses and interpretations of the African diaspora novels in this study. Rather, they encourage reductive readings that homogenize and hierarchize precisely where the novels demand that scholarly and readerly attention must be paid to the negotiation of heterogeneity and the diverse formations of non-hierarchical, rhizomatic relationships between individuals, nations and different political groupings as well as between different texts

Like my use of the term '*Bildungsroman*', the term 'African diaspora novel' allows me to group together and compare a number of heterogeneous novels that employ various narrative and representational strategies to represent and engage with the concept of a global(izing) African diaspora. These novels do not represent a singular, normative African diaspora experience. Instead their representations of life in the African diaspora underscore the heterogeneity and asymmetries of these experiences, while simultaneously seeking to reveal and establish commonalities and continuities within a shared experiential and imaginative field/terrain. This dual trajectory also allows the novels to explore the limits of the comparability of experiences as well as the limits of relationality. The alliances sought and established in these novels do not rely on essentialist conceptions of identity and

belonging. In their conscious effort to destabilize and thereby politicize notions of identity and belonging, they explore in great detail how gender inflects African diaspora experiences and whether the ideas of transnational feminism offer additional possibilities to form alliances within the African diaspora.

By organizing and examining the novels under discussion in a rhizomatic African diaspora framework, I hope to allow new discourses and dialogues to emerge or be seen more clearly. Any act of categorization is, of course, also a political act. But establishing a canon of African diaspora novels in a rhizomatic mode means that the categorization criteria have to remain open-ended and flexible enough to incorporate additional authors of the globalizing African diaspora. This canon potentially includes works by writers whose migration trajectories have not made them part of the U.S. frame of reference that determines the scope of this study. Indeed, the canon of the African diaspora novel extends beyond the scope of this study, as it can potentially be expanded to include works from other regions as well as works in languages other than English.

All the novels I discuss here, but especially the diaspora novels, also require and enable their readers to acquire what Vévé Clark has termed "diaspora literacy," "the ability [of readers as well as authors/narrators] to comprehend the literatures of Africa, Afro-America and the Caribbean from an informed, indigenous perspective," while simultaneously and actively taking into account the "socio-political culture issuing from four hemispheres of the African Diaspora" (Clark 1990: 304). The explicitly feminist positioning of the novels discussed here requires their readers to develop an explicitly feminist diaspora literary.

1.5 Making Feminism(s) Transnational in an African Diaspora Framework

Marshall, Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie have consciously positioned themselves within a transnational feminist movement – both through the novels they have written and through their intellectual presences in public life. When read in conjunction/in a rhizomatic mode, their novels map key developments in Anglo-American as well as transnational feminism, and point especially to the challenge posed to feminism by the issue of the representation of marginalized and subaltern groups.

Since there are as many ways to tell the history of feminism's development as there are feminisms, the brief and selective overview given below will be limited to those moments and debates in the history of feminism(s) that the novels under discussion in some way address or negotiate.

Often, the history of Western feminism is told by describing three major developmental phases within feminism as three distinct waves of feminism. Although the 'three-wave model' is not uncontested,[48] most historians and feminist scholars agree that it can be successfully employed to differentiate feminism's initial phase, first-wave feminism (1700s to 1960s), from second-wave feminism (1960s to 1980s), and third-wave feminism (1990s onwards) (Dhamoon 2013: 88).

Published in 1959, Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* appears to straddle the divide between first-wave and second-wave feminism, when, in fact, the novel clearly shares key concerns of second-wave feminism and participates in some of its key debates. Marshall's novel focuses on female experience and voice, thus filling the silences that, according to second-wave feminists, surround women's lives and histories. Furthermore, through its easily recognizable reliance on the author's personal experiences, her female ethnic *Bildungsroman*, like those by Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie, demonstrates that 'the personal is political' (and can be turned into art).[49] At the same time, the novel anticipates some of the major points of contention between second-wave and (radical) Black as well as third-wave feminism. Through its representation of the particular experiences of a diverse group of female first- and second-generation Barbadian-American immigrants and African Americans, the novel challenges the idea of 'woman' as a universal, homogenous category modeled after the experiences of middle- and upper-class white women residing in Europe and the U.S. *Brown Girl, Brownstones* began to explore how race, gender and class intersect decades before Kimberlé Crenshaw ever invented the term 'intersectionality' and both formalized and popularized its study in academia through her important contributions to critical race theory.[50] The republication of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* by The Feminist Press in 1981 and its subsequent rediscovery by both readers and literary scholars attest to its unique status as a 'trail blazer' feminist novel whose rise to real popularity depended

[48] See Snyder (2008) for an analysis of the continuities between second-wave and third-wave feminism that the 'three-wave-model' fails to represent.
[49] The slogan, "The personal is political" is often attributed to Carol Hanish who published an essay with the same title in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* in 1970. Second-wave feminist popularized the slogan and employed it to challenge the divide between the public and the private sphere. Second-wave feminists felt that this divide perpetuated traditional gender roles and asymmetrical power relationships. In the slogan, 'political' is used in a broad sense, as referring to power relationships.
[50] See Crenshaw (1989) and (1991).

upon the articulations and rise to prominence of (radical) Black feminism in the early 1980s.[51]

Ever since its (first documented) emergence in the days when Sojourner Truth fought for the abolition of slavery and simultaneously demanded to be recognized as female and equal, Black feminism has had to fight both misogyny and racism. Black feminism's more contemporary iterations have continued to address intersecting forms of discrimination. In the early 1980s both (radical) Black feminism and second-wave feminism began to turn their attention to the relationship between First World women and Third World women (of color).[52] Described as 'women of color feminism(s), as formulated by The Combahee River Collective in 1982, or as 'global' feminism later in the 1980s, feminism sought to explore the idea of a 'global feminist sisterhood' (Nagar and Swarr 2010: 3). The notion of global sisterhood, as advocated by Robin Morgan, serves as a good example of how second-wave feminism continued to homogenize women's experiences and struggles worldwide -- despite the efforts of feminists of color such as Audre Lorde to promote understanding and respect of difference among feminists. In her search for a global sisterhood, Morgan famously tried to establish commonalities between women that are neither "mystical" nor "biologically deterministic" but that arise as "the result of a *common condition* which, despite variations in degree, is experienced by all human beings who are born female" (Morgan 1984: 4; italics in the original). She further argues that shared oppression of women in and through patriarchy results in "shared attitudes among women which seem basic to a common world view" (Morgan 1984: 4). Morgan's notions regarding female sameness and her insistence on the comparability of female experiences across the globe came to be severely criticized by Black feminists[53] and white anti-racist feminists.[54] In many ways, these critiques anticipated the development of transnational

[51] See Gloria Hull et al.'s anthology *... But some of Us Are Brave (*1982), Barbara Smith's anthology *Home Girls: a Black Feminist Anthology (*1983). and also Moraga's, Anzaldúa's and Bambara's anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981).

[52] I use the terms 'Third World' and 'First World' in this section to reflect their usage in (feminist) discourse produced in the 1980s and 1990s. Even then critics had grown suspicious of the terms' ideological implications. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes, "terms like 'third' and 'first' world are very problematical both in suggesting over-simplified similarities between and amongst countries labeled 'third' or 'first' world, as well as implicitly reinforcing existing economic, cultural and ideological hierarchies which are conjured up in using such terminology. I use the term 'third world' with full awareness of its problems, only because this is the terminology available to us at the moment. The use of quotation marks is meant to suggest a continuous questioning of the designation 'third world.' Even when I do not use quotation marks, I mean to use the term critically" (Mohanty 1984: 354; FN3).

[53] See Collins (2000) for Patricia Hill Collins's understanding of women of color as 'outsiders within' esp. pp. 10-11. See Smith (2000/1983) for Barbara Smith's concept of "the simultaneity of oppressions" (xxx).

[54] See Rich (1986) for Adrienne Rich's 'politics of location,' an important contribution to white anti-racist feminism. Caren Kaplan warns, however, that "[a] politics of location is not useful when it is construed to be the reflection of authentic, primordial identities that are to be reestablished and reaffirmed. We should be

feminism, which was also prompted by the interventions of Third World/postcolonial feminist scholars, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

In her influential essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984), Mohanty criticizes "the production of the 'Third World woman' as a singular monolithic subject in some recent (Western) feminist texts" (Mohanty 1984: 333). She argues that feminism as a critical scholarly practice is itself implicated within and inscribed by relations of power that

> discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular "Third World Woman" — an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse" (Mohanty 1984: 334-335)

Mohanty explicitly calls out those self-aggrandizing feminist writings that produce and perpetuate a narrative of (almost) essentialist difference that casts Third World women in the role of passive victims in need of saving by white feminists, who – in contrast to the Third World women represented in their texts – represent themselves as active and in control of their lives (Mohanty 1984: 337). Similarly, she criticizes the exploitative tendency to emphasize Third World women's 'difference' and 'exoticism' for motives of profit and marketing – be it in (Western) feminist scholarship or by those who plan to diversify their curricula and syllabi through the inclusion of 'Third World literature' (Mohanty 2003: 77).

Addressing issues similar to those presented in Mohanty's essay, Spivak's essays "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985) and the seminal "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988)[55] have challenged scholars across the Humanities, but especially those studying (literary) representations, to question and study the ways in which the presences of colonized women or (female) subaltern subjects are rendered almost invisible or are severely distorted in texts and history. In "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Spivak accuses feminist criticism of "reproduc[ing] the axioms of imperialism" (Spivak 1985: 243) through its refusal to engage seriously with either Third World literature or the presences of non-white, non-Western characters in texts. She challenges feminist literary critics to acknowledge that the subject-formation of the female heroine in *Jane Eyre* and in other canonical narratives of female formation and

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suspicious of any use of the term to naturalize boundaries and margins under the guise of celebration, nostalgia, or inappropriate assumptions of intimacy" (Kaplan 1994: 139).

[55] Originally published in 1985.

empowerment often depends on the erasure of colonial presences, such as the presence of Rochester's first wife, Bertha Mason, "the woman from the colonies" (Spivak 1985: 251, 243-44). Spivak's essay can be read as a call to feminist literary critics to alter their intellectual and scholarly practices and combine feminist and postcolonial strategies of analysis in order to redress the blind spots in feminist criticism that it exposes.

"Can the Subaltern Speak?" examines issues of representation as well as questions of (subaltern) agency. As in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," Spivak undertakes an incisive critique of tendencies in Western academic and activist circles to reproduce colonial/imperial power relationships. Her critique of Western intellectuals' disregard for the complexities of issues of representation and questions of subaltern agency[56] explicitly calls out Foucault's and Deleuze's practices of speaking for the subaltern subject as though the subaltern subject were speaking for himself or herself.[57] But Spivak's critique is targeted at all those who do not sufficiently indicate, reflect and problematize their own positionality within dominant discourse when they produce discourses about and in the name of the subaltern that create the impression of letting the subaltern speak for him- or herself. Spivak deems "the first-world intellectual masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves" to be dangerous (Spivak 1994: 87), since even the most benevolent and well-intentioned attempts to speak in the name of the 'subaltern' (especially in political discourses) cannot truly escape accusations of misrepresentation, appropriation and self-aggrandizement.

She draws attention to the distinction between two "related but irreducibly discontinuous" kinds of representation: 'darstellen' (to represent in an aesthetic form, as in a "portrait") and 'vertreten' (to represent or to speak for in a political sense, by "proxy") (Spivak 1994: 70, 71). She observes that there is a tendency among Western intellectuals, academics and activists to conflate these two kinds of representation in the name of moving beyond representation (Spivak 1994: 74). Spivak alleges that any representation of the subaltern by a political proxy in political discourses misrepresents the subaltern as a coherent political subject, when, in fact, this impression only arises as an effect of discourse (Spivak 1994: 70). Since they do not engage (with) the subjectivities of subaltern

[56] Spivak adopts the term 'subaltern' from Gramsci, who, in "Notes on Italian History," uses it to describe non-hegemonic subjects that are excluded from the hegemonic representation of society as well as from the possibility of politically representing themselves because they do not possess class-consciousness.

[57] In the course of the essay, Spivak also attempts to prove that - despite claims to the contrary - the idea of a unified (Western) subject still underwrites and perpetuates itself in the works of Foucault and Deleuze (Spivak 1994: 74-75).

people, political discourses can, at best, be concerned with the needs of subaltern groups, never with an individual's desires.

Spivak compares the behavior of twentieth-century Western intellectuals and activists to that of self-described 'progressive' nineteenth-century male British colonial officials who used their legislative efforts to liberate Hindu women from the practice of 'widow-burning' to justify their colonial mission (Spivak 1994: 93, 95-104). Since in both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century examples the (female) subaltern's testimony is unavailable, Spivak characterizes these acts as iterations of the "epistemic violence" (Spivak 1994: 76-82) underpinning both the imperialist project and many contemporary postcolonial or neocolonial projects claiming to free 'Third World women' from patriarchal oppression. The fight over the custom of widow-burning (*sati)* also exemplifies what has come to be known as "double colonization,"[58] a dynamic in which the female subaltern subject has been doubly oppressed by patriarchy and (the repercussions of) patriarchal colonialism (Young 1995: 162).

While Spivak ultimately denies that the subaltern can speak (Spivak 1994: 104),[59] the (almost) absolute terms of this denial have been questioned and reinterpreted. Linda Alcoff agrees with Spivak's observation that a speaking for or a speaking on behalf of "less privileged persons" from "certain privileged locations [is] discursively dangerous," since it often "increase[es] or reinforce[es] the oppression of the group spoken for" (Alcoff 1991: 7). However, she reads Spivak as, in fact, advocating the practice of "'speaking to,' in which the intellectual neither abnegates his or her discursive role nor presumes an authenticity of the oppressed, but still allows for the possibility that the oppressed will produce a 'countersentence' that can then suggest a new historical narrative" (Alcoff 1991: 23). Similarly, Mohanty is not so much concerned with the question of whether or not the subaltern can speak, but rather with the question of whether the subaltern can be heard.[60] Addressing the question of (Western) reading practices in relation to the representation of Third World women in literature, Mohanty asserts that "[t]he existence of Third World women's narratives in itself is not evidence of decentering hegemonic histories and subjectivities. It is the way in which they are read, understood, and located institutionally which is of paramount importance" (Mohanty 2003: 77).

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[58] The term was first coined by Holst-Peterson and Rutherford in their *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (1988).

[59] However, Spivak, in contrast to Edward Said, defends the idea of the production of 'counter knowledge' through a re-reading of the colonial archive aiming at creating a radical historiography (Young 162).

[60] In the context of social justice and human rights studies, Spivak's original question has also been rephrased as: 'Can the Sublatern be Heard?' See, for example, Libin (2003) and Maggio (2007).

In spite of the difficulties involved in speaking about, speaking for, speaking to or speaking with marginalized, disenfranchised or subaltern Third World women, Third World and postcolonial feminists continue to seek ways of organizing and effecting change. In order to be able to do so, they first have had to redefine what key feminist principles, such as unity, solidarity and cooperation, might mean both in an inherently asymmetrical Third World/First World model and in an equally fraught transnational framework.

In a chapter entitled "The Politics of Experience" (2003), Mohanty directly addresses the possibilities for and limits of sisterhood and unity among women. While she does not deny the possibility of alliances and unity, she challenges earlier exaggeratedly confident proclamations of universal female sisterhood like Morgan's. At the same time, like Spivak, she calls for a new engagement and possibly a re-reading of the historical (colonial) archive, when she insists that "the unity of women is best understood not as given, on the basis of a natural/psychological commonality; it is something that has to be worked for, struggled towards – in history" (Mohanty 2003: 116). Emphasizing that solidarity among diverse groups of feminist women arises from their conscious and voluntary decision to cooperate, Mohanty enumerates key characteristics of transnational solidarity:

> I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. (Mohanty 2003: 7)

For Western feminists, then, any serious attempt to form alliances with Third World women based on solidarity involves the difficult and uncomfortable process of acknowledging how they are implicated and complicit in the political, economic and social structures that produce and perpetuate the very dynamics of inequality that discriminate against, marginalize, disenfranchise and at times render invisible and inaudible the very women with whom they wish to solidarize.

Having emerged as a response to and a critique of the ethnocentric bias of 'global' or 'international' feminisms as they were theorized and practiced in the U.S. academy in the 1980s and 1990s transnational feminism, has continued many lines of enquiry begun by postcolonial and Third World feminists. Since it is by no means a unified movement, there have been a number of different attempts to define its key aims and methods. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan were among the first to use the term 'transnational' in a feminist

framework. In the introduction to *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practice* (1994), they set out to complicate and "problematize" feminist theory by decentering feminism and exploring the possibilities offered to feminist theory and practice by postmodernity's "complex, dynamic model of social, economic, and political relations" (Grewal and Kaplan 1994: 2, 4). They employ the term 'transnational'

> to problematize a purely locational politics of global-local or center-periphery in favor of […] the lines cutting across them. As feminists who note the absence of gender issues in all of these world-system theories, [they] have no choice but to challenge what [they] see as inadequate and inaccurate binary divisions. (Grewal and Kaplan 1994: 13)

Their restatement of this definition in the year 2000 is not only clearer but also closer to what is commonly associated with the term 'transnational' in the context of feminism today. They

> use the term transnational instead of international in order to reflect [the] need to destabilize rather than maintain boundaries of nation, race, and gender. Transnational is a term that signals attention to uneven and dissimilar circuits of culture and capital. Through such critical recognition, the links between patriarchies, colonialisms, racisms, and other forms of domination become more apparent and available for critique or appropriation.
>
> (Grewal and Kaplan 2000: par. 3)

In this formulation, the term 'transnational' is employed to destabilize notions of nation and race. Like the concept of diaspora, a transnational approach, as Grewal and Kaplan conceive of it, is intended to reveal and challenge precisely those hierarchies, dynamics and formations that, because they are so often normalized, usually remain unchallenged.

Like Grewal and Kaplan, M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty seek to reorient feminism within a transnational framework that redresses some of the flaws and blind spots of earlier attempts to theorize feminism on a global scale. In their introduction to *Feminist Ideologies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (1997), they provide a definition of transnational feminism as:

> 1. a way of thinking about women in similar contexts across the world, in *different* geographical spaces, rather than as *all* women across the world
>
> 2. an understanding of a set of unequal relationships among and between peoples, rather than a set of traits embodied in all non-US citizens (particularly because of the racist heterosexist definitions of US citizenship)
>
> 3. a consideration of the term 'international" in relation to an analysis of economic, political, and ideological processes which foreground the operations of race and capitalism

(Alexander and Mohanty 1997: xix)

In addition to focusing on the material realities and lived experiences of women, transnational feminism today advocates the exploration of heterogeneity and differences in order to be able to then identify commonalities and establish solidarities. As Mohanty explains of transnational feminists,

> [i]n knowing differences and particularities, [they] can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow [them] to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows [them] to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for [Mohanty's] concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders. (Mohanty 2003: 226)

The concerns regarding representation of marginalized individuals and groups as well as those regarding knowledge production about 'the Other' raised by Mohanty and Spivak remain relevant to the analysis of the novels discussed in this dissertation, particularly to those by Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie, because these novels produce discourses about the experiences of women and men in 'Third World countries' such as Antigua (the Caribbean), Haiti and Nigeria. Any such production of discourse about marginalized and disenfranchised individuals by privileged third parties/intellectuals runs the risk of misrepresenting, essentializing or even Othering those it represents.

When Kincaid and Danticat published their female *Bildungsromane Lucy* (1990) and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), Spivak's and Mohanty's critiques of Western second-wave feminism had already begun to resonate with some scholars. In some academic fields, the discursive production of a monolithic, passive Third World woman in need of saving by Western (feminist) intellectuals was studied and challenged. But the debate Spivak and Mohanty had initiated was still unfolding and had certainly not yet found a broad echo in public discourse. Novels, such as *Lucy* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory,* have helped to carry the debate into the public realm. Aiming to diversify the representation of Third World women from the Anglophone and the Francophone Caribbean, both Kincaid's and Danticat's novels craft complex, non-essentializing and non-stereotyping representations of their female characters. While Danticat's representation of the minor female characters is at times a bit more heavy-handed in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* than in her African diaspora novel, *The Dew Breaker*, her characters, like Kincaid's and Adichie's,

can never be characterized simply as either victims in need of saving or fierce agents of resistance who want to change the world.

Both Kincaid and Danticat seem aware of the dangers involved in representing the Other. In their novels the marginalized, disenfranchised or subaltern characters do speak and the authors consciously, at times even self-consciously, employ different narrative and representational strategies in an attempt to make them heard in ways that neither misrepresent these characters (and the people like them in the 'real world') nor compound stereotypes about their communities.

Kincaid's *Bildungsroman* counteracts the discursive marginalization and appropriation of female Afro-Caribbean immigrant characters. It also hinders and frustrates those readers who seek to Other or essentialize marginalized/subaltern characters in the Caribbean through specific reading practices that are complicit in and perpetuate the colonial project. Kincaid's first-person narrator in *Lucy* is no longer part of the island community represented in the novel. Furthermore, the reader is immediately made aware that the first-person narrative by a highly unreliable and emotionally distraught narrator can only offer a highly subjective representation of events[61] that revolve around a daughter's separation from and ultimate denial of her mother. While Lucy is angered by her mother's behavior, the narrative offers a portrayal of Lucy's mother that contextualizes her actions. Like the female relatives in Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Lucy's mother is represented as both victim and agent of the colonial project. Furthermore, the prominent autobiographical parallels between Kincaid and her narrators as well as the biographical parallels between her family members and her characters invest the narrative with the kind of authenticity and authority that, to some extent, counteract tendencies, even in the *Bildungsroman*, to become complicit in the colonial project's myth of progress and in its attempt to other those on 'the periphery.' In *Mr. Potter* the first-person narrative again draws attention to its subjective nature. It details a daughter's fight against paternal disregard and indifference and represents how the narrator frees herself of this pain by working through it. The eradication of the paternal line is framed as a female prerogative that aims at protecting future generations from being affected by a negative and destructive paternal legacy. As in the case of the mother figure in *Lucy*, the genesis of the paternal figure and the paternal line is contextualized. Representing not only Mr. Potter's life but

[61] Yost observes that the narrative oscillates between retrospective passages in which Lucy looks back and comments on her experiences and those in which Lucy's voice must be regarded as highly unreliable because she gives "the narrative over to her immediate sensations, without the benefit of [retrospective] perspective" (Yost 2006: 145).

also those of his parents, the novel probes to what extent the colonial regime and its legacies made the father the person whom the narrator disdains. In order not to misrepresent the subaltern father figure, the representation follows two interwoven but separable trajectories. In the novel's most subjective passages, the narrator feels entitled to lash out against the individual who was able and felt entitled to hurt her on a personal level. In those passages that examine the father-daughter conflict in a broader Caribbean and (African) diaspora context, the narrative offers historical and socio-economic contextual information to counteract any misrepresentations of the father that arise from the daughter-narrator's feelings of hurt and betrayal. This move also enables the reader to develop the kind of deeper understanding of the intricacies of the colonial regime necessary for the acquisition of diaspora literacy. Ultimately, the narrative shows how the father became the man he is as a result both of his personal circumstance and the socio-political flaws and failures of the patriarchal colonial regime.

In both *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *The Dew Breaker*, Danticat's focalizers tend to be in a similar position: they are, like the author herself, (recent) Haitian-American immigrants who are either trying to adapt to life in the U.S. or are on a return visit to Haiti. Thus the narratives do not claim to offer full access to the testimony of a subaltern character in rural Haiti. In interviews, Danticat has commented on the special importance of her own experiences for her writing – these included periods of time spent in poor rural areas of Haiti (Smith 2017: 24; André 2017: 181-182). Claiming the authenticity of her own experience and observations seems to be one way in which Danticat approaches the issue of representing marginalized or disenfranchised characters. In addition, her narratives seek to endow these characters with authority rather than to undermine it. Whenever female subaltern/marginalized Haitian characters, such as Sophie Caco's grandmother in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, or the blind old woman in "Night Talkers," appear in a (rural) Haitian setting, they speak and contribute to the plot. But even when their statements and judgments bely their patriarchal biases, they are not challenged or criticized in the same way that similar statements by Haitian immigrants in the U.S. would be challenged. When Sophie's grandmother defends the testing custom that caused her daughters and granddaughter much pain, the old woman's statement, though challenged by Sophie, is contextualized in such a way as to explicate the grandmother's complicity in the very patriarchal structures that also oppress her and have made her their agent. In addition, both Sophie's grandmother and the old woman in "Night Talkers" are represented as wise old

women who have access to and produce knowledge beyond the scope of Western knowledge production.

Representing and negotiating the diversity of the African diaspora in the U.S., Adichie's *Americanah* offers a nuanced portrayal of different female diaspora experiences that demonstrates the absurdity of the notion of 'woman' as a universal category, while simultaneously acknowledging their similarities. Putting into practice and elaborating upon the ideas presented in Adichie's 2009 TED Talk, *Americanah* represents neither female experiences nor African or U.S. realities in terms of "a single story" (Adichie 2009). Although the novel's female main characters are initially marginalized in the U.S., they cannot be described as subaltern. In fact, the novel insists that these educated and ambitious women overcome their initial difficulties and legal vulnerabilities in the U.S., and it demonstrates that their lives in the diaspora turn out to be successful ones. Detailing Ifemelu's day at an African hair salon, the framing narrative, however, also offers glimpses into the lives and experiences of African immigrant women who, by comparison, have been less successful and fortunate. The novel suggests that because these women lack adequate English-language skills and advanced formal education they are more vulnerable to marginalization, discrimination and abuses than the protagonist and African diasporic women like her. As the novel focuses on characters who not only succeed in building a middle-class life for themselves in the diaspora but whose legal and financial status eventually also enables them to choose whether to stay in the U.S. or to return to Nigeria, it and its author are less concerned with the question of how to represent the (subaltern/disenfranchised/marginalized) Other. *Americanah* is, however, concerned with the question of how to represent Nigeria, women's life in that country and Igbo culture in ways that do not rely on Western stereotypes of Africa and African culture while at the same time remaining accessible to Western/global readers.

None of the novels examined in this dissertation can strictly speaking be characterized as a historical novel; however, when they establish family genealogies of male and female characters that due to their positionality are ignored by official history, both the *Bildungsromane* and the African diaspora novels participate in the endeavor of re-reading and re-writing (recent) history that Mohanty and Spivak have called for. Generally, the African diaspora novels exhibit a more prominent tendency to 'write back' to official history and to offer alternative readings of the recent past than the female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* I discuss; however, by exploring non-white female experiences these novels also represent and read women's specific material realities as deviating from any

(white) male default version of reality. In focusing on present and past experiences of female characters, Marshall, Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie also explore the question of how socio-political and socio-economic factors have facilitated or hindered solidarity and unity among women in a transnational framework

In addition to offering one of the earliest female-focused literary representations of Barbadian-American immigration to the U.S., Marshall's *Bildungsroman*, *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* also participates in the re-reading and re-writing of the history of the Great Migration. In its focus on Miss Thompson's life story, the novel offers an explicitly female narrative of internal migration and resettlement. The *Bildungsroman* thus not only counters tendencies in public discourse in the 1950s and beyond to ignore – or even actively suppress – the true scope and the diverse socio-economic, political and cultural effects of this massive internal American migration. It also undermines the commonplace that men were the driving forces behind the Great Migration. In addition to re-writing the history of American urban decay, ghettoization and renewal, Marshall's African diaspora novel, *The Fisher King,* insists that the immigration of African American artists and intellectuals to European metropolises, such as Paris, after WWII represents a significant moment in (African) American history. Through its focalization, the narrative endows a female character, Hattie Carmichael, with the authority to present a history of a group of diasporic African Americans in Paris that explores how female characters experience and shape their diaspora experiences. Unlike the majority of official histories of jazz, the narrative privileges a female character's perspective and writes women's experiences and contributions into the history of jazz that it narrates.

Kincaid's *Bildungsroman*, *Lucy*, challenges official colonial history since it challenges the center/periphery and civilized/uncivilized models on which colonial history relies and which it disseminates and perpetuates. The first-person narrator, Lucy, does not only travel from 'the periphery' to 'the center' but also carries the grievances of those from 'the periphery' that are most often elided from official historical records with her and voices them from her new position as an observer of those in 'the center.' In staging the conflict between Lucy and her U.S. employer and substitute mother, Mariah, Kincaid undertakes an explicit exploration of the possibilities and limits of transnational feminist solidarity and corporation. In this novel, solidarities between women are hindered not only by differences in class, nationality and generation but also by the protagonist's individualist stance. While it becomes clear that this individualist stance results from her formative, alienating experiences as a colonial subject and therefore represents a form of

self-liberation from the colonial legacy, it noticeably limits both her ability and her desire to consider herself part of a group. Lucy sides with 'powerless' when she voices postcolonial critique; yet, her individualist stance compels her to refute identity politics and take a rather politically divested stance.

Establishing the paternal genealogy of its narrator, Kincaid's African diaspora novel, *Mr. Potter*, continues to challenge and re-write official colonial history. Although the novel ultimately pieces together and invents the life story of the narrator's father, it exhibits clear feminist investments. Its representation of the life and suicide of Mr. Potter's mother is especially significant in this regard, since the novel makes a conscious effort write the life story of this subaltern – almost forgotten and most certainly condemned – mother figure into both the narrator's personal history and into public history. If the individualist narrator, who seeks to distance herself from her paternal genealogy and its damaging legacy throughout the narrative, at all acknowledges commonalities or even allows for some degree of (transgenerational) identification with parts of her extended family, these moments are enabled by the juxtaposition of the narrator and other female characters, such as Mr. Potter's mother and his other daughters. Since the novel represents and insists on generational, economic, social and geographical differences between the narrator and the women with whom she tentatively acknowledges commonalities, it is the experience of African diasporic motherlessness and fatherlessness as well as the experience of oppressive patriarchal and colonial structures rather than their common femaleness that allows the narrator to acknowledge commonalities between herself and other women from her extended paternal family.

In *Breath, Eyes, Memory,* Danticat demonstrates that significant parts of Haitian history and culture cannot be understood or approached via official history because they are only available through oral testimony, story-telling and folk myth. In this *Bildungsroman*, the rich oral tradition is not only represented as revolving around female characters and experiences but is also passed down through the maternal line. While all of the embedded oral narratives in the novel contain characters, entities and plot elements familiar from Haitian oral culture, the novel intentionally modifies existing stories or invents its own narratives containing familiar elements, thus creating 'fakelore' narratives[62] that not only underscore the suffering of Haitian women due to patriarchal and

[62] In a 2016 interview Danticat explains: "'Fakelore' is a phrase which I did not invent. I believe the term was coined by American folklorist Richard M. Dorson in the 1950s. To me, fakelore allows me to create my own folklore. I use it because it basically allows me to make up my own stories in the tradition of the stories I grew up hearing. So there is a lot of fakelore in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, for example. I borrow the rhythm and

colonial structures but also put into relief painful experiences and traumatic acts of violence both in Sophie's life and in her mother's. Inserting allusions to key figures and events from Haitian history -- such as Jean-Jacques Dessalines (one of the leaders of the Haitian Revolution and independent Haiti's first ruler [1804-1806])[63] and the *caco* militia's resistance against the U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915-1934)[64] -- into the narrative, the novel does not simply draw attention to Haiti's long and eventful history but rather uses references to Haiti's auspicious beginnings as the first free black republic to underscore the discrepancy between the promise and the ideals of Haiti's beginnings and the situation of the country and its people in the twentieth century. Since the novel acknowledges women's particular vulnerability to pervasive, state-condoned sexualized violence – the protagonist herself was conceived when her mother was raped by a faceless Tonton Macoute – and establishes a causal connection between violence in Haiti and the presence of Haitian immigrants and refugees in the U.S., the atrocities of the Duvalier regime do not simply serve as the backdrop against which the first part of the *Bildungsroman* unfolds. Intertwining an immigrant coming-of-age plot with (a) trauma narrative(s), the *Bildungsroman* represents how Sophie and her mother struggle to overcome their sexual and cultural traumas in the U.S. While the *Bildungsroman* focuses on matrilineage and explores both the victimization of women and their survival in Haiti's recent history, Danticat's African diaspora novel. *The Dew Breaker*, explored the events and consequences of that same period in the island's recent history in a more multi-faceted manner. The African diaspora novel is more suited than the *Bildungsroman* to exploring multiple and ambivalent accounts of how Haitians in the U.S. and in Haiti have been both affected by and complicit in the state-sanctioned terror and violence that Duvalier supporters visited upon their fellow citizens. Rather than re-writing history, *The Dew Breaker* makes events during and after the Duvalier regime available to a diverse readership. While female experiences of individual, cultural and transgenerationally transmitted trauma and survival (in the diaspora) continue to be important foci, the novel's title-giving narrative, which also serves to interconnect its individual narratives, focuses on a male perpetrator of state-condoned violence and torture who represents the disavowed patrilineage the novel seeks to confront. It is also in the African diaspora novel – more fully than in her *Bildungsroman* – that Danticat probes the possibilities and limits of

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pace of the old stories and remake them my own. Folklore is pretty much already spoken or written, but we can make fakelore to match the present time and conditions we're living in" (Montgomery 2017: 208).

[63] For more information about the Haitian Revolution, see Laurent Dubois's *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (2004).

[64] See Alexis (2013) for information on resistance against the occupation of the island by the U.S.

(transnational) solidarity among women – both those available to them in the family and those available to them in the diaspora community.

Unlike her 2006 novel, *Half a Yellow Sun*, Adichie's *Americanah* does not explicitly set out to rewrite Nigerian history. The 2013 novel is deeply invested in representing the present moment, yet, for many non-Nigerian readers its representation of Nigeria's recent past in the first parts of the novel may represent the first opportunity to engage with the country's most recent history (of military dictatorship) and current affairs. In this sense the novel draws attention to and demands attention for a country that is gaining global significance: Nigeria not only has the world's 7th largest population ("Country Comparison: Population" 2017), but is also one of the most economically advanced and successful countries on the African continent. Nigerian immigrants to the U.S. and Europe, like the protagonist's aunt who is a doctor, are among the best educated groups of immigrants (Gambino et.al. 2014: 9). Although the novel presents some relevant contextual information about Nigeria, it also requires that its reader possess or develop diaspora literacy and become more knowledgeable about this country.

The question of whether the novels I discuss here exploit the communities they represent by exoticizing them or fetishizing their difference must be raised, since particularly Danticat's and Adichie's novels, as well as – to a lesser extent - those by Kincaid are marketed in a way that suggests they provide inside/r access to experiences beyond the ken of 'general readers.' Graham Huggan has coined the term "postcolonial exotic" for this "global commodification of cultural difference" (Huggan 2001: vii).[65] However, in varying degrees and through different narrative and representational strategies, these novels frustrate readers who are looking for easily comprehensible and consumable glimpses into a foreign and exotic world. For although, the novels can certainly function as cultural mediators and interpreters of a collective African diasporic consciousness and memory, when they mediate or interpret between cultures and attempt to cross those divides that commonly separate communities, they do so in ways that make

[65] This issue is connected to what Anthony Appiah's describes and characterizes as the phenomenon of the formation of "a *comprador* intelligentsia[:] "Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: of a relatively small. Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other and for Africa" (Appiah 1991: 348) Even though the absolute terms of Appiah's criticism have been challenged, his criticism of self-interested intellectuals that create and perpetuate harmful and distorted images and ideas of the situation on the African continent and in other 'peripheral' regions has resonated with many critics and writers, such as Binyavanga Wainaina, whose satirical article "How to Write about Africa" (2005) offers fail-proof instructions to the 'comprador intelligentsia' on how to create the kind of highly distorted picture of Africa that is easily sold to (white) readers in 'the center.'

political demands on their readers. Not only is the reader required to develop (an explicitly feminist) diaspora literacy, she is also required to acknowledge and to reflect critically on her own positionality and privilege as well as to become accountable for it. If the authors or the narrators created by them can be called "native informants" at all (Spivak 1994: 79; Spivak 1999: 342), then they are 'native informants' with quite specific agendas of their own, unlikely and unwilling simply to corroborate Western (mis-)perceptions of their countries and communities of origin. It remains unclear whether transcultural encounters through texts can forge bonds of solidarity between Western First World readers and the Third World women described in them. While there are those who maintain that these encounters may, in fact, perpetuate the First World readers' sense of "superiority" vis-à-vis the Third World communities represented in the novels (Amireh and Majaj 2000: 8), the writers I discuss, though aware of this danger, seem willing to take the risk of exploring the possibilities of these encounters.

Kincaid, Danticat and Adichie also problematize their own positionalities as economically successful women writers residing in the U.S. (Adichie is a part-time resident) who generate their income writing about communities and experiences that they have not shared first-hand for quite some time. In *Mr. Potter*, Kincaid repeatedly mentions the privileged positionality of her first-person narrator as a writer and reader residing in the U.S. vis-à-vis the father figure as well as vis-à-vis the community that is represented in the novel. In her AIDS-memoir, *My Brother,* she also draws attention to this issue, when she self-consciously explores how her privilege vis-à-vis her family in Antigua has affected her relationships to individual family members. Unlike the other authors I discuss, Kincaid has cultivated the persona of a successful immigrant who is ungrateful to her community of origin. Unsurprisingly, she has been accused of exploiting and criticized for maligning her island of origin in her writing. Her open criticism in her book-length essay, *A Small Place* (1988), of the failures of (nationalist) politicians and Antiguan citizens to turn Antigua into a well-functioning state has generated a considerable backlash both in Antiguan and U.S. public discourse. Of the novels discussed in this study, *Mr. Potter* has received with some particularly negative reviews. While most negative reviewers disapprove of the novel's repetitive style and its alleged lack of plot, Maya Jaggi criticizes that the "novel seems to bask in the author's god-like power" (Jaggi 2002). Jaggi also takes issue with what she perceives to be Kincaid's vengeful intentions toward her father/the father figure as well as her "self-aggrandizing" voice, which fails to "dignify" the lives it represents (Jaggi 2002). While Jaggi's critique is not entirely unfounded – especially with regard to the portrayal of

the father figure – my reading of the novel will show that the narrator does, in fact, repeatedly draw attention both to the subjective nature of her account and to her attempts to temper the anger toward her father. The narrative's attempts to endow the experiences it represents with dignity is strongest in those passages that most powerfully reveal Kincaid's feminist investments, such as the portrayal of the paternal grandmother. Yet, these narrative maneuvers do not change the fact that Kincaid positions herself both as an ungrateful escapee from Antigua and as a writer who does not believe in happiness and is not in the business of making anybody happy – neither her readers nor her characters.[66]

As one of the most vocal and visible Haitian-American public intellectuals and artists, Danticat has to contend with the various demands made on her by Haitian-Americans, Haitians in Haiti and these segments of the U.S. mainstream media that have turned her into the expert and spokesperson on all Haitian(-American) matters. In her roles as editor and as author of numerous introductions and forewords to translated books by Haitian authors, Danticat uses her influence in the publishing industry to increase the availability of translations of Haitian literature in the U.S. and global English-speaking markets. In all of these roles, Danticat also seeks insistently to counteract tendencies in U.S. public discourse to conceive of Haiti and its citizens as a country and a people beyond redemption, plagued not only by violence, disease, corruption and other forms of political mismanagement but also by repeated natural disasters.[67]

In the wake of her most recent best-selling successes, *Americanah*, *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) and *Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto* (2017), Adichie has also been much in demand as a public speaker. She, too, has to contend with the appropriating demands made on her by different communities. But she has also been able to utilize her global platform to move forward the discussion of transnational/global feminism. Although *We Should All be Feminists* popularized Adichie as an outspoken feminist even among those who had not previously read her novels, the essay does not present new ideas, but

[66] In an interview from 1997 Kincaid states: "I think in many ways the problem that my writing would have with an American reviewer is that Americans find difficulty very hard to take. They are inevitably looking for a happy ending. Perversely, I will not give the happy ending. I think life is difficult and that's that. I am not at all — absolutely not at all — interested in the pursuit of happiness. I am not interested in the pursuit of positivity. I am interested in pursuing a truth, and the truth often seems to be not happiness but its opposite. […] I like to be depressing. I feel it's my duty to make everyone a little less happy. You know that line in the Declaration of Independence, 'the pursuit of happiness'? I've come to think that it has no meaning at all. You cannot pursue happiness. And to think that this bad little sentence has determined our lives" (Snell 1997: n.p.).

[67] Most recently she has condemned President Donald Trump's alleged insult of African nations, El Salvador, and Haiti as "s---hole countries" in an article for *The New Yorker*, "Trump Reopens an Old Wound for Haitians" (2017), and an op-ed piece for the *Miami Herald*, "Haitians are Used to Insults. Friday, we Mourned. Today, we Fight" (2018).

rather reiterates some of the major feminist claims made and issues negotiated in *Americanah* in a different, more concise and perhaps more accessible format. Even though the novel refrains from using the terms 'feminism' or 'feminist,' its negotiation of the interconnected issues of gender, race, class and cultural identity/difference occurs in an explicitly transnational feminist framework that reveals and criticizes various iterations of systemic gender-based inequalities and injustices within both Nigerian and U.S. societies. The novel does not, however, only offer an astute analysis of the ways in which patriarchal as well as colonial and neo-colonial forces continue to oppress and disadvantage women; rather it represents how Ifemelu's individual negotiation and her own version of transnational feminism enable her to find independence and success in the diaspora and maintain them on her return to Nigeria. She is thus one manifestation of what Adichie calls a "Happy[68] African Feminist Who Does Not Hate Men and Who Likes to Wear Lip Gloss and High Heels for Herself and Not For Men" in *We Should All Be Feminists* (Adichie 2014: 10).[69] Moreover, those parts of the novel that are focalized through Obinze, Ifemelu's first love, demonstrate that Adichie's version of transnational feminism envisions and trusts men to be capable of being feminist allies and/or male feminists.

The shift in transnational feminism toward the exploration of differences in order to facilitate the recognition of similarities, commonalities and possible alliances described and called for by Mohanty (Mohanty 2003: 226) is mirrored in the diaspora novels I discuss with regard to not only their negotiation of feminist ideas but also their engagement with the concept of a (global) African diaspora. Marshall's, Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's African diaspora novels in particular demonstrate that in order to recover, renew and reconfigure a global, (feminist) transnational African diaspora project at the turn of the

[68] Even though the protagonist is represented as initially unhappy in the U.S. and experiences intense feelings of nostalgia for her lover, Obinze, and Nigeria, she is not represented as a fundamentally unhappy character.

[69] The protagonist's examination of feminist ideas and her attempt to negotiate a feminist stance that is sustainable in both the U.S. and Nigeria recalls the give-and-take structures that Obioma Nnaemeka identifies as the key features of what she describes as "nego-feminism[:]" "First, *nego-feminism* is the feminism of negotiation; second, *nego-feminism* stands for "no ego" feminism. In the foundation of shared values in many African cultures are the principles of negotiation, give and take, compromise, and balance. Here, negotiation has the double meaning of 'give and take/exchange' and 'cope with successfully/go around.' African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to detonate patriarchal land mines; it also knows when, where, and how to go around patriarchal land mines. In other words, it knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts. For African women, feminism is an act that evokes the dynamism and shifts of a process as opposed to the stability and reification of a construct, a framework. My use of space — the third space — provides the terrain for the unfolding of the dynamic process. Furthermore, nego-feminism is structured by cultural imperatives and modulated by ever-shifting local and global exigencies. The theology of nearness grounded in the indigenous installs feminism in Africa as a performance and an altruistic act. African women do feminism; feminism is what they do for themselves and for others" (Obioma Nnaemeka 2004: 377-378; italics in the original).

twenty-first century, it is vital to acknowledge, explore and negotiate heterogeneity and difference before any valid claim of commonality can be made.

Marshall's African diaspora novel, *The Fisher King* explores questions of solidarity and unity among different subgroups of the African diaspora in America, the Caribbean and Europe. While the fate of marginalized female immigrant characters in New York City and Paris is explored in great detail, characters from the African continent do not figure prominently in this negotiation. Sonny Jr.'s father is the only African diasporic character from an African nation in the text who is any way relevant to the plot. The African man *sans papiers* is perhaps the most subaltern character represented in the novel. Working as a street vendor and living in precarious conditions in Paris at the time of Sonny's conception, this character remains shrouded in mystery throughout the narrative. While he seems to be of little importance to the adult characters, like Sonny Jr.'s mother Jojo, he is very present in the thoughts of his son, who wonders about his parents' whereabouts. However, the fact that Marshall does not provide more information about the single African immigrant/refugee character in the extended family she portrays does not necessarily indicate that he is marginalized through/in the text. Due to the novel's brief and episodic character, a number of characters are only talked about briefly but never appear. Of course, one could also argue that by not engaging more fully with the one family member from the African continent Marshall attempts to avoid the pitfall of speaking for the other as though the other were speaking for himself.

Kincaid's stance With regard to the African diaspora project must be described as the most skeptical and reluctant one of all the authors discussed in this study, since her representation of different experiences of characters from victim diaspora communities demonstrates her doubts about the constructive and transformative potential of the diaspora experience. She doubts that the trauma and the rupture of forced migration and dislocation can be overcome and positively transformed. Even though she acknowledges the shared trauma of the Middle Passage and of subsequent plantation slavery as well as the effects of racist discrimination in the lives of people of color today, her narrators do not easily form alliances. They are, first and foremost, preoccupied with themselves. Of course, this narrative decision can be called strategic, since the focus on subjective representation frees her of some of the constraints involved in any attempt to create representative and non-exploitative portrayal of marginalized/subaltern experiences. In the face of a predominantly masculine configuration of the African diaspora concept in the past, she also wonders if, as a woman/feminist, she should even want to align herself with such a

project.[70] Unlike the other authors I discuss, Kincaid, skeptical of both traditions and group identities, offers little in terms of a vision for the future although she provides an insightful analysis and critique of colonialism and its afterlife.

Representation in Danticat's African diaspora novel, *The Dew Breaker,* is characterized by fragmentation. Although the individual, self-contained narratives of the novel eventually enable the reader to recognize how the individual narratives are interconnected and/or connected to the title-giving dew breaker, [71] a sense of fragmentation and non-closure persists. This representational choice supports and facilitates the representation and exploration of heterogeneity within the contexts of both the Haitian diaspora and the larger African diaspora. While *Breath, Eyes, Memor*y establishes commonalties between African American and (immigrant) Haitian-American cultural practices and experiences, *The Dew Breaker* calls attention to fundamental differences between African American experiences and those of Haitians and (immigrant) Haitian-Americans. While the African diaspora novel does not deny the possibility of alliances and solidarity between these two groups, it primarily explores life in the diaspora and establishes similarities between different diasporic experiences.

Adichie's *Americanah* underscores that the African diaspora that its protagonist encounters in the U.S. has become a far more economically, socially and politically diverse and heterogeneous formation than most earlier formulations of the concept are able to account for. While the framing narrative set at the African hair salon insistently draws the reader's attention to the diversity of the immigrant African diasporic community, it is the protagonist herself who comments on differences and similarities between the immigrants from Africa and U.S.-born African Americans. A recent adult immigrant to the U.S. herself, Ifemelu has become a shrewd observer and commentator on American social customs and racial scripts. Her blog, "*Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*" (*A* 4)[72] allows her eventually to make a career of confronting and poking fun at the foreign- and often ridiculous-seeming rules surrounding race and blackness in the U.S., and it enables the novel to offer explicit social commentary on race relations. Furthermore, the blog

[70] Kincaid has described herself as "a victim of tradition" and warns that there is no tradition of freedom, least of all for women: "[…] I was a victim of tradition. I was on the verge of being a dead person because of tradition, and I think women especially have to be very careful of these traditions. They are the first to go when you start talking about traditions, because there is no tradition of freedom, they have to make it up. So I don't have any tradition" (Kincaid and Dilger 1992: 21).

[71] Although most narratives are connected to the dew breaker character in some way, not all of them are, and the nature of the existing interconnections varies. The dew breaker does thus not represent a hierarchically higher in the rhizomatically organized body stories.

[72] Following Ifemelu's return to Lagos, the blog is renamed "*The Small Redemptions of Lagos*" (*A* 418)

entries show how the conversation about the (global) African diaspora has diversified as a result of improved possibilities of transnational communication and interconnection via the internet. The novel also employs Ifemelu's relationship with Blaine, an African American assistant professor of comparative (African) politics at Yale, and her interactions with other (male and female) African Americans to negotiate the similarities and differences between their experiences as diasporic Africans. Although the narrative acknowledges some experiential similarities, especially when questions of race, blackness, ethnicity and nationality are inflected by gender, the novel frames the representation of differences, dissimilarities and discontinuities regarding these concepts in ways that both enable and require the reader not only to acknowledge differences but also to question these concepts in general.

All novels discussed in this study, but particularly the African diaspora novels, attest that the exploration of and the reckoning with difference is necessitated both by the African Diaspora paradigm and a transnational feminist framework.

2 Paule Marshall – Escaping the Brownstones Only to Return to Them

> For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness. And this tale, [according to that face, that body, those strong hands on those strings,] has another aspect in every country, and a new depth in every generation.
> – James Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" 147

> 'You got some of all of us in you dontcha? What you gonna do with all that Colored from all over creation you got in you? Better be somethin' good'
> – Paule Marshall, *The Fisher King* 36

Brown Girl, Brownstones and *The Fisher King,* published roughly four decades apart, are particularly well-suited to be discussed in comparison because, at their core, they both explore the multiplicity of immigrant or diasporic experiences of characters of Afro-Caribbean and African American descent against the backdrop of a distinctly urban American setting: a neighborhood in Bedford–Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York City. Although the novels' characters exist in two completely separate universes and the novels' stylistic and generic differences are striking, it is tempting and revealing to read *The Fisher King* as a narrative that consciously returns to the locale and the community represented in *Brown Girl* in order to reiterate and reconfigure some of the questions Marshall first raised in her debut novel. The fact that almost four decades have elapsed between the day in 1947 when Selina plans to travel to the Caribbean at the end of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and the day that Hattie and her grandson Sonny Jr. return to Brooklyn from Paris in 1984 at the beginning of *The Fisher King* obviously means that, although the latter novel covers some of the same terrain as its 1959 predecessor, its flashbacks to central events in the characters' pasts do not simply continue the exploration of immigration experiences and (female) identity formation begun in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. Instead this narrative return to a neighborhood and its community offers the possibility of complicating these issues in perceptive and striking ways. Furthermore, the African diaspora novel, *The Fisher King*, explores the possibilities and limits of a global African diaspora in ways that the Marshall's *Bildungsroman* could not accommodate. The comparison between Marshall's first and her sixth and latest novel reveals the nuances as well as the evolution of the author's life-long preoccupation with questions of migration, belonging and community. It also demonstrates how the construction and negotiation of the concept of the

African diaspora differs in both novels. While Marshall's works published prior to *The Fisher King* generally seek to establish connections among members of the African diaspora based on shared or similar cultural practices of 'African origin' as well as due to the shared, generationally transmitted trauma of the Middle Passage and plantation slavery, *The Fisher King*, though not denying the possibility for connection, openly addresses issues and challenges that result from the heterogeneous character of the global African diaspora.

2.1 The Question of Positionality or the Paule Marshall Phenomenon

In the course of her long and impressive writing career, which now spans more than half a century, Paule Marshall has won much critical acclaim and been awarded several prestigious prizes and grants, among them a Guggenheim fellowship (1960), a National Endowment for the Arts grant (1967/68), and a MacArthur Foundation fellowship (1992). But despite the documented and unquestioned quality of her works, neither the author nor her novels have ever quite achieved household name status in either university classrooms or among 'general readers' to quite the same degree that some of her literary contemporaries and some the younger authors discussed in this study.[1]

In the early years of her career, several factors beyond the author's control and not at all linked to the quality of her work conspired to deny Marshall the recognition male African American novelists like Richard Wright (1908-1960), Ralph Ellison (1914–1994) and James Baldwin (1924–1987) had gained at that point. Shaped by factors such as her year of birth (1929), her race, her ethnicity and her gender, Marshall's tricky and shifting positionality has not only informed her writing, but also posed difficulties to those wanting to claim her for a particular literary canon --- be it the canon of African American literature, that of ethnic American literature, or that of (Anglophone-) Caribbean literature.[2] Today, Marshall, like all the authors discussed in this study, occupies a marginal position in all of these literary traditions and canons.

[1] Dorothy Hamer Denniston claims that Marshall is among those African American women writers "who have enjoyed critical acclaim without widespread recognition" (Denniston 1995: xi). Similarly, Joyce Pettis notes that although "scholars of African-American and Afro-Caribbean literature […] consider her among the premier American writers […] significant numbers of Americans knowledgeable about literature remain ignorant of Marshall" (1995:6).

[2] Heather Hathaway's study on Claude McKay's and Paule Marshall's works is one of the earliest studies that attempts to move beyond those categorizations as it aims to 'relocate' the work of Marshall and Claude McKay in terms of "a more pointed cross-cultural consideration of both authors that moves beyond these restrictive paradigms" (Hathaway 1999:10).

When *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, was first published in 1959, its incorporation into the newly forming canon of African American literature was (at least doubly) complicated by Marshall's investment in representing life in the Barbadian-American community and by her determination to do so from an explicitly female point of view. As a result of this particular self-positioning, her assessment of and her literary engagement with the 'race question' in the U.S. took a decidedly different form than that of the race-conscious 'protest novel' made popular by her male predecessors and contemporaries and was therefore rarely viewed as equally interesting and deserving of critical attention.[3] Since ethnic American literature had not been conceptualized as such and there was little interest in the works that would come to be recognized as some of the earliest of that genre, the second canon which nowadays commonly claims (at least) Marshall's debut novel as one of its own had not even started to take shape. Similarly, feminist literary criticism had not yet emerged, and it would be almost two decades before a noticeable increase in the publication of writing by women and the establishment of feminist literary criticism drastically reshaped reception and publication patterns in the U.S. A growing interest in 'racially conscious' writings by African American women writers, such as Toni Morrison (1931-) and Alice Walker (1944-) would also help to create a renewed interest in the few African American women writers whose work, like Marshall's, had been published prior to the 1970s.[4]

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[3] In his essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel," James Baldwin describes the shortcomings of the race-conscious protest novels published by male African American authors, such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Chester Himes. Claiming that "the failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life" (Baldwin 2017: 22), he unfavorably compares Wright's novel, *Native Son* (1940), to Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) when he reads Bigger Thomas not as a negation of Uncle Tom but as his descendant. He writes: "In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas stands on a Chicago street corner watching airplanes flown by white men racing against the sun and 'Goddamn' he says, the bitterness bubbling up like blood, remembering a million indignities […]; hatred smolders through these pages like sulphur fire. All of Bigger's life is controlled, defined by his hatred and his fear. And later, his fear drives him to murder and his hatred to rape; he dies, having come, through this violence, we are told, for the first time, to a kind of life, having for the first time redeemed his manhood. Below the surface of this novel there lies, as it seems to me, a continuation, a complement of that monstrous legend it was written to destroy. Bigger is Uncle Tom's descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle; the one uttering merciless exhortations, the other shouting curses. […] For Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of his being sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at his birth. But our humanity is our burden, our life; we need not battle for it; we need only to do what is infinitely more difficult—that is, accept it. The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it is his categorization alone which is real and which cannot be transcended" (Baldwin 2017: 21-23). As my reading of the novel's last part will show, Selina does not accept the supposition that she is 'sub-human.'

[4] Barbara Christian praises *Brown Girl, Brownstones* as "such a singular novel in 1959, a novel that clearly prefigures black female literature of the 1970s" (Christian 1985: 105). For stages within Marshall criticism see also: Hathaway (1999: 9-10).

It was in this atmosphere of a newly awakened interest in the rediscovery of female (African American) literary predecessors that the Feminist Press republished *Brown Girls, Brownstones* in 1981. In the wake of the republication, literary scholars undertook to incorporate both the text and its author into the tradition of literature written by African American women that they were trying to establish.[5] Focusing on the connections between Marshall's works and later literary works by African American women, these studies succeeded in claiming the novel as a precursor of the 1970s (re)naissance of literature written by African-American women. In this context, critical interest in Marshall's work and the feminist elements therein increased significantly.[6] Marshall's feminist stance continued to be important in all of the works that followed her debut novel, but Marshall criticism in the late 1980s and the 1990s was dominated by scholars who, focusing on *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983) and *Daughters* (1994), were particularly interested in Marshall's literary attempts to reclaim, reconstruct or simply re-invent a 'common' African past for all (diasporic) people of African descent as well as in her representation of the tension between rootlessness and belonging or interconnectedness among diasporic people of African descent.[7] Although *Brown Girl, Brownstones* investment in a common African diasporic is more tentative than that of Marshall's later novels, the *Bildungsroman's* negotiations of questions of roots and belonging are both required and enabled by Selina's lived experience as a female second-generation immigrant growing up in an immigrant neighborhood.

2.2 A Challenging Appropriation – Turning the *Bildungsroman* Female and Ethnic

Brown Girl, Brownstones, Marshall's strongly autobiographically-inflected *Bildungsroman*, seeks to appropriate the authority of "the dominant genre of Western narrative" (Moretti 1978: 19) while simultaneously challenging the more confining and

[5] In this context, Barbara Christian's *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976*. (1980) remains a key publication.
[6] See essays in Christian (1985) and essays by Eugenia Collier and John McCluskey in Evans (1984).
[7] See Busia (1989), Pettis (1995), Denniston (1995) and DeLamotte (1998). Even though some of these studies also examine Marshall's 1969 novel, *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People,* these cautious critical reappraisals have not succeeded in establishing the novel as a foundational text of postcolonial literature (and criticism); despite the fact that it identifies and negotiates some of the most crucial and pressing issues that haunt the newly postcolonial world. See Spillers (1985) for an insightful reading of that particular novel. While there are some journal articles that focus specifically on Marshall's short fiction, most studies and essays of Marshall's works use references to *Reena and Other Stories* (1983) and *Soul Clap Hands and Sing* (1988) to reinforce observations made about her novels.

leveling elements of that genre tradition and re-writing it in such a way it can represent and negotiate female experiences of immigration and dislocation as well as those of assimilation and integration. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones* the typical tensions and potential conflicts between the female protagonist and her environment are further intensified, since, as a second-generation Barbadian-American,[8] Selina Boyce is aware of two competing sets of social expectations that make demands on her: the expectations of the Barbadian-American immigrant community and the expectations of American society at large. At first, she attempts to meet both sets of expectations, although they rarely fully coincide and sometimes even contradict each other. Heather Hathaway argues that the novel traces how Selina comes to exist in and speak from a "dual location" (Hathaway 1999: 86), and Eugenia C. DeLamotte reads the novel's ending as an "affirmation of doubleness" (DeLamotte 1998:39). While the novel does indeed negotiate national and cultural duality or doubleness in three of its four books, "Book 4 Selina" cannot be read only in these terms, since Selina begins to question whether the expectations made of her are at all legitimate.

In order to raise questions of equality related not only to gender and class but also to race and ethnicity, the novel traces the eponymous brown girl's development into a young woman as well as the development of the Barbadian-American (immigrant) community that resides in and is symbolized by the equally eponymous brownstones. Following the patterns for ethnic *Bildungsromane* and for novels of transformation described by Martin Japtok and Mark Stein, the novel does not privilege individualism through a narrative focus on the protagonist's development, but instead grants substantial room to, minor characters and thus portrays a large spectrum of the Barbadian-American community (Japtok 2005: 25-28; Stein 2004: 22). While the desire and necessity to represent ethnic complexities is certainly partly responsible for the novel's dual focus on Selina and the Barbadian-American community, such a tendency to focus on both the protagonist and her community is equally characteristic of female *Bildungsromane* in general and when female *Bildungsromane* represent emotionally nurturing and supportive environments for their female protagonists, they tend to do so by granting room to additional, mostly female, characters. There are even some cases in which such female

[8] In this study, people who actually migrate from a home country or country of birth are referred to as 'first-generation immigrants,' the children born in their parents' new home country or new country of residence make up the 'second generation.'

characters not only "share the formative voyages," but may even "assume equal status as protagonists" (Abel et.al. 1983: 12).[9]

The first part of the novel follows a dual trajectory. The detailed introduction of the community -- or, more precisely, the row of brownstones "resembl[ing] an army massed at attention" (*BGB* 3) that represents it -- before the protagonist is ever mentioned indicates that the novel places much importance on the representation of the Barbadian-American community. But since Selina initially interacts almost exclusively with women, not all of them Barbadian-Americans, it is clear that Marshall reconfigures the *Bildungsroman* in such a way as to accommodate the representation of not only immigrant experiences but *female* first- and second-generation immigrant experiences. From the beginning, the novel suggests that the character of Selina cannot be understood or even be approached before some of the specific racial, ethnic and socio-economic factors that have shaped the world that 'put her so'[10] are introduced. Since it draws attention to the particularities, complexities and challenges of Selina's experience, both in the private and in the public realm, Marshall's female ethnic *Bildungsroman* does not simply seek to stabilize the status quo. Instead, it seeks to both politicize the *Bildungsroman* in feminist terms to analyze and critique political and social processes related to immigration and diaspora. Furthermore, it begins to develop a progressive vision for the future.

2.2.1 Tell Me Where You Live and I'll Tell You … - On the Specificities of Location

Addressing a generalized, possibly white, "you," the introductory passage firmly situates the narrative in a Brooklyn neighborhood later on identifiable as Stuyvesant Heights (now Bedford-Stuyvesant), at a very specific time: the summer of 1939, shortly before the outbreak of WWII. The evocative and finely-crafted passage describing the row of brownstones abounds with specific architectural details which are not solely offered for the sake of realism or to exhibit Marshall's literary skill and craftsmanship.[11] This description accomplishes something much more remarkable. In describing the row of houses the omniscient narrator simultaneously characterizes the Barbadian-American community (Christian 1980: 82) and subtly introduces the major conflict that will arise

[9] Abel et.al (1983: 12) cite *Little Women* and *Sula* as examples of such novels, but the list could be continued by novels, such as *The Color Purple* or, as a more recent example, Brit Bennett's debut novel, *The Mothers* (2016).
[10] In the course of the novel, Selina's mother Silla repeatedly asks other characters who or what put them so.
[11] For an insightful early essay on the significance of architecture in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, see Benston (1975).

between the community's demand for conformity and the individual's, especially Selina's, desire for individuality, autonomy and self-realization that will drive the plot forward:

> Glancing down the interminable Brooklyn street you thought of those joined brownstones as one house reflected through a train of mirrors, with no walls between the houses, but only vast rooms yawning endlessly one into the other. Yet, looking close you saw that under the thick ivy each house had something distinctly its own. Some touch that was Gothic, Romanesque, baroque or Greek triumphed amid the Victorian clutter. […] Yet they all shared the same brown monotony. All seemed doomed by the confusion in their design. (*BGB* 3)

On the one hand, the community of immigrants derives strength from the conformity it demands from its members because it allows them to present a unified front in the face of a hostile outside world in which acts of discrimination and humiliation are daily experiences. On the other hand, conformity and unity can only go so far before their repressive and oppressive effects are felt (Hathaway 132). While temporary 'strategic essentialism'[12] in the name of presenting a unified (political) front has been and can be advantageously employed in the struggles of marginalized groups for political representation or equal rights, the strict conformity that the Barbadian-American community is shown to demand from its members in the novel is stifling. In the course of the novel, there are numerous instances where ethnic essentialism is depicted as being used neither strategically nor as a political tool but as a community- sanctioned interference in characters' private affairs aimed at repressing mutinous or subversive tendencies, especially among the younger generation. This explains the foreboding tone of the last two sentences of the quotation, since, as the reader will learn, the community is, in fact, "doomed" because it is neither able to fully repress nor able to adequately accommodate the voices of its more individualistic or non-conformist members.

Calling attention to the long tradition of immigration to the U.S., the introductory passage emphasizes that although some of the problems and challenges that the Barbadian-Americans face are unique to that particular community, they are by no means the first immigrant community that has inhabited these New York City houses and left its mark both on the city and on the nation. However, the arrival of the first large group of dark-skinned immigrants from Barbados and other islands in the West Indies, who came "[l]ike a dark sea nudging its way onto a white beach and staining the sand" (*BGB* 4), prompted a

[12] For more information see Spivak et al. (1990: 109), Lowe (1996: 82-83) and Pérez (1998). For a critique of the concept also see Grewal (2005: 12-13).

major transformation of neighborhood. The arrival of the latest group of immigrants accelerated the exodus of the white descendants of the Dutch-English and Scotch-Irish immigrants who had originally built the houses and formed the neighborhood and effected significant cultural and linguistic shifts in the neighborhood.[13] The image of the dark sea that stains a white sandy beach is striking on multiple levels. First of all, the stereotypical association of whiteness with purity and of darkness with contamination supports the idea that the introductory passage is indeed addressed to a generalized 'you' who is quite probably constructed as a white outsider and may very well be conceived of as holding biased or even racist ideas. Heather Hathaway draws attention to a similarly telling phrase in the initial description of the brownstones in which the narrator claims that the houses are "all one uniform red-brown stone" (*BGB* 3); she concludes that the narrator is looking at the row of brownstones "as though […] blinded by racism" (Hathaway 1999: 91). Both the stereotypical imagery and the peculiar configuration of the narrative situation that results from its use raise at least two questions: What does the imagery employed in the introductory passage reveal about the function of this passage – particularly in view of the fact that the novel as a whole not only brings to light acts of 'everyday' racism and unmasks internalized racist attitudes but also ponders the 'race question' in the U.S. in great detail and with reference to such renowned public thinkers and intellectuals as W.E.B. DuBois, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin? Furthermore, what do the idiosyncrasies or inconsistencies of the introductory passage reveal about the difficulties and challenges Marshall and other (ethnic) writers like her had to contend with in their attempts to appropriate and rewrite the *Bildungsroman* genre?

It is, of course, possible to view the stereotypical imagery found in the introductory passage simply as (a) manifestation of internalized racism, of which the author would have to have been unaware at the time of writing. This explanation seems highly unlikely, however; since the novel's later chapters offer an acute analysis and working through of

[13]Dodson and Diouf describe the flow of migrants and immigrants from the Caribbean in the following manner: "[In the 19th and 20th centuries t]he stream of [Caribbean] migrants to the United States was relatively small compared with the flow to Central America and Cuba. […] Those who immigrated to [the U.S.] were disproportionately literate and skilled, with a significant number being professionals or white-collar workers. The number of black people, especially those from the Caribbean, who migrated to the United States increased dramatically during the first three decades of the twentieth century, peaking in 1924 at 12,250 per year and falling off during the Depression. The foreign-born black population increased from 20,000 in 1900 to almost 100,000 by 1930. Over 140,000 black immigrants passed through United States ports between 1899 and 1937, despite the restrictive immigration laws enacted in 1917, 1921, and 1924. […] During the peak years of migration, 1913 to 1924, the majority made their way to New York City, settling primarily in Manhattan and Brooklyn. By 1930, almost a quarter of black Harlem was of Caribbean origin. Less than a decade later, the New York Amsterdam News informed its readers that, with the exception of Kingston, Jamaica, Harlem was the largest West Indian city in the world" (Dodson and Diouf 2004:161-62).

precisely this phenomenon. In view of the limited publication possibilities for non-white authors in the 1950s, particularly for female second-generation immigrant authors, addressing a generalized white 'you' rather than an explicitly African American or black immigrant, 'you' is perhaps better understood as a strategy aimed at making the novel more accessible to a diverse readership that includes African American as well as white American readers.[14] In fact, Marshall is not the only author to have used this strategy of easing 'non-insiders' into her text. For example, Toni Morrison's novel, *Sula*, originally published in 1973, also begins with an introductory passage whose function the author herself later characterized and condemned as a "deference paid to the 'white' gaze" (Morrison 2005: xiv). In retrospect, Morrison compares her introductory passage to a safe and welcoming "lobby" or a "seductive safe harbor" that is offered to the reader, to make it easier for a white (?), "outside-the-circle-reader" to enter into a "black-topic text" (Morrison 2005: xiii-xiv). Viewed in this context, the idiosyncratic narrative configuration of *Brown Girl*'s introductory passage indicates the challenges and limitations with which Marshall's reconfiguration the genre of the *Bildungsroman* must contend. The passage can thus be characterized as revealing rather than unsettling.

Similarly, Marshall's use of quotations from and references to ancient Greek dramas, such as *Medea* (*BGB* 29), *Antigone* (*BGB* 170) and *Iphigenia in Tauris/Aulis* (*BGB* 138) may appear to be a deferential act. Yet, particularly for ethnic writers or writers identifying or identified with marginalized groups or communities – and especially for such writers at the beginning of their careers -- the process of appropriating and re-writing the *Bildungsroman* tradition usually involves the creation of passages in which they prove their familiarity with and their mastery of the tradition that they re-write and continue from within.

2.2.2 The *Bildungsheldin* and her Community of Women

When Selina Boyce, whom Edwidge Danticat has characterized as "one of the most fascinating and memorable female characters in American fiction" (Danticat 2006: ix), finally enters the narrative for the first time, she does so as a ten-year-old, playing alone on the landing of the brownstone her family inhabits. With child-like abandon, she loses

[14] The first work of fiction that Marshall ever published was the short story "The Valley Between" (1954) which featured only white characters.

herself in her play and attempts to do something daring one moment, only to stop abruptly the next:

> Suddenly the child, Selina, leaped boldly to the edge of the step, her lean body quivering. At the moment she hurled herself forward, her hand reached back to grasp the banister, and the *contradiction* of her movement flung her back on the step. She huddled there, rubbing her injured elbow and hating her cowardice. (*BGB* 4-5, emphasis mine)

This paragraph can also be interpreted as foreshadowing some of the novel's major plot developments. In light of Tobias Moretti's observation that socialization processes consist "first of all in the *interiorization of contradiction"* (10; italics in the original), it is telling that Selina injures herself due to "the contradiction of her movement." At this point in the narrative, the contradiction Selina is shown to be most affected by is that between her inner world, that is the world of her imagination, and the reality in which she lives. As Selina continues to play, the house comes "alive" (*BGB* 4) to her and becomes her playground. In her play she can overcome her loneliness as well as divest herself of the racial markers that she feels set her apart from the ideals of white "beauty and gentility" (*BGB* 5) to which she still aspires at this point in the narrative. Here, as in many other ethnic *Bildungsromane* published in the decades after *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, we encounter a female child character whose self-perception, sense of beauty, and sense of self-worth have already been negatively affected by the realization that neither her appearance nor her manners can ever fully live up to white standards of beauty and demeanor.[15]

Both in the realm of her imagination and especially when she is inside the parlor, a "museum of all the lives that had ever lived there" (*BGB* 5), Selina feels seamlessly connected to the success stories of the white-skinned "Dutch-English and Scotch-Irish" (*BGB* 4) immigrants turned citizens who had owned the house before her parents moved in. In Selina's imagination, where racial markers can be shed, she, too, can participate in the American master narrative of successful immigration and unproblematic and complete assimilation and integration. Selina's carefree and playful mood is broken, however, when in the first of several mirror scenes "the mirror [flings] her back at herself" and she is "only herself again" (*BGB* 5-6).[16] Once the illusion has been destroyed by a confrontation with her mirror image, the true scope of Selina's dissatisfaction with and disappointment in

[15] Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1979) remains a key text in this context. Kincaid's, Danticat's and Adichie's novels also explore how anxieties surrounding female body image are heightened or even emerge as a response to the experiences of immigration, assimilation and displacement.

[16] For information on mirrors and mirroring in bicultural texts, see chapter two of Oster (2003), esp. pp. 36-40.

herself becomes apparent. Not only does she feel that she "[does] not belong" in the house, she even conceives of herself as "something vulgar in a holy place" (*BGB* 6).

The scene in which Selina contemplates a family photograph that does not include her shows that the twin issues of belonging and alienation do not only define the Barbadian-American girl's perception of her position vis-à-vis the white outside world, embodied by the specters by the brownstone's former owners; these issues also define her life on a private level. Her absence from the photographic family record generates first a desire to make her presence known and "declare herself" (*BGB* 6); the novel's first book, "A Long Day and a Long Night," shows how this desire is transmuted into one for companionship that makes her seek out and interact with different family members and neighbors. Although not all these interactions compound Selina's feeling of loneliness and alienation, the novel firmly establishes Selina's difference from the female members of her immediate family: her dominant mother, Silla, and her sister, Ina. Instead of providing each other with support, companionship and solidarity, Selina and her sister Ina are portrayed as complete opposites throughout the novel. Their differences in appearance, personality and attitude account for a number of their rivalries. Where Selina appears tomboyish, Ina's transformation into a beautiful, shapely and "mysterious" (*BGB* 7) young woman begins at an early age. While Ina becomes "unassailable" (*BGB* 7) to her younger sister's attacks, her taunts reinforce Selina's belief in her own ugliness. As children, they are also rivals for their father's love, even though Ina pretends she does not seek or need his love or approval. As young women, they seem largely indifferent to one another's troubles, and their differences in temperament and outlook on life grow even more pronounced. It is only in times of extreme distress, such as during major fights between their parents or in the wake of their father's death, that Selina and Ina can overcome their differences and put aside their petty arguments in order to provide some kind of sisterly comfort and reassurance to one another. Even though Ina remains one of the more sketchily drawn of the female minor characters, her presence in the novel, like that of Selina's best friend, Beryl Chancellor, and the other "soft" and lazy second-generation Barbadian-American "New York children" (*BGB* 68) who eventually graduate from college to get married and/or become respectable, hard-working professionals, is significant because it enables the reader to appreciate the extent of Selina's deviation from the norm to which her mother wants her to conform. Compared to Selina, Ina is the obedient, "gentle and virginal" (*BGB* 135) daughter who, except for becoming a devout believer and church-goer against her mother's wishes, accomplishes the feat of outwardly

meeting all of her mother's demands and expectations. While Selina has to find a way of expressing herself in opposition to "the mother," Ina makes silence her strategy for keeping both Selina and Silla at a distance.

Two further minor characters, Suggie Skeete and Miss Thompson, are also introduced in the opening chapters of the novel. Since Selina's relationship to her mother is fraught with conflict, her relationships to these two women, who could not be more dissimilar both to Silla and to each other, is of special significance, as they fulfill the role of what Rosalie Riegle Troester has described as "othermothers": adult women, who relieve the mother-daughter conflict by serving as additional role models to the child protagonist (Troester 1984: 13). These 'othermothers' can be related to the biological mother or, as in the cases of Suggie and Miss Thompson, be entirely unrelated to the family and "exemplf[y] values widely divergent" from those of the mother (Troester 1984: 13). Both 'othermothers' teach Selina important life lessons. While Selina's relationship with Miss Thompson endures, Silla has the power to effectively end Selina's friendship with Suggie, by having her fellow immigrant from Barbados evicted from the brownstone for prostitution in the same month that Selina starts college (*BGB* 210). Unable to return home because of her alleged "wickedness" (*BGB* 208) and her precarious financial situation, Suggie clearly represents a far less economically successful immigration experience than that of Selina's mother. Her story also problematizes how women are rendered voiceless and impotent even as diasporic women in allegedly progressive host countries like the U.S by the same or very similar configurations of patriarchal structures that rendered them voiceless and impotent in their home countries. Not only do patriarchal structures also exist in the U.S.; they also travel across the sea with the immigrants. Throughout the novel, the Barbadian-American immigrant community is portrayed as conservative and unable -- or at least unwilling to -- address the issue of gender inequality, even though the ambitious and thrifty women like Silla represent important pillars of the community's economic success and social mobility. Furthermore, Silla's actions show that female solidarity and sisterhood, as it is embodied by her group of female friends, is based on both principles both of inclusion and of exclusion. Suggie is perhaps the most marginalized/subaltern character represented in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, but the narrative strives to represent her as a complex, contradictory, intelligent and likeable character, without resorting to stereotypical representations, such as the 'fallen angel' or the 'tart with a heart.'[17] Embodying sensuality and sexuality as well as the spirituality and solemnity of a "priest" (*BGB* 17), Suggie

[17] See Holmberg (1996) for a brief overview of the development of the representation of prostitutes in literature and popular culture, esp. pp. 43-46.

teaches Selina to love her body as well as her own sensuality and sexuality. Suggie's example of female sensuality, a direct contrast to Silla's rigidity, later enables Selina to develop positive relationships to her body and her sexuality. Selina's most important 'othermother,' is Miss Thompson. A Southerner who came to New York as part of the Great Migration, she is represented as the neighborhood's sage woman. In an interview Marshall has characterized her as an "ancestral figure" (Dance 2010: 102). The novel establishes this notion about the character by suggesting that her physical features can be traced by to the African continent: "[H]er face resembled an African wood carving: mysterious, omniscient, the features elongated by compassion, the eyes shrouded with a profound sadness . . ." (*BGB* 41). The character serves to diversify the construction of the African diaspora experience in the novel and highlights the significance of the Great Migration at a time when this exodus of African Americans from the South was generally so widely ignored that it would later be characterized as "the biggest underreported story of the twentieth century" (Wilkerson 2010:9).

The elderly African American beautician, who is an 'othermother' not only to Selina but also to her roommate's children, takes on the role of trusted advisor and mediator in Selina's life. It is also because of Miss Thompson's life story that Selina is first confronted with the violence of anti-black racism in the U.S. Miss Thompson explains that she suffered the debilitating "life-sore" (*BGB* 27) that will not heal, when her foot was sliced open when, during a family visit in the South, a group of white men attacked her for being "uppity" (*BGB* 216) and possibly attempted to rape her. As Selina recognizes the festering sore on Miss Thompson's foot to be the festering sore of racism in America, she becomes enraged and imagines how she might avenge Miss Thompson by "rush[ing] into some store on Fulton Street [and] smashing [Miss Thompson's cane] across the white face behind the counter" (*BGB* 216).

In contrast to her mother, who relies on a community of women entirely made up of immigrants from Barbados like herself, Selina's female community incorporates Barbadian-(American) as well as of African American and Jewish-American women. Selina even forms a peculiar friendship of sorts with Miss Mary, an elderly white tenant of the brownstone who used to work as a servant for the first family who owned it. Even though Miss Mary's daughter feels stranded in the neighborhood and left at the mercy of the "black foreign scum downstairs" (*BGB* 35), mother and daughter are not able to (or fully committed to) moving to Long Island (*BGB* 35-36). Later, as Miss Mary grows weaker and her senses deteriorate, she begins to live almost exclusively in her memories of

the time when Brooklyn was still a white neighborhood and when she was in love with the son of the owner of the brownstone. Selina, who was "lured [in] as a child into [Miss Mary's] tomb with [Miss Mary's] crooning memories" (*BGB* 204), is the only person who still visits, listens to and talks to the dying woman and is present when Silla attempts to scare the "living dead" (*BGB* 19) literally to death (*BGB* 203) in order to free up space in the brownstone she has at last managed to buy. Although Selina's feelings toward Miss Mary are best described as ambivalent, she acknowledges the social and economic difficulties that the poor, unmarried single mother has had to contend with. Since Miss Mary's testimony only emerges retrospectively and remains entirely limited to the domestic sphere, it does not succeed in drowning out and silencing those social, political and cultural transformations brought about by non-white immigrants in the public sphere that she so abhors. In fact, Miss Mary has been silenced and rendered invisible in ways eerily similar to those in which Silla and her friends are silenced in the American public sphere. While Selina seems to have an inkling that similarities beyond the purely biological ones exist between marginalized women regardless of racial, ethnic or cultural differences, Silla, who feels nothing but contempt and rage toward Miss Mary, does not acknowledge any similarity between herself and the old white woman. Consequently, her cold-heated actions in Miss Mary's room only reinforce the mother-daughter conflict.

Within the African diaspora community, Selina forms lasting friendships and establishes important alliances along the lines of race and ethnicity. But as the case of her Jewish friend, Rachel Fine, demonstrates, she is also able to establish those connections to female characters with different, less pronounced and less immediate experiences of dislocation and immigration. The following description of the young women's dance performance can be read as an affirmation of cross-diaspora alliances, since "she and Rachel had danced the night before as if guided by a single will, as if, indeed, they were simply reflections of each other" (*BGB* 281). While Selina's befriending Rachel can, of course, also be read as an act of rebellion against the mother as well as as a critique of the Barbadian-American community's ambivalent or even prejudiced stance towards Jews, the representation of their friendship also serves to advocate that new alliances among women are possible based on understanding as well as on shared interests and ideals. Since in the process of her separation from home all of Selina's friendships within Barbadian-American community dissolve, her new, almost instant, friendship with Rachel seems especially significant because it challenges the priority of ethnic bonds over more freely chosen, self-

fashioned political alliances based on solidarity among a diverse group of (diasporic) women.

2.2.3 Rejecting and Claiming the Parental Heritage

Although Selina's othermothers and her extra-familial friendships have a formative influence on her, her parents, who represent her deepest and most immediate connection to Caribbean customs and culture, are stronger forces while Selina is still young. Initially, she identifies strongly with her father and starts rebelling against her mother's rule from an early age. As "Deighton's Selina" (*BGB* 307) she takes sides in her parents' battles and later in the outright war they wage against each other in the third book of the novel, aptly entitled "The War" and covering the duration of WWII. Since Selina desperately wishes to defend her father and, more importantly, because she needs to defend her own individuality and integrity against a mother who attempts to exert influence and claim authority of interpretation over every facet of her daughter's life, Silla does not only become her husband's most formidable foe but also her daughter's most challenging opponent.

A number of critics, including Hathaway (1999) and Denniston (1995), have noted that the lengthy and intricate portrayals of Silla and Deighton represent them as an oppositional pair on many levels. Some critics even go so far as to suggest that the novel is not really about Selina and her development from a girl into a young woman, but about her parents' prolonged war against each other. Although it is true that the portrayal of how the parents' relationship deteriorates from what must have been passionate love to an equally passionate hatred in Silla's case and detached resignation in Deighton's case is one of the most arresting features of the novel, Benston's insinuation that *Brown Girl Brownstones* lacks narrative unity because it focuses too little on the eponymous 'brown girl' is difficult to uphold (Benston 1975: 68). The novel contains many complexly drawn minor characters, yet, all of them are connected to Selina's story, and the fourth and last book of the novel ("Selina") focuses almost solely on the female protagonist in a world beyond her parents' reach. Even in this context**,** the detailed representation of the parental figures in this female ethnic *Bildungsroman* is indispensable for a number of reasons. First of all, Selina's parents function as individual representatives of the Barbadian-American community, and as such the portrayal of their differences and arguments draws attention to some of the inner tensions with which this community, like all diaspora communities,

struggles. Moreover, the parental figures in ethnic *Bildungsromane* are the protagonist's most important and most tangible connection to an ancestral homeland whose customs and history can, in most cases, only be experienced and comprehended in a mediated form either through the parents' ethnically inflected behavior and explicit instructions or through the stories they tell. In this regard, the literary representation of immigrant parents thus corresponds to Safran's description of how the connection to a(n ancestral) homeland is maintained, since diasporic parents attempt to ensure that the their children "continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to [the family's] homeland in one way or another, and [that] their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship. (Safran 1991: 84). It is mostly in the protagonists' identification, interaction or battle with the paternal figures that these ethnic *Bildungsromane* can establish what distinguishes their backgrounds and childhood experiences from those identified with non-immigrant or dominant culture.

Through the representation of differences between Selina's father and her mother *Brown Girl, Brownstones* explores the tensions within the Barbadian-American community. Although, from the beginning, Deighton Boyce, is associated with sunshine and laughter as well as idleness and leisure, while his wife is associated with "the theme of winter" (*BGB* 16), ambition and hard work the full extent of their differences and the consequences that result from them becomes apparent only as the novel progresses. Not only do they represent two very distinct immigration experiences, they also embody conflicting sets of values and aspirations between which Selina at first feels forced to choose. Toward the end of the novel, she finds a balance between these two sets of values ---- but only because she also rejects those parts of her matrilineal and patrilineal legacies that she deems detrimental or undesirable. Having entered the U.S. as a legal immigrant in the 1920s, Silla, whom Selina calls "the mother," wants to stay in "this white-man country" (*BGB* 71) and make the most of the opportunities that she believes it offers to all those who are willing to work hard. Despite the gender- and race-based discrimination she faces in the U.S., she is convinced that the U.S. offers greater opportunities to people like herself and her daughters than Barbados ever will. To Silla, who grew up working in the "Third Class" (*BGB* 45) on the sugarcane fields in a rural part of the island, Barbados is the country where black people like her are treated "like slaves" (*BGB* 70) even though officially slavery has been abolished for some time. To her, Barbados is the country where black people will always be poor and will never be able to make any "head-way" (*BGB* 70). She compares living in such a disheartening situation to "kind of d[ying] inside" (*BGB*

70). Since, in these passages, the novel constructs Silla as the representative of and speaker for a community of women who had to endure similar hardships, her account of the hardships she had to endure as a marginalized/subaltern child and young woman in Barbados, is endowed with special authority and authenticity. As the gross mischaracterization of Britain's colonial project as a 'civilizing mission' is revealed and corrected, Silla not only becomes "the collective voice of all the Bajan women, the vehicle through which their former suffering found utterance" (*BGB* 45); her account is also validated and reinforced by her group of female friends who agree with her description and evaluation of life in Barbados compared to that in the U.S. (*BGB* 70). Silla's account is further authenticated and reinforced because her descriptions of life in Barbados are represented not only in her direct dialogue with her friends but also in a language which attempts to transpose Bajan dialect and oral tradition into written speech.

In contrast to Silla, Deighton, who entered the U.S. illegally in 1920, dreams of a return to the "poor-poor but sweet-enough" (*BGB* 11) island of his childhood. The fact that Deighton and Silla disagree so fundamentally about the nature of their stay in the U.S explains why Deighton is not interested in saving up money or selling the land he recently inherited in order to be able to make a down-payment on the brownstone that the family is renting, while Silla, by contrast, is prepared to "show the world that Silla ain't nice" (*BGB* 76), "[to damn] her soul" (*BGB* 114) and to destroy any trust between herself and her husband in the attempt to turn her dream of possessing the brownstone into reality. In contrast to the deep-seated but rarely verbalized conflict arising from the question of who is to blame for the death of Selina's brother, which occurred before her birth, the couple's disagreement about whether or not to buy a brownstone is well known both to the couple's daughters and to other members of the Barbadian-American community, nearly all of whom take Silla's side and condemn Deighton for his failure to make a real effort to become successful in the U.S. Rather than relentlessly pursuing the capitalist (American) dream of achieving upward social mobility through hard work and education the way Silla does, Deighton hangs on to pipedreams of one day being able to secure a better job by taking and "half-stud[ying]" (*BGB* 82) correspondence courses to become a radio-repairman, an accountant or a trumpet player. He dreams of becoming so successful in these professions that he can return to Barbados, or Bimshire as he lovingly calls it, as a 'made man' who can afford to build a "white house with Grecian columns and stained-glass bathroom windows" (*BGB* 115).

Even though Selina initially shares her father's dream of returning "home" (*BGB* 11) and detests the mother for deceiving and betraying her father in order to sell the land that he recently inherited, she still loves the mother and is in almost equal parts drawn to and intimidated by her strength and determination. In contrast to Deighton, Silla is shown to succeed in dealing with or even overcoming the obstacles put in her way in the private as well as in the public sphere. As she moves from odd cleaning jobs to a job in a war plant and later to a nursing job, her ambition and success earn her the respect of her peers. Selina arrives at a new appreciation and later on perhaps even a grudging admiration of the mother's strength on the evening that she comes to the factory in order to confront her about the land-selling scheme. Observing Silla among the machines tempers Selina's anger and leaves her feeling both awed at her power and skill and intimidated into inaction by it:

> Watching her, Selina felt the familiar grudging affection seep under her amazement. Only the mother's own formidable force could match that of the machines; only the mother could remain indifferent to the brutal noise. How, then, could Selina hope to intimidate her with a few mild threats? (*BGB* 100)

At home, in the sanctuary of her white, spotless kitchen, surrounded by a supportive group of female friends, Silla's voice and her opinions are in no danger of being drowned out by the sound of machines or the intersecting oppressive forces that usually succeed in effectively silencing subaltern subjects/immigrant working-class women like Silla and her friends. Much like the "Poets in the Kitchen" to whom Marshall pays homage in an essay by the same name,[18] Silla is portrayed as an eloquent, sharp and opinionated orator. A "real-real Bajan woman" (*BGB* 200) and a supporter of Marcus Garvey,[19] she exhibits an acute understanding of the oppressive forces that continue to limit her choices even after her successful escape from Barbados. Among her female friends, Silla's opinions and her

[18] Originally published in 1983, Marshall's essay "From the Poets in the Kitchen" has been republished in various outlets. All quotations are taken from its 2001 republication in *Callaloo.*

[19] Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), was hailed and presented himself as a 'Black or Negro Moses' intent on leading 'his people' home. During the 1910s and 20s Garvey, an immigrant from Jamaica, became an important political leader who advocated a highly nationalist, Pan-African program of racial improvement for people of African descent that differed significantly from ideas of racial improvement and uplift promoted by American-born W.E.B DuBois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), which Garvey founded and spear-headed, attracted many supporters worldwide and is perhaps best remembered for its "Back to Africa" and "Africa for the Africans" slogans as well as the Black Star Line Steamship Corporation (1919-1922). Due to ideological similarities with Zionism, Garveyism has also been dubbed 'Black Zionism.' While in the 19th and 20th century many groups and individuals promoted the ideas of Black Zionism, Garvey' movement had the largest mass appeal. 1925 Garvey was sentenced to five years in prison on federal charges of mail fraud. In 1927 his sentence was commuted and he was deported to Jamaica. For a concise overview, see Guterl (2009). For a more complete overview, see Grant (2008) or Cronon's authoritative biography of Garvey originally published in 1955.

advice are welcomed and appreciated both for their astuteness and for their artistry, since she has, in fact, mastered both the art and the survival skill of "tak[ing] yuh mouth and mak[ing] a gun" (*BGB* 71).[20] Even as a young girl, Selina recognizes "the mother's power with words" (*BGB* 71) and is awed by it; she is certain that she will never be able to match or defeat her using her own verbal skills, which she perceives to be underdeveloped, especially when opposing the mother. Even though Selina can neither sway the mother nor get other grown-ups, including her father, to take seriously her warnings about the mother's plan to sell the land in Barbados behind her father's back, she continues to question the mother's most fundamental beliefs about what is important in life and how one attains or accomplishes these things. Silla's life has taught her to accept that "'[…] to make your way in this world you got to dirty more than yuh hands sometime…'" (*BGB* 102-3), but Selina can neither accept the validity of this statement nor can she appreciate the spirit in which the mother offers this life lesson to her. The rejection of the mother's advice corresponds to Selina's violent rejection of Florrie Trotman's attempt to include her into the group of grown-up women on the day that Silla initially vows to sell Deighton's land (*BGB* 76-77) and beseeches her daughter to keep silent about this plan. Selina even goes so far as to openly challenge capitalism when she questions the primacy of money over love. To Silla, Selina's rejection of her own pragmatic, capitalist values in favor of idealist(ic) and romantic values confirms two things: On the one hand, it confirms the mother's sense that Selina is her father's daughter who shares his vices of laziness and pleasure-seeking, and on the other hand, she suspects that Selina's "womanish" ways, her "too own-way" (*BGB* 102) personality, and her increasing maturity will result in additional conflicts, thus adding to Silla's "crosses" (*BGB* 47, 102). Even though Silla is, for a time, still able to reprimand and ridicule Selina for disobedience and what she perceives to be her foolishness, it gradually becomes clear to both the mother and the reader that Selina will not be a "David without a sling" (*BGB* 106) for much longer and that she will eventually succeed in making herself heard and making people pay attention to her.

Through its representation of Silla, the novel also calls attention to the high emotional costs of relentlessly pursuing material gain in the hopes of finally meriting social recognition and validation. As Silla's most persistent and perceptive critic, Selina continues to condemn both her mother's ardent capitalism and her decisions to first

[20] In "From the Poets in the Kitchen" Marshall stresses the therapeutic function of the women's talks, since language became their refuge and, quoting Polish émigré writer Czeslaw Milosz (1911-2004), their "only homeland" (Marshall 2001: 630). She also explains that "since language was the only vehicle readily available to [the women] they made of it an art form that - in keeping with the African tradition in which art and life are one - was an integral part of their lives" (Marshall 2001: 629).

deceive Deighton about the land and to later on betray him to the authorities for deportation. Although later on Silla is represented as being affected by Selina's criticism and haunted by her final betrayal of Deighton, she remains a survivor figure rather than a victim. At the end of the novel, the woman who came to America to escape the feeling of "d[ying] inside" (*BGB* 70) continues to find strength in the community of like-minded women who, like her, have not stopped "inveigh[ing] against a world they [do] not trust" (*BGB* 200). It is difficult to determine whether it is her refusal to give up and die or her will to survive that keeps Silla alive; what is certain, however, is that in this area, too, Silla and Deighton are constructed as an oppositional pair, since Deighton either chooses to kill himself or simply drowns off the coast of Barbados, after he has been forced to leave the U.S. And much as the exact nature of his death remains elusive, so does the reason for his continued failure to succeed in any area of life. Although the novel shows that Deighton loses his footing in life as the result of his wife's betrayal, a number of slights and injuries he suffers in the working world, and a deeply-seated feeling of inadequacy and inferiority that was instilled in him while still living in Barbados, it is difficult to identify why he seems to resign himself to self-sabotage and failure when for his wife and the other Barbadian-American husbands represented in the novel, giving up is unthinkable. Losing the piece of land in Barbados, for example, is represented as being a highly ambivalent event in Deighton's life. The "dissolution of his dream," breaks him emotionally, but at the same time it occasions a moment of "profound relief": Silla "had unwittingly spared him the terrible onus of wrestling a place in life. The pretense was over. He was broken, stripped, but delivered…" (*BGB* 115). In this passage as well as in others detailing Deighton's actions, his suffering echoes the representation of Christ's passion, although it remains unclear who, if anyone, is redeemed through Deighton's suffering: "There were sins, perhaps, lodged in him and charging the air around him that demanded his perpetual sacrifice" (*BGB* 115). Although he succeeds in taking revenge on Silla by spending the money that she made by selling the land in Barbados on luxury items instead of depositing it in the bank, he never recuperates from his wife's betrayal and remains "a hollow man" (*BGB* 116), insecure about his position in his family and his masculinity as well as about his racial and cultural identity. But even when Silla threatens to take the ultimate revenge on Deighton ("Nothing, nothing gon stop me. I gon steel my heart and bide my time and see you dead-dead at my feet' An imperceptible shudder passed over his body, then he shrugged, smiling, 'You's God, you must know'" [*BGB* 131]), Selina continues to secretly admire her mother, who "might have been a cane-cutter wielding a golden machete

through the ripened cane or a piston rising and plunging in its cylinder," for her "dark strength" (*BGB* 131-132).[21]

The representation of the events at the "the beautiful-ugly [Steed] wedding" (*BGB* 135) underscores Deighton's marginalization and ultimate exclusion from both his family and the larger Barbadian-American community. Selina experiences moments of acute alienation from both her family and the community as well as moments of reassuring belonging during the wedding ceremony and the subsequent festivities. Her parents' experiences, however, carry none of these ambivalences and are represented as polar opposites. While Silla is reassured of the community's continuing support to such an extent that Selina feels the wedding is actually held "in [the mother's] honor" (*BGB* 139), Deighton is literally and metaphorically barred from re-entering the immigrant community because his alleged laziness, lack of thrift, and resignation violate its key values and self-imposed work ethic. Instead of siding with the father, however, Selina somewhat reluctantly participates in Deighton's expulsion from the community, as she is incorporated into the group of singing calypso dancers and becomes "part of a giant amoeba which change[s] shape yet always remain[s] of one piece" (*BGB* 148). The calypso chant, "Small Island, go back where you come from" (*BGB* 148), tells Deighton exactly what the community expects him to do. This scene exemplifies how the celebration of homeland/ancestral culture can serve to unite and heal as well as to separate and to hurt (African) diaspora communities. The Barbadian-American diaspora community as Marshall represents it in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* seems unwilling and unable to tolerate or even accommodate difference, opposition and dissent.

Shortly after leaving the Steed wedding in "agony" (*BGB* 150), Deighton loses the function of one arm in a workplace accident and decides to leave his family to join the Peace Movement – a religious sect modeled on the cult surrounding the historical figure of Father Divine – in Harlem.[22] A devout follower of Father Peace, Deighton shuns his familial and parental responsibilities and keeps in contact with Selina only because she continues to seek him out in his church. As he loses himself in his new-found religiosity,

[21] Marshall's description of her mother's silent strength as well as of her power with words echoes Audre Lorde's account of her mother in the first two chapters of *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* (1982).

[22] Denniston explains that "Father Divine […] spearheaded a social and religious movement that spread to many eastern and mid-western communities in the United States [during the 1920s and 1930s]. Father Divine (his real name was George Baker) claimed to be God incarnate and, recognizing the spiritual as well as the physical needs of his followers, he espoused an ideology of peace in the here and now, as opposed to the more common religious theme of peace in the hereafter. He opened buildings which he called 'heavens,' and there he fed thousands of the dispossessed, the disillusioned, the disenchanted" (Denniston 1995: 27). Marshall has commented on this parallel between Deighton Boyce and her father in "From the Poets in the Kitchen (2001: 632) and in interviews with Pettis (2001: 87) and Dance, where she describes the loss of her father to the religious leader as "the greatest grief of [her] childhood" (Dance 2001: 103).

Selina is forced to contend with the many ways in which she is losing her father. While in her daughter's perception, Silla can still be likened to an angry but mighty goddess who takes action and shapes her world, Deighton has not only turned from "Daddy" into "Brother Boyce" (*BGB* 171), he has also turned from a "dark god" (*BGB* 52) to be admired into a vulnerable follower to be pitied. Nevertheless, during the last summer of WWII, Selina spends some time in the "monk's cell" (*BGB* 180) to which her father has moved. She relishes the silence and the solitude she finds there as well as the "certain intimacy" (*BGB* 180) that she is able to develop with her father. In contrast to Selina, who, like the reader, eventually attempts not judge her father and his history too harshly, Silla seems to entirely disregard the manifold factors that have contributed to Deighton's decline and failure. She challenges her husband's masculinity by calling him a "no real-real Bajan man" (*BGB* 173) and deems his efforts to succeed in America an utter failure. The more certain and peaceful Deighton becomes due to his conversion; however, the angrier Silla becomes with him:

> His certainty made Silla doubt. Perhaps he had found peace. An unreasonable envy seized her. […] And a new fear welled, for his bland peace might become a wall which she could never hope to penetrate. This dread suddenly swept aside her tenderness and twisted her love into wrath. (*BGB* 173)

It is in this mindset that she decides to give her husband up to the immigration authorities and to even lead the white policeman to her husband's workplace. Aiming to humiliate the man who has humiliated her, Silla has engineered an arrest and deportation scenario that is in equal parts inescapable, humiliating and destructive. Deighton simultaneously suffers and "welcome[s his] final humiliation" (*BGB* 181) at the hand of the policeman:

> He studied the policeman's face and in his shattered mind it became the white faces in the stores of Bridgetown long ago. Those faces […] that had utterly unmanned him before he was yet a man; that had stripped him of any possibility of self and then hustled him out… . (*BGB* 182)

In order to retaliate against the man who betrayed her aspirations and put himself outside of her physical and emotional reach, Silla is even willing to collaborate with the 'white-people authorities' that she otherwise despises and avoids.

Deighton's deportation allows the novel to explore how the notions of legal immigration and illegal immigration/migration are, perhaps falsely, constructed as absolute binaries in political and legal discourses. Deighton's status as illegal immigrant means that

he "[does] not exist fuh true" (*BGB* 66) within the U.S. administrative system. Furthermore, he has no protection under the law against deportation, despite having lived and worked in the U.S. for more than two decades. In contrast to other novels discussed in this study, however, the novel neither elaborates on these issues nor represents Deighton's status as illegal alien as the underlying cause of his failure to succeed. Returning to the private realm, the narrative continues to seek reasons for his failure in Deighton's and Silla's relationship instead. But even though the couple shares a final moment once the policeman is ready to take Deighton away, the exact reasons for their failures and successes are not revealed: "Silently they asked each other what had gone wrong, what it was that had ruined them for each other, and their mutual bewilderment confessed they did not know" (*BGB* 182).

As bewildered and distraught by the events leading up to Deighton's deportation as her parents, Selina lashes out at her mother and calls her "Hitler" (*BGB* 184) even though Silla's behavior is clearly more reminiscent of Medea than of Hitler. In the opening pages of the novel, Silla is first associated with Medea because the following epigraph from Euripides' play precedes the section that first introduces her: "Of all things upon the earth that bleed and grow, a herb most bruised is woman" (*BGB* 29).[23] Silla shares some traits, such as willfulness, jealously and assertiveness, with Euripides' Medea. It is due to these traits that they are deemed to be 'unnatural' and 'unwomanly' by their husbands as well as by the outside world. Moreover, both characters are foreigners in the communities in which they now reside and their outsider (diasporic) status makes them vulnerable. Despite these similarities, however, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* offers a cleverly reconfigured version of the Medea character and her 'man-made' monstrosity. As a diasporic Afro-Caribbean woman in the U.S. in the first half of the twentieth century, Silla not only battles against the limitations put upon her and her children by intersecting oppressive patriarchal and racist structures in the public realm; she also fights against the ways in which these structures are reproduced in the private realm, where they put her in a legally inferior and dependent position in relation to her husband. Initially, Silla's 'monstrosity' emerges in response to what she perceives as Deighton's lack of ambition and his unreasonable spending habits. Once he renounces his familial responsibilities and becomes physically and, more importantly, emotionally unavailable to her, however, her anger at him transforms into the kind of wrath that may also have spurred Euripides' Medea into action. But as a legal immigrant to the U.S., Silla, unlike Medea, can use Deighton's precarious

[23] Marshall quotes from the 1906 translation by Gilbert Murray. In Paul Roche's translation (1988) lines 230-231 read: "Of all the creatures that can feel and think, we women are the worst-treated things alive."

legal position, which is, of course, markedly different from Jason's, to ultimately defeat her husband, without physically harming her children**.** As in the cases of Mrs. MacTeer in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and the mother figure in Audre Lorde's *Zami – A New Spelling of My Name*, Silla's harsh and demanding attitude towards her daughters is shown to result from the mother's wish to both protect her daughters from and prepare them for a world that is hostile to black girls. All diasporic mother characters I examine in this study also have to contend with the additional difficulty of being unsure of how to adequately prepare their children for a world that they perceive as both hostile and alien. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, both the indirect representation of Deighton's death and the ambiguity surrounding its exact circumstances serve to further diminish Silla's 'monstrosity.' Since throughout her writing career Marshall has been careful not to perpetuate the myth of black (female) pathology as it has been disseminated by the Moynihan Report (1965) and elsewhere,[24] the novel neither represents Silla as a monster nor as a victim. Describing the political dimensions of her writing at the beginning of the 1980s, Marshall explains her reasoning:

> I'm not going to use the kind of themes that are fashionable because they would sell, I'm not going to suggest that Black life is in such disarray, that our unity is so disintegrated that we don't constitute any kind of force in this country. I'm not going to portray Black women as the eternal victims, I'm not going to give the impression that the whole thing that one reads so much of the literature of rape, incest and so on is a pattern in the Black community. (Bröck 2001: 67)

In view of these programmatic statements, it is only consistent that *Brown Girl, Brownstones* details both the violent escalation of the mother-daughter conflict at the end of "Book 3 The War" and Selina's gradual reconciliation with her mother towards the end of "Book 4 Selina." In the aftermath of the violent fight between mother and daughter, it becomes clear that Silla has no real intention of harming Selina. If anything, she is possessive of her daughter and hopes to win her undivided loyalty once Deighton is gone (*BGB* 185).

[24] See U.S. Department of Labor (1965). For analyses and critiques of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* see, for example, Spillers (1978), "Quick Read Synopsis" (2009) and Geary (2015).

2.2.4 Venturing out into the World

Having spent one year mourning her father, Selina is at a pivotal moment in her life at the beginning of the novel's last book. Finally, she has to deal with numerous conflicts, make plans for her future and negotiate the as yet unknown terrain of her own sexual desires. While the socialization processes of her Barbadian-American friends have made them more uniform and, it seems, led to their "*interiorization of contradiction*" (Moretti 1987: 10; italics in the original), the contradictions in Selina's life are still too manifold and too glaring to be interiorized. She still has to resolve her conflict with her mother as well as the conflicts that arise from the contradictory demands made of her by the Barbadian-American community and by American society. She also has to face and deal with the reality of American racism**.**

Since Selina is shocked and appalled by the way in which her old friends, especially Beryl, obediently do everything their parents, particularly their fathers, ask of them, she feels alienated from her peers (*BGB* 195-97). Even though she would like to preserve her former self and her childhood friendships, she doesn't share her friends' enthusiasm for either the "Association of Barbadian Homeowners and Businessmen," which promises upward social mobility and to which her mother belongs, or for the Association's plans to establish the "Young Associates" as a platform for young Barbadian-Americans like Selina's friends (*BGB* 196). Suggie also warns her against joining the Association, yet, shortly before she is evicted, she encourages "the only one [she] can call friend in this man New York" (*BGB* 209) to stop thinking about death and start living. During Selina's first year of college she feels adrift: the mother-daughter conflict continues to fester, her college experience takes on a quality of unreality, she avoids her old friends, and, like Hattie in *The Fisher King,* she takes to walking through the city. Even though these walks become her only refuge, she cannot entirely escape feelings of exclusion, alienation and dissatisfaction:

> At Fifth Avenue she walked almost cautiously past the luxurious displays in the tall windows and covertly watched those to whom the street belonged: the meticulously groomed, mink-draped women, who tapped out their right to who moved secure in an aura of wealth, with ennui like a subtle blue shading under their cold eyes and a faint famished touch to their pallid cheeks. They made her rage inside, for she knew, walking amid them in her worn coat and tam, that she was nonexistent — a dark intruder in their glittering inaccessible world. (*BGB* 213)

Her unsettling experiences during the day make her yearn for some kind of violent upheaval and fall in love with the city's nightlife, "for its chaos echoed her inner chaos" (*BGB* 213). In another parallel to *The Fisher King*, the sound of jazz outside the Metropole makes her feel alive again and returns her to herself (*BGB* 214). Like her father, she is drawn to the glittering lights and action of the city, but even at night she does not really participate in the life around her but remains an observer looking and listening in from the outside.

Encouraged by Miss Thompson to reach an understanding of her mother, Selina makes another attempt to reconnect with the Barbadian-American community. She attends an Association meeting in which the community celebrates its motto: "IT IS NOT THE DEPTHS FROM WHICH WE COME BUT THE HEIGHTS TO WHICH WE ASCEND" (*BGB* 220). Initially, the community appears to be one of upwardly mobile, patriotic model immigrants to the U.S. However, Selina and the reader discover that the community's ambition to assimilate into America has blinded most of its members to the realities of racial stratification in the U.S. The meeting makes it clear that the majority of Barbadian-Americans rejects the idea of a global African diaspora. Since the community that "ain't white yet" (*BGB* 221) strives to assimilate into dominant white culture, they determinately wish to distance themselves from African Americans, whom they regard as being trapped in the position of poor supplicants, begging rich white people for money. As a result of what can be characterized as their ethnocentric tribalism, they almost unanimously vote against the following "communist" (*BGB* 223) proposal:

> "You need to strike out that world *Barbadian* and just put *Negro*. That's my proposal. We got to stop thinking about just Bajan. We ain't home no more. It don't matter if we don know a person mother or his mother mother. Our doors must be open to every colored person that qualify…" (*BGB* 222; emphasis in the original).

Selina's ambivalent response to these events corresponds to her emotions during the Steed wedding. Once again, the uniformity of the community disturbs her, even though she envies its members their certainty and determination. When Silla and her group of friends continue their discussion of the proposal, she elaborates on her reasons for rejecting a global 'communist' community of people of African descent. Acknowledging that "they is still [their] color" (*BGB* 223) she explains that in their situation Barbadian immigrants in the U.S. cannot do anything differently for fear of "los[ing] out" themselves, even though being unable to do better "does hurt and shame [them] so" (*BGB* 224). Silla speaks her truth:

> "[P]ower is a thing that don really have nothing to do with color. Look how white people had little children their own color working in coal mines and sweatshops years back. Look how those whelps in Africa sold us for next to nothing… […] No, nobody won't admit it, but people got a right to claw their way to the top and those on top got a right to scuffle to stay there. Take this world. It won always be white. No mahn. It gon be somebody else turn soon -- maybe even people looking near like us. But plenty gon have to suffer to bring it about. And when they get up top they might not be so nice either, 'cause power is a thing that don make people nice. But it's the way of this Christ world best-proof." (*BGB* 224-225)

Silla offers a bleak description of a capitalist dog-eat-dog world in which power not only corrupts but also destroys those without power. Although she envisions an end of white supremacy she does not believe that the underlying corrupting and destructive dynamics of power generated by capitalism are ever going to be fundamentally altered. The hierarchical system she describes necessitates the existence of subaltern groups, since people can only get ahead by dominating, exploiting and ultimately destroying those who are weaker. In a world characterized by relentless competition and commodification, there is little room for community and solidarity, least of all, for community and solidarity based solely on skin-color. Silla's statement also reveals that in her frame of reference solidarity among all people of African descent is difficult to justify or establish, since the subjugation, commodification, exploitation and murder of African slaves was also made possible by intra-African slave trade, in which members of some African tribes sold tribal members of opposing tribes into slavery. Furthermore, her impassioned declaration reinforces the recurring notion that the kind of suffering Silla has had to endure does not ennoble but enrage. While in Silla's case, her rightful anger and rage become (self-)destructive, the novel maps how Selina's anger evolves into the kind of transformative force that Audre Lorde describes in "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," a keynote speech originally delivered in 1981:

> Every woman has a well-stocked arsenal of anger potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which brought that anger into being. Focused with precision it can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change. And when I speak of change, I do not mean a simple switch of positions or a temporary lessening of tensions, nor the ability to smile or feel good. I am speaking of a basic and radical alteration in those assumptions underlining our lives. (Lorde 1984: 127)

The novel locates the beginnings of the evolution of Selina's anger into a transformative force in her response to her mother's utterances. Being horrified and enraged by her mother's view of the world, "her own small truth that dimly envisioned a different world and a different way" (*BGB* 225) appears difficult to defend, since, by comparison to Silla, she has so little lived experience to confer authority to either her vision or her voice. At that point her "small belief" in a different way of doing things is too "illusory and undefined still" to confront and disavow her mother (*BGB* 225). Yet, Selina is able to denounce the plans of the Young Associates as not only "[c]lanish," "[n]arrow-minded" and "[s]elfish" but also as ignorant of the workings the "white world [they]'re so feverishly courting" (*BGB* 227). Selina's self-positioning as an 'outsider' to the group of Barbadian-American women endows her voice with authenticity while also allowing her to speak from a critical distance in which she invites the reader to share.

Meeting Clive Springer also contributes to the evolution of Selina's vision of a different life in a different world. A fellow second-generation Barbadian-American, Clive is almost as disenchanted with the Barbadian-American community and its Association as she is. Together, the two dissenters, or "missing links" (*BGB* 260), who both cannot completely escape their mothers' influences and demands, explore and experience life beyond the conformity and respectability ("puritan morality" [*BGB* 245]) demanded of both young (immigrant) women and men in the 1940s. The representation of their developing relationship emphasizes their equality rather than their similarity. Since Clive lives on his own, is almost a decade older than Selina, and views himself as a 'failed' artist, his experience of the world clearly exceeds Selina's. However, Clive, a WWII veteran who exhibits symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (*BGB* 235), believes Selina to be stronger than he is. His similarities to Deighton are striking. He, too, is desperate to make something of himself but ultimately too insecure in both his abilities and his masculinity to fully commit himself to change. Consequently, Selina sometimes feels as though he, too, does not see her because he is so self-involved. However, their companionship and their sexual encounters become a way for both of them to escape the confusions and disappointments in their lives. The novel's frank representation of mutually satisfying sexual encounters for which neither party is punished by either pregnancy and marriage or social ostracization can be characterized as both progressive and feminist. Clive's and Selina's relationship is constructed and represented as a counter model to the ubiquitous, inherently unequal power dynamics between men and women in patriarchal societies. At least initially, the lovers explicitly seek not to reproduce the unequal power dynamics that

have characterized marriages like Deighton's and Silla's. In contrast to Selina, however, Clive knows that their relationship is only temporary, because someone capable of "ruthlessly seizing and using, then thrusting aside others" like Selina has only limited need or use for someone less capable of seizing life's opportunities (*BGB* 247). Of course, Selina is disturbed when Clive characterizes her as "[her] mother's child" (*BGB* 248), and it will be some time before she comes to grudgingly apply this description to herself. Challenging Selina to question some of her beliefs about herself as well as about others, Clive introduces her not only to a 'bohemian' lifestyle but also shares his views and experiences of issues related to race and racism in the U.S. with her. While both Selina and Clive struggle to establish their individuality and gain autonomy from the Barbadian-American community as well as from their mothers, Selina's approach is more successful and proactive than Clive's. When Clive reveals how desperate he is for change, Selina hatches the plan to "be contrite, dedicated, the most willing worker they've ever had" in order to win the Barbadian Association's scholarship and use the money to travel the world (*BGB* 267). Allegedly rediscovering her Barbadian identity and pretending to return to the fold, she succeeds in fooling both her mother and the members of the Association about her true intentions. Working for the Association and putting effort into her dance training, where she determinately works to "mold her body into an expressive whole" (*BGB* 275), take up more and more of her time. Combining her maternal and her paternal heritages, her mother's determination "to impose her will" (*BGB* 274) and her father's "disarming smile" (*BGB* 270), she is elected vice-president of the Young Associates. As she and Clive drift further and further apart, Rachel becomes her true confidant who, once she learns of Selina's plan, not only suggests the Caribbean as destination because of Selina's family's roots but also offers to look into job opportunities aboard ships. Of the two, Selina is represented as the more non-conformist, since she can say "to hell with marriage" with conviction (*BGB* 279), while Rachel has decided to try again with the young man her parents want her to marry – despite feeling "like puking" (*BGB* 278) when her boyfriend wanted to put an engagement ring on her finger.

Selina's college years end with a dance recital in which she is to perform a solo of the life-and-death cycle. Her individual artistic performance both evokes and overwrites the communal, ritualistic calypso dancing during the Steed weeding. Furthermore, Selina's thoughts just before her performance recall those on the novel's opening pages, as she realizes "how utterly dependent she would be upon her body" and worries that the body which "must speak for her […] would prove not eloquent enough" (*BGB* 281). Yet, she

feels borne by the music and the people in the audience, and the passage establishes her resounding success. Her body has not failed her; in fact, it is represented as a source of strength and creativity, as it provides her with the possibility of translating her otherwise silent or inexpressible emotions into movement and thereby 'speaking' her inner voice in front of a large audience. She has finally found and mastered a form of artistic expression in which she is at least equal to her mother or perhaps even surpasses her mother's artistry with words. Yet, even in dancing Selina continues to be connected to her maternal line, since Silla is said to have been a good calypso dancer as a young girl, and she even danced at the Steed wedding (*BGB* 145). In addition, the scene recalls the insecurities related to body image and performance that have accompanied Selina since a young age, it also indicates that for women like Selina, the fight against internalizing and succumbing to an ideology that views non-white female bodies as doubly deficient is a continuous struggle that carries into adolescence and beyond.

After the performance, Selina goes home with Margaret Benton, a white fellow dancer, and meets Margaret's mother. Resembling an "inquisition" (*BGB* 287), Selina's conversation with Mrs. Benton is a turning point in the narrative and has been read in different ways. DeLamotte offers an insightful and extensive reading of Mrs. Benton as a white "second mother" against whom Selina must struggle and assert her voice as attempts are made to silence her (DeLamotte 1998: 10, 27-28.).[25] During the conversation, which tellingly takes place not in a brownstone but in a "grey-stone apartment house" (*BGB* 283), Selina is at a strategic disadvantage, as she has entered the hostile territory of white dominant culture that seeks to assert its supremacy on various levels. Though polite and well-spoken, Mrs. Benton almost instantly arouses Selina's suspicion, since she can "feel [the woman's] whiteness" (*BGB* 285). The very "texture of [Mrs. Benton's] skin" momentarily stirs "a faint uneasiness" within Selina. Throughout *Brown Girl Brownstones*, whiteness is not conceived of as an empty signifier or the default category. Instead both the term's constructedness and its destructive potential are rendered visible. Throughout the novel, the private realm has been represented as a politicized realm in which the political and social controversies and conflicts of the public realm are reproduced, experienced and intensified. In the sanctuary of her flat, Mrs. Benton functions both as a representative of white supremacy and as its agent. Disputing second-wave feminism's notions of understanding and solidarity based on a common gender or a common female experience, the novel stages the conversation as a battle of opposing forces, in which prior conflicts in

[25] See also Hathaway (1999: 114-115).

the novel are recalled and intensified. An allegedly innocent conversation about Selina's origins and her plans for the future becomes a pretext for a battle of white vs. black, 'American' vs. 'immigrant,' rich vs. poor, established center (East Side) vs. marginalized periphery (Stuyvesant Heights), old vs. young. Since Mrs. Benton presents herself as a benevolent, liberal proponent of racial uplift, Selina has difficulty asserting herself against the discursive assault of the white woman's statement, which dismisses Selina's individuality and in Selina's own words aimed to "[r]emin[d her] that [she] was only a nigger after all" (*BGB* 294):

> "Oh, it's not their fault, of course, poor things! You can't help your color. It's just a lack of the proper training and education. I have to keep telling some of my friends that. Oh, I'm a real fighter when I get started! I wish they were here tonight to meet you. You … well, dear… you don't even act colored. I mean, you speak so well and have such poise. And it's just wonderful how you've taken your race's natural talent for dancing and music and developed it. Your race needs more smart young people like you. Ettie used to say the same thing. We used to have these long discussions on the race problem and she always agreed with me. It was so amusing to hear her say things in that delightful West Indian accent …" (*BGB* 288-89).

In Mrs. Benton's eyes Selina will forever remain simply a 'black girl,' whose only distinguishing mark in her 'favor is her West Indian heritage, which, in Mrs. Benton's eyes, makes her slightly more 'tolerable' than 'real' African Americans. Mrs. Benton's praise of Selina's talents is no praise at all, since it effectively attempts to burden Selina with responsibility for 'her race.' Furthermore the essentializing view of her artistic talents puts her in her place by implying limits to what she can achieve in which areas. The statement also renders the 'real' Selina both invisible and inaudible by conflating her with the Benton's former West-Indian domestic help, Ettie. Mrs. Benton's knowledge production about 'West-Indian girls' is represented as a form of epistemological violence against which Selina, like Ettie before her, is impotent. Selina realizes that Mrs. Benton sees only her blackness and has to confront this fact: "[S]he knew that the woman saw one thing above else. Those eyes were a well-lighted mirror in which, for the first time, Selina truly saw—with a sharp shattering clarity—the full meaning of her black skin" (*BGB* 289). As she agonizes over the question why Mrs. Benton cannot see her, she feels as though all the white people she encounters "[seek] to rob her of her substance and her self" (*BGB* 289). Eventually, she flees from the Benson's apartment, but the conversation continues to

haunt her. After wandering aimlessly through the night, Selina is again confronted with her mirror image this time reflected in a pane of glass:

> She peered shyly at her reflection—the way a child looks at himself in the mirror. And in a sense, it was a discovery for her also. She was seeing, clearly for the first time, the image which the woman – and the ones like the woman – saw when they looked at her. […] Her dark face must be confused in their minds with what they feared most: with the night, symbol of their ancient fears, which seethed with sin and harbored violence, which spawned the beast in its fen; with the heart of darkness within them and all its horror and fascination. The woman, confronted by her brash face, had sensed the arid place within herself and had sought absolution in cruelty. Like the night, she was to be feared, spurned, purified---and always reminded of her darkness. (*BGB* 290-91).

Instead of simply confirming Selina's notions of self and identity, the confrontation with her mirror-image forces her to acknowledge and echo processes of misrecognition as well as the psychodynamics of racism also described by W.E.B. DuBois, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. While Selina's reaction has prompted Mary Helen Washington to posit that DuBois's concept of "double-consciousness […] is the problem at the heart of *Brown Girl[, Brownstones*]" (Marshall 1981: 319),[26] Gavin Jones points out that the novel "exists in a sophisticated dialogue with the themes and ideas of more widely discussed works from the 1950s" and "transcend[s] the idea of double identity in [its] creation of a prismal world of shifting and various selves, a world which contains a whole spectrum of social issues and identities" (Jones 1998: 597, 604). In such a reading, Selina learns both to "look at [her]self through the eyes of others" (DuBois 2007: 8), and to acknowledge that an Ellisonian kind of invisibility affects her. In *Invisible Man* (1952), Ellison's nameless first-person narrator states that "[he is] invisible […] simply because people refuse to see [him]" and continues to explain that "the invisibility to which [he] refer[s] occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom [he] come[s] in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes" (Ellison 2001: 3; italics in the original). It is Clive who first introduces Selina to the psychodynamics of racism as described by Baldwin (*BGB* 253) that she echoes here. Intertextual connections like the ones outlined above, particularly to Baldwin, can also be found in *The Fisher King*. Marshall's explicit

[26] DuBois writes: "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (DuBois 2007: 8). Washington is not alone in connecting the novel's mirror scenes to the phenomenon of DuBois concept of 'double-consciousness.' In *Beyond Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors also observes that "[d]ouble-consciousness characters may be attracted to mirrors, reflecting windows, or smooth-surfaced ponds" (*Beyond Ethnicity* 1986: 249).

engagement with these intellectuals and their notions of American 'blackness' or race can be understood as a deferential act on her part in which she honors the contributions her male predecessors have made to African American intellectual life. However, it can also be understood as a challenge to and complication of their male African American models, since the novel does not simply posit that identity or the self are multiple, fluid, or as Jones would have it, "shifting" (Jones 1998; 604). *Brown Girl, Brownstones* illustrates with great specificity how race, gender and ethnicity intersect to produce a more heterogeneous set of experiences of being raced, gendered and marginalized in a U.S. context than those experiences described by her male African American predecessors.

On her journey home from the Bentons' apartment, Selina remains distraught, but ultimately resolves not to be defeated – even though she is painfully aware of the fact that the illusions about race and racial difference she has to fight may perhaps prove to be insuperable:

> She fell against the glass, […] crying suddenly because their idea of her was only an illusion, yet so powerful that it would stalk her down the years, confront her in each mirror and from the safe circle of their eyes, surprise her even in the gleaming surface of a table. It would intrude in every corner of her life, tainting her small triumphs—as it had tonight—and exulting at her defeats. She cried because, like all her kinsmen, she must somehow prevent it from destroying her inside and find a way for her real face to emerge. […] she cried in outrage: that along with the fierce struggle of her humanity she must also battle illusions! (*BGB* 291-92)

This passage underscores the vast scope of racism in America. Selina realizes that even though racism is based on illusions rather than biological difference, it is a systemic, institutionalized and ubiquitous phenomenon that a single individual is powerless to overcome. This new racial awareness remains a heavy burden for Selina. But unlike the protagonists of those protest novels that Baldwin criticizes in his essay, "Everybody's Protest Novel," Selina has not ultimately "accepted a theology that denies [her] life [she has not accepted] the possibility of [her] being sub-human and [does not feel] constrained, therefore, to battle for [her] humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed [her] at [her] birth" (Baldwin 2017: 22). Furthermore, the revelations and realizations of the night have also instilled in her a new sense of belonging within the African diaspora:

> In each light she saw the shovel cutting like a scythe in the sunlight [cf. Miss Thompson's story of assault] and, in a way, it was no different from the woman's voice falling brutally in the glare of the lamp. […] She was one with Miss Thompson […] One with the whores,

> the flashy men, and the blues rising sacredly above the lain of neon lights and ruined houses. […] And she was one with them: the mother and the Bajan women, who had lived each day what she had come to know. How had the mother endured, she who had not chosen death by water? (*BGB* 292-93).

While Selina's conception of connection and solidarity among diasporic people of African descent is far less clannish and essentialist than that promoted by the Barbadian Association, it is still more limited than those promoted in some of the other novels discussed in this study, including *The Fisher King*. While men are also included in the group of people with whom Selina feels united, women dominate in the description, as they do throughout the novel. The reference to (her mother's survival and) her father's suicide not only underscores Selina's connections to her biological family, but can also be read as an allusion to the Middle Passage, since some imprisoned Africans managed to end their suffering by choosing "death by water." The description of blues music that contains African and Afro-Caribbean elements and influences "rising sacredly" into the night air emphasizes the significance of music as a cultural force that connects across the diaspora and even takes on a religious quality or function for the African diaspora community that Selina describes and simultaneously calls into being. Commenting on the significance of blues in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* in an interview, Marshall explains "that [the lines from blues songs she uses as epigraphs in the novel] give [the Black] community its unique and special quality" (Bröck 2010: 68). She also quotes Baldwin's claim that "[i]t is only in his music, which Americans are able to admire because a protective sentimentality limits their understanding of it, that the Negro in America has been able to tell his story. It is a story which otherwise has yet to be told and which no American is prepared to hear" (Baldwin 2017: 25).

In its construction, the community Selina envisions appears to be deeply rooted in the Middle Passage epistemology, establishing connections based on a shared history of generationally transmitted trauma and past and present suffering rather than making both a history of suffering and the experiences and challenges of living in the diverse diasporic formations a basis for connections, alliances and solidarities. It is possible to read this scene as a description of Selina's assimilation into 'African Americanness.' In view of the novel's ending, however, the scene can also be read as a staging of Selina's realization that 'African American,' like 'Barbadian-American,' is a too-confining category. But even Hathaway's and DeLamotte's readings that read the novel and its ending in terms of "dual location" (Hathaway 1999: 86) and affirmed "doubleness" (DeLamotte 1998:39) rather

than assimilation fail to take into account that the novel deliberately combines the culmination of Selina's process of formation with the construction of a model of life in the African diaspora that is neither necessarily limited to the oscillation between or negotiation of life between just two countries/regions or just two cultures nor to hybridization processes involving only (African) American and Barbadian-American influences. Stressing the open-ended nature of the novel's last chapters as well as of Selina's formation, Dorothy Hammer Denniston claims that Selina's "cultural identity has not yet been firmly established" and that she is ready to "accept the challenge of defining herself in her own terms within a black cultural matrix" (Denniston 1995: 32). In my reading, the possibility of a more diverse global African diaspora experience, as it is then negotiated in *The Fisher King,* is already explicitly suggested in the last pages of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. The exploration of the African diaspora is not, as Denniston suggests, entirely reserved for Marshall's later publications (Denniston 1995: 32), but the genre constraints of the *Bildungsroman* preclude a more elaborate exploration of the topic in this novel.

When, a week after escaping from the Bentons' apartment, Selina wins the Association's scholarship, she confesses to having deceived the community and, to her mother's horror, declines the prize. Even though she has come to a new appreciation of the endurance, dedication and hard work of her parents' generation, she still rejects not only her mother's vision of the world as well as her aspirations for material gain but also key American ideals and ideologies. Yet, as an adult, Selina no longer feels morally obliged to demonize her mother. She can feel respect for her mother's strength and achievements without forgiving her for Deighton's deportation and death/suicide off the coast of Barbados. Where she once "longed to understand the mother, for she knew, obscurely, that she would never really understand anything until she did" (*BGB* 145), she has finally gained the kind of understanding of both Silla and herself that allows her to see her place in the matrilineage more clearly. When she accepts her maternal legacy and freely admits that she is her mother's child in terms of temperament, determination and will, she also claims parts her mother's Medeaesque traits (*BGB* 307). Marshall's novel and her protagonist thus participate in the effort of reinterpreting, re-writing and appropriating the Medea narrative in (proto-)feminist terms. While Marshall's rewriting of the myth takes a significantly different and far less elaborate form than rewritings and reworkings of myths by Modernist artists, her employment of the ancient myth prefigures that of second- and

third-wave feminist writers and critics, such as Adrienne Rich,[27] and Cherríe Moraga,[28] who have reinterpreted Medea's story in an (ethnic) twentieth-century context and claimed part of Medea's legacy for themselves as Medea's daughters.[29]

Although the novel's resolution remains deliberately open-ended, it is fair to say that in true *Bildungsroman* fashion, Selina has succeeded in resolving the various conflicts that characterized her life at the beginning of the novel. At the very end of the novel, she can feel deep affection for the place and the people that have shaped her and still choose to leave them as well as the wasteland that their neighborhood has turned into behind.

> The project receded and she was again the sole survivor amid the wreckage. […] She wanted suddenly, to leave something with [all the people she had ever known]. But she had nothing. […] Then she remembered the two silver bangles [that she, like other Barbadian girls,] had always worn. She pushed up her coat sleeve and stretched one until it passed over her wrist, and without turning, hurled it high over her shoulder. (*BGB* 310).

At this point, the *Bildungsroman* can only suggest that Selina's journey of self-discovery will continue. The novel's deliberately open-ended ending encourages the reader to consider the possibilities ahead for the self-stylized "sole survivor amid the wreckage" (*BGB* 310).

Will Selina travel the Caribbean to reconnect with her family's Barbadian heritage? Is her journey prompted by her desire both to complete her father's journey and to reconnect and reconcile herself with him as she has done with her mother? What will she

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[27] In *Of Woman Born* (1986) Rich describes her feelings of kinship with Medea: "But I do know that for years I believed I should never have been anyone's mother, that because I felt my own needs acutely and often expressed them violently, I was Kali, Medea, the sow that devours her farrow, the unwomanly woman in flight from womanhood, a Nietzschean monster. Even today, rereading old journals, remembering, I feel grief and anger; but their objects are no longer myself and my children. I feel grief at the waste of myself in those years, anger at the mutilation and manipulation of the relationship between mother and child, which is the great original source and experience of love" (Rich 1986: 32). She also explains why the dark and negative aspects of motherhood, as embodied by Medea, should not or cannot be disavowed: "A 'dark' or 'negative' aspect of the Great Mother was thus already present from the beginning, inseparable from her benign, life-giving aspect. And, like death, violence, bloodshed, destructive power, were always there, the potentially 'evil' half of the Mother's profile, which, once completely split off, would become separately personified as the fanged blood-goddess Kali, the killer-mother Medea, the lewd and malign witch, the 'castrating' wife or mother" (Rich 1986: 116).

[28] Cherrie Moraga's post-apocalyptic play, *The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea* (1995), combines elements of the Medea myth, with those of La Llorona (The Weeping Woman) as well as references to the Aztec goddess Coatlicue. Explaining her relationship to her own mother, Audre Lorde also commented on the similarities between Medea and La Llorona: "Modesta […] told me the legend of La Llorona. A woman had three sons and found her husband lying in another woman's bed-it's the Medea story-and drowned her sons in the *barrancas,* drowned her children. And every year around this time she comes back to mourn the deaths. I took this story and out of a combination of ways I was feeling I wrote a story called 'La Llorona.' It's a story essentially of my mother and me, it was as if I had picked my mother up and put her in that place, here is this woman who kills, who wants something, the woman who consumes her children, who wants too much, but wants not because she's evil but because she wants her own life, but by now it is so distorted .... It was a very strange unfinished story, but the dynamic---" (Lorde and Rich 1981: 718).

[29] The essays collected in Bartel and Simon (2010) discuss a variety of adaptations, rewritings and reworkings of the Medea myth in an interdisciplinary framework.

find in the Caribbean? What can someone who objects to capitalist values find there if this someone travels there as part of the tourism economy? Does the fact that she throws away and leaves behind one silver bangle really only emphasize her desire to remain connected to or leave her mark on the Barbadian-American community and America? Could the same action also be read as indicating that she leaves behind and rejects those parts of/in herself that are American or have been shaped by the American capitalism her mother so devoutly believes in? Another important set of questions revolves around the fate of the neighborhood. Why has the neighborhood turned into a wasteland and will only those who leave it survive?

The ending of *Brown Girl, Brownstones* raises these questions or at least enables the reader to ask them, because Marshall's *Bildungsheldin* has not successfully 'interiorized' the majority of contradictions in her life, and she has decided to leave American soil. While the remaining questions and contradistinctions cannot be negotiated or resolved the within a conventional *Bildungsroman*, not even within one that has been adapted and transformed to accommodate the *Bildung* of a female ethnic *Bildungsheldin* like Selina, Marshall's African diaspora novel, *The Fisher King*, is free to return to some of these very questions and contradictions and negotiate them and their implications for the notion of a African diaspora community in detail.

2.3 *The Fisher King*'s Many Returns

The Fisher King, like all the African diaspora novels I discuss, is a novel of manifold returns. While the novel can certainly also be categorized as a jazz novel (Rosenthal 2011: 152-154; Lowney 2015) or described as a diasporically-inflected rewriting of a quest narrative (Wallhead 2002; Valverde 2011; Rosenthal 2011: 146-148), it is through its multiple geographical, emotional and thematic returns that it becomes an African diaspora novel. Its formal features, such as the novel's narrative structure, its manifold allusions and its mix of languages and registers further require that its reader develop a (feminist) diaspora literacy and consciousness.

The Fisher King represents a deliberate return to the Brooklyn locale and a Barbadian-American and African American communities familiar from *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. Its diverse cast of young and old, male and female African American, Barbadian-American, American-French and French-American characters allows it to return to issues first raised in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* with new sets of eyes and from a vantage

point of the late twentieth century. Set in 1984, the novel complicates questions of unity in diversity first raised in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. The negotiation of issues of exile and return is one of the novel's major foci, as it narrates in flashbacks spanning a period from the 1940s to the 1970s how three young people, Hattie Carmichael, Sonny (Everett) Payne and Cherisse McCullum-Jones (later Payne), form a deep friendship, and immigrate to Paris in order to escape U.S. racism and become successful in the European jazz music business. In Paris, "The Inseparable Three" (*FK* 186) become an unconventional family and prove that "'[t]here's all kinds of family, and blood's got nothing to do with it'" (*FK* 18).

2.3.1 Returning to the Brownstones – Returning the Brownstones to the Community

Decades later, Hattie, the sole survivor of the trio, returns to America with her grandson, Sonny Carmichael Payne, in order to attend a jazz concert organized to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of Sonny (Everett) Payne's death. The novel remains deliberately ambiguous in its representation of Sonny's death at the bottom of a flight of stairs in a Paris metro station, but police brutality is alluded to as one of its possible causes. Although Sonny-Rett Payne is only present in flashbacks and recollections, his character and that the grandson named after him as well as his musical legacy occasion and determine the narrative.

The commemorative concert, organized by Sonny's older brother Edgar, is also a pretext for organizing the very first meeting between 8-year-old Sonny Jr. and his relatives in America. Configured to include characters with diverse immigration and migration experiences, the boy's extended family represents the heterogeneity of a global African diaspora community that connects the U.S., the Caribbean, Europe and, marginally, Africa. As in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, the African diaspora community existing on U.S soil, or more precisely on Macon Street in Brooklyn, includes characters who came to New York City from both Barbados and from the American South. Sonny Jr., the son of Sonny and Cherisse Payne's daughter, Jo-Jo, and a Parisian *sans papiers* from Cameroon (*FK* 209), literally embodies the diversity of the African diaspora in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Upon first meeting him, his maternal great-grandmother, Florence Varina McCullum-Jones, reacts to his existence and his appearance in a way that calls attention to the challenges of a global African diaspora without rejecting the possibility of reconciliation and the formation of new alliances:

> "Who's the daddy?" […] "African?" […] Dismay for a moment, followed by a philosophical sigh, and then the woman smiling at him. "You got some of all of us in you dontcha? What you gonna do with all that Colored from all over creation you got in you? Better be somethin' good" (*FK* 36).

Despite her initial dismay at his African parentage, Florence Varina quickly comes to adore her grandson. But the presence of the child can facilitate the literal and metaphorical mending of only some of the rifts that exist within his extended family as well as in the African diaspora community. Sometimes reconciliation remains impossible. For example, neither his Barbadian-American great-grandmother nor his Southern-born African American great-grandmother is prepared to forgive the other for having given birth to the child that ruined her child's chances in life by persuading him or her to permanently leave the U.S. for Paris. Nevertheless, there are also numerous moments in which the novel suggests that reconciliation across national borders and ethnic barriers as well as new beginnings and the formation of new alliances – especially among the younger generation – are both possible and necessary.

Since she decided years ago to permanently turn her back on the U.S., Hattie quickly comes to regret even her temporary return to Bedford-Stuyvesant. Even the pleasure of attending and participating in the commemorative concert for Sonny-Rett fails to reconcile her with either the U.S. or the neighborhood of her childhood: "'Could somebody please tell me what I'm doing back here? How I could've let myself be talked into coming near this place again?'" (*FK* 73). While there are short moments of reconnection with musicians she has known since her early days as Sonny-Rett's confidant and manager, these temporary connections among people with a similar passion for jazz as well as a shared admiration for Sonny-Rett's genius do not sustain her (chapter 6 of *FK*). Hattie is represented as unable to reconnect with or reclaim either the neighborhood or the community in Bedford-Stuyvesant that she left behind roughly three decades earlier. As a diasporic African American woman living in Paris, her loyalties, allegiances and alliances have permanently shifted to her Paris neighborhood. Inhabited by socially and economically marginalized people, mostly women with diverse ethnic backgrounds, like herself, her Paris neighborhood and especially the tenement house in which she lives have become her permanent home.

Not unlike the neighborhood of her childhood, the ethnically and religiously mixed Paris neighborhood she now calls home provides the backdrop for the representation and negotiation of conflicts and challenges that arise in a diverse community of marginalized,

predominantly non-white diasporans in a European metropolis. The novel addresses the challenges of recent legal and 'illegal' people of African descent from countries in North Africa and West Africa only in a French or, at best, European context. Since by the mid-1980s both new African immigration and increasing immigration from Caribbean nations, including Haiti, had already begun to significantly alter the ethnic composition of the African diaspora community in the U.S. (Berlin 2010: 6, 205-207), it is surprising that this transformation of the African diaspora community in the U.S. is not addressed by the novel.[30]

While Hattie's predominantly female neighborhood network is an important factor that ties her to Paris, she also considers herself to be irrevocably bound to Paris because it is in the City of Light that she feels most connected to the two people that she has loved most: Cherisse and Sonny-Rett. In addition to the women in her tenement, she is also more tenuously connected to a community of "'Black 'Pats'": "die-hard expatriate friends who, like [Hattie] herself, also considered Paris home above and beyond any other place on earth" (*FK* 159). While the African American expatriates remain nameless, Hattie's boss at the Violette nightclub, Marcel Ducongé, who also supplies her with pills, or "*médicaments*" as they are euphemistically referred to throughout the novel, is named (*FK* 160; italics in the original),. His story, like Sonny-Rett's, is representative of the decline of the Parisian jazz scene after 1960. In the wake of restrictive French legislation limiting the participation of non-French artists in French productions and shows as well as the airplay time of songs in languages other than French, these people, like Sonny-Rett, have found it difficult to find steady work in their original métiers and have thus turned to semi-legal business practices and petty crime (*FK* 202). The novel suggests that the legislative measures implemented in France in the 1960s are closely tied to a political agenda that is not only pro-French and anti-foreign but also explicitly anti-black. Since the novel does not fully contextualize its flashbacks to these events and developments in the past, readers seeking to develop or increase their diaspora literacy are required to actively seek information about the presence of African American artists in Paris and other European metropolises.[31] Hattie's experiences demonstrate that from the 1960s onward Paris can no longer be described as a colorblind city. Tyler Stovall characterized the 1960s as period of

[30] Novels that address the phenomenon of new African immigration, such as Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), Dinaw Mengestu's *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (2007) and NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013) were only first published roughly a decade after the publication of *The Fisher King* (2000). They were almost exclusively written by writers who fall into the category of recent African immigrants or sojourners to the U.S.

[31] For a good overview of the African American presence in Paris as well as of rise and decline of jazz culture in Paris, see Stovall (1996).

change and disenchantment for many African American expatriates in France and explains that

> some [African American expatriates] observed new and disturbing manifestations of racism. The horrors of the Algerian war underlined the discrimination and hostility faced by France's Arab minority, and the increasing population of immigrant workers from North Africa, black Africa, and the Caribbean suggested that America was not the only country with a racial caste system. […] Taken together, shifting racial realities in both France and the United States cast the experience of Paris's black expatriates in a new light. (Stovall 1996: 244).

Being back in Bedford-Stuyvesant obliges Hattie to confront not only her feelings of isolation and loneliness, but also those of economic failure. Although she, Cherisse and Sonny-Rett enjoyed a number of economically successful as well as artistically and emotionally rewarding years in Paris, theirs is not represented as an immigration story of unmitigated success and forward momentum, since they began to struggle economically, artistically and emotionally even before Sonny-Rett's sudden death. Whereas in Paris Hattie's life has revolved around taking care of Sonny and waiting for the day when she will finally be able to claim her plot next to Cherisse's and Sonny Rett's in the Cimetiére de Montmartre (*FK* 91), being back in the neighborhood of her childhood not only forces her to confront old hurts and disappointments but also to own up to her own financial and emotional incapability and failures. The novel enables and encourages the reader to compare Hattie's childhood situation as a neglected, abused and lonely "City child" (*FK* 68) to her present situation, in which only the task of raising Sonny seems to give her life purpose and joy and saves her from succumbing to misery.

Apart from Hattie, Edgar Payne is the only other major character in *The Fisher King* who grew up and came of age prior to the various social transformations connected to the Civil Rights Movement and is still alive in 1984. A wealthy and successful real estate developer in Central Brooklyn, Sonny-Rett's older brother no longer lives in Bedford-Stuyvesant but in a predominantly white neighborhood on Long Island. He nevertheless remains tied to the neighborhood of his childhood for both monetary and personal reasons. As a businessman, he is interested in the neighborhood because his company "The Three R's Housing Group" is redeveloping and restoring the area. As someone "from around the block" (*FK* 29), he is emotionally invested in his childhood neighborhood both because his elderly mother still lives in the dilapidated family brownstone and because he believes that

altered, improved living conditions are a requirement for the kinds of political changes and social improvements he envisions for the neighborhood's African American community.

Edgar remains an ambiguous character whose complexities and contradictions only come to light gradually. While Sonny Jr. grows to like Edgar the more the two interact and eventually even decides to call him Uncle Edgar, the reader grows more and more suspicious of his true motives, as it is revealed that the commemorative concert was planned in part so that Edgar could convince -- or more precisely, trick -- Hattie into bringing Sonny to New York City. Once the two of them are in the U.S., he attempts to first persuade and then strong-arm Hattie into turning over custody of Sonny Jr. to him. He has used his considerable wealth and influence to collect damaging information about Hattie's and Sonny's life in Paris to ensure his success in a court of law. Even though the novel ends before the question of Sonny's custody is permanently resolved, the reader knows that Edgar is capable of coercing Hattie's compliance with his wishes because he knows about her pill addiction, her poor housing situation, her unstable work at a questionable place of employment and her romantic and sexual relationships with both Sonny and Cherisse. While, at the end of the novel, the reader knows how to evaluate these pieces of information in the context of Hattie's life story and experiences and would, consequently, not automatically deem her unfit to raise Sonny, the novel suggests that it would be almost impossible for her to convince a judge or a jury of her mental, emotional and financial fitness to raise a child – especially as the story of Hattie's life both in the U.S. and France proves that "[m]oney will do it every time" (*FK* 223). However, since Edgar's true motives for inviting Hattie are only fully revealed in the last chapter and prior to the argument about where to raise Sonny the novel has successfully established him not only as a shrewd businessman but also as a caring and committed, son, brother, husband, father, uncle and grandfather, the reader is not entirely unsympathetic to his demand that Hattie "give [Sonny] a chance" (*FK* 218).

As a businessman, Edgar is not without critics, Florence-Varina characterizes him as the "ringleader" of "a gang of thieves" responsible for the social upheavals connected to the gentrification of the neighborhood entailed by his business practices (*FK* 40). As "the Shylock of Central Brooklyn" (*FK* 51, 218), he admits that nothing he does is "pure" (*FK* 51, 50). However, while certainly not entirely selfless, neither his interest in the neighborhood and its community nor his interest in Sonny can be characterized as solely motivated by economic considerations or egoistic self-interest. In his own way, Edgar remains true to the ideals represented by the three Rs in his company's name:

"Reclamation. Restoration. Rebirth" (*FK* 29). On a personal level, he seeks to reclaim Sonny and restore him to his 'rightful home.' In Edgar's view, Sonny Jr. is "the one hopeful thing that's come out of the thirty-year war and disunity on this block" (*FK* 219), and he desperately wants to "do better by him" (*FK* 214). By extension, he seeks to redress the wrongs he committed against his younger brother and assuage his personal feelings of guilt for not having helped him when he should and could have done so. During his childhood Edgar protected Sonny-Rett neither from their mother's punishments nor from her repudiation of her younger son. As an adult, he failed to reach out to his brother when, in a letter, Sonny-Rett asked him to take care of his daughter JoJo for him. At the end of the novel, Hattie doubts that Sonny-Rett ever contemplated sending JoJo away from Paris and thereby effectively taking her away from her second mother, Hattie. But in view of Edgar's feelings of guilt and remorse neither Hattie nor the reader can be entirely sure that Edgar has made up the letter in an attempt to make it easier for him to be granted custody of Sonny Jr.

Edgar seems less interested in his financial profit than in restoring and reviving the neighborhood that he grew up in. The neighborhood, which was already falling into decline when Selina set out to travel the Caribbean in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, is represented as a literal and metaphorical wasteland[32] in dire need of restoration. Hattie is especially dismayed at its present condition of neglect and ruin:

> "Reid Avenue, Reid Avenue, it's a hundred times worse than I remember it," Hattie exclaimed in dismay [. … Edgar Payne] nodded "It is. The sixties really did it in. All the burn-baby-burn rioting. Our folks justifiably angry, but harming themselves more than anyone else, seemed like. Reid Avenue still hasn't recovered. It's got a long way to go but my group is working on it." (*FK* 47)

While the novel does not seem to fully support all of Edgar's political views, he is represented as a perceptive observer of political processes and current affairs. As someone who has lived in the U.S. all his life, he speaks as an observer, a witness and, to some extent, as a participant when he claims that the neighborhood's and the community's present condition is a direct result of the community's anger about the ways in which true equality and full civil rights continued to be denied to African Americans after the mid-1960s. While the novel does not provide extensive contextual information for the reader who knows little about that particular period in recent U.S. history, its numerous allusions

[32] See Wallhead (2002) for a discussion of the notion of wasteland in connection to the Myth of the Fisher King.

to the events of the late 1960s and 1970s require that the reader familiar only with the dominant historical narrative about that period begin to question that particular narrative and, if necessary, seek different sources of information. In suggesting a causal connection between the "blight" of the neighborhood (*FK* 47, 126) and the reactionary backlash against the advances achieved by the Civil Rights Movement, *The Fisher King* offers an alternative reading -- or a re-writing -- of the dominant historical narrative about this time. According to Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "the New Right" was able to establish a tendentious and damaging narrative that viewed "the 1970s as a tragic denouement" of the Civil Rights era (Hall 2005: 1234) and that has become the dominant narrative in U.S. public discourse about that period. In this narrative, the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 mark the end of the 'proper' Civil Rights era:

> Then comes the decline. After a season of moral clarity, the country is beset by the Vietnam War, urban riots, and reaction against the excesses of the late 1960s and the 1970s, understood variously as student rebellion, black militancy, feminism, busing, affirmative action, or an overweening welfare state. A so-called white backlash sets the stage for the conservative interregnum that, for good or ill, depending on one's ideological persuasion, marks the beginning of another story, the story that surrounds us now. (Hall 2005: 1234)

Exploring the continuities between the 'classical phase' of the Civil Rights Movement and progressive movements of the 1970s and 1980s, Hall advocates a re-writing of the dominant narrative of the Civil Rights era in favor of a narrative of the "long civil rights movement" (Hall 2005: 1235) that was inspired by and took shape in "the liberal and radical milieu of the late 1930s" (Hall 2005: 1235), included labor movements as well as black nationalist movements, and extended well beyond the 1960s into the 1970s and 1980s, when its influences on the feminist movement and LGBT activism became more obvious (Hall 2005: 1245, 1254-1256). While the dominant narrative represents the Civil Rights Movement (1954-mid-1960s) as a largely rural and religious movement (Hall 2005: 1251; Reed 2005: 41), in the 1970s the movement had turned into several more or less interrelated movements that were both significantly less religious and significantly more urban (Reed 2005: 41). Arising from a history at least as long as that of the struggle for freedom and civil rights in the U.S, the "white backlash" against this kind of political activism for civil rights (Hall 2005: 1234) gained momentum after 1965, when media coverage of civil rights activism turned "hostile" and the media began to propagate the notion of a rupture between the 'true' Civil Rights Movement and "the advent of black

power and black uprisings in the urban North" (Hall 2005: 1236). According to T.V. Reed, by the mid-1970s President Johnson's 'war on poverty,' had made way for "a war on the poor" that both financially and socially devastated inner-city neighborhoods (Reed 2005: 70). Edgar describes this period as one of "bloodletting" that "just wouldn't quit" (*FK* 56).

Read in this context, the sheer scope and the political dimensions of Edgar's endeavor to restore, reclaim and revive Bedford-Stuyvesant become more pronounced. Having worked with Robert Kennedy in the 1960s, Edgar is represented as a successful and well-connected real estate developer with established and photographically documented ties to the Democrats that he began to use strategically to advance his plans after Robert Kennedy's death:

> "[A photograph of Edgar and Kennedy] has helped us get many a loan. The people from the banks come in here, see me and Kennedy shaking hands --- they can't miss it sitting where you are --- and they're more disposed to approve the loan and hand over the check." (*FK* 56)

The figure of Edgar requires the reader to consider how men like him have or could have influenced or affected U.S. politics. Although *The Fisher King* is invested in representing the particular complexities and peculiarities of specific locations at specific moments in time, the novel encourages the reader to ask how the formation of new alliances across historical ethnic and political divides within the African diaspora community in America could affect American politics, the economy and international relations. Since Edgar's political investment in a flourishing, self-sufficient African American community is represented as corresponding to ideals of black nationalism, the novel, in the manner of many postcolonial texts, also asks the reader to reflect on the relationship between oppression and nationalism as well as on the relationship between liberation and nationalism. As someone intimately familiar with the history of colonialism due to his mother's accounts of it, Edgar certainly views the power relationship between 'white America' and African Americans as one eerily similar to that of colonizer and colonized:

> "Not that I like it all that much – the hand shaking and smiling. Truthfully, I wish it were otherwise. That we had our own banks, and loan companies, our own resources, so I wouldn't always have to be running after these people skinning my teeth, saying 'Please, massa' with my hand 'long out' as my mother would put it … […]" (*FK* 57).

Since 'massa' is an expression common in Barbadian English, it evokes not only the history of slavery in the U.S. but also that of colonial slavery in the Caribbean, where 'massa/Massa' was used to describe "an absentee European planter [and his descendants] exploiting West Indian resources, both human and economic" (Williams 1989: 724). Edgar's use of the word indicates that his view of the relationship between dominant 'white America' and a subjugated African American community is influenced by both his mother's experience of colonialism and the teachings of a number of African American political leaders. Particularly those political leaders identified with black nationalism have described that relationship in a similar fashion. In 1935 W.E.B. DuBois published an article entitled "A Negro Nation within a Nation," in which he advocated for African American racial self-segregation, self-reliance and autarchy (DuBois 2016). Walter Rucker argues that

> by combining the views and approaches of his two arch rivals – Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey – Du Bois effectively created a model for the community-control black nationalism that Black Power advocates of the mid to late 1960s[, such as Stokely Carmichael (aka Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton,] would passionately argue for.
>
> (Rucker 2002: 38)

Prior to Carmichael and Hamilton, Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X and had already echoed DuBois' idea of a "Negro nation in a nation." In 1967, King described run-down African American neighborhoods as "little more than a domestic colony" (King 1967; qtd. in Arneil 2017: 8), while, in "The Ballot or the Bullet" (1964), Malcolm X compares colonization to second-class citizenship and describes the U.S. as "just as much a colonial power as England ever was" (Malcolm X 2003: 77). However, it was Carmichael's and Hamilton's book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967), that popularized the idea of internal colonialism (Hayes 2017: 30). Building on Frantz Fanon's work in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963),[33] they described the political, legal and social situation of African Americans in the U.S. as one of internal or domestic colonialism. Framing the struggles of African Americans against white oppression as the fight of the oppressed against colonialization, Carmichael and Hamilton identified points of connection between struggles for equality and full civil rights in the U.S. and anti-colonial struggles worldwide. In *A Colony in a Nation* (2017), Christopher Hayes returns to the paradigm of internal colonialization in a U.S. context when he argues that after 1960 the U.S. criminal justice system and the democratic processes that shape this system have been vital in

[33] Originally published in French as *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961).

creating a country divided into the Nation and into the Colony. Building on Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), he explores how by legal means the predominantly white Nation subdues, oppresses and exploits a Colony largely inhabited by marginalized, mostly non-white people. People in the Nation enjoy protection under the law, whereas in the Colony policing aims to establish order.

Unlike his mother and, indeed, his parents' generation, American-born Edgar Payne does not describe himself as a Barbadian-American but as an African American and advocates ending the "American—West-Indian War" (*FK* 51). He firmly believes that "a people in [their] situation [cannot] afford that kind of divisive nonsense" (*FK* 51). The novel chooses not to indicate, however, whether Edgar's stance in favor of intra-racial unity would also extend to new immigrants of African descent in the U.S. Since Edgar never addresses Sonny's rumored Cameroonian heritage, his attempts to reclaim Sonny for his family and by extension for the African American community remain deliberately ambiguous. While in some iterations black nationalism promotes transnational solidarity and corporation, the novel chooses not to indicate whether Edgar's conception of black nationalism is inclusive enough to accommodate and incorporate new immigrants of African descent in the African American community should they want to be included. The fact that the novel seems to refuse to take a position on this issue forces the reader to consider different possibilities for herself. Since the novel does not explicitly address the question of new immigration from African countries in a U.S. context, however, it is possible to read the omission of any discussion of Sonny's immediate familial/biological connection to Cameroon as indicative of a general reluctance among those who consider themselves African American to address questions related to an expanding African diaspora community in the U.S. Some may regard it as strategically ill-advised to align oneself with immigrants or diasporans if one still seeks to be truly recognized as American citizen endowed with equal civil rights both on paper and in practice. Since the novel as a whole explores the African diaspora as a complex formation and, with reference to Hattie's life in Paris, also shows that inter-racial and inter-ethnic solidarities and loyalties can be established and sustained among people, particularly women, in the diaspora, *The Fisher King* promotes the notion of intra-racial unity and encourages the reader to explore the possibility as well as the limits of such unity on a grander, perhaps even global scale. It seems to ask what could be reclaimed, restored and revived by the African diaspora if intra-racial solidarity could be established. Edgar's endeavors to reclaim and redevelop the

neighborhood in order to return it to the community, emphasize that in the novel such transformations, are not to be understood as mere utopian pipedreams or dreams about a distant future but as processes that people can not only set into motion but also to some extent mold to fit their needs. *The Fisher King* demonstrates how the movement to reclaim and restore an urban African American neighborhood, an endeavor that could in a different context easily be characterized as a reactionary, can in fact represent the kind of future-oriented transformation required to ensure the survival of the neighborhood and its community. The attempt to restore and redevelop the neighborhood, though admittedly not entirely pure and selfless, is represented as a form of political activism, since, as Banor Hesse describes, attempts to ensure the existence, restoration, maintenance and possible expansion of (African) diasporic neighborhoods and communities like Bedford-Stuyvesant (or of "Black settlement[s]," as Hesse calls them) have multiple political dimensions and implications:

> The contours of Black settlement are […] always more than residential. They are cultures of movement […]. The articulation of community itself is a discursive investment in time-spatial constitutions within and beyond the nation-state. This not only inscribes pluralism as cultural difference, in the social, but also articulates conditions in which struggles against racism in housing, education, policing and other social institutions are fought and thought as attempts to revalorize the terms upon which public justice has been settled. The affirmation of Black community is its politicization, even in a day-to-day sense. Categoric distinctions between public and private, personal and political, local and national are blurred in the activities of diasporic identification (Hesse 1993: 177).

Whereas Marshall's description of the Barbadian-American neighborhood in the *Bildungsroman* could only point to some of these implications, the portrayal of the neighborhood in *The Fisher King,* and particularly of Edgar's endeavors to restore it and return it to the community, corresponds closely to Hesse's description of politicized African diasporic/Black communities. The representation of Edgar's investment in the neighborhood allows the novel to explore the political particularities and challenges of a specific African American neighborhood through time and encourages the reader to consider these issues in relation to other neighborhoods, be they ethnic neighborhoods, immigrant neighborhoods or simply poor and politically neglected neighborhoods.

2.3.2 Returning to the Brownstones – The Ceaseless Return of the Past

The Fisher King represents Sonny's great-grandmothers, Florence Varina McCullum-Jones and Ulene Payne as women who are trapped in their pasts. The novel also employs their life stories to explore how the realities and challenges of distinct migration and diaspora experiences can make it difficult or impossible to even consider the possibility of cross-national African-diasporic commonality, corporation and solidary. Instead of telling the stories of two women who, over time, discover common aims and recognize similarities in their experiences, *The Fisher King* chooses to portray the two women as trapped in the cycle of mutual suspicion, distrust and contempt that began to characterize the relationship between U.S.-born African Americans and immigrants from the Caribbean when increased immigration from the islands transformed the cultural, social and ethnic composition of formerly African American neighborhoods in New York City. Marshall has described the difficult relationship between immigrants from the Caribbean and American-born African Americans in the decades following massive immigration both from the islands and from the American South in the early decades of the twentieth century in the following way:

> [An] internecine conflict also characterized to an unhappy degree the relations between West Indians and native-born blacks who had arrived in central Brooklyn from the South during the same period as the immigrants and who were themselves struggling to buy house. While there were many instances of cooperation and friendship between the two groups, there was also considerable friction. The West Indians criticized their American counterparts for not being more ambitious and for being too easily intimidated by white people. The Afro-Americans retaliated by calling the Islanders 'monkey chasers' and ridiculing them for the too-bright "West Indian colors" they wore on dress-up occasions. (Marshall 1985).

The life stories of Sonny's great-grandmothers not only illustrate the scope and persistence of the intra-racial "American --- West-Indian war" (*FK* 51) but also allow the novel to explore issues of gender and class inequalities. While the narrative exhibits little patience with the women's prejudices and their stubborn refusal or inability to move forward, the novel does not demonize them. Instead the reader is invited to read the characters' prejudiced and egotistical behaviors against the backdrop of their difficult pasts. The two women living in brownstones at 301 Macon Street and 258 Macon Street have in different ways experienced the hardships and adversities of immigration and migration as well as assimilation and adaptation to life in New York City. After losing their husbands early in

life, they both had to become their families' breadwinners at a time of great economic crisis. Both women once entertained musical aspirations for their children, since those career paths promised social access and mobility for non-white Americans in ways that few other careers did. Ulene intended for Sonny-Rett to become a classical concert pianist, but he turned to jazz. Florence-Varina hoped to turn Cherisse into a Broadway starlet and spent much of her hard-earned money on singing, acting and dancing lessons, but Cherisse had neither the talent nor the motivation to pursue the career path that her mother had envisioned for her. Ultimately, both matriarchs saw their hopes for their children dashed when together Sonny-Rett and Cherisse moved to Paris.

It is due to the painful losses and disappointments in their lives as well as to their advanced ages that both Ulene and Florence-Varina are not constructed simply as representatives and witnesses of the past, or even of another age entirely, but as characters caught in the past. Even when coming face to face with their great-grandson forces them to confront those questionable parenting choices that drove their children away, they are represented as trapped in a feud that is representative of past and present tensions and animosities within the (global) African diaspora and can be traced back primarily to anti-immigrant bias on Florence-Varina's part and class bias on Ulene's. The women's narratives allow the novel to scrutinize why this generation seems unable to overcome or move past the prejudices and the disappointments of the past. In Florence-Varina's case, the recollection of past disappointments can to some extent be balanced with those of a happy childhood as the youngest Brooklyn-born daughter of a relatively wealthy Southern family that came to New York as part of the Great Migration to escape racist discrimination and persecution in the South. In 1984, Florence-Varina takes immense pride in the fact that 258 Macon Street, the brownstone that her father bought when the McCullums first arrived in New York, has been a popular stop of the "Landmark Conservancy Tours, the Brooklyn Chapter" for years (*FK* 121). As a tour guide, she presents her family home as proof of the long presence and the accomplishments of African Americans in her Brooklyn neighborhood. In addition to distinguishing itself as the first African American-owned house on Macon Street, the history of the house and its inhabitants also calls attention the history of the Great Migration, which the novel frames as the history of a domestic diaspora in the U.S., so as to encourage the reader to compare and contrast different African diasporic experiences. Both the existence of "the full grown magnolia grandiflora in her front yard" (*FK* 121) that flourished and took root in hostile Northern soil and, indeed, Florence-Varina's name itself serve as examples of the manifold

ways in which African American people from the South, their customs and material culture have taken up residence in the North and transformed Northern life. The novel represents her as a woman whose ingenuity, talent for story-telling and possibly ability to narratively embellish or invent her past enabled her to hold on to the brownstone in adverse economic conditions. "Talking for dear life" (*FK* 122), she utilizes the past to create both her own brand of a 'useable past' that ensure her economic survival and an identity as a Southern transplant that enables her to distinguish herself from her immigrant neighbors by romanticizing her own origins.

Having fought for social recognition and financial stability almost her entire life, Florence-Varina instantly recognizes those visitors who call into question her right to be included in the tour of city's historical landmarks:

> "Didja hear him? Didja hear him? He'd be interested to know how I learned of the Conservancy! What he meant, the old geezer, was how could someone like *you* living in a ghetto possibly have heard of *our* Conservancy." (*FK* 120; italics in the original)

The novel does not simply grant Florence-Varina the opportunity to vent her anger and hurt about the man's dismissive line of questioning. Rather, the scene serves to remind the reader that even in what should be 'the sanctuary of own home,' she is not beyond the reach of casual racism and the discriminatory practices and dynamics that are so omnipresent as to be almost invisible. The novel's rendition of Florence-Varina's life story underscores how deeply ingrained racism and discrimination are in the American social fabric. The glimpses of Florence-Varina's employment history as a day worker in Flatbush after her husband's death that the novel provides demonstrate that she routinely suffered humiliation and degradation at the hands of women and men who, at a time of great economic insecurity, exercised their temporary power over her in order to reassure themselves of their own allegedly higher and more secure social status (*FK* 120-121). Like *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, the novel suggests the antagonism between African Americans/Barbadian-Americans and Jewish-Americans and indicates how, in a society based on competition, periods of economic instability, such as the Great Depression, tend to exacerbate racism and classism (*FK* 101; 120-221). Florence-Varina is not represented only as a victim of the dynamics of exclusion and discrimination, but as acutely class-conscious and hostile to immigrants and thus as actively perpetuating and complicit in these structures, since they reassure her of her own status and value compared to newly arrived immigrants to the U.S. Her inability, in 1984, to move beyond her racist and classist prejudices against Ulene Payne and other Barbadian Americans, whom she

demeans as "monkey chasers" (*FK* 38), can be understood as a rather pessimistic comment on the ability or inability of people, particularly people of that generation, to question their views, seek common ground, and embrace difference and diversity.

In contrast to Florence-Varina, Ulene has few happy memories to recall or compose into a 'useable past.' Her recollections of life in Barbados and her motives for immigrating to the U.S. strikingly resemble those of Silla in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. While *The Fisher King* uses Ulene's account of her best friend Alva's violation, misfortune and social disgrace to briefly highlight the vulnerability of female foreign domestic workers to exploitation and sexual abuse by employers (*FK* 103), Ulene's account of her own arrival in the U.S., like Silla's, strikes a balance between emphasizing both the determination to improve her situation and the vulnerability to forces beyond her control: "When the white people war finish" and Ulene had secured her "show-money," "'[she] came to this man country with nothing but a gripsack and two willing hands'" (*FK* 103, 99). Putting her hands to work, Ulene, like Silla, has managed to buy the brownstone she now lives in and, like Silla, turned into an exacting and strict landlord, forever scolding her roomers to be quiet and not to waste energy.

In 1984, Ulene is still haunted by her roomers' noise and wastefulness and repeatedly scolds them, or more precisely scolds their ghosts, in her great-grandson's presence (*FK* 20). As an old woman, whose "mind […] comes and goes sometimes" (*FK* 98), Ulene is haunted by an intrusive past that cannot be dismissed. Unlike Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, *The Fisher King* cannot be characterized as a 'typical' trauma narrative; yet, it recalls traumatic events and represents and negotiates how these events continue to affect a number of characters.[34] Ulene not only hears her roomers, but also mistakes her great-grandson for her son Everett (Sonny-Rett) and scolds Sonny Jr. for not being able to remember people and details from her own past. Sonny does not seem overly affected by the "forbidding woman['s]" (*FK* 24) strange behavior; he is used to the eccentricities of elderly people because he regularly spends time with Madame Molineaux, his neighbor and babysitter, and Hattie, his "fathermothersisterbrother" (*FK* 18), also exhibits symptoms commonly associated with the sudden, unexpected intrusion of

[34] In her pioneering work on trauma in narrative and history, Cathy Caruth defines a trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the events occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 1996:11). Commenting on the historical dimension and the power of trauma, she explains that "[t]he historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience: since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (Caruth 1995: 8).

traumatic past events or emotions into a person's consciousness. Though Ulene scolds and punishes herself for losing track of time and is truly sorry for neglecting Sonny in these moments, Sonny seems more scared by Hattie's occasional mental absences than by Ulene's failure to recognize him as her great-grandson. Unwilling or unable to confront those decisions in her past that drove her son away, Ulene mistakes her grandson for her son. While her encounters with Sonny Jr. allow her to temporarily escape into a time when young Sonny-Rett still obeyed her and practiced only Bach on the player-piano, they allow Sonny to experience the "magic" of the player piano and connect with his grandfather through music (*FK* 22).

Whereas, in the course of *The Fisher King,* Sonny Jr., finds creative and child-appropriate ways to connect to a grandfather and a past he has never known -- both by inviting the ghost of a young Sonny-Rett's to play the piano alongside him and by providing him with ever new safe homes in the elaborate medieval castles that he draws onto his *bloc*, neither Florence-Varina nor Ulene are represented as having the luxury of reencountering her individual past with Sonny's ease or creativity. While the presence of their great-grandson seems to momentarily ease the women's hurts and regrets, they are ultimately unable to dismiss even those parts of their past that trap them in their brownstones, isolate them form their family and/or community and emotionally cripple them.

2.3.3 Returning Ulene's Voice to her: Linguistic Diversity in the Marshall's African Diaspora Novel

As in *Brown Girl Brownstones*, the voice of the female Barbadian immigrant is endowed with special authority and authenticity: Marshall allows Ulene to speak her 'truth' in a language that, while not a literal transcription of Barbadian English ("the King's English" [*FK* 177]), transposes some of the language's grammatical and semantic idiosyncrasies onto paper and communicates important aspects of her personality and her beliefs. Marshall's insistence on retaining the characteristics of such spoken forms as, Barbadian creole, Black English, jazz jargon, and the dialect "from around block" (*FK* 29, 52), in a written text gives a particular oral quality to the entire novel. Emphasizing the significance of orality for/in the narrative, each of the *The Fisher King's* relatively short seventeen chapters is titled with a key statement from a dialogue within that particular chapter. These titles not only draw attention to key insights gained and questions raised in a particular

chapter, but also noticeably shift the focus from the written to the spoken word, thus challenging the primacy of written language as a source and "vehicle of authority and truth" (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 151). Ulene's narration of her life story and Hattie's account of Sonny-Rett's life and music demonstrate that the spoken word and oral narratives give access to additional or different knowledge(s) as well as to affects that cannot be found in official or conventional written accounts or histories. While Marshall does not explicitly participate in the rediscovery or (re)creation of a "nation language" in the way that Edward Kamau Brathwaite has proposed it in relation to (Afro)-Caribbean language(s) and culture(s) (Brathwaite 1995: 311),[35] there are recognizable parallels and points of connection between their projects. Invested in representing the linguistic diversity of the African diaspora, Marshall's narrative, particularly those passages that involve dialogue containing Barbadian English and Black English or jazz jargon, endows spoken English with special properties that correspond to Brathwaite's description of the characteristics of "nation language:" "It may be in English: but often it is in an English which is like a howl, or a shout or a machine-gun or the wind or a wave. It is also like the blues. And sometimes it is English and African at the same time" (Brathwaite 1995: 311). Resembling howls, shouts, and perhaps even the sound of a machine gun, Ulene's exclamations, protests and reproaches can be described as examples of 'nation language.' If 'nation language' is like the blues, it is may also share properties of blues's urban cousin jazz and may therefore be found not only in Ulene's utterances but also in those passages that contain the author's sophisticated descriptions of Sonny-Rett's songs. Like Brathwaite's "nation language" (Brathwaite 1995: 311), both the dialogues in *The Fisher King's* and the novel's overall narrative structure challenge fundamental Eurocentric beliefs in the superiority of the written word and the inferiority of orality and oral culture. This challenge is closely connected to an ideal of epistemological diversity that allows for different, alternative or marginalized stories, histories, songs and 'truths' to come forth. Since *The Fisher King*

[35] Brathwaite argues that "[n]ation language is the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/ Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sound explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree. […] But it is an English which is not the standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people. It is what I call, as I say, *nation language.* I use the term in contrast to *dialect.* [… Dialect] carries very pejorative overtones, […] Dialect has a long history coming from the plantation where people's dignity is distorted through their language and the descriptions which the dialect gave to them. Nation language, on the other hand, is the submerged area of that dialect which is much more closely allied to the African aspect of experience in the Caribbean. It may be in English: but often it is in an English which is like a howl, or a shout or a machine-gun or the wind or a wave. It is also like the blues. And sometimes it is English and African at the same time" (Brathwaite 1995: 311).

explores a grander scope of the African diaspora than commonly conceived of in U.S contexts, Sonny Jr.'s and Hattie use of French expressions must be read as a gesture toward an inclusive, multi-lingual conception of the global African diaspora. As the embodiment of that particular diaspora in the last quarter of the twentieth century, Sonny is the only character alive in 1984 who speaks both English and French perfectly. The fact that one of his American cousins has begun to learn French may also indicate that formerly distinct parts of the African diaspora are reaching toward new understandings – or at least that they are capable of it.

2.3.4 Returning to the Triangle

While in the novels published between *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Fisher King* Marshall addresses the (generationally transmitted) trauma of the Middle Passage fairly explicitly, her focus in *The Fisher King* seems to be directed toward the private and communal traumas in her characters' more immediate pasts. Even though the triangle is a recurring motif in the novel and can be read as alluding to the triangular transatlantic slave trade, *The Fisher King* deliberately draws the reader's attention to other, more recent aspects of African diasporic history that need to be accounted for. The novel suggests that in order to understand the heterogeneous nature of African diasporic experiences in the twentieth century, the reader, like the characters Marshall represents, needs to work through and resolve issues in her or his more immediate past. The novel suggests that, in contrast to the traumas of the Middle Passage and plantation slavery, both of which will never be fully knowable or 'speakable,' some of the more recent individual and communal traumas that affect the African diaspora community in the twentieth century can be addressed, represented and possibly even be redressed. While the novel certainly does not encourage the reader to forget about the originary trauma of the Middle Passage, its orientation toward reconciliation and its cautious optimism vis-à-vis the future require that it create its own version of a 'useable past.' Seeking both to maintain old alliances and to establish new ones across communities, this process entails a careful selection and re-evaluation of past events. I suspect that Marshall's reluctance to compare members of the African diaspora and the inhabitants of the African continent in the twentieth century might be the result of such a necessary re-evaluation of the possibilities as well as the limits of the ideal of unity in diversity. While points of origin in Africa as well as points of connection with Africa must be acknowledged, it is perhaps not the job of a diasporic

African American writer like Marshall to represent non-diasporic Africa in the twentieth century.

The motif of the triangle and triangular relationships is somewhat overdetermined in the novel. In addition to describing the relationship of Sonny-Rett, Cherisse and Hattie, this recurring motif gestures toward the novel's investment in both representing and reconsidering the concept of the (global) African diaspora. Yet, its employment draws attention to how little the novel truly engages with the African continent, its history and its peoples. While the concept of triangular trade describes a particular system of historical trade and power relations between Europe, the Americas (including the Caribbean) and Africa the novel maps twentieth-century movements through the Americas (from the Caribbean to New York City and from the American South to New York City), as well as between the U.S. and Europe, that are not triangular. Rather than connecting the global African diaspora, as a historical reference, the triangle thus draws attention to the lack of connection between people of African descent in the diaspora and Africans.

The Fisher King's representation of the lives of Sonny's grandparents in Paris explores the ambiguities and challenges as well as the rewards of life in the diaspora. Paris is not simply represented as the venerable and traditionalist capital of a former colonial power, whose wealth and grandeur can only be appropriately evaluated if one confronts the fact that large parts of its wealth and grandeur result directly from the crimes committed in the colonies. Instead, Paris becomes a place of possibility and experimentation, where African American immigrants and expatriates like Sonny-Rett, Cherisse and Hattie can live lives that would have been impossible, perhaps even unthinkable, in Bedford-Stuyvesant. While each of the characters represents a distinct migration experience with its own challenges, Paris affords them some years of respite from these challenges. Even though Marshall does not celebrate the experience of diaspora in the way that some, predominantly metropolitan, postcolonial scholars do, she, too, suggests that a change of place, a shift of alliances, and the establishment of additional allegiances can be rewarding.

Exerting considerable effort to quickly and fully assimilate to life in Paris, Cherisse quickly reaps the benefits of learning the language and becoming more French than the French in a city "made to order for her" (*FK* 188). Her diaspora experience is represented as the most successful of the three models presented. At a time when "[t]he French *definitely* liked Colored" (*FK* 189; emphasis mine), she enjoys being admired and treated like a "*vedette*" (*FK* 188; italics in the original). Cherisse's narrative is reminiscent of those texts that frame the relationship of Americans to the French capital in terms of a love

affair. The novel suggests that her love for Paris and the Parisian lifestyle she has adopted may be deeper than her love for either Sonny-Rett or Hattie -- or even her daughter JoJo. Since she is represented as almost entirely unburdened by emotional ties to her former life, being in the French metropolis enables her fulfill her childhood aspiration of reinventing her life as "*someone else altogether*" (*FK* 135, 197; italics in the original).

Hattie initially comes to Paris in order to be reunited with Cherisse and Sonny-Rett rather than to escape from America and quickly settles back into her role as Sonny-Rett's confident and financial advisor and Cherisse's best friend. Later, after JoJo's birth, she also becomes the child's primary care-giver. Hattie is prepared to take on both the roles and the tasks the other characters in the novel confer on her and imagines her function in their family in the following way: "[I]t might be the way things were meant to be, he three of them like the connected sides of the triangles she used to draw in geometry in high school, which her as the base, joining them to herself" (*FK* 143). Neither Sonny-Rett, nor Cherisse, nor JoJo, nor Sonny Jr. could have survived without Hattie, but the narrative, although partly focalized through her eyes, represents her as perpetual outsider and secondary character in the lives of others. Her position as an outsider looking in is already firmly established in those flashbacks that grant the reader glimpses into Hattie's early life. For example, Hattie became a "City child" (*FK* 68) put into foster care, when her mother, Dawn, was sent to an asylum for the mentally ill. Placed with different families, she had to endure both sexual abuse and neglect (*FK* 69). Represented as literally and metaphorically orphaned, Hattie is prepared to come to Paris and to embrace a, for the time, rather unconventional form of family life with Sonny-Rett and Cherisse in an environment that later also enables the trio to pursue a romantic relationship. Although granted periods of happiness or, at least, contentment in Paris, there too, Hattie remains an outsider, who walks the city. Marshall constructs Hattie as a diasporic twentieth-century *flâneuse* who has been "a walker in the city from way back" (*FK* 59).[36] Observing the city's many spectacles as well as its aesthetics without being observed herself, Hattie remains detached from the life she so keenly observes. The fact that Hattie, "*une Americaine noire*" (*FK* 62; italics in the original) whose command of French has never surpassed the level of "scrambled, make-do" (*FK* 18) continues to call Paris her home, even after the people who first drew her there have died indicates how strong her ties to the place have grown.

[36] Discussing women in the literature of modernity, Janet Wolff has argued that due to sexual divisions of the nineteenth century, the figure of the *flâneuse* was an impossibility. No woman invested in her respectability could wander around the city alone nor could any 'respectable' woman, conceived of only as the object of the male gaze, freely direct her gaze at men (Wolff 1985: 41-42, 45).

However, her preference of Paris over New York City must also be understood as directly resulting from her appraisal of how much bleaker her situation would be in the U.S. compared to her life in France.

Although Sonny-Rett's musical talent is quickly recognized, and he becomes a widely celebrated musician and composer, he neither falls in love with the city nor takes to Parisian life as easily as his wife or Hattie. While for Cherisse and Hattie Paris becomes the home they have chosen and made for themselves, Sonny-Rett's relationship to the city is represented as rather ambiguous. As his economic situation deteriorates, his feelings of alienation and exile become more prominent and he becomes dependent on drugs. Paris, like the New York of his adolescence, leaves him disillusioned because it fails to protect him from the racism and discrimination that he hoped to escape when he first came to the City of Light. Where once his detachment from and indifference to the 'real world' could be explained as an effect of his musical genius, the novel, in the voice of Hattie, suggests that later, when drugs had become a necessity, they were responsible for the kind of detachment and loss of reality that may also have contributed to his death at the bottom of a flight of stairs in the "empty Châtelet station of the Métro" (*FK* 107).

2.3.5 Returning the Jazz Legend Home

Since jazz no longer plays as significant a role in contemporary popular culture as it did in the heyday represented in the novel, *The Fisher King* provides some contextualizing information, before it negotiates the issue of Sonny-Rett's posthumous return to Bedford-Stuyvesant. As part of the novel's endeavor to enable the reader to acquire and improve her or his diaspora literacy, it emphasizes the political dimensions and implications of jazz culture. As a hard bob jazz pianist, roughly contemporaneous with Miles Davis and Sonny Rollins, Sonny-Rett garnered reactions similar to those described by Frantz Fanon in *Wretched of the Earth.* Fanon describes the significance of the development of new styles such as bebop and later hard bob and comments on the way in which white (American) audiences reacted to these developments:

> It is the colonialists who become the defenders of indigenous style. A memorable example, and one that takes on particular significance because it does not quite involve a colonial reality, was the reaction of white jazz fans when after the Second World War new styles such as bebop established themselves. For them jazz could only be the broken, desperate

> yearning of an old "Negro," five whiskeys under his belt, bemoaning his own misfortune and the racism of the whites. As soon as he understands himself and apprehends the world differently, as soon as he elicits a glimmer of hope and forces the racist world to retreat, it is obvious he will blow his horn to his heart's content and his husky voice will ring out loud and clear. The new jazz styles are not only born out of economic competition. They are one of the definite consequences of the inevitable, though gradual, defeat of the Southern universe in the USA. And it is not unrealistic to think that in fifty years or so the type of jazz lament hiccupped by a poor, miserable "Negro" will be defended by only those whites believing in a frozen image of a certain type of relationship and a certain form of negritude. (Fanon 2004: 175-76)

The novel's representation of Sonny's professional and artistic development – his difficulties in the U.S. due to racism, his success in Europe, particularly in an initially significantly less racist France – aligns with Fanon's claims. While Sonny is represented as suffering and dissatisfied in the French diaspora, Hattie's recollections as well as the titles of his best remembered songs (*FK* 181, 201) demonstrate that, he, like the jazz musicians described by Fanon, did not create laments "bemoaning his own misfortune and the racism of the whites" (Fanon 2004: 176). Instead, the representation of Sonny-Rett's music foregrounds syncretizing processes of appropriation, adaptation and re-writing, in which different influences, ranging from European classical music to medieval architecture, rather than overwhelming and dominating the creative process, provide inspiration that the artist can creatively transform.

As an art form, jazz is especially appropriate to the negotiation of the chances and limits of the concept of the African diaspora in a U.S. context because of what Jürgen E. Grandt has described as "the apparent paradox that jazz music is at once a distinctly black American art form as well as a cultural hybrid" (Grandt 2004: 78). While jazz set out to conquer the world from U.S. shores, its origins have always been described as already hybrid in nature and irrevocably tied to the global African diaspora. Furthermore, E. Taylor Atkins's characterization of jazz as a "transgressor of the idea of nation" and as an "agent of globalization" (Atkins 2003: xiii) casts jazz culture as both emerging from and representing modern diasporic formations.

As an African diaspora novel that frames jazz culture in quintessentially African diasporic terms and that is deeply invested in negotiating the ambivalent relationship between African Americans and Barbadian- or Caribbean-Americans in the U.S., many of *The Fisher King's* formal characteristics closely resemble those outlined in Kamau

Brathwaite's essay "Jazz and the West Indian Novel" (1967). Brathwaite claims that even though there is no one-to-one correspondence between literature and music, there is a relationship between music and literature, a relationship between jazz improvisation and the folk tradition/oral tradition, to be more precise: "[I]t would appear that many folk forms, and those passages on West Indian (and other) literary works that grapple most closely with folk forms and folk experience, contain elements of improvisation. (Brathwaite 1995: 327). While *The Fisher King's* engagement with folk form and folk experience as well as the novel's investment in their 'accurate' representation is most palpable in those passages that allow Sonny-Rett's and Edgar's mother Ulene Payne to speak, the entire novel prioritizes dialogue over description and attempts to display and celebrate the heterogeneity of spoken expression. Brathwaite further maintains that the jazz novel "[is not] "epic,", that it "[deals] with a specific, clearly-defined, folk-type community" and that it "will try to express the essence of this community through its form" (Brathwaite 1995: 330). Creating unity in diversity and narrative cohesion out of a set of heterogonous narratives, Marshall's novel fulfills this description of the jazz's mandate more successfully than the musician Sonny-Rett.

Sonny-Rett is modeled on or exists in an extended dialogue with Sonny, the jazz musician character of James Baldwin's, short story, "Sonny's Blues" (1957). Like Baldwin's narrator's reformed drug addict, musician brother, Sonny-Rett is constructed as a musical genius who turns to drugs because he is unable to cope with the harsh realities of second-class citizenship, first at home and then in the diaspora. Baldwin's short story stages how jazz facilitates the direct reconciliation between the first-person narrator and his younger jazz musician brother, whereas *The Fisher King* neither reunites the brothers in the flesh, nor represents Edgar's desire to atone for his indifference toward his bother as anything but a one-sided attempt at reconciliation and atonement. Marshall's novel thus explores what kinds of reconnections, recoveries and reconciliations are possible, if, in the face of death or other unfillable voids, these processes can only take place in an indirect, mediated form.

The Fisher King stages Sonny-Rett's posthumous, mediated return to America as well as different attempts to reconcile him with the childhood neighborhood that drove him into exile in different ways. Most obviously, for those who, like Edgar, are invested in genetic continuity and blood connections, Sonny Jr.'s arrival in Bedford-Stuyvesant establishes the presence of a younger, male member of Sonny-Rett's family in the

neighborhood. Sonny Jr. also continues his grandfather's line both as his namesake and as his artistic successor.

Sonny Jr. further participates in the process of returning his grandfather to America and his childhood neighborhood, because, unbeknownst to the adults in the story, he envisions keeping Sonny-Rett safe as an inhabitant of each of the medieval castles he draws in course of the narrative. Celia Wallhead has pointed out that medieval European myth of the Fisher King crosses the Atlantic "and accommodates themes concerning identity and race in the contemporary world" (Wallhead 2002: 205).[37] The manner in which Marshall appropriates and adapts the medieval European tradition in her African diaspora novel can be characterized as more elaborate, more sophisticated, and more irreverent than her rather self-conscious and straightforward references to Greek plays in *Brown Girl Brownstones*. As an established novelist and a writer's writer, she no longer seems to feel the need to prove her knowledge of Western traditions to a suspicious audience. Sonny Jr., who was born in Paris, is constructed as the natural heir of both a European tradition and an African diaspora tradition – both of which he self-confidently claims and adapts to fit his needs.

The commemorative concert Edgar organizes returns both the specter of Sonny-Rett -- and, perhaps more importantly, his jazz compositions and musical legacy -- to what Edgar perceives to be their rightful place in the heart of Bedford-Stuyvesant. The novel deliberately returns him and his music to the stage of nightclub that the Three Rs Housing Group has recently finished refurbishing and will now return to the community as a community center, because it was on that very stage that Sonny-Rett first proved his virtuosity to his peers and was transformed from "goody-two-shoes" (*FK* 83) Everett Payne into Sonny-Rett, genius jazz musician. In Baldwin's short story the Sonny character also returns to a stage on which he has celebrated musical successes prior to his prison sentence; Baldwin's character is transformed and healed by his return to this stage and can in turn, at least temporarily, transform his audience. Baldwin allows the older brother to witness and participate in this triumphant return. Furthermore, he allows the narrator to gain a glimpse of his younger brother's soul through his music at a time when this epiphany may very well positively affect their relationship or brotherhood. *The Fisher King* does not represent Sonny-Rett's posthumous return to the stage in as triumphant a manner. Neither does it specify to what extent the concert helps Edgar to comprehend or experience Sonny-Rett's art. But Edgar has previously admitted that he only began to re-

[37] See Wallhead (2002) for an examination of how Marshall rewrites elements of the Fisher King myth, such as the Waste Land, the King, the Healer, the Weeping Women, and the Hairless Maiden.

approach and, perhaps for the first time, appreciate Sonny-Rett's art after his brother's death. The novel clearly suggests that he turns into something of jazz aficionado, music collector and expert on publically available information on Sonny-Rett's musical legacy, because he wants to lay claim to Sonny-Rett, and because he seeks forgiveness and posthumous reconciliation with the brother whom he failed to understand while he was still alive. *The Fisher King* attempts to capture and represent the sophistication and innovation of Sonny-Rett's music, but its representation of the commemorative concert does not offer the kind of unmediated and transformative performance that forms the climax of Baldwin's short story. Baldwin represents (jazz) music as a transformative power that ideally connects listeners to their emotions, allows them to envision (political) change, enables them to recall their pasts and helps them to claim their place in their family genealogies:

> Sonny's fingers filled the air with life, his life. But that life contained so many others. And Sonny went all the way back, he really began with the spare, flat statement of the opening phrase of the song, Then he began to make it his. It was very beautiful because it wasn't hurried and it was no longer a lament. I seemed to hear with what burning he had made it his, with what burning we had yet to make it ours, how we could cease lamenting. Freedom lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us to be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did. Yet, there was no battle in his face now. I heard what he had gone through, and would continue to go through until he came to rest in earth. He had made it his: that long line, of which we knew only Mama and Daddy. And he was giving it back, as everything must be given back, so that, passing through death, it can live forever. I saw my mother's face again, and felt, for the first time, how the stones of the road she had walked on must have bruised her feet. I saw the moonlit road where my father's brother died. And it brought something else back to me, and carried me past it. I saw my little girl again and felt Isabel's tears again, and I felt my tears begin to rise. And I was yet aware that this was only a moment, that the world waited outside, as hungry as a tiger, and that stretched above us, longer than the sky. (Baldwin 2004: 1716)

In Baldwin's short story the jazz performance enables both brothers to acknowledge their own pain and suffering as well as that of their parents' generation. Furthermore, the performance initiates a communal process of working through emotions of pain and anger that promises to set the community free. Since the artist, as Baldwin represents him, has experienced suffering more deeply than most of his audience and is capable of constructively transforming his pain and anger into art, he is destined to introduce, lead and guide his community of listeners through their individual processes of reckoning. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Marshall's construction and understanding of the artist's function is

still quite similar to that which Baldwin envisions in "Sonny's Blues." In *The Fisher King*, however, she draws a less encouraging and celebratory picture of the artist's function and capabilities. This difference can, in part, be explained by the difference in genre. Although Baldwin's narrator is aware that there is a life beyond and after the performance, the text chooses to mention only briefly "the world [that] waited outside, as hungry as a tiger" (Baldwin 2004: 1716), whereas Marshall's African diaspora novel explores in great detail what happens after the performance when the tiger lunges at her characters. While the representations of jazz performances in earlier chapters of the novel, particularly that in which Everett Payne is reborn as Sonny-Rett (*FK* 82-83), explicitly endow jazz with transformative potential, Marshall's staging of the jazz performances in chapters 15 and 16 of *The Fisher King* explores the ways in which the artist and his family fell prey to worldly forces they have been unable to transform or even really influence. Instead of describing particular rhythms and melodies, or the emotions these may evoke, the representation of the performance at the commemorative concerts serves to (re-) contextualize and re-read Sonny-Rett's compositions, as an archive of pieces influenced by or created in response to specific events in both his private and his public life. In order to do so, the novel focuses on the narratives that introduce and accompany Sonny-Rett's most important pieces, instead of attempting to capture the sound of Sonny-Rett's individual compositions. John Lowney has pointed out that these narratives, the public one recounting how Sonny-Rett's songs reflect events and phases in his private life as well as the private one in which Hattie's inner thoughts create a counter narrative that is unsuitable for public iteration, establish an alternative history of jazz which reveals official jazz history to be less democratic and more patriarchal than some would like to portray it (Lowney 2015: 5-6). Invoking Morrison's concept of "rememory," he reads Hattie's accounts as the "narrative 'rememory' of a black female character […] whose authority to represent Sonny-Rett's legacy is contested throughout the novel" (Lowney 2015: 2). While it is certainly true that Hattie's accounts of Sonny-Rett's life aim to establish her, and not Edgar, as the authority on both his life and his work in the eyes of the reader, Hattie's private recollections also lay bare the characters' failures and self-deceptions, including Hattie's own.

Hattie's 'rememory' thus draws the reader's attention to the question of family and family ties in and across the African diaspora. In this way the novel's staging of Sonny-Rett's mediated and posthumous return to a New York stage enables the reader to contemplate the possibilities and limits of the concept of African diaspora. Highlighting memorable moments from their family life in Paris, Hattie's inner counter-narrative draws

a picture of family life in the diaspora that raises numerous questions and draws attention to the gaps in family genealogy of "The Inseparable Three" (*FK* 186). Reminiscent of the rhythms of jazz, the form of the novel is characterized by brevity, repetition of key phrases, and the syncopated interplay of flashbacks and passages set in the narrative present. These stylistic choices both distinguish *The Fisher King* from Marshall's earlier novels and also encourage the creation of a fragmented narrative that can be regarded as an unusual deviation from established stylistic patterns for a writer who has called herself a "picture-writer" (Dance 2010: 108). However, since Marshall's skillful employment of allusions and implications succeeds in creating narrative cohesion, or unity in diversity on a formal level, where and when she deems it appropriate or desirable, the gaps in the family story that *The Fisher King* presents appear particularly striking. Certain elements or events of the family history as well as key figures in the family genealogy remain unaccounted for. What happened to JoJo? Who is Sonny Jr.'s father and where is he? Why did Jojo run away and destroy all photographic evidence of herself? How and why did Sonny-Rett, Cherisse and Hattie hide their relationship from JoJo? Why is entire parent generation, represented by JoJo, Sonny Jr.'s Cameroonian father and Edgar's divorced daughter, ominously absent from the novel, in which grandparents take care of the children? As the entire novel uses Sonny Jr.'s introduction to and incorporation into his American family, as an occasion to consider and negotiate the chances and challenges of a global African diaspora, the gaps in the family history presented in *The Fisher King* emphasize on multiple occasions that in the late twentieth it has become difficult to establish conventional family genealogies in the (global) African diaspora. Not only has it become more difficult and problematic to claim one's place in these genealogies than in both Baldwin's short story and Marshall's *Bildungsroman*; Sonny Jr.'s story proves that some family connections in the present are not recoverable at all, not even by turning to music and other syncretic forms of artistic expression. At the concert, Sonny Jr. is anxious to hear the song "P'tite JoJo," a lullaby written for his "runaway girl-mother" (*FK* 77), but while he recalls how listening to a recording of the song would help him to fall asleep as a younger boy, the song, significantly, fails to reconnect him to his mother or even simply to remind him of stories about her (*FK* 198-199).

In contrast to her earlier novels, such as *Praisesong for the Widow*, that focused on reestablishing and reinventing connections by focusing on a shared past as well as by celebrating common or syncretized culture practices, such as jazz, across the African diaspora, in *The Fisher King*, Marshall investigates the challenges of heterogeneity as well

as the challenges created by unbridgeable gaps, missing links, omissions and lacunae within the narrative of the African diaspora family. In order to point to the flaws of the family model, which so often has been made to represent connections in the African diaspora and which (over-)emphasizes notions of brotherhood and sisterhood but fails to account for moments of tensions and mis- or non-communication, *The Fisher King* creates a twentieth-century African diaspora family narrative that, like the narrative of the African diaspora family, fails to – because it cannot – fully take into account and reconcile the multitude of heterogonous narratives it seeks to accommodate.

Although the novel does not end on a happy note, the hope for a more complete reconciliation within the African diaspora has not been entirely abandoned but transferred to Sonny's generation. The novel fails to explore why the generation of the absentee parents appears to be of little help in this endeavor. It also chooses to end its exploration in 1984. As a result, the reader is left to wonder and judge from her own lived experience at the turn of the millennium, whether the grandparents' "dream deferred" has come to some kind of fruition or whether it has "*explode[ed]*" (Hughes 1951: ll. 1, 11; italics in the original).

3 Jamaica Kincaid – An Individualist Struggles with the African Diaspora

> I now consider anger a badge of honor.
> – Jamaica Kincaid (Kincaid and Perry 1990: 497)
>
> One question is who is responsible. Another is can you read?
> – Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* p. 3

Jamaica Kincaid's female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman*, *Lucy* (1990), and her African diaspora novel, *Mr. Potter* (2002), explore questions regarding Caribbean-American migration and complicate the concept of a global African diaspora in a Caribbean-American framework. Described as "extended serial autobiography" (Gilmore 2001: 104),[1] the novels in Kincaid's oeuvre write and re-write migration experiences that in many ways mirror the author's own. At the same time, these novels explore those social and political circumstances that made an escape from an often unnamed island in the (Anglophone) Caribbean to the U.S. necessary or even inevitable – both for Kincaid's first-person narrators and for the author herself.

Kincaid was born as Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson in St. John's, Antigua, in 1949. Feeling alienated from her family and her island even before it was decided that she was to pursue a nursing career in the U.S., she moved to Westchester, New York at the age of sixteen. Like the protagonist of her *Bildungsroman*, she first worked as a nanny for a wealthy American family. Before turning to writing and eventually becoming a fulltime journalist for *The New Yorker* and a successful fiction writer, she worked various jobs and explored different educational avenues, including photography classes at the New York School of Social Research. She now lives mainly in Vermont and teaches creative writing at Harvard University, where she holds the position of Professor of African and African American Studies in Residence. [2]

In the two novels discussed in this chapter, Kincaid delves into some of the same questions originally raised by Paule Marshall. Like Marshall (and later Edwidge Danticat), she is dedicated to capturing the complex and unique nature of the Caribbean-American

[1] Many attempts have been made to find terms for Kincaid's unique brand of intensely autobiographical texts. While some critics, such as Leigh Gilmore (2001) and Susheila Nasta (2009), approach Kincaid's works as autobiographies rather than as literary novels and examine how her texts manipulate the conventions of the genre of autobiography, others maintain that Kincaid blurs the genre boundaries of both the novel and the autobiography in her works and therefore approach her oeuvre as "ongoing self-narration" (Bouson 2005: 66) or an "ongoing fictional semiautobiographical saga" (Ferguson 1994: 107).

[2] In 1979, Kincaid married Allen Shawn, the son of famous *New Yorker* editor William Shawn. They have two children but are now divorced. Kincaid is a convert to Judaism.

diaspora experience. Her idiosyncratic narratives, whose form insistently draws attention to itself, highlight that artistic responses to and engagements with similar questions of migration and (a global African) diaspora, since, instead of celebrating community and continuities, her novels prioritize the individual and seek to ensure her narrators' survival through permanent rupture. Written against the backdrop of what has been termed both "the age of diaspora" (Radhakrishnan 1991; Brubaker 2005: 7, 8) and the "Age of (intensified) Migration" (Friedman 2009: 22), Kincaid's representations of the (diasporic) realities of Afro-Caribbean women reveal the difficulties involved in attempting to carve out a life for one's self in a world in which the physical and psychological remnants of colonial structures, patriarchal power structures and powerful neo-colonial formations can at times severely limit women's self-determination. Due to the radically individualist stance promoted in her texts, her engagement with all issues connected to the concept of a global African diaspora takes a decidedly different form than the more community-oriented and at least partially celebratory representation of African diaspora experiences in the works of Marshall, Edwidge Danticat and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Since, as Kincaid herself acknowledges, she "reduce[s] everything to a domestic situation" (Kincaid and Perry 1990: 503), her works exemplify and explore how and why the personal is political and vice versa. Her narratives also generate a discussion of certain dissatisfactions with developments within third-wave feminism as well as within postcolonial theory.

Kincaid's project of radically individualist female self-determination and self-realization sets her noticeably apart from both Danticat's and Adichie's visions of simultaneous individual as well as communal and cooperative female empowerment. Nevertheless, both these younger authors have acknowledged that Kincaid's texts, characterized by rebellious female first-person narrators as well as by a captivating lyricism, have exerted a significant influence on them, particularly at the beginning of their writing careers. Danticat remembers being impressed, and a little intimidated, by Kincaid when she first encountered Kincaid's work and the author herself during a reading at Barnard College (Treisman 2013: 0:55–1:28). She explains that Kincaid's texts, especially when read out loud, "expanded [for her] the notion of what you can do with fiction" (Treisman 2013: 1:38-1:44). At a time when Danticat's dream to become a writer was still mostly a personal secret, the presence of a "black woman from the Caribbean" like herself on the literary market encouraged her to pursue writing (Treisman 2013: 1:59-2:33). Furthermore, she began to recognize similarities not only between those experience represented in Kincaid's work and her own diasporic experience but also between

Kincaid's themes and her own future literary themes, such as "difficult mother-daughter relationships,"[3] "migration" and an ambivalent "relationship with the motherland" (Treisman 2013: 2:43-3:27). Commenting on the purging and cathartic effects of writing, Danticat has pointed out another similarity between herself and Kincaid: "Jamaica Kincaid has said that if she didn't write she'd be burning down buildings. My work allows me to exorcise my ghosts. I purge the pain from it" (Adisa 2017: 49). Adichie, for her part, has stated that she first discovered Kincaid's novel, *Lucy*, after she had come to the U.S. and was herself working as a babysitter in Philadelphia (Treisman 2010: 0:55- 1:18).[4] She describes her encounter with the novel as: "This wonderful discovery of a voice that was very familiar to me that made me feel not so alone. […] It was just this wonderful poetry about the writing that just completely charmed me" (Treisman 2010: 1:19-1:33). She adds that she is drawn to Kincaid's writing because "there is a willingness to confront darkness. […] There is a kind of delicious darkness […] in her work." (Treisman 2010: 2:37-2:44).[5]

3.1 *Lucy* –Complicating the Bildungsroman by Cutting Ties and Slashing (Some) Traditions

Containing prominent intertextual references to traditional female *Bildungsromane* by Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë and Louisa May Alcott,[6] Kincaid's *Lucy,* challenges and expands the conventions of the tradition of the male *Bildungsroman* as well as that of the female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman* to accommodate a postcolonial and diasporic *Bildungsheldin.* On the level of the plot, Lucy's process of self-formation is represented as an increasingly successful process of "disidentification" (Majerol 2007: 18; Lowe 1996: 4-6, 101) with community of origin and an almost absolute separation from the powerful mother figure. This process also entails gradual and less absolute processes of

[3] Danticat rejects the idea that Kincaid is limited to writing about mothers and daughters: "I think that it is narrow-minded of people to say that she's fixated with mothers and daughters. Have people read her *My Brother* or *Mr. Potter*? Her gardening or travel book?" (Adisa 2017: 49).

[4] Adichie explains that she has read much of Kincaid's work (Treisman 2010: 1:53-2:06). Furthermore, Kincaid also heads Adichie's 2010 list of "favorite writers over forty" (Knox 2010).

[5] In the same section of the interview (21:14-28:40), she also explains that even though she ought to answer that knowing Kincaid's work is autobiographical should not matter to her reading experience, knowing about the similarities between Kincaid's life and the fiction she writes, in fact, "changed how [she] read it" and "gave [Kincaid's work] a kind of power" (Treisman 2010: 24:34-25:09).

[6] For a discussion of *Lucy* in relation to J*ane Eyre* (1847) see Simmons (1998). For an examination of the similarities and differences between Kincaid's Lucy and Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe in *Villette* (1853), see Yost (2006). See Rodriguez (2006) for an examination of how Alcott's *Little Women* informs *Lucy*. Other notable intertexts include John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and William Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807/1815).

identification and disidentification with social, political and cultural structures and traditions that Lucy encounters once she arrives in the U.S. In contrast to many other female *Bildungsromane*, including those by Marshall, Danticat, and Adichie, the protagonist's self-formation is constructed as a radical self-invention that affirms, perhaps even celebrates, the kind of radical individualism and upward social mobility often associated with the traditional male *Bildungsroman*. Unlike traditional male *Bildungshelden*, however, Kincaid's protagonist does not "*interioriz[e ...] contradiction*" (Moretti 1987: 10; italics in the original) in a conventional manner that would eventually serve to stabilize the status quo and if evaluated according to a traditional male paradigm, Lucy's *Bildung* may be described as a failed *Bildung*. Since, however, Kincaid's novel seeks to transform and adapt the conventions of the genre of the *Bildungsroman* in such a way as to make it responsive to the realities of a young diasporic woman in the twentieth century, it *must* confront conventional (male) notions of successful *Bildung* and failed *Bildung*. As a result, *Lucy*, more insistently than *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, challenges the notion that in a (female) ethnic *Bildungsroman* successful *Bildung* equals assimilation and integration – or, at the very least, the protagonist's successful negotiation and claiming of "doubleness" (DeLamotte 1998:39) or a "dual location" (Hathaway 1999: 86). The notion of 'doubleness,' though theoretically more capable of accommodating ambivalences and contradictions, is of rather limited use in describing who Kincaid's protagonist has become after a year of radical, intuition-driven (*L*134) and still ongoing self-invention. Equipped only with "memory," "anger" and "despair" (*L*134), but cut free of family ties and oppressive traditions, "the girl of whom certain things were expected […] had gone out of existence" (*L* 133). For reasons to be examined below, Kincaid's radically individualist, even solipsistic, protagonist refuses to – or is unable to – be integrated or assimilated into any group. Instead, she is forced to ceaselessly disidentify in order to exist. Recalling Stuart Hall's assertion that "[d]iaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 1994: 402), Kincaid's text offers an idiosyncratic and non-celebratory rendition of how precisely a female diasporic individualist is forced ceaselessly produce and reproduce her identity by disidentifying with (asserting her difference from) (almost) everybody and (almost) everything that surrounds her.

The novel's narration continuously oscillates between identification and "disidentification" (Majerol 2007: 18; Lowe 1996: 4-6, 101) with different literary and critical traditions. Encompassing postcolonial and feminist agendas, on the level of

narration, the novel negotiates whether or how these explicitly political and cooperative agendas can be combined with the modernist and postmodernist impulses to individualize and aestheticize. While the genre conventions of the *Bildungsroman* limit the negotiation of these only partially reconcilable impulses and help contain the palpable narrative tensions generated by their juxtaposition, the African diaspora novel is capable of accommodating a broader negotiation of these issues.

3.1.1 Making Tradition Useable – An Individualist's Attempt

Kincaid's female ethnic/diasporic *Bildungsroman* chronicles how, in her first year in the U.S., the nineteen-year-old protagonist discovers and adapts to her new living conditions as a nanny in the household of Mariah, Lewis and their four daughters and ultimately fashions a new and ultimately autonomous life for herself in her adopted home. The episodic novel carefully maps the protagonist's hopes as well as the emotional turmoil she experiences, as she attempts to prioritize her present over her past and her new experiences and possibilities over established traditions. Both on the level of the plot and on the level of the narration, the novel negotiates the question of what (cultural and literary) traditions – if any – should be maintained, adopted or adapted by the female diasporic protagonist (and her author) and which traditions need to be rebuked, discontinued, or 'slashed'[7]. The novel stages the negotiation of this question by detailing a multitude of processes of identification and disidentification with characters, entities, concepts and schools of thought. In *Immigrant Acts* (1996) Lisa Lowe observes that cultural expressions:

> offer other modes for imagining and narrating immigrant subjectivity and community – emerging out of conditions of decolonization, displacement, and disidentification – and refuse assimilation to the dominant narratives of integration, development, and identification (Lowe 1996: 101)

[7] In an interview with Gerhard Dilger entitled "I Use a Cut and Slash Policy or Writing" (1992), Kincaid has famously described the evolution of her writing policy in the following terms: "So I just now use this slash-and-burn policy of writing, I just say what I have to say and get out" (Dilger 1992: 23). While it remains unclear whether Dilger's decision to change the phrase "cut-and-burn policy" into "Cut and Slash Policy" in the interview's title was driven by anything other than the need for a catchy title, both phrases not only describe Kincaid's approach to writing but also capture the impatience, irreverence and at times even aggression, with which Kincaid's text encounter and attempt to destabilize different cultural and literary traditions. I assume that the expression 'cut and slash' may simply have been *en vogue* at the time, since the beginning of the 1990s saw artists, such as designer Vivienne Westwood, experiment with 'cut-and-slash techniques.'

Building on these observations, Veronica Majerol explores how Kincaid's diasporic artist protagonist develops an "aesthetics of disidentification […] borne out of the contradictions inherent in the attempt to assimilate such a subject into a larger narrative of progress or development" (Majerol 2007: 18). While Majerol almost exclusively locates and describes Lucy's disidentification in the context of the representation of her relationship to the character of Mariah, her employer and substitute mother figure in the U.S., I argue that Lucy does not merely develop an "aesthetics of disidentification" (Majerol 2007: 18); rather the novel demonstrates how she comes into being, becomes visible, and exists as an individual through and ongoing process of disidentification that enables her to foreground her singularity and individuality. Combining key episodes from Lucy's past with those that represent her tackling the challenges confronting her in her adopted home, the narrative demonstrates that the protagonist's individualist stance, which propels her to continuously disidentify, results from her alienating experiences first as a colonial subject and later as a female, working-class diasporic in the U.S. In both settings the protagonist counters the danger of being either rendered an "echo" (*L* 36) by her mother or rendered invisible or entirely obliterated by different discursive bodies of tradition by physically withdrawing from the mother's influence and emotionally, intellectually and ideologically disidentifying with those traditions that threaten her existence (as an individual). Lucy's individualist stance affects all her interpersonal relationships as well as her aesthetic preferences and her political opinions. While the evolution of her individualist stance is represented in a striking and plausible manner, the drawbacks of that stance are nowhere explicitly problematized, although it also significantly limits the novel's overall political project. Despite the fact that Lucy sides with the marginalized and those who look "like [her] relatives" (*L* 32), the novel is primarily invested in exploring how the individual freedom of its protagonist can be achieved. Framing her story as one of personal liberation from various societal restraints, the narrative necessarily fails to fully examine whether – or at what cost – constant disidentification and radical individualism are a sustainable form of being.

On the level of the plot, Lucy, first and foremost, identifies and later disidentifies with the other female characters in her life – her mother, Mariah, and, to a lesser extent, her friend Peggy – and with the behaviors and traditions these women represent. Another process of identification and disidentification takes place on the level of narration and involves Kincaid's positionality toward some aspects of literary modernism and postmodernism as well as toward certain postcolonial and feminist notions. In a discussion

of Kincaid's book-length essay *A Small Place* (1988), Isabel Hoving cogently argues that it is difficult to label Kincaid's work as either modernist, or postmodern, or postcolonial, or feminist because "her writing does not inhabit a binary scheme" but exists "in a zone where modernisms, postmodernisms, postcolonialisms and feminisms collide and overlap" (Hoving 2001: 224). She explains that while Kincaid's texts, "often ironically, appropriate" some characteristics of these traditions, they reject other important characteristics of the same traditions (Hoving 2001: 224). The author's apparent impatience and dissatisfaction with existing, often self-contained, literary/critical schools of thought as well as her desire to destabilize, juxtapose and combine anew different cultural and literary traditions corresponds to Lucy's anger at cultural and discursive bodies of tradition, such as patriarchy and colonial discourse, as well as her to drive to expose and subvert them.

In *Lucy,* the question of what constitutes a 'useable tradition,' particularly what constitutes a 'useable literary tradition,' is very productively negotiated on the level of narration. Through its intertextual allusions to precisely to those female *Bildungsromane*, such as *Villette* and *Jane Eyre,* whose structures and conventions it emulates ('identifies with'), ridicules and subverts ('disidentifies with'), the he novel self-reflexively draws attention to its reconfiguration of the *Bildungsroman* genre. Kincaid flaunts her familiarity with key texts of the *Bildungsroman* genre at every turn, handling its genre conventions in an innovative but ultimately irreverent manner that produces a deliberately destabilizing reconfiguration of the *Bildungsroman* that mirrors her protagonist's project of freeing herself of all those traditions that oppress her. Equally familiar with key texts and conventions of (literary) modernism and postmodernism, she does not set out to destabilize or challenge these traditions in a similar manner, but rather (re)engages them in order to gauge to what extent they, rather than realism,[8] may offer representational strategies that are capable of representing the ambivalence and fractures that characterize life as Kincaid sees and represents it in her texts. While many scholars have characterized Kincaid's work as postmodernist, she herself has called attention to its affinities for and continuities with modernist writing. In an interview, she explains why she feels drawn to modernist writing:

> [James Joyce's and Virginia Woolf's] writing exposed the world as I saw it: fractured, scattered, and yet somehow whole. I immediately understood modernism. It made incredible sense, because the historical events I write about are also fractured and

[8] In the same interview with Selwyn R. Cudjoe in which Kincaid cites Modernist writers Virginia Woolf and James Joyce as inspiration, she asserts her disinterest in realism and the idea of 'realistic' representation: "The idea of a story – or anything – being realistic, the idea of representing something as it is, was absurd" (Cudjoe 1989: 403)

> complicated and antagonistic and ambivalent and contrary. Modernism is more like life than the other kinds of fiction I had read. (Johnson 1997: 4)

Many of the thematic and formal characteristics of Kincaid's *Bildungsroman* and her later African diaspora novel have been categorized as postmodernist, particularly her use of parataxis.[9] Some of the formal features of Kincaid's *Bildungsroman*, such as its focus on one individual consciousness, its lapses in chronology, its numerous moments of intertextuality, its rhythms, and its tendency to create sequence and coherence through evocative repetitions of key images, phrases and themes, recall experimental representational strategies that were first employed by modernist writers. These strategies aestheticize Lucy's diaspora experience and/or enable the narrative to put into relief different moments of ambivalence and fracture/rupture in the narrative. The novel's (re-) negotiation of the trope of exile and displacement as well as its representation of Lucy's inner world, as characterized by confusion and dissatisfaction, on the one hand, and rebellion and anger on the other hand, recall modernist conditions and affects and indicate a reengagement with and partial redefinition and reclamation of these sentiments. Kincaid's writing intentionally moves beyond the by-now often rehashed discussion of whether "postmodernism is continuous with modernism" or whether postmodernism "is a radical rupture, a break with modernism" (Huyssen 1986: 9-10), by demonstrating how a (modernist) investment in 'the new' / in 'making it new' can coexist with a (postmodernist) investment in rupture and radical difference.[10]

The novel's opening passage demonstrates how Kincaid incorporates this unique combination of modernist and postmodernist strategies and elements to represent the highly subjective perceptions, thoughts and opinions of a female diasporic as she encounters a new world. Lucy recalls that her first encounter with her new surroundings

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[9] Although Kincaid's self-acknowledged affinities run toward European and American modernism rather than Caribbean modernism, her interest in the continuities and discontinuities between modernism and postmodernism also links her to Caribbean modernism. Simon Gikandi characterizes Caribbean modernism as "highly revisionist" and argues that it emerged from the tensions and ambivalences between colonialism and nationalism, (1992: 4, ix). Since Kincaid's texts also explore these ambivalences as well as the legacies of these phenomena, it seems apt that her formal choices not only link her to Eurocentric modernist writing but also to Caribbean modernist literature. See also Brown (2011) for and overview of the relationship and the general affinities between modernism and Anglophone Caribbean literature.

[10] Although Kincaid's overall affinity for modernist writing is already obvious in the *Bildungsroman*, it is in her later works, such as *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1996) and *Mr. Potter*, that Gertrude Stein's influence on her writing becomes particularly obvious and undeniable. Not only do Kincaid's and Stein's works share an interest in reconfiguring and extending the genre boundaries of autobiographical writing, Stein also represents an interesting choice of modernist precursor because her writing has been described as "postmodernist" (Berry 1992: 3, 7) or "modern and post-modern" (Stimpson 1984: 316) and may thus serve as another example of the always already intimately intertwined relationship or coexistence of modernist and postmodernist impulses.

left her simultaneously over- and underwhelmed. The assault of so many new images and impressions that she "could not see anything clearly" (*L* 3) overwhelmed her, while she also had to contend with the underwhelming "disappointment of reality"– a disappointment that "would not be [her] last" (*L* 4). Kincaid's protagonist is disappointed and confused by the fact that the places and images that used to fill her daydreams and that used to provide a measure of solace to her fail to trigger epiphanies and fail to function as "lifeboats to [her] small drowning soul" (*L* 3), when she first encounters them in reality. At the beginning of the novel, the new is represented as capable of causing feelings of alienation and disorientation as the old life from which Lucy seeks to escape. In this regard, the protagonist's relocation – or her choice of exile for economic and emotional reasons rather than from a (typically modernist) position of artistic privilege – falls short of her expectations. Like other immigrants and exiles in literature, she discovers that even after the longed-for change of location has finally taken place, things can continue to be and to feel "all wrong" (*L* 5), since one cannot easily divest oneself of one's emotions: "Oh, I had imagined that with my one swift act – leaving home and coming to this new place - I could leave behind me, as if it were an old garment never to be worn again, my sad thoughts, my sad feelings" (*L* 7).

Characterized by misunderstandings, miscommunication and, in the case of the maid, open dislike (*L* 9), her first interactions with her American employers also fall short of her expectations. The narrative stages a dinner conversation during which, Lewis and, to a lesser extent, Mariah attempt to assert their authority of interpretation over Lucy's behavior and her experiences (*L* 13). The passage enables the reader to discover some of the pitfalls of cross-cultural, cross-generational communication because it demonstrates why it may be undesirable, and ultimately impossible, for Lucy to fully identify with the family's life and "be a part of things" (*L* 13) in the U.S. In the course of the conversation, Lewis, who with "a sympathetic tone to his voice" calls Lucy as "a poor Visitor" (*L* 14) due to her failure to adapt and interact with him and Mariah in a more 'natural' manner, is prompted to tell the story of his uncle, who had grown so fond of the monkeys he was raising in Canada "that he found actual human beings hard to take" (*L* 15). Lewis seems unaware of the racist undertone of his story, and the text does not further specify how Lucy reads Lewis's comparison of her behavior to that of Lewis's uncle. But the reader understands that Lucy's behavior is being characterized as uncivilized; she is not used to the company of 'real' humans. The comparison can even be construed as suggesting a similarity between Lucy's behavior and that of monkeys. In both readings, Lewis's

interpretation of Lucy's behavior not only betrays his biases and/or his willful – and blissful – ignorance of colonial history and the larger global and economic dependencies that have resulted from European colonial and American neocolonial endeavors but can also be interpreted as pointing to the underlying racial and cultural hierarchies and dynamics that determine how racial and cultural difference is evaluated in dealt with both within the U.S. and in the country's interactions with other countries.[11]

In a maneuver that is reminiscent of 'free association,' Lucy responds to – or counters – Lewis's story by telling the couple about a dream of her own:

> Lewis was chasing me around the house. I wasn't wearing any clothes. The ground on which I was running was yellow, as if it had been paved with cornmeal. Lewis was chasing me around and around the: house, and though he came close he could never catch up with me. Mariah stood at the open windows saying, Catch her, Lewis, catch her. Eventually I fell down a hole at the bottom of which were some silver and blue snakes. (*L* 14)

While to Lucy, the inclusion of Lewis and Mariah in one of her dreams represents "that [she] had taken them in, because only people who were very important to [her] had ever shown up in [her] dreams (*L* 15), Mariah and Lewis are made uncomfortable by the connotations of the naked chase, not because it could be read as pointing to the Master/slave echoes in their employer/employee relationship with Lucy, but rather because they instantly resort to a Freudian interpretation of the dream and believe that the chase bespeaks Lucy's repressed sexual desires. Since Lucy offers a different interpretation and confesses to not having heard of Freud before, the passage serves to reject Eurocentric Freudian psychoanalysis as the only or even an appropriate frame of reference and interpretation for Lucy's dream.[12] Throughout the *Bildungsroman*, Lucy's self-representation of her experience as a female diasporic challenges Eurocentric frames of reference and models of interpretation. She confronts and also forces others to confront the shortcomings of established Eurocentric models which not only fail to represent or explain her experience but also fail to account for the ambivalences and fractures that characterize the world at the end of the twentieth century.

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[11] In contrast to Lewis and Mariah, Lucy recognizes and acknowledges the existence of a causal relationship between the wealth Lewis accumulates on the stock market and exploitative capitalist structures that create and perpetuate the wealth discrepancies from which people in the West profit and which structurally disadvantage the majority people in other regions of the world. She also draws a connection between these practices and the destruction of the environment that Mariah and her activist friends seek to protect (*L* 73).

[12] The rejection of Freudian psychoanalysis seems striking, since much of the criticism focusing on the mother-daughter relationship in Kincaid's work chooses a psychoanalytic approach.

The way in which Kincaid employs and evolves representational strategies originally inspired by modernist texts can be understood as an attempt to both challenge and claim this tradition and/or make it productive for the representation of the "fractured and complicated and antagonistic and ambivalent and contrary" (Johnson 1997: 4) events and occurrences in Caribbean and diasporic/Caribbean-American history and experience. Her writing demonstrates that the strategies developed by modernists – and advanced by those who have continued this tradition and taken it in different directions – are responsive to the representational needs of a female diasporic Caribbean writer. Furthermore it proves that they can be adapted and refined to adequately represent (the) Caribbean experience(s), even though, initially, the modernist tradition did not adequately engage and represent non-white, non-male, and non-Anglo-European experiences**.** In the fourth chapter, "Cold Heart," the novel draws attention to precisely this issue by enabling the reader to scrutinize Lucy's ambivalence regarding the life and work of a European expatriate painter who is easily identified as Paul Gauguin. Lucy is instantly drawn to Gauguin as a man whose life and art made him "stand apart," a quality in people that she comes to admire and seek out (*L* 98). Even though Gauguin's migratory trajectory reversed Lucy's own, she can also identify with him as a fellow expatriate who sought to escape the confines and pressures of his home country:

> Immediately I identified with the yearnings of this man; I understood finding the place you are born in an unbearable prison and wanting something completely different from what you are familiar with, knowing it represents a haven. (*L* 95)

At the same time, she is aware of and angered by the fundamental differences between herself, "a young woman from the fringes of the world" who "had wrapped around [her] shoulders the mantle of a servant[,]"and the male painter "whose life could be found in the pages of a book" and who – despite being "doomed to defeat […] had the perfume of the hero about him" (*L* 95). While the text does not explicitly criticize Gauguin's modernist primitivism as exploitative, colonialist and chauvinist, the reader is enabled – and perhaps even required – to compare those privileges enjoyed by Gauguin and men like him by virtue of their gender, race, country of origin and class to the limits or difficulties imposed on Lucy by her gender, race, country or origin and class. Clearly, Kincaid's writing does not seek to endorse modernism as a hegemonic Western project, but rather to employ modernist-inspired representational strategies to expose the fault lines of that project. As a burgeoning artist, who is beginning to create her own art both as a photographer and as the first-person narrator of the *Bildungsroman*, Lucy asserts not only her authority to represent

herself but also her authority to represent others. As a result of her relocation to 'the center,' the first-person-narrator/photographer is afforded the opportunity to shift the dominant gaze. Not only does the narrator insist on the centrality of her own experiences as a diasporic from 'the periphery,' she also claims the right to critically represent precisely those people from 'the center' who usually only self-represent and/or, either deliberately or thoughtlessly, misrepresent those on and from 'the periphery.' For example, Lucy scrutinizes her employers' family life and is thus able to exposes fractures within the family unit even before the family members themselves are able or ready to acknowledge them. The family portraits on display in her employers' house are aimed at producing the image of an ideal family.

> In the photographs of themselves, […] their six yellow-haired heads of various sizes were bunched as if they were a bouquet of flowers tied together by and unseen string. In the pictures, they smiled out at the world, giving the impression that they found everything in it unbearably wonderful. (*L* 12)

In modernist-inspired fashion, the image of the bouquet of yellow flowers links the first chapter to the second chapter in which one particular yellow flower, the daffodil, comes to represent the colonial project, Read retrospectively, the image of the bunch of yellow flowers thus ties the existence of the ideal and happy WASP family to the suffering and the injustices caused by the colonial project. In contrast to this simultaneously benign and loaded image on display in the family's home, Lucy's candid photography challenges the family's self-representation because it captures emotions, behaviors and developments not considered fit for public display. For example, Lucy's photography captures Mariah's sadness and helplessness as well as Lewis anger, even before they reveal their imminent divorce to Lucy and their children (*L* 118). Since there are almost no photos of Lewis and none of Lucy herself (*L* 120), her photography also foreshadows that the happy family unit will soon have to cope without the father and without the nanny.

Lucy, like *Brown Girl, Brownstones,* portrays a female protagonist who discovers and claims an artistic form of self-expression for herself and comes to "reject heterosexual love and romantic thralldom" (DuPlessis 1984: 94). Yet, in contrast to the traditional developmental trajectory of the female artist in twentieth-century *Künstlerromane* described by DuPlessis, Lucy's artistic talent and her discovery of photography as her art form do not connect her to either one of her parents. Instead of representing Lucy as completing "a thwarted parent's task" (DuPlessis: 1984: 94) in the diaspora, Lucy's artistic

skills emphasize her individuality as well as her difference and thus afford her another possibility to disidentify with her mother and her past.

3.1.2 Cutting Ties with the Past – An Individualist's Attempt to Ceaselessly Disidentify

Originally published as five self-contained short stories in *The New Yorker*, each of the *Bildungsroman's* five chapters recounts the protagonist's increasingly decisive and successful attempts to distance, separate and disidentify herself from her past as well as from her mother and her community of origin in order to (re)invent herself in the U.S. Of course, the narrative also attends to those ambivalences, contradictions and impossibilities that are inevitably brought into relief in the process of radically (re-)inventing oneself and attempting to substitute one life for another**.**

At the beginning of the *Bildungsroman*, the reader knows neither why Lucy has decided to exchange her life at 'the periphery' for one at 'the center' nor why this requires her to cut ties with her family. But it is quickly made clear that she perceives her family, whom she characterizes as "the people who become a millstone around your neck" (*L* 8), as an almost unbearable burden. The *Bildungsroman* details how, in ridding herself of the burden of her family and the societal expectations they represent, Lucy gains room to explore, to grow, and to mature. The novel suggests that in addition to diminishing the narrator's sense of familial duty, Lucy's geographical relocation from the tropical to the temperate zone enables her both to put an end to her unhappy past and to clearly distinguish her dissatisfying past from a present and a future that she can claim as belonging solely to herself. And that hold infinitely more promise than the past since they have yet to be experienced and endowed with significance:

> I was no longer in a tropical zone and this realization now entered my life like a flow of water dividing formerly dry and solid ground, creating two banks, one of which was my past—so familiar and predictable that even my unhappiness then made me happy now just to think of it—the other my future, a gray blank, an overcast seascape on which rain was falling and no boats were in sight. (*L* 5-6)

Initially, Lucy's situation in the U.S. is indeterminate, a blank; yet, she never considers the possibility of a return, even though her community seems to expect and to look forward to her eventual return (*L* 11). The narrative suggests that a return home is not impossible for geographical or financial reasons, but rather for emotional reasons: "I looked at a map. An

ocean stood between me and the place I came from, but would it have made a difference if it had been a teacup of water? I could not go back" (*L* 9–10). Since the protagonist categorically refuses to entertain even the possibility of a physical return to the island, *Lucy* breaks the pattern of the traditional female *Bildungsroman*, whose developmental trajectory is "largely circular" (Ferguson 1983: 228) and mandates the female protagonist's return to the domestic sphere in some fashion. Lucy will not be domesticated; she will neither return to her domestic country nor be 'domesticated' by fully assimilating to U.S. norms/society nor, so the novel suggests, will she be limited to a life in the domestic sphere as a result of marriage. While all of the *Bildungsromane* discussed in this study represent both the idea of return and the actual returns staged in the novels as highly ambivalent events, Danticat's and Adichie's protagonists do, in fact, (temporarily) physically return to their communities of origin and their domestic environments. And even Marshall's *Bildungsroman* negotiates 'returns,' since it frames its protagonist's journey to Barbados as a 'return' and does not rule out Selina's eventual return to her New York neighborhood. With regard to the question of a possible physical return 'home,' the experiences represented in Marshall's, Danticat's and Adichie's *Bildungsromane* correspond to findings of diaspora scholars who emphasize the continuing importance of the (notion of an ancestral) homeland as well as a desire to return to that homeland among many diasporans as key characteristics of diaspora communities and diaspora experiences (Safran 1991: 83; Cohen 2008: 17). The experiences and beliefs of Kincaid's protagonist do not only not reflect these findings; the openly challenge them. Lucy repeatedly insists on the singularity of her experience and emphasizes her desire to "stand apart" (*L* 98). Maria Helena Lima observes, however, that Lucy's relocation to the U.S. is not as singular an act as the protagonist claims it to be, because she "ironically […] recreate[s] the mother's own journey away from […] the island of Dominica, thus reinforcing a familial pattern of rupture" (Lima 2002: 862). In fact, Lucy not only follows in her mother's footsteps but expands the mother's action both in terms of geographical scope – from the local/regional to the global – and in terms of the scope of the rupture, since she not only continues and perpetuates "a familial pattern of rupture" (Lima 2002: 862) but transforms 'rupture' and disidentification it into a form of being and relating to the world.

Lucy's absolute refusal of a physical return to the Caribbean does not prevent the text from negotiating the issue of return on the level of narration, where the return to established literary patterns and their re-negotiation suggests a less clear-cut and rather more ambivalent attitude toward the question of return.

As the particulars of the mother-daughter relationship are revealed in the course of the novel, the reader begins to comprehend that the narrator's repeated attempts to draw a line of demarcation between her past and her present as well as between herself and her mother must also be understood as Lucy's attempt to divest herself of an intersecting network of traditions and beliefs that, since it is meant to keep women in their – domestic, subjugated – place, can perhaps only be escaped by choosing life in the diaspora and by continuously 'disidentify' with it in all its iterations, including those to be found in the diaspora.[13] Represented in flashbacks that do not simply break the flow of the narration but reverse its forward momentum and thus challenge the linear trajectory of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, Lucy's memories of her past on an unnamed island in the Anglophone Caribbean largely focus on the development of the mother-daughter relationship.[14] Through Lucy's at times nostalgic, at times anger-filled recollections of her life with her mother, the narrative carefully maps the intricacies of that relationship and identifies the fundamental shift in the mother-daughter relationship as a major source of Lucy's anger and of her dissatisfaction with her past life on the island. The novel explores how the once loving, almost symbiotic mother-daughter relationship that gave the narrator's early childhood an almost Edenic air turned into one of intense antagonism as she grew older and became aware of the ways in which her mother, acting as an agent of patriarchal and colonial power structures, began to curtail her freedom and her opportunities.[15] As demonstrated by Lucy's memories, the process of her intellectual and emotional separation from the powerful mother figure that she, like Marshall's Selina, experiences as "god-like" (*L* 153) had already begun when Lucy was still living on the island. Since Lucy refused to be only her mother's "echo" (*L* 36), their conflict escalated to the point where Lucy wished her mother dead (*L* 93). In Lucy's eyes, her mother's greatest, unforgivable betrayal is her failure to recognize Lucy's equality to her younger brothers, her failure to recognize

[13] In her interview with Dilger, Kincaid elaborates on why her personal, female experience with tradition has made her cautious of the notion of tradition: "One of the reasons why I left home was that I was a victim of tradition. I was on the verge of being a dead person because of tradition, and I think women especially have to be very careful of these traditions. They are the first to go when you start talking about traditions, because there is no tradition of freedom, they have to make it up. So I don't have any tradition" (Dilger 1992: 21).

[14] Many critics have examined the representation of the mother-daughter relationship (also: mother-daughter dyad) in Kincaid's fiction. See, for example, Ferguson (1994) and Bouson (2005). The mother-daughter relationships in Kincaid's fiction have been especially intensely scrutinized by those critics who, like Ferguson and Bouson, classify Kincaid's texts as some type of autobiography rather than as novels and thus select an autobiographical approach for their readings.

[15] Ferguson observes that: "Jamaica Kincaid continually fuses diverse formulations of motherhood, maternality, and colonialism. Reflecting on these crossover conjunctures, she demystifies the ideology of a colonial motherland. That doubled articulation of motherhood as both colonial and biological explains why the mother-daughter relations in her fiction often seem so harshly rendered, a fact that has constantly unsettled reviewers" (Ferguson 1994: 1).

Lucy's intellectual potential, that is, her failure to recognize the intellectual potential of a fellow woman, and her subsequent failure to envision for her daughter a future less limited by patriarchal structures and class hierarchies than her own:

> My father did not know me at all; I did not expect him to imagine a life for me filled with excitement and triumph. But my mother knew me well, as well as she knew herself: I, at the time, even thought of us as identical; and whenever I saw her eyes fill up with tears at the thought of how proud she would be at some deed her sons had accomplished, I felt a sword go through my heart, for there was no accompanying scenario in which she saw me, her only identical offspring, in a remotely similar situation. To myself I then began to call her Mrs. Judas, and I began to plan a separation from her that even then I suspected would never be complete. (*L* 130)

Although being in the U.S. – at least to some extent – affords Lucy the freedom and opportunity to re-invent or fashion her self according to her own principles and ideals, the need to constantly disidentify with the dominant mother remains. As Lucy explains:

> I could see the sameness in everything: I could see the present take a shape – the shape of my past.
>
> My past was my mother; I could hear her voice, and she spoke to me not in English or the French patois that she sometimes spoke, or in any language that needed held from the tongue; she spoke to me in a language anyone female can understand. And I was undeniably that --- female. Oh, it was a laugh, for I had spent so much time saying I did not want to be like my mother that I missed the whole story: I was not like my mother --- I was my mother. (*L* 90)

Even in America, Lucy is thus in constant danger of losing her freedom(s), living or repeating her past and becoming or being her mother. Since the mother-daughter conflict is not framed as merely generational or in purely biological terms (as a struggle for dominance that will resolve itself once one of the women dies), but rather as an overdetermined conflict in which the generational, the biological and the colonial conflict are inextricably conflated (Ferguson 1994: 1), it cannot be fully overcome or solved. Lucy will only be able to escape the fate of becoming her mother, the danger of ceasing to exist as an individual, if she continues to disidentify – a task made harder because she retrospectively characterizes her relationship to her mother as a "love affair" that was "perhaps the only true love in my whole life I would ever know" (*L* 132). While Lima claims that in *Lucy* (and in *Annie John*) "the female writing subject comes into existence to try to recover that something—the lost mother/stolen land—as a reaction to the

homelessness imposed both by patriarchy and colonization" (Lima 2002: 863), I argue that Lucy comes in to being by a continuous process that evolves from identification to disidentification. Remembering and recovering the past, which includes various iterations of the patriarchal and the colonial, are necessary steps in this process. In order to be able to successfully to create and defend her individual self through disidentification, that is to create herself in opposition to her past and to her mother, she needs to narratively recollect, recover and create versions of the past/the mother with which she can then disidentify. The process of identification and disidentification is necessarily incomplete, circular and ambiguous, because Lucy needs to disidentify to live since there is an irreducible something – be it an emotional bond, a desire to belong or a desire to know one's origins/influences – that resists complete disidentification and upon which Lucy remains dependent precisely because her mode of being in the world is one of disidentification.

For some time, Lucy seeks and finds a substitute mother figure in Mariah, "a good mother", who "reminded [her] more and more of the parts of [her] mother that [she] loved" (*L* 110, 59). Whereas Lucy represents her real mother as opposed to her individuality as well as unsupportive of her intellectual and educational aspirations, Mariah, generally speaking, wishes to support Lucy, recognizes her individuality and her abilities, and respects her decisions (*L* 64). But, of course, their substitute mother-daughter relationship is not without the tensions resulting from their different socio-economic statuses as well as from their different upbringings and prior experiences. Mariah's attempts to 'educate' Lucy through trips, museum visits and books may be well-intentioned, but they also cast Mariah in the role of the neo-colonial agent seeking to 'educate' Lucy on the correct – read: white Western/American – way of seeing and doing things. Again, a process of identification and disidentification is set into motion.[16] Lucy acknowledges Mariah's kindness, but she also exposes the other woman's privilege and ideological blind spots. The narrative uses their relationship to stage and negotiate some of the key conflicts between possibly well-meaning, but condescending, white American feminism and third-wave/postcolonial feminism. Whenever the text foregrounds the asymmetrical nature of their relationship ("master" / "servant" (*L* 143), employer/employee, older/younger, wealthy/poor, citizen/immigrant), it challenges the notion of 'woman' as a universal category. In response to the universal feminism propagated in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949/1953), a book given to Lucy by Mariah, Lucy insists on the significance of difference and the relevance of lived experience and situated knowledge. Lucy's

[16] See also Majerol (2007).

criticism of the idea of a universal, homogenizing feminism, however, is available only to the reader since, tellingly, she is unable to articulate or voice this criticism to Mariah's face:

> [Mariah] spoke of women in society, women in history, women in culture, women everywhere. But I couldn't speak, so I couldn't tell her that my mother was my mother and that society and history and culture and other women in general were something else altogether. […] Mariah had completely misinterpreted my situation. My life could not really be explained by this thick book that made my hands hurt as I tried to keep it open. (*L* 131-132).

Even though Lucy is still unable to articulate and voice her criticism, being unconvinced of and disenchanted with first-world feminism helps her to gradually disidentify not only with this body of knowledge but also with her surrogate mother figure. Constructed as the novel's representative of first-world feminism's failures, Mariah promotes a problematic ideology of both colorblindness and the erasure of difference and thus fails adequately to take Lucy's experience into account. The process of disidentification from Mariah and first-world feminism both requires and enables Lucy to insist on the unique nature of her experience; it also promotes and is promoted by her individualist stance.

Different experiences of what it means to be a woman in (different socio-economic strata of) the world are, however, not the only reason why Lucy disidentifies with Mariah. Lucy's experiences as a colonial subject also compel her to question Mariah's other everyday actions as well as her convictions and to read them in a counter-hegemonic, postcolonial framework. As Lucy attempts and fails to make Mariah understand that the colonial education system was not a benign institution that taught her to read, write and memorize English Romantic poetry but rather the institution responsible for countless acts of epistemological violence throughout the colonies, she comes to realize that Mariah may never be able to fathom the "daffodil gap" [17] (Tiffin 1993: 920) and may never understand why the sight of daffodils,[18] a sight that Lucy is only 'granted' as an adult, devastates her:

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[17]Helen Tiffin explains that "[t]he gap between the lived colonial or post-colonial experience and the imported/imposed world of the Anglo-written has often been referred to by Commonwealth post-colonial writers and critics as 'the daffodil gap'" (Tiffin 1993: 920).

[18] The daffodil and a Haitian-American version of the "daffodil gap" (Tiffin 1993: 920) also features prominently on the first pages of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, suggesting not simply Danticat's familiarity with this trope in postcolonial texts by Kincaid, Olive Senior, Lorna Goodison and others, but rather suggesting that she consciously seeks to position her writing within a female/feminist postcolonial (diasporic) Caribbean tradition of literature. See Braziel (2003) for a reading that insightfully compares Kincaid's and Danticat's employment of the 'daffodil.'

> I did not know what these flowers were and so it was a mystery to me why I wanted to kill them. Just like that. I wanted to kill them. I wished that I had an enormous scythe: I would just walk down the path, dragging it alongside me, and I would cut these flowers down. (*L* 29)

While in this key scene, Lucy's anger is clearly directed at the colonial project and its "wretched" (*L* 30) botanical emblem rather than at Mariah personally, she grows more and more irritated by the other woman's inability to reflect and take responsibility for her "white privilege" (McIntosh 1988).[19] She is also astounded and angered by the fact that Mariah can claim partial Native American ancestry and thus "get[s] to be sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also" (*L* 41). As the novel stages more and more scenes that enable Lucy – and the reader – to recognize that Lucy's experiences and opinions as a female diasporic colonial subject may ultimately be irreconcilable with the experiences, views and self-interests of a privileged white American woman, Lucy is empowered, partly by anger, to disidentify with Mariah and leave the 'halfway-home' of her employers' house.

As Lucy gradually disidentifies with Mariah, she develops new interests and forms new relationships and friendships. Rather than simply indicating Lucy's desire to lead a full and interesting life in the U.S., these relationships are also strongly motivated by Lucy's desire to disidentify and thus also proceed from identification to disidentification. The representation of how Lucy develops, handles, and ends relationships enables the novel to foreground the ways in which Lucy disidentifies, that is, how she takes control of her interpersonal relationships by physically and emotionally removing herself from them. The novel thus represents the *Bildung* of a young feminist who, in the Land of the Free, not unlike Herman Melville's Bartleby seizes the freedom to say 'no' and takes pleasure in finally being in the position of not having to do something. Even though Lucy does not, exclusively or even primarily gain 'negative freedoms,'[20] those negative freedoms she does gain enable her to prioritize her own desires and live by her own rules, thus reinforcing her individualist stance. While Lucy clearly experiences the freedom to say 'no' and the

[19] In everyday situations, Mariah is represented as enjoying the kind of "white privilege" that Peggy McIntosh ([1988] 2005) describes in her by now classic essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." As a wealthy, white North American she also enjoys the long-term, structural economic and social benefits that result from belonging to a class of people who have been granted, either directly or by proxy, this kind of privilege for centuries.

[20] Sir Isaiah Berlin's influential definition (orig. 1959) of 'negative freedom' (or 'freedom from') defines it as the absence of intentionally constructed artificial barriers, obstacles, or constraints to people's actions and opposes it to positive freedom (or 'freedom to'). My usage and understanding of 'negative freedom' in this chapter reflects Berlin's definition in the sense that Lucy's relocation and her disidentifications free her actions from the intentionally constructed constraints different bodies of tradition attempt to impose on her.

freedom to disidentify as precisely the kind of liberation she hoped to find in the U.S., there are also moments in which the novel suggests that the choices and actions of the *Bildungsheldin* are determined and restricted rather than multiplied by her constant, almost compulsive acts of disidentification and refusal. Like Melville's eponymous scrivener, Lucy often reacts rather than acts.

Her choice to befriend Peggy demonstrates that even Lucy's everyday choices are simultaneously free and determined or restricted because they are framed as reactions against her past/her mother as well as made in opposition to actions and opinions of others. Peggy, an Irish-American girl who later becomes Lucy's roommate, is a compelling choice because she affords Lucy the opportunity to disidentify with both her mother and Mariah, since neither mother figure would have deemed or deems Peggy an appropriate choice of friend. Although, at first glance, Lucy's decision to disidentify by choosing to become friends with people who allegedly exert a bad influence over her is reminiscent of teenage rebellion, the novel suggests that her need to disidentify with her mother is more acute and runs deeper than adolescent growing pains. Similarly, her decision to take lovers whom she neither loves nor intends to marry is represented as a way of disidentifying with the mother, since, in seeking sexual pleasure rather than security and permanence in a heteronormative marriage, she violates (disidentifies with) the patriarchal code of good, modest female behavior that her mother subscribes to and sought to instill in her. Insisting that "[l]ife as a slut was very enjoyable, thank you very much" (*L* 128), Lucy asserts the right to seek and experience sexual pleasures and resists the commodification of her sexuality in patriarchal marriage or relationship structures and logics. She underscores this refusal when she insists that she will not betray herself by marrying in the way that her mother did when she married Lucy's stepfather (*L* 127-28).While the novel demonstrates that Lucy asserts her right to explore and define her sexuality and her (transgressive?)[21] pleasures, the text also suggests that even in this area of her life she is not as free and independent as she would like to be, because, at least in part, her sexuality is defined in opposition to/reaction to her mother/her past. Since Lucy chooses her partners because she is sexually attracted to them rather than because she has romantic feelings for them, the

[21] While Lucy's choice to have pre-marital sex with different male partners as well as her sexual experimentation with Peggy may violate her mother's idea of decorum and may still be considered transgressive in conservative circles, only Lucy's peculiar interpretation of Mr. Thomas's sexual abuse of her friend and peer, Myrna, could be described as transgressive, since it views children is sexual beings and offers a representation of how children conceive of their own and the sexuality of others (*L* 102-108). Since, however, Lucy feels slighted and attacked in her individuality rather than sexually drawn to Mr. Thomas, the scene, primarily, demonstrates how self-centered Lucy was as a child, and it also suggests that she was unable to acknowledge, or at the very least, unable to fully empathize with, suffering and hopelessness in the lives of others.

Bildungsroman challenges the genre convention of representing (romantic) love as an important, sometimes even as the decisive, aspect of the protagonist's *Bildungserfahrung*.

At the end of the novel, Lucy has made socio-economic and educational progress: She has discovered her passion for photography; she works as a receptionist for a photographer; the flat that she shares with Peggy is not a home (*L* 156), but it is hers "as long as [she] can pay for it" (*L* 146); she has a boyfriend and thus outwardly even fulfills heteronormative expectations of womanhood. There is no reason for the reader to believe that the story of Lucy's successful upward social mobility and transformation from poor, but unafraid, visitor to independent artist, who has finally found a place and a space where she can "stand apart" (*L* 98), will not continue in a similarly successful fashion. Yet, on an emotional, interpersonal level, she has made little progress: She holds on to her strained friendship with Peggy and her lackluster relationship to Paul, who may or may not be cheating on her with Peggy, not because she is invested in these people but because she has "had enough of partings just now" (*L* 161). Taking stock of her situation after about a year in the U.S., she declares: "I was alone in the world. It was not a small accomplishment. I thought I would die doing it. I was not happy, but that seemed too much to ask for" (*L* 161).[22] This passage recalls an earlier passage in which Lucy describes her situation as one of quintessential, permanent loneliness: "As I sat on that bed, the despair of a Sunday in full bloom, I thought: I am alone in the world and I shall always be this way – all alone in the world (*L* 93). Initially, being alone is associated with despair, whereas she later frames being alone, which at that point in the narrative describes both her condition and her stance, as an accomplishment – albeit one that does not include happiness. While the novel explores how Lucy's experiences as a colonial subject and as a female diasporic from the Caribbean contribute to or even create her need to finally be recognized as an individual, the *Bildungsroman* fails to explore explicitly to what extent Lucy's unhappiness and loneliness at the end of the novel result from the fact that the radically individualist stance that forces her to constantly disidentify in order to exist is, in fact, unsustainable, or at the very least, represents a negative form of existing that precludes happiness.

At the end of the novel, it is difficult to determine whether the process of Lucy's *Bildung* has been successfully completed or whether it has failed. On the one hand, the novel suggests that Lucy's *Bildung* is complete, when in a diary entry at the very end of the

[22] This is not the first time that Lucy describes her situation as one of quintessential, permanent loneliness: "As I sat on that bed, the despair of a Sunday in full bloom, I thought: I am alone in the world and I shall always be this way – all alone in the world (*L* 93). While, at first, being alone is associated with despair, she now frames "being alone," which at that point in the narrative describes both her condition and her stance, as an accomplishment – albeit one that does not include happiness.

narrative, she reveals and claims her full name and thus her self: Lucy Josephine Potter. On the other hand, the reader is left wondering whether Lucy's emotional *Bildung* has been completed or is, indeed, completeable. While perhaps intended to challenge the dichotomy between successful male and successful female *Bildung*, the status of Lucy's emotional *Bildung* at the end of the novel sets Kincaid's *Bildungsroman* apart from the other female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman* discussed in this study. Lucy's ultimate confession: "'I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it.'" (*L* 163) causes her shame and makes her cry so much that "all the words [on the page] become one great big blur" (*L*163), suggesting that, at the end of the novel, she is as overwhelmed by her situation as she was when she first came to the U.S.[23] Clearly, Lucy's individualism and her desire to love are at odds. In contrast to most conventional *Bildungshelden* and many *Bildungsheldinnen*, Lucy is not granted a happy ending since she has not successfully interiorized the contradiction between the desire to live and die for herself and according to her own terms and her desire to live with and for others. Regardless of the author's self-avowed investment in "the pursuit of truth" rather than in the "pursuit of happiness" or "the pursuit of positivity" (Snell 1997), the novel ultimately suggests that the cycle of ceaseless identification and disidentification in which Lucy is caught not only fails to be constructive or emotionally rewarding but – if radically pursued – may, in fact, be an unsustainable way of relating to the world.

3.1.3 Caught between Identification and Disidentification with the African Diaspora – On the Possibilities and Limits of an Individualist Stance

Since Kincaid's *Lucy* is primarily invested in representing the unique developmental trajectory of an individual female diasporic from the Caribbean who comes into being as a radical individualist in a ceaseless process of identification and disidentification with characters, communities and traditions, the *Bildungsroman* is unable to address the phenomenon of a global African diaspora community in an extended manner. Nevertheless *Lucy* contains events and descriptions that directly refer or indirectly allude to the African diaspora both as a historical and cultural tradition and as (part of) the protagonist's lived

[23] On the level of narration, the circular connection between ending and beginning can be said to create a sense of narrative wholeness or completion. As my reading of *Mr. Potter* shows Kincaid is more prone, however, to employ circularity, repetition and circular movements to indicate stagnation (and even destructive energies) than she is to create 'wholeness' of any kind.

experience. Again, a process of thematic as well as formal identification and disidentification renders visible Lucy's and Kincaid's ambivalences regarding this issue.

In the process of disidentifying with her community of origin, Kincaid's first-person narrator also creates a portrayal of her community – albeit a more partial, less representative and less flattering one than those offered in the other *Bildungsromane* discussed in this study**.** Even though Kincaid's novel, like those of Marshall, Danticat and Adichie, firmly places her protagonist's loyalties with women, is not devoid of female friendship and – with regard to women's lives on the unnamed Caribbean island – at least suggests the possibility of female community, it is less invested in notions of community, cooperation and belonging than the *Bildungsromane* by Marshall, Danticat and Adichie. Due to her radically individualist stance, Lucy is reluctant to become part of any community. Having just successfully rid herself of her family – the only community unit represented in the novel – by emigrating, she does not seek a substitute family in the African diaspora community, a community that in the public discourse and artistic engagements at the time, was often discursively framed and represented as a global family of people of African descent who are linked by and to Mother Africa. Another reason for Kincaid's disidentification with both the idea of a global African diaspora community and the image of Mother Africa may be that in Caribbean women's literature, the concept of Mother Africa is viewed and dealt with rather critically. Ann Elizabeth Willey notes that "while many male authors hold up the figure of Mother Africa as a promise of home and identity, female authors tend to have a much more complicated relationship to the figure of Africa" (Willey 1997: 454). She explains that women writers have grown weary of the image since, in the literature of male authors, "the image of Africa as the motherland […] becomes a paradoxically masculinized mother figure" (Willey 1997: 466). In the Caribbean context, the connotations of the image of Mother Africa have also shifted because the image of (a masculinized) Mother Africa has been appropriated by nationalist discourses. In that sense Lucy's disidentification with the mother also represents a disidentification with nationalism.

As she seeks to disidentify with both the poverty and the lack of choice that determine life on the Caribbean island, she explicitly links these conditions to the island's history of colonialism, which would have been unthinkable without the enslavement of Africans and their dispersal throughout the Americas via the Middle Passage. The Middle Passage is thus framed as a devastating originary trauma, but, in contrast to other authors,

Kincaid makes no attempt to narratively (re)appropriate it, or even gauge its potential to connect people transnationally**.**

In the course of the novel, Lucy explicitly or implicitly positions herself (identifies and disidentifies with) vis-à-vis different communities, demographic groups, political bodies and cultural traditions, such as Caribbean Americans, African Americans, people of color, 'the colonized,' 'the marginalized,' and 'the powerless.' The way in which Lucy chooses to position herself defies easy categorization into the above-mentioned categories and thus challenges and destabilizes the categories themselves. In view of Lucy's individualist stance, her ambivalences toward groups, group identities and identity politics are hardly surprising. Underscoring her individualist stance, the *Bildungsheldin* defies those who seek to ascribe, interpret and exploit her representativeness as a black woman. The novel's postcolonial investments preclude any absolute disidentification with 'the marginalized' and 'the powerless,' however, and require both Lucy and her author to carefully negotiate which formation, conception or alliances of 'the powerless' or/and the 'marginalized' to support, to resist or to outright oppose. At the same time, the (post)modernist investments of the *Bildungsroman* create frictions and self-imposed conceptual/plot limits that can be can be traced back to a key difference between the postcolonial and the postmodernist that has been described and analyzed by Linda Hutcheon and others.[24] While postcolonial and postmodernist impulses are not entirely separate, need not negatively interfere with each other, and can be productively combined, Hutcheon explains that: "The post-colonial, like the feminist, is a dismantling but also constructive political enterprise insofar as it implies a theory of agency and social change that the postmodern deconstructive impulse lacks." (1989: 171). The representation and negotiation of the concept of the (global) African diaspora in Kincaid's *Bildungsroman* – and even more so in her diaspora novel – demonstrate that Kincaid's (post)modernist impulse to individualize and aestheticize reduces the idea of agency to that of individual agency and thus limits the kind of social change that can be envisioned in the fictional universes of both novels. While in the other *Bildungsromane* and diaspora novels discussed in this study the concept of a global African diaspora retains its function as a concept that – despite its acknowledged shortcomings – potentially allows and enables the rhizomatic formation of political, social and cultural alliances across national borders and class boundaries, Kincaid's individualist *Bildungsroman* is simply not that interested in this potential. Instead, it prioritizes its interest in the individual over any investments in

[24] See also Appiah (1991) and During (1987).

larger social bodies. The concept of the African diaspora – as it is conceived of in Kincaid's *Bildungsroman* – represents just another tradition to engage, challenge and be suspicious of.

The novel first addresses the African diaspora shortly after Lucy arrives in the U.S., when, in the description of her new room, she briefly alludes to the Middle Passage:

> The room in which I lay was a small room just off the kitchen --- the maid's room. I was used to a small room. But this was a different sort of small room. The ceiling was very high and the walls went all the way up to ceiling, enclosing the room like a box --- a box in which cargo traveling a long way should be shipped. But I was not cargo. I was only an unhappy young woman living in a maid's room, and I was not even the maid. (*L* 7)

As soon as she partially 'identifies with' this part of colonial/African diasporic history by suggesting similarities between the spatial and economic configurations of her new life in the U.S. and that of the human cargo that was transported along the Middle Passage in the claustrophobic cargo holds of slave ships, she rejects the association, underscores her (unique) humanity and describes how her situation differs from that of (human) cargo. While there are other instances in which the *Bildungsroman* addresses African diasporic slavery, the result of the Middle Passage, it usually does so in the context of colonialism and colonial history. In key scenes, Lucy identifies as and speaks with the authority and authenticity of a former colonial subject and postcolonial diasporan who forces both the reader and Mariah to confront the realities of colonial history: "[…] I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered, a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes" (*L* 30). At the same time, she also attempts to distance herself and to disidentify with her colonial history:

> The object of my life now was to put as much distance between myself and the events mentions in her letter as I could manage. For I felt that if I could put enough miles between me and the place from which that letter came, and if I could put enough events between me and the events mentioned in the letter, would I not be free to take everything just as it came and not see hundreds of years in every gesture, every word spoken, every face? (*L* 31)

As the passage demonstrates, Lucy's attempt to disidentify with her past and free herself of any restricting intellectual and emotional engagement with the island of her origin must also be understood as the *Bildungsheldin's* attempt to distance herself from or even free herself of her colonial history. Formulated as a question, however, the second sentence of the passage casts doubt on the narrator's assumption or hope that given sufficient distance

she will, at some point, be able to *not* historicize and *not* contextualize everything she perceives, experiences and encounters in a colonial/postcolonial framework. Subsequently, Lucy's astute observations regarding the U.S. racial and class hierarchies she witnesses aboard a train cement these doubts, since it is precisely her experience as a colonial subject that enables her, but not Mariah, to observe, acknowledge and interpret these hierarchies:

> We went to the dining car to eat our dinner. […] The other people sitting down to eat all looked like Mariah's relatives; the people waiting on them all looked like mine. […] On closer observation, they were not at all like my relatives; they only looked like them. My relatives always gave backchat. (*L* 32)

In addition to drawing the reader's attention to the persistence of race and class hierarchies even in the wake of the classical Civil Rights Movement at the end of the 1960s (the novel is set in 1968/69 and Kincaid came to the U.S. in 1967), the passage also exemplifies how exactly Lucy positions herself vis-à-vis African Americans. While she recognizes visual or phenotypic similarities, she is quick to point out behavioral and attitudinal differences that cast the group of the African Americans as the meeker, perhaps also weaker, of the two groups of people of African descent. The fact that Lucy's own 'backchat' is, however for the most part, available only to the reader either suggests that Lucy's view of the intra-racial/inter-ethnic differences is inaccurate or that she has already partially internalized U.S. racialized behavioral scripts and keeps her 'backchat' to herself.

In addition to enabling Lucy to disidentify with African Americans, the overnight train ride also offers the narrative the opportunity to return to the issue of slavery by means of allusion and association:

> Every time I tried to sleep, just as it seemed that I had finally done so, I would wake up sure that thousands of people on horseback were following me, chasing me, each of them carrying a cutlass to cut me up into pieces. Of course, I could tell it was the sound of the wheels on the tracks that inspired this nightmare, but a real explanation made no difference to me (*L* 32-33)

Echoing Lucy's earlier dream of being chased naked around the table by Lewis, the images of her nightmare conjure up a scene instantly associated with both U.S. and colonial slavery, arbitrary (often sexualized) violence and lack of protection under the law. The size of the group of hunters, presumably some kind of slave patrol, suggests that dream-Lucy's/the escapee's situation is hopeless. The sheer numeral imbalance not only demonstrates a power imbalance but might also point toward a temporal dimension. No

matter how many individual hunters dream-Lucy or the escapee(s) manages to outsmart or outrun, there will always be another hunter – and another one. Since the dream is represented as being triggered by an encounter with the persistent U.S. race and class hierarchies exhibited in the dining car, the reader understands that the dream was under no circumstance solely inspired by the sound of the wheels but by the fact that the protagonist needs to come to terms with the revelation of her own inferior and vulnerable position within the racial hierarchy as it presents itself to her in the U.S. Although it is not explicitly framed as such, this realization may be counted among the many disappointments that characterize Lucy's first months in the U.S. In the wake of the nightmare, the view of freshly plowed fields visible through the train's windows does not offer Lucy respite or aesthetic pleasure but prompts her to express her gratitude for being spared having to work in them: "I said, a cruel tone to my voice, 'Well thank God I didn't have to do that.' I don't know if [Mariah] understood what I meant, for in that statement I meant many different things" (*L* 33). In contrast to Mariah, the reader understands that Lucy is grateful that in the 1960s no-one can legally enslave her and force her to do unpaid labor.

Although the novel's non-white characters could potentially represent the diversity of the African diaspora in the U.S., Lucy does not conceive of herself or others as sharing a group identity based on African descent.[25] In fact, she has few good things to say about the few characters of African descent whom she observes or with whom she actually interacts. She dislikes and is disliked by her employers' maid, "who gave as her reason the way [Lucy] talked" (*L* 9). Only Roland, a Panama-born camera salesman with whom she spontaneously decides to have sex, reaps her unreserved approval. But then, he is a fellow diasporic and an honorary fellow Caribbean – or at least not a U.S.-born African American – since his parents originate from the Caribbean island of Martinique. Lucy's tendency to draw distinctions between African Americans and other non-white people living in America recalls the intra-racial tensions between Barbadian-Americans and African Americans that Marshall describes in both *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *The Fisher King*. But in contrast to Marshall's novels, neither Kincaid's *Bildungsroman* nor her diaspora novel explores these intra-racial distinctions in order to negotiate whether or how unity in diversity could be achieved; instead, the distinctions are endowed with significance because they help the Kincaid's narrator to disidentify.

[25] Lucy tentatively acknowledges similarities between herself and other immigrants, such as Sweden-born Gus (*L* 33-34) and Peggy's cousin who has just recently come to the U.S., but she is also quick to emphasize her difference from them and establishes that two people cannot successfully form a friendship based on the fact that they are both foreigners (*L* 61).

While the first-person narrative addresses race when Lucy represents the racial hierarchies she observes as power hierarchies, it does not engage the terms/categories of 'race' or 'blackness.' In contrast to Danticat's and Adichie's *Bildungsromane*, *Lucy* does not contain a representation of how the protagonist is 'raced' or racialized as a result of her relocation from a dominantly black country to the U.S. The rejection of the category of 'race' can be read as an expression of the protagonist's resistance to assimilation as well as an expression of her resistance to hegemonic scripts and the U.S. neocolonial project, which are both partly sustained, enforced and invigorated by structures and individuals that maintain the significance of racial difference and the category of 'race' in public and in private life. While in the logic of the novel, it makes a lot of sense to challenge and reject the category of race outright, since this move corresponds to other liberating processes of disidentification with concepts and traditions that Lucy has already accomplished, the novel's/protagonist's outright refusal to engage 'race' – or the differently connoted concept of 'blackness' – cuts it/her off (or liberates it/her) from access to differently politicized discourses.

When she was asked about her tendency to "heap scorn on those — mostly African-Americans — who define their identities by their blackness" (Snell 1997) in an interview published in *Mother Jones* in 1997, Kincaid vehemently denied the charge; yet, she identifies those tendencies and behaviors among many African Americans participating in U.S. public discourse that she finds frustrating and deems counter-productive:

> The African-American is often used, and has conspired with the rest of America to be used, as a diversion from America's problems. I wish African-Americans would stop contributing to this sideshow. I also wish all African-Americans would cease to sing and dance just for a generation. I think we provide too much entertainment. […] What frustrates me is to see African-Americans behave as though what European-Americans say is worthwhile. It simply isn't. It's just some silly people who can make laws and have the power to enforce them. I'm often amazed at the conversations black people have about themselves. They ought to be having these conversations about white people. It's white people who are flawed and at fault. (Snell 1997)

It is possible to interpret the novel's reluctance to engage more fully with questions of a collective or global African diaspora as an attempt on Kincaid's part to shift public conversation and reframe its parameters in the way she suggests in the interview. Instead of having a conversation about intra-diasporic similarities and points of contention Kincaid's *Bildungsroman* stages and opens up the conversation between non-white people

and white people. More precisely, the novel represents and enables a conversation between non-white (diasporic) feminists, as represented by Lucy, and the white feminists, as represented by Mariah.

In interviews, Kincaid has repeatedly asserted that she has moved beyond 'race' and refuses to be obsessed with it. She concedes, however, that it is an important concept to many and alleges that for many black people and people of color in America race has turned into an obsession:

> In America, black people are obsessed with skin colour, so to the point that they write those long articles about who is really black, and who isn't, and who's part white, and this sort of nonsense [...]. They've just never really gotten beyond the question of the colour of your skin to see humanity. […] Now the people, it would seem, most interested in racial classification are black people or non-white people in the United States. And they got so very annoyed at me because I wouldn't say Lucy is black and that kind of thing. When a white person writes, he or she doesn't say, 'I'm white', and Lucy simply assumes her place in humanity. […] These words, 'white' and 'black', are really representations of power and the powerless. When you say 'white', you know the winner, if you say 'black', you know the loser. (Dilger 1992: 23).[26]

Kincaid's statement highlights how her refusal to adopt a language that reflects (and perhaps also, to some extent, perpetuates) U.S. racial scripts sets her apart from, one might say allows her disidentify with, those African American writers, journalist and readers who are invested in the concept of 'blackness.' The author's rejection of the category of race also allows her to disidentify with important contemporary female African American writers, such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker. Asked whether she sees parallels between the increasing recognition of Caribbean women writers and the resurgence of African American women writers in the U.S., she is quick to point out differences between Caribbean women's writing and African American women's writing:

> I don't know. Paule Marshall is really another generation. No, I think it must be a coincidence; I don't think American women have much that we [Caribbean women] can draw from. I mean the use of language is very different, and their concerns are much different. A much different sensibility. For instance, I think that American black people seem to feel-almost-that being black is a predestination in some way. They have a kind of

[26] "I can really no longer speak of race, because I no longer understand what it means. I can speak with more clarity about power. I know I come from people who were slaves. I can make judgments about the past. I can see history, but I can no longer say 'white people' with any conviction. They're just a group of people behaving really abominably" (L. Jones 1990: 75; qtd. in Bouson 2005: 191).

> nationalism about it that we don't have: black nationalism. (Ferguson and Kincaid: 1994: 164)

In addition to linguistic differences between the two sets of writers, Kincaid identifies a different understanding as well as a different lived experience of 'blackness' as something that distinguishes the work of African American women writers from that of Caribbean women writers. Although the use of 'we' in this interview seems to indicate that she is less reluctant to be grouped among Caribbean (or "West-Indian" [Ferguson and Kincaid: 1994: 164]) women writers than with African American writers, she chooses not to use her relative fame and the platform interviews like these provide to identify other women writers from the Caribbean by name. Instead, she insists on her singular status when she professes her belief to be "the first person from Antigua [her extended community] to write and perhaps the first woman from that country" (Ferguson and Kincaid 1994: 164). Later in the same interview she calls into question the entire notion of a 'Caribbean/West-Indian writing tradition' by pointing out inextricable connection and indebtedness of writing from and about the Caribbean to British literature. She cites canonical British authors and texts, such as Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats, Austen, the Brontës and the King James Bible, not only as staples of her education and colonial education in general but also as the source material and tradition from which postcolonial writing like George Lamming's and Tsitsi Dangarembga's emerge (Ferguson and Kincaid 1994:168-169).

Whereas Kincaid openly acknowledges that, both as a reader and as a writer, she appreciates the modernist tradition and seeks to continue and complicate it in her own work, she seems reluctant, almost hypersensitive, when asked if she "see[s her]self in the Afro-Caribbean tradition of storytelling" (Dilger 1992: 21). The absolute terms in which she then distances herself from "any African type of storytelling tradition" because "[t]he great griots did not exist in [her] life" and "[a]ll the great traditions of village life in Africa just absolutely escaped [her] (Dilger 1992: 21), may surprise those familiar only with Kincaid's works, but they do not astonish those familiar with the discrepancies between the infinite negotiations, ambivalences and ambiguities staged and created in the author's fiction and the far less ambiguous statements that 'Jamaica Kincaid,' her carefully crafted, willful and contrary public persona, is capable of making in interviews. While it is true that neither *Lucy* nor Kincaid's African diaspora novel, *Mr. Potter*, reconstruct or celebrate "any *African type* of storytelling tradition" (Dilger 1992: 21; emphasis mine), the novels still draw the reader's attention to the existence as well as to the significance of the oral tradition/orality in the Caribbean experience, since the novel suggests that Lucy's only

access to her mother's – and to a lesser extent her father's – history as well as her own early history is through the stories her mother has told her. Furthermore, the text problematizes the imbalance between the kinds of histories available through the oral tradition and the (mostly male) Eurocentric histories to "be found in the pages of a book" (*L* 95). Kincaid's African diaspora novel about the emergence and genealogy of an absentee father can be read as an attempt to make available 'in the pages of a book' precisely the kinds of histories and experience usually ignored or suppressed in Eurocentric and Anglo-American discourses.

3.2 *Mr. Potter* – Negotiating a Negative Paternal Legacy in the African Diaspora Novel

In Kincaid's African diaspora novel, *Mr. Potter*, a first-person narrator who has a lot in common with the first-person narrator in *Lucy* and who, like all of Kincaid's narrators, is difficult to distinguish from the author herself,[27] tells the life story and maps the genealogy[28] of the eponymous, elusive, biological father figure. As an inhabitant of Antigua, an island in the Anglophone Caribbean where European, African, Lebanese/Syrian and Jewish migratory trajectories have collided and/or merged, Mr. Potter both embodies and comes into contact with different diasporic formations and experiences without being able to either comprehend or give an account of these experiences – even when they are his own or when they have shaped his existence in significant ways. Since he is represented as unable to comprehend ('read') or give an account of ('write') either his life or his self, it falls to the adult daughter-narrator, who has moved "north of the equator" (*MP* 165) and "found [her] voice" (*MP* 168) to read and write the father's story (*MP* 21). In *Mr. Potter,* Kincaid continues to explore the question of what constitutes a 'useable tradition' for a female diasporic from the Caribbean. This question is explored thematically – on a personal level and on a broader political level – as well as formally. Whereas *Lucy* details how the protagonist geographically, ideologically and emotionally separates herself from (disidentifies with) bodies of tradition that are represented by the almost omnipotent

[27] Both novels discussed in this chapter are classified as novels on their covers and will be discussed as such in this study; however, the boundaries between fiction and autobiography/memoir are particularly blurry in the case of Kincaid's African diaspora novel, *Mr. Potter*. Whereas the first- person narrator in *Lucy* ultimately identifies herself as Lucy Josephine Potter (*L* 163), a name close to but not identical with Kincaid's birth name (Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson), the first person narrator in *Mr. Potter* identifies herself as first as Elaine Cynthia Potter (*MP* 143) and later as Elaine Cynthia Potter Richardson (*MP* 193).

[28] Jana Evans Braziel reads *Mr. Potter* as a "postcolonial, postmodernist creation myth" and examines how genealogy inflects the autobiographical genre in this novel (Braziel 2006: 128).

and "god-like" mother (*L* 153) whom she simultaneously adores and despises, Kincaid's African diaspora novel stages processes of identification and disidentification with the paternal genealogy and the tradition that the protagonist's patrilineal heritage represents. *Mr. Potter* draws an ambivalent portrait of a father figure who is longed for and written into being only to be ridiculed, silenced, rejected and ultimately (narratively) destroyed. Instead of employing repetition and circularity to establish points of connection and continuities, Kincaid's narrative uses these narrative techniques to repeatedly reject the patrilineal heritage and to narratively destroy the father again and again.

On a personal level, the narrative seeks to prevent the continuation of the paternal line and the passing on of the paternal heritage, which is understood to be a 'negative life,'[29] to future generations. Where the *Bildungsroman* stages the disidentification with the matrilineage, *Mr. Potter* represents the narrator's disidentification with the patrilineage. In both novels, her individualist stance is represented as a necessary antidote to those patriarchal structures and social and cultural traditions that seek to eradicate her. In contrast to the narrator of the *Bildungsroman*, the first-person narrator in the African diaspora novel is, however, more palpably invested in a future that extends beyond her own life, since she is devoted to protecting not only herself but also her offspring from the damaging paternal legacy. The disidentification with the father figure and the eradication of her negative paternal legacy are represented as both the daughter's feminist duty and her prerogative.

On a political level, the novel exercises great caution with regard to questions of continuity and solidarity Even though, unlike *Lucy*, Kincaid's African diaspora novel explicitly explores the history of the formation of the African diaspora in the Caribbean and addresses the question of the possibilities and limits of inter- and intra-diasporic similarities, solidarities, allegiances and alliances, without instantly and categorically denying them, the novel locates those notions – if it considers them as at all viable – in the

[29] The life of the father figure can be characterized as a 'negative life' because his life, defined by all the things he is incapable of doing, is destructive rather than constructive. There is, however, also another dimension to the notion of a 'negative life.' In her reading of Kincaid's novel, *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1996), Judith Halberstam explains that: "Kincaid's commitment to a kind of negative life, a life lived by a colonized character who refuses purpose and who as a result leaves the reader unsettled, disturbed, and discomforted, represents a Fanonian refusal to blindly persist in the occupation of categories of being that simply round out the colonial project. Where a colonized subject finds happiness, Kincaid, following Fanon, seems to say, he or she confirms the benevolence of the colonial project." (Halberstam 2011: 132-33). Unlike the refusal of purpose and the refusal of happiness in *The Autobiography of my Mother* that Halberstam describes, Mr. Potter's refusal or inability to lead a conventionally 'productive' and responsible life carries no counterhegemonic, anti-colonial overtones. The narrator claims that Mr. Potter is a happy man – despite his situation and his actions – because he is unable contemplate his existence, and she despises his happiness as a symptom of his complicity in his own subjugation.

past rather than in the present or in the future. Yet, the life story and the genealogy that the narrator pieces together, imagines and invents[30] for Mr. Potter carry political significances beyond the confines of any individual life. They are constructed as representative of a broader damaging and painful (male) African diaspora experience in the (Anglophone) Caribbean that began in 1492 and continues to render the people living in the region people "of no real account" (*MP* 85), particularly if, as the descendants of slaves, they "looked like [Mr. Potter]" (*MP* 84). The story of the father figure who can neither comprehend nor express himself or his world/experience thus allows the author to highlight and contemplate the less celebratory aspects, effects and affects of the African diaspora experience in the (Anglophone) Caribbean.

3.2.1 Antigua as the Meeting Ground of Different Diasporic Trajectories

The reader is first introduced to the narrator's father – later identified as Roderick Nathaniel Potter – on what appears to be an ordinary day in a long succession of ordinary days for Mr. Potter on the island of Antigua:

> And that day, the sun was in its usual place, up above and in the middle of the sky, and it shone in its usual way so harshly bright, making even the shadows pale, making even the shadows seek shelter; that day, the sun was in its usual place up above and in the middle of the sky, but Mr. Potter did not note this, so accustomed was he to this, the sun in its usual place, up above and in the middle of the sky; […]. (*MP* 3)

Consisting of one long sentence that begins with 'and,'[31] employs a simple vocabulary, and relies on repetition and rhythm, the introductory paragraph introduces the reader not only to a male character numbed to and unaware of his surroundings but also to key features of the novel's circular, style, that, even more so than that of *Lucy,* is reminiscent of Gertrude Stein's style.[32] Instead of using repetition and cyclical movements in ways that emulate

[30] "I didn't know him at all. I only had his birth certificate, death certificate, and his parents' death certificates" (Essence 2002: 108; qtd. in Bouson 2005: 166).

[31] Examining how the text engages the Book of Genesis, Braziel observes that "Kincaid reiterates [the] biblical beginnings, but forces creation and creativity to her will, wielding her pen to confront history and so-called divine orders" (Braziel 2006: 129). Building on Spivak's examination of the function of parataxis in *Lucy*, Nicole Matos (2009) observes that the stylistics of *Mr. Potter* depend on parataxis and juxtaposition rather than on subordination.

[32] Although some early reviews of the novel share this observation, the similarities of Kincaid's writing to Stein's are often judged unfavorably. In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Andrew Roe, for example, talks about "Kincaid's linguistic distractions" and comments on the novel's 'Stein-infected' first paragraph in the following way: "It's difficult to think of a more daunting beginning in recent fiction. […] Where to begin? Well, for starters, note that the sentence begins with the word 'and.' Hemingway's favorite conjunction also

natural cycles and point to interconnected, continuous processes of growth and decay – as do Marshall's and Danticat's African diaspora novels as well as much contemporary African American and Anglophone Caribbean women's literature – the narrative, in each of its twelve unnumbered sections, uses these strategies either to underscore the ways in which stagnation and futility characterize Mr. Potter's life on the island or to provide the narrator the opportunity to repeatedly confront, reject and ultimately eradicate the paternal legacy. The reader is offered glimpses into island life as Mr. Potter continues his morning walk to his place of work. Whereas the narrative repeatedly emphasizes that Mr. Potter fails to reflect on his situation and thus to draw any kind of connection between himself or his situation and the sights offered to him along the way because he is simply unable to do so, the reader is required to contemplate the very question of how the sight of a pregnant female dog, "her breasts distended and swollen, her stomach distended and swollen, lying in the shade of a tree native to some of the dry vast plains of Africa" (*MP* 3), and the sight of a blind beggar whom Mr. Potter has never shown any charity, "expelling into the ground a mouthful of the thick, sticky white phlegm that had slowly gathered in his throat" (*MP* 4), relate to this man's life and circumstances or reflect parts of his personality. As the answer to this question is withheld rather than readily provided by the text, the opening passage calls attention to the fact that the text requires its reader to become and remain intellectually and emotionally involved. Whereas "there was no distance of any kind" "between [Mr. Potter] and all that he saw" (*MP* 5), the narrative suggests that both the narrator and the reader possess the kind of distance necessary for (self-)reflection and self-awareness. They are thus enabled and required both to reflect on Mr. Potter's situation and to position themselves vis-à-vis (the representation of) his experience.

While Mr. Potter is represented as too self-absorbed or too limited to conceive of any similarities and differences between his employer, Mr. Shoul, his passengers, Dr. and Mrs. Weizenger, and himself, because "events great or small did not enter his mind, nothing entered his mind, his mind was already filled up with Mr. Potter" (*MP* 27), the reader comes to conceive of Mr. Potter's home island as the meeting ground of different, intersecting but ultimately incommensurable diaspora experiences of three literally and quintessentially orphaned men. Although Mr. Shoul's life story bears traces of what Cohen characterizes as trade diaspora, labor diaspora and victim diaspora experiences (Cohen

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begins just about every other sentence in the book, in addition to practically every paragraph and chapter. Note, too, the recurrence of certain words and phrases ('the sun in its usual place,' etc.). This technique gets repeated tic-like throughout, as if a Gertrude Stein virus had invaded Kincaid's word-processing program" (Roe 2002).

2008: 18), it is clear that the life story of the successful Middle Eastern business owner, as the novel narrates it, also focuses on those features of his experience that underscore his status as victim of history and circumstance.

Mr. Shoul, the presumably Christian (*MP* 111)[33] owner of a chauffeuring business came to Antigua from "Lebanon or Syria, someplace like that, barren and old" (*MP* 6) by way of Surinam, British Guiana and Trinidad (*MP* 110-111). Represented as a refugee who made a habit of "stay[ing] when it was good and le[aving] soon after things got bad" (*MP* 6-7), he has succeeded in building a flourishing business on the island. Nevertheless, he has been unable to come to terms with the initial shattering of his world caused by his parents' early and unexpected deaths (*MP* 107, 108-109) and the subsequent shattering of his family's "little trading empire" (*MP* 108). Constructed as somebody who is affected by events in world history (that, in his case are never specified but only very vaguely alluded to) his life as an "immigrant" (*MP* 110) begins as a result of the initial shattering of his world:

> […] and he was on ships and the ships where tossed about on the ocean and the seas and when inside the ships he was tossed about, his stomach heaving through his windpipe and up through his nostrils before settling down again the way the ship settled on the ocean and then the sea, and then he settled on land and this was in Surinam. (*MP* 110)

Since the novel seeks to draw the reader's attention to both similarities and differences between the diaspora experiences it represents, the representation of his voyages is clearly unlike but at same time evocative of literary representations of the horrors of the Middle Passage. The novel suggests, however, that Mr. Shoul was able to put an end to the cycle of being 'tossed about,' himself when, after escaping the competition of many Middle Eastern traders like himself in Trinidad, he finally came "to Antigua, and there he rested and rested and rested again" (*MP* 111). In contrast to Mr. Potter, he is represented as being, at least partially, able to reflect on his experience, even though he cannot really come to terms with it and remains caught in "the land of the almost" (*MP* 107), a nostalgic realm, where he is simultaneously elated and saddened by the prospect of almost hearing his mother's last words.

Dr. and Mrs. Weizenger are also constructed as representatives of particular diaspora experiences. May Weizenger, an Englishwoman (and a nurse), not only

[33] "'Potter, me ah tell you mahn,' said Mr. Shoul, and Mr. Shoul made the sign of the cross over himself, and Mr. Potter did not like to see that, a man making a crossroads of himself, a man making a meeting place for the devil on his own body, […]" (*MP* 111). The road to Damascus, which figures prominently in Mr. Shoul's narrative, alludes to the story of the conversion to Christianity of Saul of Tarsus (later the Apostle Paul).

accompanies her husband on his journey and thus shares part of his story of forced relocation, but – due to her proper English accent and her 'proper ways' – is also made to embody the continuing authority of the British Empire over its colonial subjects, such as Mr. Potter, at a time when British influence in the world was slowly beginning to wane (*MP* 11, 16). Even more than the juxtaposition of Mr. Potter and Mr. Shoul, the encounter between Mr. Potter and Dr. Zoltan (Samuel) Weizenger is staged as the encounter of two victim diasporas: the African/Caribbean diaspora, as represented by Mr. Potter, and the twentieth-century Jewish diaspora, as represented by Dr. Weizenger. The reader learns that prior to arriving in Antigua by ship, Dr. Weizenger had to flee his home in Prague and, as the only surviving member of his family, only narrowly escaped being murdered by the Nazis. Like Mr. Shoul, Dr. Weizenger traveled to and, the reader is led to assume, attempted to settle in places in the British Empire other than Antigua, such as Singapore, Sydney and Shanghai (*MP* 10), before arriving on Mr. Potter's home island. Now a multiply diasporized inhabitant of Antigua, his character invites the reader to ponder the question of who, in the wake of the worldwide upheavals of the early and mid-twentieth century, can claim to belong anywhere. Even though the novel insistently points to basic similarities between Mr. Potter and Dr. Weizenger, such as their inability to give (accurate) accounts of themselves and their negative experiences at sea, which "for both of them […] held such peril, such dark memories (*MP* 10), it simultaneously points to fundamental and, it would appear, irreconcilable differences, such as their almost diametrically opposed educational status and difference in temperament: "Such a dead man thought Mr. Potter to himself when he saw Dr. Weizenger. […] Such stupidity thought Dr. Weizenger to himself when he met Mr. Potter, so much ignorance" (*MP* 10). The significance of their differences is underscored by the fact that even their most basic similarities are available to the narrator and to the reader but not to the men themselves. Since their entire encounter is characterized by miscommunication, lack of understanding and outright dislike, it demonstrates that the rupture of forced dispersal and dislocation does not instantly or necessarily serve to establish a sense of transnational, transracial/transethnic and transtemporal commonality or community. Rather than representing diaspora as a choice and perhaps even celebrating the opportunities that life in the diaspora may offer to the individual at the turn of the century, as *Lucy* does, Kincaid's African diaspora novel represents how the experience of being forced into life in the diaspora is perceived as a permanent rupture that traumatizes and isolates. Not only is Dr. Weizenger's attitude toward Mr. Potter characterized by "hatred and lack of sympathy for Mr. Potter (and all

who looked like Mr. Potter)" (*MP* 8); the narrative also suggests that Dr. Weizenger will never overcome his fundamental prejudices against Antiguans because he, too, is unable to read and comprehend the world he inhabits: "And on Mr. Potter's face was written 'Africa' and 'Europe' but Dr. Weizenger had never had to and would never be able (as it turned out) to read the language in which these words were written" (*MP* 11). The narrative takes Dr. Weizenger's traumatization into account by representing him as a men who relies on his biases; his inability to read either world/colonial history or the people it has created is a coping mechanism that prevents him from "f[a]ll[ing] apart" (*MP* 11). But it also represents the trained psychiatrist (*MP* 166) as a doctor of rather limited medical knowledge and none of the personal skills and empathy usually required of doctors (*MP* 133-134). A remote island of the British Empire, such as Antigua, is one of the few places where he can find work and recognition as a doctor.

Mr. Potter's encounter with Dr. Weizenger also serves to illustrate his literal and metaphorical inability to read. What is more, Mr. Potter is represented as lacking the ability even to dwell on the fate or plight of others, even when they resemble his own. This inability, in his case, is, however, not explicitly represented as a coping mechanism:

> And on that day, Mr. Potter drove Mr. Shoul's car to the jetty to await a large steamer coming from some benighted place in the world, someplace far away where there had been upheavals and displacements and murder and terror; Mr. Potter was not unfamiliar with upheavals and displacements and murder and terror; his very existence in the world had been made possible by such things, but he did not dwell on them and he could not dwell on them any more than he could dwell on breathing. (*MP* 7).

Of course, Mr. Potter's failure to dwell on the similarities between his fate and the fates of others as well as his failure to feel sympathy for those affected by "displacements and murder and horror" (*MP* 7) are as much an expression of the individual character traits the first-person narrator ascribes to her father as they are the result of a more general lack of education and lack of access to information on the island. In other words, Mr. Potter's inability to read is framed as both an individual failure and as a structural consequence of colonialism that, the novel suggests, constitutes part of Antigua's colonial legacy even when the narrator returns to present-day Antigua after Mr. Potter's death. In combination, these structural obstacles and Mr. Potter's individual failure to reflect and empathize serve to isolate him and to make his situation inescapable. In a move that enables both the narrator and the reader to distance themselves from Mr. Potter's suffering, the first-person narrator suggests, however, that since Mr. Potter is unaware of and unable to reflect on

either his own suffering or that of others, he does not suffer from the situation as much as he otherwise might. Throughout the narrative the narrator is far more inclined to take an explicitly empathizing and compassionate stance toward characters other than her father. A programmatic statement that relates human equality to vulnerability is, for example, parenthetically inserted in that part of narrative that details Mr. Shoul's experience of being driven away from his home: "(he was a human being and so, therefore, his existence was tender and deserved to be protected)" (*MP* 109).

The passage in which Mr. Potter shows the Weizengers around their new home cements the differences between the two men and decisively dismisses the notion that they may eventually find common ground based on the fact that they both suffer as a result of having been displaced. Although the novel suggests that Mr. Potter may be willing to share his island and his life with the newcomers (*MP* 22) – albeit without being able to reflect on the practical impossibilities of his spontaneous idea – Dr. Weizenger is represented as both too traumatized and too prejudiced regarding race and class to entertain such an idea:

> […] but Mr. Potter could not read and Mr. Potter could not write and in any case Dr. Weizenger did not want to share anything with him. Dr. Weizenger, so recently placed on the very edge of extinction, did not want to share anything with Mr. Potter, a man so long alive in a cauldron of terror. (*MP* 22)

The novel's representation of the meeting of diasporas emphasizes a general lack of solidarity among the recently and not so recently dislocated as well as an inability and unwillingness of individuals to conceive of themselves and their lives as meaningfully (and possibly constructively) connected to or interrelated with those of others. The novel stresses the accidental nature of Dr. Weizenger's and Mr. Shoul's presence on the island and thus refuses to represent them as especially meaningfully linked to Mr. Potter's presence on Antigua (*MP* 155).

On a formal level, this lack of connection and interrelatedness is underscored by the novel's paratactic structures and its refusal to offer a hypotactic narrative. Building on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's examination of the function of parataxis in *Lucy*, Nicole Matos observes that the stylistics of *Mr. Potter* depend on parataxis and juxtaposition rather than on subordination (Matos 2009). Parataxis has been recognized as a characteristic of postmodernism as well; a frequently employed narrative device in postmodernist texts, it not only destabilizes established hierarchies of meaning but also allows a more subjective (re)construction of meaning to take place (Hassan 1993: 281;

Perelman 1993; Matos 2009).[34] In his 1971 essay, "The Culture of Criticism," Hayden White describes parataxis as the non-hierarchical, egalitarian arrangement of phenomena and entities "in what might be called a democracy of lateral coexistence, one next to another" and observes that more than any other avant-garde strategy, parataxis threatens the practice of humanist realism (White 2010: 109; 108-110). Although she does not cite him, Matos echoes White when she argues that "[a]lthough Kincaid's style may at times distort anticipated narrative progression, it nonetheless serves to advance a crucial premise of the novel: the importance of rhizomatic realities, lives-alongside, lives in the Land of the Almost, [*MP* 107] to the task of writing a neglected life into existence, […]" (Matos 2009: 83). Even though I agree that Kincaid's paratactic structures advance the novel's project, I want to clarify that Kincaid's text creates a particular kind of rhizomatic structure, one that is characterized by a reduced or dysfunctional relationality. Despite the fact that parataxis enables the novel to represent existences in their plurality and diversity, the narrative does not afford equal space and attention to each life story it narrates. The unique narrative situation clearly creates a hierarchy between the narrator and the characters she represents. The omnipresent 'and' not only emphasizes lateral connections but also insistently calls attention to those moments in the text when social, gender, race and class hierarchies persist, are addressed and negotiated. Furthermore, since the stylistic device draws attention to the novel's artifice, it also enables the reader to maintain a certain degree of distance to the events and characters represented in the text.

In her discussion of parataxis in *Lucy*, where parataxis features to a far lesser extent than in *Mr. Potter*, Spivak argues that the novel's paratactic structures, which withhold causal and other relations, ask the reader to interact with the text and make precisely those connections and draw those conclusions that the novel's structure withholds (Spivak 2000: 338f.). This demand for readerly interaction and engagement with the text is even greater in the case of Kincaid's African diaspora novel. As *Mr. Potter* unfolds, the active and involved reader is required and enabled to draw precisely those parallels and see those causal connections and relationships that the novel withholds on a syntactical level but simultaneously enables through its narrative juxtaposition of the different diaspora experiences. This formally challenging, novel seems to ask the reader the two questions that I have chosen as one of the two epigraphs of this chapter: "One question is who is responsible. Another is can you read?" (Morrison 2009: 3). But while, in *A Mercy*,

[34] Although parataxis is far from being uncommon in texts not usually characterized as postmodernist, as texts by modernist writers, such Stein and Ezra Pound, and even Walt Whitman's catalogues and passages in Ralph Waldo Emerson's essays prove (Buell 1968: 331), it is more common in postmodernist writing.

Morrison gives primacy to the question of responsibility, Kincaid's novel places primary importance on the ability of its reader to actively read and follow up on the allusions and historical references the text contains, in order then to be able to ask the question of who is responsible for the past and present situations Kincaid's African diaspora novel depicts. Like *Lucy*, *Mr. Potter* must be understood as a text of postcolonial critique. When the narrator describes her father as belonging to "the ordinarily degraded," she not only emphasizes the disparity of social standing and understanding between herself and the father, who would never know "that though his very being was holy, his existence was a triumph of evil" (*MP* 80), but also recalls and extends the postcolonial critique expressed in *Lucy*, since its first-person narrator asserts that "the origin of [her] presence on the island – [her] ancestral history – was the result of a foul deed" (*L* 135). In addition to explicitly uttering postcolonial critique, the text creates a network of direct and more indirect historical references that enable the reader who seeks to acquire or improve her diaspora literacy to do so. For example, *Mr. Potter* contains a number of passages describing everyday objects, such as yards of cloth or Mr. Potter's third-hand American car that put into relief not only the flows of money and goods between 'the periphery' and 'the center' but also demonstrate the unequal power relationships between the two. Underscoring how the political and the private are inextricably intertwined, the novel also establishes a parallel between the "tormented skin" (*MP* 73) of Mr. Potter's mother and the "tormented history" (*MP* 74) of the production the poplin fabric that covers her body on the day she dies. Provoking the reader to recall what she knows about the "tormented history" (*MP* 74) of the global production of poplin and other cloths, whose raw materials were grown in the colonies, or to consult sources that would rectify her deficient knowledge, the juxtaposition enables the reader to establish a causal link between global flows of production and individual suffering, even though the causal nature of the relationship is not made syntactically explicit. The more indirect references to the particulars of colonial history in the Caribbean -- like that to the production of poplin -- not only allow the reader to determine the degree of her active engagement with the text but also influence how she evaluates the novel's overall investments. Is Mr. Potter a politically invested novel since it expresses postcolonial and feminist critique? Or is it rather politically neutral, since its primary focus is on the individualist daughter's attempt to exorcise her father's ghost and eradicate his legacy? Or is it a text in which typically apolitical individualist and postmodernist impulses and particular political investments in postcolonial and feminist critique are combined and negotiated? Of course, all reading experiences can be said to be

subjective. But a text like *Mr. Potter* draws particular attention to this fact. The novel's formal strategies, such as parataxis and circularity, allow for highly idiosyncratic readings of the text and its characters because they resist the reader's attempts to order the narrative and resolve is ambiguities and tensions. The novel's rather indirect forms of critique also require the reader to actively engage with the text and to acquire or improve her diaspora literacy.

Unlike the other African diaspora novels discussed in this study, *Mr. Potter* does not offer a progress narrative in which characters gain awareness of, negotiate and eventually come to terms with their histories of forced migration, dislocation and rupture. Instead, it presents characters who are too traumatized to be able really to reflect on their traumas and therefore fail to come to terms with them. But although the narrative demonstrates that their different histories of displacement and rupture are unavailable and/or unspeakable to Mr. Shoul, Dr. Weizenger and Mr. Potter, Kincaid's novel seeks to make their stories, particularly that of Mr. Potter's life – "this small narrative of this small life" (*MP* 177) – as well as the stories of those lives that preceded his available, comprehensible and speakable to both the narrator and the reader. The combination of circular and paratactic structures in the text also, however, limits the extent to which the narrator is able to achieve knowledge about her paternal genealogy and herself. Her discovery of her own 'voice' towards the end of the novel is framed first and foremost as the event that enables her to more fully disidentify with the father. At the same time, the last section of the novel stages the narrator's realization that the fact that she can read and write and possesses a voice that will be heard, and that she therefore is the only one who can tell the father's story. Ironically, the avowed individualist somewhat reluctantly becomes the creator of and/or spokeswoman for a number of experiences that not only are not her own but are also representative of the very (Caribbean) African diaspora experiences from which she seeks and needs to disidentify.

3.2.2 Establishing an African Diasporic Paternal Genealogy of Circumstance, Shiftlessness, and Choicelessness

In order to make Mr. Potter's life comprehensible and speakable, Kincaid's African diaspora novel delves into, identifies and invents key moments and minute details of those individual lives that constitute the narrator's paternal line. Since the narrator attempts to come to terms with her father's history and, most importantly, with the ways in which her

father's history has shaped, shadowed and marred her own life, the novel seeks to uncover the story of Mr. Potter's origin and genesis. Yet, the genealogy that the narrative maps is that of the narrator's father and that of a type of man. Rather than solely focusing on Roderick Nathaniel Potter and beginning the narrative of his individual life on the day of his birth, January 7, 1922 (*MP* 35), the novel contextualizes his life and his actions by narrating the life stories of both his father, Nathaniel Potter, and his mother, Elfrida Robinson. These stories not only expand the paternal side of the narrator's family tree by one generation but also demonstrate that Mr. Potter's refusal to accept paternal responsibility for his "many girl children" (*MP* 140) – a decision that the narrator frames as his refusal to provide her with "the protection of his patrimony" (*MP* 129) and for which she partly (and, in view of Kincaid's oeuvre, unsurprisingly) also blames her mother (*MP* 129)[35] – continues a familial tradition of abdication of parental duties and responsibilities, since Nathaniel was a father in name only and Elfrida also chose not to permanently take responsibility for her son. Juxtaposing Nathaniel's and Elfrida's lives, the narrator contemplates – and also requires the reader to contemplate – the differences between the male legacy of suffering, shiftlessness and irresponsibility as represented by Nathaniel and continued by his son Roderick and the female legacy of suffering and choicelessness as represented by Elfrida's life and death.

The narrative represents Nathaniel as a deeply dissatisfied man who is unable to clearly identify the source(s) of his dissatisfaction, anger and pain. As "the father of eleven children with eight altogether different mothers" (*MP* 36)[36] Nathaniel Potter "ha[s] so many children that none of them could matter at all" (*MP* 188). He therefore greets the birth of his youngest son, the narrator's father, with indifference and forever "with[holds] himself from the world of Mr. Potter" (*MP* 36). Before he curses god and subsequently dies of boils, aged forty-seven (*MP* 47), Nathaniel has continued the family tradition and made his living as a fisherman – a trade that he learned from his own father but did not pass on to his son. His thoughts during his fishing trips off the Antiguan coast indicate that his dissatisfying living situation results from a combination of (limited) personal choices and the island's history of forced migration and slavery – a history that exceeds his comprehension and lies outside of his influence:

> Nathaniel could hear the faint sound of all that had been capricious and had come to make up his life: his children, their mothers, his ancestors from some of the many places that

[35] The narrator traces her biological parents' hatred of each other back to the fact that the narrator's mother hurt Mr. Potter's ego and his chances in life when she took his savings and left him before the narrator was born (*MP* 20).
[36] The narrator claims that Mr. Potter is rumored to have fathered as many as twenty-one children (*MP* 38).

> make up Africa, and from somewhere in Spain and from somewhere in England and from somewhere in Scotland. And the faint sound of all that he was made of caused him to grow angry, caused him to grow almost happy and curious but then angry again, and the anger welled up in him and he was all alone in world, the world that refused to bear any trace of the capriciousness of history or the capriciousness of memory, the world that had passed away. (*MP* 39-40)

While the narrator confesses to her difficulty in tempering her anger at her father (*MP* 137) and her desire for narrative revenge is palpable when she is tasked with telling her his story, she endows Nathaniel with an inner life that enables the reader to conceive of him as a complex character with whose ambivalent feelings toward his ancestry and his family the narrator – and many readers – can at least partially identify. The narrative's unequivocal condemnation of Nathaniel's refusal to fulfill his paternal role in Mr. Potter's life, neither prevents the novel from portraying him both as a vulnerable – at times literally and always metaphorically "[n]aked" (*MP* 42) – human being in need of protection and as an unloved and unloving man in desperate need of love (*MP* 43), nor does it prevent the text from insistently calling attention to the fact that men like Nathaniel Potter, haunted by negative emotions such as sadness, anger, helplessness and hopelessness, did not come into this world deformed or flawed: "How simple he was then, how without knowledge of harm he was then, how beautiful, how innocent, how perfect" (*MP* 40). Regardless of his initial perfection, however, Nathaniel is represented as unable to "make [something] of himself" (*MP* 40). Since he is haunted by an "impossible" past that he, like his son, is unable to intellectually comprehend or give an account of, his future is rendered "unimaginable" (*MP* 42). Due to his utter despair at the invariable sameness of his hard and miserable life in a miserable, inhospitable, and possibly god-forsaken place, Nathaniel bares his backside to the heavens in an ultimately inconsequential act of defiance against an indifferent god (*MP* 43-44). He passes on a legacy "of helplessness combined with despair" (*MP* 57) to his numerous acknowledged and unacknowledged children, among them the narrator's father. While the narrative writes Nathaniel into being and insists on the significance and value of his life and his experience, his life story, like his son's, represents the kind of 'negative life' against which the narrator seeks to protect herself and her children through disidentification.

The inclusion of Elfrida Robinson's life story in the narrator's paternal genealogy enables the narrative to compare and contrast a unique and simultaneously representative set of male and female experiences of (non)-parenthood and abandonment in one of the

British colonies in the Caribbean. Elfrida's inclusion also enables the narrative to show how the "double colonization,"[37] of women, through the intersecting oppressive forces of patriarchy and patriarchal colonialism affected women in Antigua in the late 1920s. In Elfrida's case, these oppressive structures conspire to settle her with the sole – and it would appear unmanageable – responsibility for her only son while failing to provide her with any legal recourse to demand Nathaniel's financial support for his son. The reasons why Elfrida is unwilling or unable to take care of her son when he has just turned five years old become comprehensible when the narrative reveals that she is herself a motherless child. Her ancestry, which can be traced to the discovery of the island in 1492, is one characterized by parental abandonment. The narrative insists that the reader evaluate Elfrida's life (and that of her son Roderick) and her choices in light of this history:

> See her as a small girl motherless, and see her mother before her motherless and that mother, too, motherless, and on and on reaching back not so much into eternity as into a sentence that would begin with the year fourteen hundred and ninety-two; for eternity is the unimaginable awfulness that makes up the past and the unimaginable peace and pleasure that is to come. And where is Elfrida's father, that man named something Robinson? And where is his father before him and on and on into eternity, the eternity of what has been, not the one that is to come. (*MP* 71-72)

While the narrative does not offer Elfrida's quintessential motherlessness in order to completely absolve her from personal responsibility, the passage underscores her own vulnerability and victimization and thus contributes to the generally compassionate tone that distinguishes the narrative of her life from that of Nathaniel's life. Represented as a young woman without familial connections or friendships whose "life at sixteen was already shriveled and pinched" (*MP* 64), Elfrida becomes the embodiment of (female) pain. The narrative frames Roderick's birth, which she experiences as both physically and emotionally taxing, as a moment of existential crisis in her life that prefigures her later suicide:

> And as he emerged from his mother's womb (her name was Elfrida Robinson) she felt herself as if cast asunder, as if split into many pieces, and each piece flung far away from the other and would not be united again and she wondered who she was what she came from and struggled to remember her own name, for that might amount to something, her name was Elfrida Robinson, and she remembered her name and it was Elfrida Robinson. (*MP* 62)

[37] The term was first coined by Holst-Peterson and Rutherford in their *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women's Writing* (1988).

In addition to offering the reader insight into Elfrida's thoughts and emotions, the passage establishes significant differences between Elfrida Robinson and Nathaniel and Roderick Potter. While the narrative represents the male characters as not only disconnected but also disinterested in their origin and history, it represents Elfrida Robinson as genuinely invested in her identity and her origin/history, even though she struggles to hold on to or establish them. Regardless of the fact that Elfrida's attempt to establish her identity and history is represented as ultimately less successful than the narrator's attempt to do the same thing, Elfrida's investments enable the narrative to suggest a certain degree of similarity between Elfrida (the narrator's paternal grandmother) and the narrator.

The narrative establishes significant differences between Elfrida's and the male characters' ability to love. Whereas Nathaniel and Roderick are represented as incapable of loving another human being – Nathaniel's existence is described as one into which love never entered (*MP* 43) and Roderick Potter's ability to love is characterized as limited to "self-love" (*MP* 24) – Elfrida is represented as capable of at least temporarily feeling love for another human being, her son (*MP* 63). While it could be argued that, ultimately, Elfrida is as unable to love as Nathaniel and Roderick Potter, the narrative, in fact, offers a more nuanced representation of the mother's ability/inability to love that regards it in its context of persistent, transgenerationally transmitted ill-effects wrought by the ruptures of family structures under (colonial) slavery. Hortense Spillers has argued that the legacy of the institution of slavery, which was designed to 'ungender' and objectify women and men, to rob parents of their rights to motherhood and fatherhood, and to prevent acts of 'mothering' and 'fathering' between parents and children from taking place, has been passed down through the generations.[38] She explicitly challenges the notion propagated in the Moynihan Report and elsewhere that, predominantly matrilineal, African American family structures are characterized by pathological dysfunction and describes alternative forms of family as well as alternative ways of 'mothering' and 'fathering' that developed in response to the familial ruptures wrought by slavery an in its aftermath. Rather than representing and negotiating alternative, constructive forms of mothering and fathering, the narrator in Kincaid's text confronts and critically and extensively examines what she perceives to be a legacy of patrilineal, transgenerationally transmitted familial dysfunction.

[38] While the particulars of slavery throughout the Americas differed, the underlying structures and mechanisms by which people were 'turned into chattel' that Spillers describes did not. Although slavery was officially abolished in Antigua in 1834, the text establishes a continuity of subjugation and suffering on the island, beginning in 1492 and continuing into the present moment, when it claims that "Mr. Potter's lifetime began in the year fourteen hundred and ninety-two" (*MP* 177).

She does so, however, in order to disidentify with this legacy and prevent it from being passed on to her two children. The narrator's wish to eradicate her father's legacy of 'non-parenting, however, can be read as a way to establish her own 'alternative' way of parenting.

In the process of examining the familial dysfunction passed down on her father's side, the narrator reveals that Elfrida's unconditional, motherly love for him has run its course at the end of the first week of Roderick's life. "The innocence of [his] existence exhaust[s] her" (*MP* 68) and she tires of him and the demands his existence makes of her. When she leaves him alone, "sometimes her heart [breaks] in two when she hear[s] his cries and sometimes her heart harden[s]" (*MP* 69). Yet, the narrative indicates that prior to her suicide she takes care of all her son's basic physical needs to the best of her (limited) ability, and in a last act of maternal responsibility, she also selects the Shepherds as new guardians for him before she commits suicide (*MP* 70). The passage detailing her suicide is worth being quoted at length since it demonstrates how Kincaid's African diaspora novel continues and complicates negotiations begun in *Lucy*:

> […] and then she walked into the sea, and walked into it as if in walking she would eventually come to something new, some new place that had no resemblance to what she had known, some new place which would obliterate the memory, no really the actuality, of what she had just known. The sea then just looked as the sea was itself, an enormous body of water, the water itself so present that it overwhelmed everything that was known, everything that she, Elfrida Robinson, could know, and as she walked into it, the sea, its reality was out of her senses, but what could that be, out of her sense, for she understood herself so very well, she understood herself completely, she understood outside herself and she understood inside herself an she even understood the very boundary between herself and some something else so different, something not herself at all. But this element, so new, was not water as Elfrida Robinson could recognize it. This water was thick and blank (it was a form of darkness), black unorderly, moving without anything and thick with something, but whatever it was thick with held no nourishment, and it was so thick and then so heavy, so overwhelming, as if it could be grace, or a blessing, or something good, anything good, but a name could not be found for it, and it was the very texture and atmosphere and reality of the sea, the sea into which Mr. Potter's mother, Elfrida Robinson, walked when she grew tired of his existence. And Mr. Potter's mother walked into the sea without even so much as despair she did not have even so much as a sense of hopelessness and then going beyond that she was made up only of what lay beyond that. (*MP* 70-71)

The representation of Elfrida's suicide asks the reader who possesses diaspora literacy to reflect on slavery and the African diaspora because her chosen form of suicide recalls and merges accounts of slaves choosing to jump ship and drown themselves rather than endure the horrors of the Middle Passage with accounts of the Igbo (Ibo) landing, an African American folktale /oral narrative in which newly arrived slaves seeking to escape their enslavement and seeking to return to Africa choose to either fly or walk across the Atlantic.[39] Unlike Ma Chees, the grandmother character in Kincaid's 1985 novel, *Annie John,* whose swift and unexpected arrival on days when the steamer is not scheduled to arrive at Annie's home island suggests that she possesses the ability to fly/walk across the sea, Elfrida does not possess any supernatural abilities that might save her from drowning. Yet, the allusion to a narrative of communal resistance can be understood as a narrative strategy aimed at thwarting one-dimensional and reductive readings that cast Elfrida solely in the role of a defeated woman or an irresponsible mother. Since the narrative insists that Elfrida 'walks' into the sea, the passage can also be understood as an invitation to contemplate the question of what kinds of mobilities were available to women like her in the Caribbean – not only at the beginning of the twentieth century but in earlier centuries at well. The novel suggests that while the narrator (like Lucy) has been able to escape the hardships and monotony of life on the island, Elfrida is not granted the opportunity to leave the island for a different, possibly better place. Her desire for new experiences to obliterate the past – a desire that clearly corresponds to Lucy's desire to disidentify with the past and also bears traces of the daughter-narrator's desire to eradicate the negative paternal legacy that casts a shadow over her life and substitute it with something new – cannot be fulfilled in life. Elfrida's suicide or her abdication from maternal duty may thus represent not only one of the few actions but also the only clearly recognizable act of disidentification available to her. Elfrida's act demonstrates, however, that absolute disidentification is lethal, which is why for both Lucy and Mr. Potter's daughter the processes of identification and disidentification must not ever stop. While the narrative frames Nathaniel's early death, which has him utter a final "'Ooooooohhhhh'" (*MP* 57) of hopelessness and despair, as a possible punishment, in Elfrida's case, it chooses to represent what should be a difficult and painful death, in relatively benign terms. Although Elfrida is overwhelmed by the strange blackness and thickness of the element as she drowns, she experiences being overwhelmed almost as a blessing. Furthermore, in the process of dying, she is granted the kind of self-awareness and self-understanding that has been denied to her throughout her

[39] See Walters (1997) for more information on the different versions of the folktale of Flying Africans.

life. Of course, Elfrida's short moments of complete self-understanding neither retroactively redress her suffering nor can they be productively or constructively employed by the character herself. They can, however be understood as the narrator's attempt to offer some kind of narrative redress to a character so dispossessed and alienated from herself that she does not even possess "despair […] or a sense of hopelessness" (*MP* 71) when she walks into the water. Since the representation of her suicide prevents Elfrida from being forgotten, the narrative must also be understood as an attempt to narratively reclaim the female orphan/irresponsible mother from the past and from the forgetfulness of history:

> And after a short while, no one spoke of her again, her courage (for it was that, courage) became cowardice and then strange, so strange that it must not be repeated, and after a short while no one thought of her again, not her only child, her son, Mr. Potter, not his father Nathaniel and not Nathaniel's other children or his other wives or loves or acquaintances, not anyone, and only I now do so, think of her, […] (*MP* 77)

In addition to calling attention to her own special relationship to Elfrida, the narrator emphasizes her paternal great grandmother's courage and frames her suicide as a dignified choice that possesses counterhegemonic qualities.

Narrating and inventing the specificities of the lives of Mr. Potter's parents enables the narrator to represent the people and examine the circumstance responsible for Mr. Potter's individual emergence and existence. The parents' narratives, like their son's, however, also exhibit representative qualities that call on the reader to ask herself who is responsible for the conditions of their existence. Since the narratives revolve around the histories of a man and a woman trapped in lives characterized by deprivation and despair, they represent the (Afro-Caribbean) colonial experience as characterized by endless cycles of suffering and dysfunction from which generations of subalterns – referred to as "the despised" (*MP* 67) in Kincaid's African diaspora novel – cannot escape. Both Elfrida's and Nathaniel's narratives contribute to the novel's project of representing history as a malevolent (or, at the very least, as an indifferent) rather than a progressive force. By calling attention to precisely those narratives that are often absent or strategically omitted from the grand narratives of 'History,' Kincaid's African diaspora novel clearly challenges the Humanist notion that 'History' is inherently progressive.[40] Since the daughter-narrator – like Kincaid herself – has access only to a few official records, such as Mr. Potter's birth certificate, his death certificate and his parents' death certificates (*MP* 100), the novel itself becomes a

[40] See also Braziel for a discussion of how *Mr. Potter* participates in "the Caribbean quarrel with History" as described by Glissant (Braziel 2006: 134 ff.).

unique kind of 'historical' narrative that seeks to redress the lack (or non-existence) of historical records and historical narratives about a subaltern group whose experience testifies to the fact that history is not inherently progressive. Negotiating postmodernist and (feminist) postcolonial impulses, Kincaid's employment of and engagement with history and historical narrative in *Mr. Potter* can only be characterized as idiosyncratic. While, in a postmodernist impulse, she uses the historical past as raw material in ways reminiscent of Fredric Jameson's reconceptualization of the historical past in his 1984 essay, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," private and world history as well as historical narratives continue to be meaningful referents for Kincaid in ways that they are not for most self-described postmodernists. Kincaid's narrative establishes her narrator's paternal genealogy as a referent precisely because the narrator seeks to understand her present both in relation and in distinction to her own and her father's past.

The daughter-narrator repeatedly draws the reader's attention to the fictionality of the narrative paternal genealogy she creates; apart from the scant data provided in the official birth and death records, all the details that constitute the individual life stories as they are represented in the novel are, in fact, entirely her creation:

> And Roderick was my father but he could not read or write either, Nathaniel Potter only made Roderick Potter and he was my father but he could not read or write, he only made me and I can read and I am also writing all of this at this very moment; at this very moment I am thinking of Nathaniel Potter and I can place my thoughts about him and all that he was and all that he could have been into words. These are all words, all of them, these words are my own. (*MP* 48)

Even if Mr. Potter had not already died at the time when the narrative is being created, in the mind of the narrator, the fact that he remained literally and metaphorically illiterate, has always clearly put him at a disadvantage vis-à-vis his daughter, who in the act of creating can claim the kind of authority of interpretation over the father's life that was denied to Mr. Potter in his lifetime. As her meta-narrative comments demonstrate, she seems to be aware of the responsibility that falls to her as a result of this unique configuration. In addition to problematizing the subjective nature of her account, she makes transparent the power imbalance inherent in writing about an illiterate father whom she despises and whose legacy she rejects. While the narrator judges her father for his failures, condemns his denial of her and confesses to the pain caused by "having a line drawn through [her]" (*MP* 142) as an illegitimate child, she attempts to offer a comprehensive portrayal of her father and repeatedly admonishes herself and the reader to really "[s]ee the small boy" (*MP*

78) when she represents and invents both quotidian and formative moments form his childhood.[41] The representation of these moments, in which Mr. Potter is a helpless, vulnerable, fatherless and soon also motherless child, allows the daughter-narrator and the reader to recognize that Mr. Potter, too, fell victim to his circumstances and the history of the region into which he was born before he ever became so indifferent to others that his indifference became the means by which he hurt those women and children in his (limited) circle of influence. The narrative illustrates the different ways in which Mr. Potter himself had "a line drawn through him" (*MP* 102) before he passed on this legacy to his daughter. The phrase is clearly overdetermined in the narrative, since it does not simply describe the situation of being an illegitimate child, on whose birth certificate a line has been drawn where the name of the father is supposed to be recorded. The condition of 'having a line drawn through oneself' negatively effects a person's entire life and can even, as in Mr. Potter's case, describe the condition of 'having a line drawn through one's very self' (*MP* 100). The phrase thus carries connotations of destructiveness, damnation, (un/deserved) punishment, futility, existential abandonment, and an existence characterized by limited or no choices in a (post-)colonial setting. As the narrator explains:

> And "A line runs through him" is something I heard my own mother say (her name was Annie Richardson) to someone, a friend of hers I suppose, and I do not now know, which is to say I do not remember, the very first time I heard her say this, but I knew in a way I cannot explain that she was referring to my father, that is, Mr. Potter, and when she said, "A line runs through him," that was not a good thing, I knew she meant that. "A line runs through him," as a curse, that he was a bad man and on top of that he was doomed. I did not know then what made a man doomed and I do not know now, what makes a man doomed. Mr. Potter was born in nineteen hundred and twenty-two and he died in nineteen hundred and ninety-two at seventy years of age. All men are born and then die at some time or another and that would seem to be a natural turn of events, this borning and dying, but when Mr. Potter died his death seemed deserved, his death seemed a punishment, his death was accepted with an impatient gratitude, for a line had been drawn through him and he had no way of erasing it, he did not even know that this line, which passed through him, existed. (MP 101-102)

Before the narrator voices these damning verdicts, however, she continues to painstakingly map her father's development from abandoned little boy into the man capable of hurting her so much that she is compelled to narratively exorcise his ghost and his legacy.

[41] The imperative to "see the small boy" and its variations, such as "see him," are repeated almost twenty times within what amounts to roughly four pages of text (*MP* 77-81).

After his parents' deaths, Roderick's cycle of suffering continues as he starts living with the Shepherds, people "who could not love him, who could not love anything at all, and neither could he, Dickie, who was not yet Mr. Potter (*MP* 81). Mr. Shepherd, who as "the headmaster of a school for wayward boys" embodies the inefficiency and the destructive power of the colonial education system, oversees his continuing "degradation in the world" rather than his development into a confident, independent young man (*MP* 102). The narrative insists that the man who despised Mr. Potter when he should have valued him passed on a contaminated, destructive legacy to the young man:

> […] and he passed on to Mr. Potter the love of contempt for all that was vulnerable and weak and in need and lost and in pain, and he passed on to Mr. Potter a love of self and the love of appearing before people well dressed, wearing a nicely pressed and clean pair of trousers, a nicely pressed and clean shirt, a tie, polished shoes, and a cap worn in such a way that everyone who saw Mr. Potter when wearing his cap thought of him as always being in a pleasant mood. (MP 103)

The description of Mr. Potter as a jovial, philandering young man who attaches much importance to his appearance recalls Marshall's description of Selina's father, Deighton Boyce. Marshall's narrative, however, explicitly demonstrates how Deighton's love of clothing and finery as well as his exuberant personality result from his experience and fear of being degraded for being a black man both on Barbados and in the U.S. Similarly, Deighton's abdication form his paternal responsibilities is framed rather differently than Mr. Potter's; Deighton is represented as insecure and self-destructive rather than as contemptuous and destructive of those more vulnerable than himself. Even though Deighton and Mr. Potter share characteristics that can be traced back to experiences of alienation as colonial subjects, Kincaid's African diaspora novel offers a far less compassionate portrayal of the father figure, who is deliberately rendered as an unlikeable character. More so than in *Lucy*, the reader is put into a position where, like the narrator, she, too, oscillates between moments of identification and moments of acute and uncomfortable disidentification. While the narrative deliberately creates moments in which both the narrator and the reader are enabled and required to empathize (identify) with each of the characters and their (representative) experiences, including Mr. Potter's, the African diaspora novel also creates strategically placed and cleverly paced moments that enable both the narrator and the reader to disidentify with Mr. Potter.

3.2.3 Disidentifying with and Eradicating the Negative Paternal Legacy

Particularly those passages in which the narrator attempts to give an account of her father's life as it intersects or, more precisely, fails to intersect with her own demonstrate why she feels compelled to disidentify with the father and his legacy. Since contact between father and daughter has been almost nonexistent throughout the narrator's life, the first-person narrative's negotiation of this process is limited to comparing and contrasting their first and their last (non-)encounter. The narrator provides different versions of her first encounter with her father when she was still a child. While some details of that encounter vary from version to version, the crucial elements remain the same. In telling, retelling and revising the account of the first meeting, narrator compels herself and the reader to repeatedly confront and attempt to make sense of Mr. Potter's rejection of her and his total abdication from his paternal duty. Furthermore, the narrative returns to and repetitions of the same decisive scene enable the narrator to examine and articulate how the rejection, which is represented as varying slightly in intensity and intent, has emotionally affected her. The first version of the encounter describes how the narrator, as an "innocent" four-year-old (*MP* 125) and in obedience to her mother, attempts to walk up to her father to ask him for money for writing paper. The narrator waves at him and greets him. In her recollection, these simple actions gain enormous significance, since they are reinterpreted by the adult narrator as her early avatar's attempt to claim the father:

> […] I had waved at him, I had stood before him and wished him a good morning, and I had said, through gestures only, that he was mine and I was his, […], that the seemingly invisible spaces between two people who shared a common intimate history were impossible to destroy. (*MP* 125).

The choice of the word 'spaces' instead of 'bonds' is striking in this passage, but it fittingly describes the situation of father and daughter, since the emotional, experiential, temporal, social distance between the two simply cannot be bridged ('destroyed').[42] It is therefore unsurprising that during their first encounter the father neither recognizes nor reciprocates the daughter's claim on him:

> And when Mr. Potter saw me wave he did not frown on me, he did not dismiss me with a wave of his hand, he did not curse under his breath my very existence, he only rolled his

[42] The passage can also be read as a comment on the African diaspora project. To the extent that the father is constructed as a representative of those parts of both the African diaspora legacy/past and its present-day experiences that are unavailable to or resist comprehension and appropriation by diasporized people like Kincaid/the narrator, it expresses skepticism regarding the question of whether an 'intimate history" is sufficient to overcome significant difference in the present moment.

> shoulders, both at the same time, forward and backward, backward and forward, and looked at the spot on the street which I occupied, […]. (*MP* 125-126)

Focusing on the ways in which the father failed to react in an unambiguously negative or rejecting manner, rather than on his indeterminate action, the rolling of his shoulders, the narrator's description anticipates precisely those more unambiguous rejections by the father that she claims to recall in her subsequent rehearsals of this encounter later in the narrative. She concludes the description of her only childhood encounter with her father with the statement: "Not only did he ignore me, he made sure that until the day he died, I did not exist at all" (*MP* 126). The father's refusal to acknowledge his daughter is experienced as a continuous assault on the narrator's identity or even as a threat to her very existence. It takes the narrative longer, however, to fully acknowledge and narratively flesh out the fact that it is this existential battle between father and daughter that drives the novel. Even though the narrator remains unable to fathom the reason(s) for her father's indifference or rejection of her, her narrative returns to the scene are crucial to the narrator's process of disidentification as it is performed by the novel, since they unmask the father and force the daughter to confront her ambivalent feelings toward him. Every time the narrative returns to the first encounter and offers a slightly modified version of events to the reader, the narrator's lingering emotional distress is put into relief, as is the fact that, with regard to the father, she remains caught in the role of the little girl, who, through her mother's narration of the events, "[has] come to see [her]self [as] waving to Mr. Potter, waving and waving to Mr. Potter" (*MP* 126). Of all the versions that the narrator offers of the events, the one in which she recounts how she is sent by her mother to ask her father for money for either writing supplies or schoolbooks only to be dismissed as through she "were nothing to [him]" (*MP* 146) most memorably captures the daughter's past but still emotionally present humiliation by the father:

> One day when I was about four years old, the age at which reality and apprehension of reality and bewilderment and uncertainty made up my world completely, I stood in the shadow of Mr. Shoul's garage and waited for Mr. Potter, […], and I waited and waited, and waiting seemed so natural to me then, […], and his friend George Martin said he would not come, but I waited all the same, and then Mr. Potter came, driving a car with the brand Hillman or Zephyr stamped on it, and when he saw me, he waved me away as if I were an abandoned dog blocking his path, as if I were nothing to him at all and had suddenly and insanely decided to pursue an intimate relationship with him. "Eh, eh," said Mr. Potter. (*MP* 146)

Filtered through the mind of the adult narrator, the encounter encapsulates the father-daughter dynamic as she must have experienced it throughout her childhood. Cast in the role of a powerless, waiting supplicant, hoping to catch sight of the father even though the odds are stacked against her, the little girl is flatly dismissed and rejected by her father, who may or may not have recognized her because, like all his daughters, she has inherited his nose (*MP* 168). Since the narrative stresses that the narrator is one of "many little girls" (*MP* 122) for whom Mr. Potter refuses to take financial and emotional responsibility, it establishes her as part of a larger group of female children and women who have been denied "the protection of [Mr. Potter's] patrimony" (*MP* 129). As such, it demonstrates that the narrator's story has representative qualities, and it persuasively illustrates the material deprivation and emotional suffering that one human being is capable of causing when colonial traumatization is coupled with patriarchal privilege. In all variations of the first meeting, Mr. Potter's words, like his motives, remain as incomprehensible to the reader as they remain to the narrator.[43]

Later, the narrator modifies her accounts of her first encounter with Mr. Potter and points to the unreliability of both her memory and her account, when she says:

> I saw him from across the street and from across the street I asked him for money to buy books that I needed for school, but I do not remember any of this, it is only that my mother has told me so and my mother's tongue and the words that flow from it cannot be relied upon, she is now dead (*MP* 154).

At this point in the narrative, the reader has, of course, already become aware of the fact that the fictional character of Mr. Potter is the narrator's to "make" and "unmake" (*MP* 158). She is also aware of the fact that the narratives that are being presented by the narrator offer neither representations of a verifiable historical past nor a conventional, realistic autobiographical account but are rather part of her artistic (re)creation of her paternal genealogy.

[43] The image of "an abandoned dog" that is perceived as a nuisance and driven away is striking in this passage and effective on a number of levels. Mr. Potter's flat dismissal of the little girl who happens to be his daughter not only enables the reader to gauge the degree of pain that the father's rejection has caused his daughter but also forces the reader to recall how contemptuously he treats those more vulnerable than himself. Furthermore, it also recalls the very beginning of the novel, when Mr. Potter fails to recognize how the sight of a pregnant dog relates to his life. The appearance of dogs in the novel also establishes an intertextual connection between *Lucy* and *Mr. Potter* based not solely on a noticeable overlap between the novels' principal characters but also on shared imagery. In *Lucy*, a pregnant dog attaches herself to the mother figure. The narrative establishes similarities between Lucy's equally pregnant mother and the pregnant dog while emphasizing that they are both "unmaternal" (*L* 151).

The narrator's second encounter with Mr. Potter takes place when she has already left Antigua and become an established author whose life has become "far removed from its origins" (*MP* 166). Attempting to reverse the power dynamics that characterized their first meeting, the representation of the second meeting raises questions of authority, voice and revenge. The living, literate narrator conceives of herself as holding power over Mr. Potter's (narrative) life; no longer unacknowledged and of no consequence to her father, she represents herself as a central figure in his life: "And I am now the central figure in Mr. Potter's life as he has been in mine without either of us knowing it" (*MP* 153). Although this time she can claim to narrate the encounter from her own memory, the second meeting of a lifetime between the then 33-year-old narrator and her father reads as almost unreal or dreamlike:

> And Mr. Potter hovered over it, my life, with his line drawn through me and I was alive and would be for a long time, a time beyond his imagining. And at that time, […], he came into my life like a dying insect drawn to a heated glassy surface, or like a dying insect drawn to the stilled surface of a pool of water. He was dying then and I was living in a place far from where I was born, comfortably. But how was I to know that he was dying, for he did not tell me, he did not know it himself. And Mr. Potter and I were standing in a room with three windows and the room was in a house and the house had many rooms and each room had at least two windows, sometimes three windows, sometimes four windows, but each room was part of this entire house in which I now lived. (*MP* 165-166)

The comparison of the father to a dying insect demonstrates that the narrator's sense of Mr. Potter's physical, economic, and moral inferiority and prefigures the daughter's later confession that she would like to see her father dead. Before she confesses to these thoughts, however, she recalls in detail how the encounter with the father led her to literally and metaphorically find her voice:

> And the light grew dim and then darkened and then completely disappeared because in the middle of everything I found my voice, not my nose, which was there and dominated everything and would not go away, but my voice, and I said to Mr. Potter, who was standing across from me in only one of the many rooms in which I lived then: What should I call you? How should I address you? What is your name to me? When wanting your attention, how can I get it? And I asked him plainly in this straightforward way: What am I to call you? And that very question itself, What am I to call you? seemed to rearrange not only a singular world but a whole system of planetary revolutions, for in that simple statement, and it was a statement, not a question, I raised the issue of what he was to all

> these girls and what he was to himself and who was he to me as he stood before me in that room, one of many in the house in a city in the temperate zone (*MP* 168)

The fact that the question "What am I to call you" is said to "rearrange not only a singular world but a whole system of planetary revolutions" (*MP* 168), indicates that the scene does not revolve only around the narrator's personal genesis and her positionality vis-à-vis her father but transcends the level of individual human beings, suggesting the need to approach Mr. Potter's life and legacy as part of a grander historical narrative – perhaps even as part of the large scale evolution that Braziel describes as "Caribbean genesis" (Braziel 2006:139). Even in a reading of the scene that does not identify metaphysics and creation myths as its primary foci, this passage remains important because in it the narrator's discovery of her voice – the voice that permits her to challenge the father and begin to disidentify with him – is enabled by her recognition that she is connected to other African diasporic female (semi-)orphans like herself. As their spokeswoman or, better, their 'spokesdaughter,' she challenges Mr. Potter and all he represents for his failure to be a father to any and all of them. The daughter-narrator's ability to identify with African diasporic female orphans and their suffering and, what is more, to derive affirmation and authority from this act represents its own rearrangement of "a singular world" (*MP* 168).. While, for Lucy, a true identification with those who suffer, especially with those whose experience and legacy of suffering resembles her own, is impossible since it endangers her individualist stance, the narrator of the African diaspora novel endeavors to establish her paternal genealogy not only for her own benefit but also for that of the other daughters, who – so the narrative insists – can only make sense of themselves and their worlds "through [Mr. Potter] and with him" (*MP* 168). It is also the narrator's recognition of her connectedness to (female) others that enables her to insert moments of identification with her paternal grandmother, Elfrida Robinson, into the narrative when she begins the process of inventing and imaging the missing pieces of her paternal legacy after Mr. Potter's death in 1992.

Since Mr. Potter fails to react to the narrator's allegations, she imagines different, ever more violent courses of action:

> And at that moment, should anger have surged through me like a force unpredictable in nature, should I have wished my father dead, should I have gone beyond mere wishing and walked over to him and grabbed him by the throat and squeezed his neck until his body lay limp at my feet, should I have thrown him out the window and then looked to see him lying in a lifeless, decorative puddle of blood, tissue, and bones on the sidewalk, should I have

> wished him somewhere else and something else and not related to me in any way at all at that very moment? (*MP* 169)

Even though her desire to disidentify with Mr. Potter is acutely palpable in this passage, she is unable to formulate even this non-violent and entirely comprehensible desire as a direct statement of intent. It is only later that she comes to openly admit to her anger at her father and confesses that she wished him dead: "And I did wish him dead and I did want him dead and I wanted my moments past, present, and future to be absent of him, but he did not die then and I never saw him again and again or ever again and then he died" (*MP* 169-170). While the narrator has through the act of recollecting both confronted her negative and 'undaughterly' feelings for her father and revealed her struggles to the reader, the narrative refuses to entertain the notion that Mr. Potter is capable of experiencing equally complex emotions. The narrator suggests that the father was not affected by the encounter in any way and can thus "smooth[ly]" return to the "everydayness" and the "ordinariness" of his life (*MP* 171). Here the narrative does not simply seek to establish another difference between the narrator and her father, but rather performs another act of denial that robs Mr. Potter of his subjectivity. The narrative's numerous acts of denial make for uncomfortable reading. Not only do they appear to be partially motivated by the narrator's desire for revenge, they also create the portrait of a man of limited intelligence, limited skills and limited emotional range that is eerily reminiscent of the portrayals of different groups of enslaved and colonized people in Western colonial discourses that have sought to legitimize the colonial project. At the same time, the narrator warns her reader of the danger of misrepresentation as she repeatedly draws attention to the subjective nature of her account and her own biases regarding her father. In an almost cynical contribution to the discussion of the question of whether the subaltern can be heard/speak and how/if those who represent subaltern groups can avoid misrepresenting them, the narrative almost entirely refrains from employing direct speech. It has the narrator imagine the thoughts of those characters to whom she ascribes the ability to think. Mr. Potter's thoughts, when he is capable of thoughts at all, characterize him as intellectually and emotionally limited. His direct utterances are limited to seven passages in which he utters or is said to utter his characteristic, incomprehensible "Eh, eh." (*MP* 173).

Returning to the topic of Mr. Potter's death and burial, the novel's last section again renders visible the narrator's ambivalent, even contradictory, emotions and impulses regarding both the father's life and death and their representation and memory. The narrator's first discussion of the circumstances of Mr. Potter's funeral with the cemetery's

grave master details her not necessarily satisfying search of the exact location of the grave and focuses on the way in which the events of her father's funeral brought into relief his flaws, perhaps even his crimes. Not only is Mr. Potter's gravesite "a worn-down mound of earth" (*MP* 51) difficult to locate, it is also obviously uncared for, which indicates that, except for the narrator, no one any longer shows any interest in him and the preservation of his memory. Moreover, the grave master's mediated recollections of Mr. Potter's funeral reveal that the entire funeral ceremony was overshadowed by torrential rain, strife and violence within his extended family and Mr. Potter's daughter's accusation that he raped her. While the passage certainly enables the narrator to disidentify with Mr. Potter and invites the reader to do the same, even this less than elegiac first description of Mr. Potter's funeral reminds both the narrator and the reader of Mr. Potter's double status as both someone who has caused suffering and someone who suffered: "So much suffering was attached to Mr. Potter, so much suffering consumed him, so much suffering he left behind" (*MP* 52). Whereas the penultimate section of the novel primarily negotiates the ultimate confrontation between one particular daughter and one particular father, the last section initially seeks to (re)establish the notion that Mr. Potter must be read not only as an individual father figure but also as a representative type. Covering much temporal and thematic ground, the last section takes the reader back to a time before the narrator's birth but after the arrival of both Mr. Shoul and Dr. Weizenger and his wife. While the passage evokes and again paratacticly connects the individual experiences of rupture and dispersal of the three orphaned men, it is quick to remind the reader that neither their diasporic lives, lived alongside each other, nor their deaths, happening in quick succession, connected them in particularly meaningful ways. The narrator to frame Mr. Potter's destructive existence as directly related to the colonial project and its various acts of violence. When she states that "Mr. Potter dies, he died again and again, and he also died and again, and he also died only once, in the way that all people do, just die, die, and die" (*MP* 180), she points to the physical, psychological and epistemological destructions wrought by colonial slavery and in its aftermath. The individual experiences these as 'everyday deaths' that chip away at and destroy a person's life and self. At the same time, the sentence also invites the reader to recall and reconsider the different ways in which the narrative has Mr. Potter die and how it kills him (his subjectivity) again and again through its acts of denial. At the same time, the narrator acknowledges, and also asks the reader to acknowledge, the suffering of those who have been more recently displaced for different reasons. While this section does not refrain from criticizing and ridiculing the three men, it nevertheless takes

a more elegiac form than all prior sections. As the representation of Mr. Shoul's and Dr. Weizenger's lives demonstrates, suffering is something to be endured rather than escaped and something one is shaped by rather than something that one can overcome, transcend or even transform. As such, it fails to establish common ground among people. For the narrator, it does, however, retrospectively explain parts of her father's behavior. While she does not lament his passing, she is enabled to lament his suffering and redress his lack of voice:

> […] and only because I am his daughter, for I have his nose, and because I learned how to read and how to write, only so is Mr. Potter's life known, his smallness becomes large, his anonymity is stripped away, his silence broken. Mr. Potter himself says nothing, nothing at all. How sad it is never to hear the sound of your own voice again and sadder still never to have had a voice to begin with. (*MP* 189)

Reiterating information from the first section of the novel and thus drawing attention to the novel's circularity, the passage recalls Mr. Potter's parents, his birth, his childhood and his adult life. It also provides condensed versions of the lives of the two other diasporized characters, Mr. Shoul and Dr. Weizenger, before one last time insistently calling on the reader to open her senses to the experience of key moments not only from Mr. Potter's life but also from the narrator's life. Where earlier in the text the narrator admonished her reader to 'see' Mr. Potter as a small boy, she now demands that the reader "[h]ear" and even "[t]ouch" Mr. Potter (*MP* 193-195).

At the end of the novel, the narrator has established her paternal genealogy, disidentified with its most harmful parts and reached the kind of understanding of her father and of herself and her past that prevents the passing on of negative paternal legacy to future generations:

> And this line that runs through Mr. Potter and that he then gave to me, I have not given to anyone, I have not ceded to anyone, I have brought it to an end, I have made it stop with me, for I can read and I can now write and I now say, in writing, that this line drawn through the space where the name of the father ought to be has come to an end, and that from Mr. Potter to me, no one after that shall have a line drawn through the space where the name of the father ought to be, and that through him coming through me, everyone after that shall have a father and a mother and so will inherit twofold the great cauldron of misery and small cup of joy that is all of life. (*MP* 100-101)

Rather than, in a signature postmodernist move, ultimately destabilizing the narrative she has created and doubting that knowledge can liberate her, the narrator has

compiled, created and invented the kind of knowledge about her African diasporic paternal genealogy that liberates her to say: “Mr. Potter was my father, my father’s name was Mr. Potter” (*MP* 195) because she is no longer afraid to be contaminated by his legacy.

4 Edwidge Danticat – Positioning the Haitian *Dyaspora* within an African Diaspora Framework

> Edwidge Danticat: "I consider myself a writer of the African Diaspora—Haitian, Caribbean, and African as well." (Smith 2017: 30)
>
> "The more Haiti appears weird, the easier it is to forget that it represents the longest neocolonial experiment in the history of the West." (Michel-Rolph Trouillot 1990: 5)

Ever since Edwidge Danticat's appearance on the American literary scene in the early 1990s, it has been impossible to divorce the accomplished, best-selling author of literary fiction from the passionate and vocal advocate for social justice both in her adopted homeland, America, and in her country of origin, Haiti. Danticat's belief in and her fight for social justice and equal rights for disadvantaged, overlooked and/or disenfranchised women and minorities informs her fiction as well as her 2010 essay collection *Create Dangerously – The Immigrant Artist at Work* and politically-engaged writing for magazines, such as *The Progressive*, *The Nation* and *The New Yorker.*

In both her first novel, the ethnic female *Bildungsroman Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), and her 2004 African diaspora novel,[1] *The Dew Breaker,* Danticat's engagement with and her conceptual and spatial reconfiguration and expansion of the African diaspora concept is routed through narratives of individual and collective cultural trauma.[2] Only by reading these two narratives in conjunction and by approaching them in dialogue with one another can the full scope of Danticat's spatial and conceptual expansion of the notion of the Caribbean-American diaspora and ultimately the notion of a global African diaspora be appreciated. Thematically, the two narratives are not only linked by the representation of strikingly similar traumatic experiences; they are also linked by their focus on children's struggles to build or maintain relationships or connections to their mothers, fathers or parental figures. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory* the reader accompanies the first-person-narrator,

[1] The individual chapters that comprise *The Dew Breaker* have been described as both chapters in a novel and short stories that form a short story cycle. I read *The Dew Breaker* as an African diaspora novel whose rhizomatically interconnected story chapters meet the programmatic and aesthetic needs of the African diaspora novel as Danticat envisions it.

[2] According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, "[c]ultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves inedible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 2001: 1).

Sophie, as she traces her matrilineage. In *The Dew Breaker* the reader is invited to accompany the different protagonists of the nine interrelated story chapters as they probe their patrilineages. But whereas Sophie eventually reclaims parts of her matrilineage, the characters in *The Dew Breaker* continue to probe and scrutinize their patrilineages without ever reclaiming them. Tellingly, it is in narratives about characters who struggle to come to terms with their matrilineage or patrilineage that Danticat also ponders the question of what the concept of a global African diaspora – a condition that has often been cast in terms of being forcefully and irrevocably severed from the African motherland/fatherland – could mean in both a Haitian and a diasporic Haitian-American context. While *Breath, Eyes, Memory* seeks both to underscore similarities between Haitian history and cultural practices and those of African Americans and to (re)establish past and present ties between the two communities, African American influences play only a minor role in *The Dew Breaker*. Danticat's African diaspora novel prioritizes, in that order, Haiti and its '*dyaspora,*' in the U.S., the Caribbean as region, and Africa as continent whose influence on contemporary Haitian and Caribbean life and customs continues to manifest itself. Like Danticat herself, many of the characters in *The Dew Breaker* negotiate what it means to live in Haiti's 'tenth department,' "the floating homeland, the ideological one, which joined all Haitians living outside of Haiti, in the *dyaspora*" (*CD* 49).

Attending to the traumas suffered by Haitians and Haitian Americans during the Duvalier dictatorship[3] and in its wake, the two novels I discuss in this chapter can be – and have been[4] – characterized as trauma narratives that are part of and continue a number of different but intersecting literary traditions.[5] While Danticat herself tends to emphasize her

[3] When François Duvalier ('Papa Doc') first became president of Haiti in 1957, he had U.S. backing and many observers believed that the middle-class physician, who had some previous government experience, would lead Haiti into a more stable political and economic future. Even though Duvalier promised democratic reforms and civil rights when he first came to power, his (unofficial) militia almost instantaneously began their attacks on different opposition forces and the press. Duvalier's militia troops, which later came to be known first as the *Tontons Macoutes* then as *Volontaires de la Sécurité National* (National Security Volunteers), were instrumental in securing Duvalier's power because they enabled him to systematically terrorize the Haitian population. In 1964 François Duvalier became President for Life. After his death in 1971, his 19-year-old son, Jean-Claude Duvalier ('Baby Doc'), succeeded him. In 1986 he was ousted but granted exile in France (Dubois 2013: 312-13; 320-364).

[4] For other readings of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* as a trauma narrative, see, for example, Francis (2004) and Kalisa (2009). For readings of *The Dew Breaker* as a trauma narrative, see, for example, Kaussen (2007), Kalisa (2009), Collins (2011) and Fuchs (2014).

[5] Just as Danticat's tricky positionality – as a diasporic Haitian-American women writer who writes about and is often understood to speak for Haitians (and Haitian-Americans) – defies easy categorization along lines of nationality and identity, so do her works fail to easily align themselves with any one literary tradition or canon. For studies of Danticat's connection to a tradition of Haitian and francophone Caribbean literature, see, for example, Kalisa (2009) and Adjarian (2004). Danticat's work has frequently been read in comparison to that of Haitian authors Marie Vieux Chauvet, Jan J. Dominique and that Guadeloupian writer Maryse Condé. Jacques Roumain has also been identified as an important influence. As the author of numerous forewords, Danticat has regularly used her platform within the English-speaking literary world to support Haitian writers, especially women writers whose work has recently been translated into English.

connection and indebtedness to Paule Marshall's work – particularly to *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and Marshall's celebration of "the poets in the kitchen" (Marshall 2001; Lyons 2003: 185; 193-94)[6] – *Breath, Eyes, Memory,* also aligns itself with a female, feminist, activist African American literary tradition begun by Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, as it continues the literary engagement with trauma – particularly the trauma of incestuous sexual molestation and abuse – that was central to the writings of African American women writers during the 1970s and 1980s.[7] At the same time, both novels can also be read in the context of immigration narratives that began to be published by mostly female diasporic writers in the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s and that represent and revolve around different traumatic experiences of violence and loss.[8] Since Haiti has been both a 'post-colonial' and a 'postcolonial' nation for far longer than other island nations in the Caribbean, Danticat's novels also negotiate the individual and collective traumas that are attached to or result from Haiti's particular postcolonial condition. In addition to pointing to the lingering effects and affects of Haiti's varied colonial history of Spanish invasion and later of plantation slavery under French rule, the novels discussed in this chapter represent the relationship between Haiti and the U.S. as a neocolonial one. Danticat suggests that, in many ways, Haiti and its inhabitants and diasporic nationals have been at the mercy of a currently indifferent and disinterested neocolonial power whose political, military and economic aspirations in Haiti (and to a lesser extent in the larger Caribbean region) have remained largely unacknowledged.

As trauma narratives, both of Danticat's novels illustrate and explore what has been described as a central "contradiction" or paradox of trauma theory (Luckhurst 2008:82):

> There seems to be a flat contradiction between cultural theory that regards narrative as betraying traumatic singularity and various therapeutic discourses that see narrative as a means of productive transformation or even final resolution of trauma. (Luckhurst 2008:82)

Seeking to respect the singularity of trauma, Danticat's *Bildungsroman* and her African diaspora novel rely on the kinds of narrative techniques that tend "to bring conventional narrative techniques to their limit" and that have been identified as typical of or at the very least common for (postmodernist) trauma fiction (Whitehead 2004: 82). As both novels find ways to "internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience

[6] On the back cover of Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* (1995) Paule Marshall is quoted as praising Danticat's work in the following terms: "Spare, luminous stories that read like poems . . . [These] tales more than confirm the promise of her magical first novel. A silenced Haiti has once again found its literary voice."

[7] It is, of course, also possible to view Harriet A. Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) as the beginning of an African American literary engagement with sexual abuse and trauma.

[8] See for example: Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* (1990) and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter* of *Maladies* (1999).

within their underlying sensibilities and structures" (Vickroy 2002: 3), the narrative techniques employed in them, rather than simply representing trauma, also perform it. In doing so, both novels require the reader to consider both the possibilities and limits of the representation of trauma. In addition to demonstrating how trauma tends to challenge, resist, and escape conventional narrativization, the novels also probe the notion advocated by Judith Herman and others[9] that the act of telling the trauma story has transformative and perhaps even restorative/healing potentialities. According to Herman, "[t]he fundamental stages of recovery [after trauma] are[:] establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community" (Herman 1992: 3). Read in light of Herman's assertions, Danticat's *Bildungsroman*, in particular, functions both as a trauma narrative detailing the distinct but intersecting traumas of Sophie and her mother and as a survivor's narrative detailing Sophie's attempts to reconnect with her Haitian community and her matrilineal heritage.[10]

By rhizomatically interlinking a number different trauma narratives in her multifocal and, in comparison to the female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman*, more fragmented African diaspora novel, Danticat is able to take up many of the issues and ideas first addressed in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and complicate them with regard to plot and narrative technique. In *The Dew Breaker* she explicitly explores the stories of the (mostly male) perpetrators of state-sponsored or state-condoned violence in Haiti's recent history as well as in the present. Even though the *Bildungsroman* insists that its characters are affected and even haunted by the violent parts of Haiti's recent history, the narrative's focus on its protagonist and her matrilineage does not allow for any prolonged exploration of the (predominantly male) perpetrators' lives and motives. While the perpetrators of state-sponsored and state-condoned violence in *Breath, Eyes and Memory* remain faceless and without a(n individual?) story of their own, *The Dew Breaker* brings into focus criminals' and perpetrators' faces and stories as the novel acknowledges and scrutinizes a patrilineal legacy that is dominated by self-perpetuating cycles of private and public violence and

[9] Laub (1992), esp. pp. 68-71.

[10] Sophie's reconnection with her matrilineal heritage and her exploration of African diasporic traditions also enables the *Bildungsroman* to show that approaches to trauma and trauma discourse need not be limited to a narrow Eurocentric framework. The issue of whether or not trauma studies originary Anglo-European/Eurocentric framework and the scholarship that has evolved around it are able to accommodate non-Eurocentric trauma experiences remains controversial. While as early as 1995 Cathy Caruth argued that "In a catastrophic age […] trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves" (Caruth 1995: 11), Stef Craps and Gert Buelens observe that scholarship in trauma studies homogenizes trauma since so far it has been "almost exclusively concerned with traumatic experiences of white Westerners" (Craps and Buelens 2008: 2). As a result, they identify the need to "postcolonializ[e]" trauma studies (Craps and Buelens 2008: 3).

victimization. While *The Dew Breaker* also addresses questions of forgiveness and healing, its nuanced negotiation of these issues calls attention to those instances when healing and/or forgiveness are difficult or even impossible to achieve.

Giving voice especially to women's experiences of violence and trauma as well as of resilience and healing, both of Danticat's novels participate in an explicitly feminist knowledge production about gendered violence and the traumas that (may) result from it. In her study, *Violence in Francophone African and Caribbean Women's Literature* (2009) Chantal Kalisa emphasizes that

> [f]or women writers, literature offers a privileged medium through which they attempt to resolve the tension between historical or external forms of violence associated with colonialism and postcolonial conditions and internal forms of violence that result from unfair cultural, social, and political rules based on gender. (Kalisa 2009: 3)

She goes on to explain that in "examin[ing] the effects of rape, sexual violence, and physical and physiological abuses on women" women writers aim to "remove intimate violence from its private and domestic sphere and interweave it with public discourses of violence" (Kalisa 2009: 3). Since they demonstrate that the boundaries between state-sponsored (i.e. public) violence and domestic (i.e. private) violence are, in fact, artificial constructs, both *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *The Dew Breaker* are prime examples of texts that stage the kinds of interventions that Kalisa describes. Both texts also succeed in raising the reader's awareness of two facts: Violence in its many shapes and forms --- public/private violence; direct/indirect violence; present/past violence; state-(condoned)/criminal violence, physical/psychological violence; physical/epistemological violence and sexual/non-sexual violence; traumatic/-non-traumatic violence (to give only some examples) --- permeates all areas of life. And all human beings, but particularly those commonly referred to as marginalized, voiceless or subaltern, are extremely vulnerable to it. The novels, however, also demonstrate that at least in some cases, it is possible for those who have been affected by traumatic violence to regain agency and transform their story from one of victimization into one of survival. Although the narratives involving the character of the title-giving dew breaker raise the questions of whether perpetrators of violence are capable of change and of whether they might be redeemed, it ultimately remains the individual reader's task to answer those questions.

4.1 Questions of Representation: or Of 'Others,' 'Monsters' and 'Misfits'

Since Danticat seeks to represent, engage and give voice to precisely those people who are commonly absent form or silenced in public discourse, both *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *The Dew Breaker* negotiate the ethics of representing individual and collective traumas and, in a second step, examine how the interwoven tales of individual, collective and national trauma point toward the larger social and political concerns that she also addresses as an activist and public intellectual. In the context of both Haiti's national history and the history of the Haitian-American diaspora, it is especially important to investigate how her narratives ensure that the represented traumas do not themselves become branded as pathological and as a sign of Haitians' essential Otherness. The idea that Haitians are essentially Other – very often "repulsive[ly]" (Dash 1997: x), irredeemably and contagiously so – continues to dominate U.S. discourses about Haitians living on the island as well as discourses about Haitians or Haitian-Americans residing in the U.S.[11] In order to be able to recognize and evaluate how Danticat positions herself vis-à-vis this discourse and attempts to stimulate a counter discourse both in her fiction and as a public figure, it is necessary to rehearse some of the most important tendencies and patterns in U.S. public discourse about Haiti, Haitians and to some extent also about Haitian-Americans. While the majority of discourses about the Caribbean and Caribbean immigrants to the U.S. still in some way perpetuate the idea of the Otherness of the people from the different Caribbean islands, discourses about Haitians remain especially effective in disseminating and perpetuating the idea of an essential Otherness, because Haitians are often represented as being either irredeemable and/or in some way contagious. While President Trump's by now infamous alleged insult of Haiti, El Salvador and African nations as '—hole countries' clearly marks a new low point in U.S. official government discourse about Haiti, the tendency to pathologize the island and its citizens is not new. Recent examples of U.S. discourses that employ and thus reinforce the idea of Haitians' 'irredeemable Otherness' can be found both in history writing and in newspaper coverage in the wake of Haiti's 2010 earthquake. Both in histories of Haiti, such as Philippe Girard's, and coverage of the 2010 earthquake in the respectable newspapers such as the *New York Times*, Haiti is represented as a "Paradise Lost" or a "Third-World Hotspot," (Girard 2005) that is, as a

[11] In the preface to the second edition of his study of national stereotypes, *Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination* (1997), Michael J. Dash laments that due to America's "demonic" perception of Haiti, the country has "for too long" been "relegated to a state of repulsive otherness" (Dash 1997: x).

place – and people – beyond hope and beyond redemption.[12] This stance is indicative of what might be termed 'Haiti-pessimism.' Analogous to "Afro-pessimism" (Gikandi 2011: 9),[13] Haiti-pessimism is the tendency to view Haiti's severe and enduring social and political problems as a consequence of the country's or the people's inherent and pathological tendency to fail.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot was one of the first scholars to trace the "fiction of Haitian exceptionalism" (Trouillot 1990: 11; qtd. in Bonilla 2013: 152) and criticize its persistence in scholarship. In "The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean, and the World" (1990), he characterizes the psychological, social and political effects of this fiction as follows:

> When [Haitians] are told over and over again that Haiti is unique, bizarre, unnatural, odd, queer, freakish, or grotesque, [they] are also being told, in varying degrees, that it is unnatural, erratic, and therefore unexplainable. [They] are being told that Haiti is so special that modes of investigation applicable to other societies are not relevant [there]. (Trouillot 1990: 5; qtd. in Bonilla 2013: 152)

Considering the political reasons for and implications of the trope, Trouillot argues that Haiti's alleged exceptionalism functions as a persistent, strategic, and extremely harmful framing narrative perpetuated in the West because "[t]he more Haiti appears weird, the easier it is to forget that it represents the longest neocolonial experiment in the history of the West" (Trouillot 1990: 5; qtd. in Bonilla 2013: 153).[14]

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[12] The following examples from *New York Times* articles published in the wake of the 2010 earthquake illustrate how the idea of Haitian Otherness and 'irredemability' is reinforced and disseminated even by 'quality news outlets,' such as the *New York Times*. These reports tend to stress the prevalence of violence and crime: "Post-quake Haiti is a dangerous place […] Hundreds of thousands of displaced people still live in poorly policed camps where they fall prey to rapes, robberies, and other violent crimes. Prison escapees have regrouped in urban slums; drug traffickers and armed gangs are back in business" ("Editorial: Building a Safer Haiti" 2010). The also foreground the victim-status and the passivity of the affected population: "A few yards away, hundreds of families displaced by the earthquake languished under tents and tarps, bathing themselves from buckets and relieving themselves in the street as barefoot children frolicked on pavement strewn with garbage" (Romero 2010). As the title of the article, "Quake Accentuated a Chasm That Has Long Defined Haiti," suggests Romero also discusses the extreme discrepancies in wealth distribution on the island. Furthermore, it can be said to praise the resilience of Haitian people in a way that Danticat has grown suspicious of: "[…P]eople often talk about the resilience of Haitian people, they are extraordinary resilient, but one worries that that resilience, you know, I think some people take that resilience to mean that we can suffer more than other people, and I think that's the danger" (Holdengräber 2017: 95).

[13] Simon Gikandi defines Afro-pessimism, "which emerged as the figure of representing Africa during the political and economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s" and which has since "become the dominant idiom through which African experiences are recuperated and filtered" as "the belief that the continent and its populace is hopelessly imprisoned in its past, trapped [in *sic*!] a vicious cycle of underdevelopment, and held hostage to corrupt institutions" (Gikandi 2011: 9). Gikandi further observes that Afro-pessimism "[fits] neatly into traditional Western notions of Africa as the 'other' of modern reason and progress" and "seems to be the only logical response to political failure and economic stagnation in Africa" (Gikandi 2911: 9).

[14] See Bonilla (2013) for a detailed reading of Trouillot's analysis and critique of the trope of Haitian exceptionalism.

Danticat has repeatedly and directly addressed the stigmatizing discursive patterns that create, perpetuate and spread the idea of Haitian Otherness. While most recently these comments have addressed President Trump's alleged insult of Haiti, proposals to change U.S. immigration laws, the U.S. response to the 2010 earthquake and the issues revolving around rebuilding efforts in its wake, at the beginning of her career, she addressed the processes of stigmatization of Haitians surrounding the HIV/AIDS crisis and the theories claiming that the origins of the virus lay in Haiti. Using the notions of contamination and infection to frame discourses on Haiti and Haitian refugees and immigrants in the 1980s and early 1990s, the U.S. media and U.S. government agencies increasingly began to construct Haitians as a threat to national security and public health. At the time, Haitian immigrants and refugees were usually referred to as 'boat people' and had to fight misrepresentation and discrimination because government agencies such as the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and CDC (Centers for Disease Control) began to target them in their campaigns to raise public awareness of the spread of HIV/AIDS via carrier groups.[15] Like many members of the Haitian-American community, Danticat has spoken out against these discriminatory and scientifically incorrect CDC labeling practices and has described their lingering and damaging effects in a number of essays and interviews[16] as well as in *Breath, Eyes, and Memory,* where shortly after her arrival in the U.S., 12-year-old Sophie Caco is urged to lose her accent quickly so that other students will not bully her for being Haitian and having AIDS because: "Many of the American kids […] accused Haitians of having AIDS because they had heard on television that only the 'Four Hs' got AIDS --- Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals, and Haitians" (*BEM* 51). Discrimination and stigmatization are among the very first things Sophie is taught about and encounters in her new home.

Like many debut novelists, Danticat attempts to reinforce her authority and authenticity as a writer by working within a well-established and respected literary genre as well as by writing from personal experience. As in the cases of Marshall and Kincaid, the use of the traditional *Bildungsroman* genre can be read as legitimizing and authority-lending strategy that enables the (female) 'ethnic' or diasporic writer to exhibit her mastery of a prominent 'world'-literary' genre to those who might doubt her literary skills, while at

[15] Haitians were one of the feared 4Hs, groups of people considered to be HIV carriers: homosexuals, hemophiliacs, heroin-users, and Haitians. See also Kaussen 2009: 185-186.

[16] See, for example, Edwidge Danticat's article, "Don't Let New AIDS Study Scapegoat Haitians" (2007). After its initial publication, this particular article was reprinted by a number of news outlets, and it has since been widely circulated in newsletters and online forums. Danticat has also identified a great, lingering desire for respectability among many Haitian-Americans as one of the aftereffects of the stigmatization many of them experienced in the U.S. during the AIDS crisis and in its wake (*CD* 32).

the same time affording her the opportunity to continue and adapt the genre to address issues that arise as a result of experiencing socialization processes (as a female) in the diaspora. The long tradition of African diasporic autobiographical writing that includes Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (1794), Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845) and Malcolm X's *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) attest to the genre's counter-hegemonic potentialities and its efficacy in resisting, intervening and dismantling dominant discourses of, for instance, slavery, colonialism, and racism, and autobiographically inflected female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane*, such as *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, also seek to resist, intervene in, and perhaps even dismantle, dominant discourses of racism, sexism and post-and neo-colonialism. Moreover, autobiographically-inflected narratives offer a certain degree of protection against criticism of exaggeration and misrepresentation. While many debut novelists, male and female, seek authority and legitimacy by narrating or fictionalizing their own authentic experiences, being a diasporic writer may increase the perceived need to legitimize and give authority to one's writing. The biographical similarities between Danticat and Sophie should not, however, be taken to indicate that there is total identity between the author and her narrator.[17] In fact, it is where their stories diverge and Danticat's reliance on potentially authenticating autobiographical experiences becomes less overt that the novel accomplishes its most interesting work.

While Danticat uses both her novels and her platform as a public figure to challenge discriminatory discourses of otherness, she is not invested in creating 'respectability narratives' about either the Haitian or Haitian-American communities she represents. Rather, both novels discussed here demonstrate her investment in exploring ways to represent the multiplicities and complexities of the Haitian diaspora experience in an ethically grounded, compassionate and politically conscious manner that avoids categorically othering, exoticizing or otherwise exploiting the lived experiences and realties that serve as her inspiration, while at the same time calling attention to those problems that many in that community would rather not acknowledge. Both the relatively 'unmotherly,' mentally unstable mother figure in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and the perpetrator father figures in *The Dew Breaker* – particularly the character of the dew breaker himself –

[17] Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince in 1969. Her parents immigrated to the U.S. in 1971 and 1973. She and her brother were raised by relatives in the Bel-Air neighborhood of Port-au-Prince until 1981, when she and her brother were able to rejoin their parents and two U.S.-born siblings in New York City. After high school she attended Barnard College and earned an MFA in creative writing from Brown University. She currently lives in Miami with the husband and two children. In the course of her career she has been the recipient of various awards, including the prestigious MacArthur Foundation Genius Award.

are not only portrayed as highly complex but also as characters who require the reader to explore questions of Otherness.

The representation of the custom of 'virginity testing' in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* requires a similar engagement with Otherness and/or cultural difference. Danticat has repeatedly commented on the kind of backlash that her representation of this particular custom caused, especially among factions of the Haitian-American community. Although the novel was met with much critical acclaim on its initial publication in 1994 and gained even more appreciative readers when it was praised by Oprah's Book Club in 1998 for its evocation of "the wonder, terror, and heartache of [Danticat's] native Haiti—and the enduring strength of Haiti's women" ("*Breath, Eyes, Memory*"), some Haitian-Americans felt insulted by Danticat's representation of the custom of 'virginity testing'– a practice that, Danticat claims, used to be quite common in Haiti, but which she insists was not part of her own upbringing.[18] Danticat admits that negative responses to her work, such as "'You dishonor us, making us sexual and psychological misfits.'" (*CD* 32) and "'You are a parasite and you exploit your culture for money and what passes for fame'" (*CD* 33), affect her and goes on to explain that, as an immigrant artist, she does not set out to malign her community but also does not want to censor herself (*CD* 33). In 1999, however, she appended an explanatory letter to Sophie to the original text of the novel in which she explicitly states that "*Not all Haitian daughters are tested as you have been*" (*BEM* 236; italics in the original) and insists on the singularity (*BEM* 236) and fictionality of Sophie's story (*CD* 32). The letter can clearly be understood as a conciliatory gesture toward certain factions of her Haitian-American readership. Danticat not only seems to feel a particular kind of responsibility for and duty toward both members of the Haitian-American community and the people in Haiti but is also aware of her heightened visibility as a spokesperson – or, in the U.S. context, perhaps even *the* spokesperson – for both Haitian-Americans and Haitians living in Haiti. She clearly endeavors to avoid "dishonor[ing]" Haitians and "make[ing them] sexual and psychological misfits" (*CD* 32). The explicit depiction of sexual(ized) violence in both her *Bildungsroman* and her African diaspora novel does not, however, lend itself to easy incorporation into an immigrant community's narrative of its own respectability and successful integration or assimilation, yet both novels demand that this aspect of (recent) Haitian and Haitian-American history be acknowledged and dealt with.

[18] "[T]hough I was not saying that 'testing' happened in every Haitian household, to every Haitian girl, I knew many women and girls who had been 'tested' in that way" (*CD* 33).

4.2 *Breath, Eyes, Memory* – Expanding the Female *Bildungsroman's* Circular Trajectory

Circles, cycles and circular trajectories play an important role in the plot and formal structure of *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. On a formal level, Danticat's retrospective first-person narrative of female (ethnic) *Bildung* both confirms and challenges Mary Anne Ferguson's observation that female *Bildungsromane*, unlike their male counterparts, tend to follow a "largely circular" pattern or trajectory that keeps girls and young women in the domestic sphere or draws them back into it (Ferguson 1983: 228). In addition to the fact that a twentieth-century female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman* about migration to the North necessarily involves female mobility – both geographical and social – on a larger scale than its nineteenth-century predecessors, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* demonstrates how the circular trajectory of a young diasporic woman's *Bildung* simultaneously expands upward and outward – particularly since she seeks to break a vicious cycle of transgenerationally transmitted trauma and simultaneously to reclaim valuable parts of her matrilineage. After twelve-year-old Sophie travels to America to be reunited with her mother, she returns to Haiti twice: once after she has married the African American musician, Joseph, and given birth of her own daughter and a second time to bury her mother. Her journeys to Haiti can be read as circular because they represent her return to a rural domestic sphere. But rather than stunt her development, these returns prompt significant moments of insight and enable her maturation. Since the reader thus sees Sophie move onto a higher experiential and emotional plane, her developmental trajectory is best described as following a circular upward trajectory that ultimately enables her to articulate her story. The fact that Sophie ultimately comes to forgive her mother, Martine, and that she is able to reclaim parts of her matrilineage can be read as her 'coming full circle.' Yet, in coming full circle in Haiti she is able not only to break the vicious cycle of oppression and abuse that has determined the lives of women in her family for generations but also to reject this part of the matrilineal legacy. Neither she nor her daughter, Brigitte Ifé Woods, will be forced to replicate Martine's life. The novel also suggests that those circular and cyclical structures that continue to be part of Sophie's life at the end of the novel, such as her journeys between the U.S. and Haiti or her regular group therapy sessions, are helpful rather than harmful. Her insistence on maintaining a connection to both her new and her old home as well as her ability to form bonds and emotional attachments outside of her immediate matrilineal family circle show that her developmental trajectory is also moving outward.

4.2.1 The Mother-Daughter Conflict and Cycles of Matrilineal Traumatization in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*[19]

Although both Martine and Sophie Caco[20] become victims of sexual(ized) violence, only Sophie succeeds in taking steps toward dealing with the trauma resulting from this violence. Sophie's circular upward and outward journey toward independence and self-awareness is represented as inextricably intertwined with the cycles of separation and reunion that characterize the troubled mother-daughter relationship, and this enables the narrative and its narrator to repeatedly confront and work through this challenging dynamic and the traumas it involves.

Like Marshall's and Kincaid's *Bildungsromane*, Danticat's novel presents the mother-daughter conflict as *the* central conflict with which the protagonist has to contend in order to grow up, gain independence, and heal herself. Like the mother characters in Marshall's and Kincaid's novels, Danticat's mother figure exerts enormous influence over her daughter, since she is in a position to limit not only Sophie's independence but also her agency and even her social contacts. Despite some striking similarities to the mother-daughter conflicts in Marshall's and Kincaid's *Bildungsromane*, Danticat's representation of this conflict differs from theirs by foregrounding the traumatization of the mother figure and exploring the condition of motherlessness in a more detailed manner. By recalling the different stages of her conflict with her mother, the narrator in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* enables the reader – and herself – to recognize how in the Caco family individual and collective cultural traumas are passed on from mother to daughter. As the stages of the conflict are rehearsed and worked through, Sophie's retrospective first-person narrative ultimately enables her to contextualize and reevaluate her mother's actions.

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[19] Because of the novel's cyclical nature, it is necessary in several different stages of the argument presented in this section to return to the same material to show how the novel simultaneously accomplishes multiple things in the same passage or sequence of passages.

[20] The family name alludes to both a crimson bird indigenous to Haiti and the uprising of *caco* farmers against the U.S. occupation of Haiti. Paraphrasing Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (1994: 89), Valerie Kaussen states that "[i]t is estimated that up to one-fifth of the population participated in the *caco* insurgency, which was the object of a swift and violent military operation; 50,000 peasants likely died during the U.S. military's *anti-caco* campaigns and another 600,000 (out of 2 million) probably fled the country" (Kaussen 2007: 34). Odile Ferly points out that "Sophie's grandfather, Charlemagne Le Grand Caco, brings to mind the legendary *caco* farmers who rose against the U.S. occupation in 1918, headed by the 'great *caco'* Charlemagne Péralte. Sophie's suggestive patronymic, which significantly she inherited from her mother, is thus a tribute to the Haitian peasantry, to their resilience and resistance" (Ferly 2012: 63, italics in the original). According to Danticat, "[f]ew Americans are aware their country once occupied ours, and for such a long time. This is not surprising, for as one Haitian proverb suggests, while those who give the blows can easily forget, the ones who carry the scar have no choice but to remember. […] The 1915-1934 U.S. occupation is not the only problem that Haiti has or has ever faced in the last nine decades. Yet it is one more hurdle that the country has had to overcome in a long and painful cycle of destruction and reconstruction, self-governance and subjugation" (Danticat 2005)

Whereas Sophie represents her time Haiti in the care of her aunt, Atie, in almost Edenical terms, her relocation to New York City puts an end to her childhood innocence because it forces her situate her narration within a larger social context. The narrator recalls witnessing manifestations and consequences of the political turmoil that characterized Haiti in the time leading up to the coup against Jean- Claude Duvalier without being able to properly comprehend them. Not only does she almost miss her flight because of riots in the streets of Port-au-Prince, but she also overhears that the little boy sitting next to her on the plane has had to flee the city because his father, a government official described as "*très* corrupt" and "*[t]rès* guilty of crimes against the people" (*BEM* 38), was killed in the riots. While, the narrator seems relatively unaffected by these events, her reunion with her mother reveals that, far from being mere witnesses to the violence incited by Haiti's political regime, she and her mother have, in fact, been deeply affected by the violence routinely inflicted on Haitians during the dictatorship. Very shortly after Sophie's arrival in the U.S., she learns that Martine fled Haiti after giving birth to her, because she had hoped to escape the haunting memories of her rape by a faceless and nameless man whom Sophie later assumes to be a member of the *Tonton Macoutes*. Throughout the novel, Martine is described as a representative of those Haitians who need to but are largely unable to forget while Sophie slowly comes understand her need to remember and articulate both her personal history and that of others (*BEM* 95). Although Martine neither blames Sophie nor confronts her with the details of the crime that resulted in her conception, Sophie remembers being rendered speechless by her mother's revelation about her origin:

> "The details are too much," she said. "But it happened like this. A man grabbed me from the side of the road, pulled me into a cane field, and put you in my body." I did not press to find out more. Part of me did not understand. Most of me did not want to. (*BEM* 61)

Confiding in the reader and foreshadowing the novel's ending, she admits that it "[i]t took me twelve years to piece together my mother's entire story" and that "[b]y then, it was already too late" (*BEM* 61) for Martine. As the narrative progresses, the temporal and cognitive distance between 'narrating I' and 'experiencing I' that is expressed in this statement gradually disappears.

Despite their reunion in the diaspora, the two characters, who are – biologically – mother and daughter, do not really successfully fulfill the social roles of mother and daughter in relation to one another. As the novel's representation of Martine stresses her 'unmotherly' and even 'monstrous' features, Sophie's story becomes a variation of the

motherless child trope that has been crucial to many works by writers of the African diaspora.[21] This development is foreshadowed on the first pages of the novel, since Sophie recalls being haunted by nightmares of her biological mother when she was still in Haiti:

> I only knew my mother from the picture on the night table by Tante Atie's pillow. […] I sometimes saw my mother in my dreams. She would chase me through a field of wildflowers as tall as the sky. When she caught me, she would try to squeeze me into the small frame so I could be in the picture with her. I would scream and scream until my voice gave out, and then Tante Atie would come and save me from her grasp. (*BEM* 8)

Just as the scene establishes Martine as the 'monster in the night' who attempts to miniaturize and imprison Sophie in the picture frame, Atie is established as Sophie's 'real' mother and her savior.[22] The narrative repeatedly juxtaposes the two characters and favorably contrasts the kind of mothering and the matrilineal legacy represented by Atie to those represented by Martine. Although Sophie and Atie do not meet again in person until after Sophie has herself become a mother, their bond has endured their geographical/spatial separation. Even as an adult, Sophie's recollections of experiencing maternal care and comfort involve Atie rather than Martine (*BEM* 110, 114). Sophie admits that she also remembers and longs to be with Atie, while Martine tests her virginity. Since Atie is associated with positive aspects of the matrilineage, such as strength, caring for others, and the storytelling tradition, all of which Sophie seeks to maintain, she feels comfortable leaving her twenty-week-old infant in Atie's care rather than Martine's when she visits her family in Haiti. (*BEM* 115).

When Martine and Sophie are first reunited in the U.S., both do their best to be each other's mother and daughter. It is clear from the beginning, however, that, even though she tries hard, Martine, who is still haunted by nightly dreams of her rape in the cane field, is reluctant and/or unable to fulfill the mother role as well as her sister had done. The text subtly but repeatedly questions Martine's motherly qualities by offering a highly ambiguous representation of her behavior. It is possible to read the fact that she

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[21] In the introduction to her study, *The Motherless Child in the Novels of Pauline Hopkins*, Jill Bergman traces the development of the topos of motherlessness. Regarding the African American experience, she reads motherlessness as a metaphor not only of the condition of being torn from one's homeland and unwelcome in one's host country, but as a "metaphor of national alienation" (Bergman 2011: 3) She adds that since it "[j]oin[s] the private and the public, the individual and the communal, the topos of motherlessness describes the psychological and political condition of African Americans in the post-Reconstruction United States and offers an enabling rhetoric for rebuilding that fragmented community" (Bergman 2011: 2). As a metaphor expressing both national alienation and the condition of being severed from one's county/continent and culture of origin, motherlessness, of course, also resonates in colonial, postcolonial and neocolonial contexts, including but not limited to the postcolonial/neocolonial African diasporic condition explored in the novels that I discuss in this study.

[22] The representation of Atie's role also calls to mind the notion of the "othermother" (Troester 1984: 13).

keeps a doll that does not much resemble Sophie but used to serve as a stand-in for her real daughter as indicative either of how much she longs to be reunited with her daughter or of how little she is, in fact, equipped to deal with either the physical or the emotional needs of her real child (*BEM* 45-46). Likewise, her bleached, wan skin and her inability to physically support Sophie certainly indicate fatigue from working very long hours and being kept awake by nightmares, but these physical facts also underline her inadequacy and give her a zombie-like, nightmarish aspect that recalls Sophie's earlier nightmare (*BEM* 41-42, 46, 58).[23]

The very first night Sophie spends with Martine in the U.S. establishes a pattern in which, at night, the conventional roles of caregiver (adult) and receiver of care (child) are reversed. Prior to falling asleep, Martine is represented as attempting to assume her role as a parent, when she promises Sophie that she "[is not] going to be alone" (*BEM* 46) and promises (or threatens) that "'[she] will never let [Sophie] go again.'" (*BEM* 49). In view of the fact that it is Martine who later 'tests' (i.e. sexually assaults) Sophie when she suspects her of having had intercourse with a man, these statements, rather than merely expressing her happiness about the reunion with her daughter, take on a more possessive and sinister character. Since, during the night, Sophie is tasked with waking her mother up, Martine, or better, Martine's nightmares burden Sophie with adult responsibilities for her mother's wellbeing and thus initiate a role-reversal between mother and daughter or adult and child that becomes more and more pronounced as Martine's mental health deteriorates in the course of the novel. As attested in the mirror scene that follows the first night they spend together as mother and daughter, the act of witnessing and intervening in Martine's night terrors has already irrevocably changed Sophie and aged her beyond her years. Instead of being reassured by the familiar image of her face in the mirror, she is distressed by the strange, new features that greet her on her first day in a foreign country:

> I looked at my red eyes in the mirror while splashing cold water in my face. New eyes seemed to be looking back at me. A new face altogether. Someone who had aged in one day, as though she had been through a time machine, rather than an airplane (*BEM* 49)

But like the protagonists of the other female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* discussed in this study and like those of most immigration narratives, Sophie is ready to take on the challenges that have been put in front of her: She is willing to adapt herself to her new life

[23] The figure of the zombie (*zombi*) is evocative of both potentially monstrous violence and victimization. Describing the zombie in Haitian folk culture as "a soulless husk deprived of freedom [, …] the ultimate sign of loss and dispossession [,]" Joan Dayan links its emergence and evolution in Haitian (and the greater Caribbean) culture to the experience of the Middle Passage as well as to the victimization of slaves under colonial plantation slavery (Dayan 1995: 37, 36).

in New York, and she vows to remain her aunt's child while at the same time becoming a good daughter to her mother (*BEM* 49). As Martine's nightmares persist, mother and daughter develop a nightly routine in which Sophie takes on the role of her mother's savior. Waking her mother from nightmares of being raped in the cane field, Sophie "save[s Martine's] life" over and over again (*BEM* 81). It is only later, after the birth of her own daughter and at a point in her life when she has no contact with her mother, that Sophie confesses to how deeply she has been affected by her mother's suffering. The novel thus suggests that Sophie is herself, to some extent, traumatized by her mother's trauma:

> Some nights I woke up in a cold sweat wondering if my mother's anxiety was somehow hereditary or if it was something that I had "caught" from living with her. Her nightmares had somehow become my own, so much so that I would wake up some mornings wondering if we hadn't both spent the night dreaming about the same thing: a man with no face, pounding a life into a helpless young girl. (*BEM* 193)

Sophie' traumatization through and her recollection of (the narrative of) her mother's trauma calls to mind Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which she defines as

> the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before — to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. (Hirsch 2012: 5; italics in the original).

Although Sophie's confession of being plagued by nightmares of a rape scene takes place after she has been sexually assaulted by her mother and has turned to 'doubling' [dissociating] as a coping mechanism,[24] the *Bildungsroman* does not explore more fully to

[24] The narrative offers the following contextualization of the practice of 'doubling:' "There were many stories about our ancestors having *doubled*. Following in the *vodou* tradition, most of our presidents were actually one body split in two: part flesh and part shadow. That was the only way they could murder and rape so many people and still go home to play with their children and make love to their wives" (*BEM* 155-156). In addition to drawing the reader's attention to Haiti's complex political history, the passage can be read as suggesting a continuum between victims and perpetrators because it claims that perpetrators, too, resort to 'doubling' as a coping mechanism, which suggests that they, too, are traumatized by the violence they commit. In this context, it is important to recall Dominick LaCapra work on "perpetrator trauma" (LaCapra 2001: 79). He explains that '[v]ictim' is not a psychological category. It is, in variable ways, a social, political, and ethical category. Victims of certain events will in all likelihood be traumatized, and not being traumatized would itself call for an explanation. But not everyone traumatized by events is a victim. There is

what extent Sophie nightmares can be traced back to the traumatic experience of being tested by her mother. Sophie exhibits additional symptoms of being traumatized: She admits to having had suicidal thoughts (*BEM* 193); she grows to hate her body and develops an eating disorder; she clearly dislikes sexual intercourse but she 'doubles' [dissociates] rather than resisting her husband (*BEM* 156; 200).[25] In Martine's case, the narrative explicitly links the pain and traumatization caused by rape to those caused by the testing custom, since, on being reunited with Sophie in Haiti, she declares:

> "[…] I realize standing here that the two greatest pains of my life are very much related. The one good thing about my being raped was that it made the testing stop. The testing and the rape. I live both every day." (*BEM* 170)

Before Martine is able to come to this realization and make this confession to her by then adult daughter, however, the narrative continues its exploration of how the mother-daughter conflict intensifies until it escalates into sexualized violence.

Even though the novel's first-person narrative allows more insight into Sophie's feelings of motherlessness than into Martine's emotions, the novel's overall exploration of the theme of motherlessness indicates that Martine may feel just as motherless as her daughter – if not more so. While to the American outside world she appears to be a fit mother and a hard-working immigrant who 'made good,' she is plagued by self-doubts and feelings of guilt. To the poor rural community of her origin, some of her lifestyle choices in the U.S., such as her sexual relationship with the Haitian lawyer Marc Chevalier and the fact that she was raped and is an unmarried woman with a child are at odds with its patriarchal standards. By these standards and to some extent even in her own eyes Martine remains tainted by the act of violence inflicted on her. Despite having spent the majority of her life in the U.S., she remains unable to free herself of the oppressive standards upheld both in her community of origin and – to a lesser degree – in the Haitian diaspora community in which she now lives and with which she identifies. Martine's fear both of reinforcing her trauma and of being judged has made it impossible for her to return to Haiti for longer periods of time, thus effectively cutting her off from those resources provided by

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a possibility of perpetrator trauma which must itself be acknowledged and in some sense worked through if perpetrators are to distance themselves from an earlier implication in deadly ideologies and practices. Such trauma does not, however, entail the equation or identification of the perpetrator and the victim" (LaCapra 2001: 79).

[25] Francis claims that Sophie "associates her husband with her mother's violator" and argues that it is feeling compelled to have sex with Joseph – who is Martine's age rather than Sophie's – that causes Sophie to suffer from nightmares that resemble her mother's (Francis 2004: 82). This reading, though based on some textual evidence, contradicts Danticat's own description of Joseph as a reincarnation of "the dream boyfriend of [her] late teens" (Danticat 2015).

the matrilineage that Sophie experiences as positive forces and seeks to reclaim. Martine whose favorite spiritual is "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" (*BEM* 215) and who, like Sophie, is represented as feeling disconnected from both her motherland Haiti and her biological mother (Ifé), cannot overcome the condition of literal, cultural and spiritual motherlessness in any way, whereas, in the course of her development, Sophie is able to strengthen and reestablish her ties to Haiti as well as to her matrilineage. Read in this light, Martine and Sophie can be read as members of a transtemporal, transspatial and transnational genealogy of 'motherless children' originating in the genocide of colonial conquest, the forceful removal of enslaved people from Africa and the subsequent strategic and systematic disruption of family structures under slavery and links members of the African diaspora. Danticat explores issues of cyclical African diasporic motherlessness in order then to posit and affirm the significance of an eclectic matrilineal tradition as a counter-weight to cultural and spiritual orphanhood or motherlessness. Since *The Dew Breaker* further complicates the issue by scrutinizing formerly ignored or disavowed parts of the patrilineage, it is important to establish how and to what effect *Breath, Eyes, Memory* employs both the condition of motherlessness and the figure of the 'monstrous' parent. In addition to enabling the reader to contemplate how long-established colonial strategies aimed at disrupting and thus pathologizing African diasporic family structures continue to haunt families and societies in the postcolonial/neocolonial present in ever-new shapes and forms,[26] the negotiation of both the condition of motherlessness and of Martine's unmotherly, 'monstrous' traits in Danticat's first-person narrative returns the authority over the representation of this issue and these traits to one of the characters in the narrative who has been most affected by them, thus creating a particular kind of fictitious 'self-representation' that gains additional force through the autobiographical similarities between Sophie and her author.

In view of the predominance of discourses – and especially U.S. discourses – that 'other' Haitians and Haitian experiences, Danticat's narrative choices bespeak her desire to intervene in these discourses and regain some control over them. By focusing on the experiences of women and narrating the events from a female witness/victim point-of-view, the *Bildungsroman* attempts to exert some discursive control over how the historical narrative about the traumatization of women in Haiti's recent past is spun. Providing a non-exploitative representation of sexual(ized) violence and trauma, the novel offers a decidedly non-masculinist, feminist perspective on the violated women and bodies it represents that also challenges Haitian and Caribbean nationalist discourses seeking to

[26] See also discussion of Hortense Spillers' analysis of these issues in 3.2.2.

coopt women's bodies and the notion of the mother for their political agendas. The novel insists that any serious cultural or societal engagement with the individual and cultural traumas of the Haitian people requires those producing and participating in these discourses to acknowledge the complexities and intricacies of Haitian/Haitian-American experiences and history. Since it is impossible to fight one stereotypical representation with another, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* does not present an immigration story about the seamless integration and assimilation of a model immigrant and her daughter. Rather, it acknowledges and asks its diverse readership to acknowledge that immigrants and refugees carry their often traumatic pasts with them. For those who, like Martine, escape regimes characterized by state-sponsored injustice, violence and terror this means carrying a burdensome traumatic past into the present moment. As Martine's story demonstrates, the past is an active force that continues to shape and, in some cases, perhaps even to determine the present. The *Bildungsroman* represents her festering, largely unacknowledged and certainly untreated trauma as the source of her 'monstrous' motherly inabilities and thus as a source of anguish not only for herself but also for her daughter. Insisting that it is vital to acknowledge the dynamics by which the largely unacknowledged individual and cultural traumas represented in the story fester and turn into traumatizing forces in their own right, the *Bildungsroman* requires its readers to face rather than shy away from the fact that traumas or, as Danticat puts it, "nightmares are passed on through generations like heirlooms" (*BEM* 234). While the novel encourages Haitian-American readers to acknowledge the existence of a cultural trauma and, if possible, find ways to give voice to the traumatic memories and postmemories existing in their midst, U.S.-American readers, especially, are required not only to acknowledge the existence of trauma within the Haitian diaspora community but also to consider the role their government and their society has played both during the Duvalier regime and in its aftermath. This dynamic is explored in more detail in *The Dew Breaker.*

While prior to the 'testing' scene, Martine motherly qualities are only subtly undermined through the narrative, the testing scene itself underscores Martine's 'unmotherly' and 'monstrous' traits. The scene portrays Martine as perpetrator and foregrounds her violent, possessive and abusive tendencies, while at the same time confirming Sophie's traumatization by and dissociation from the events. The narrative chooses to represent Sophie's traumatization by means of narrative fragmentation.

> "I thought you were dead," she said when I walked in. I tried to tell her that I had not done anything wrong, but it was three in the morning. […] "Where were you?" She tapped the belt against her palm, her lifelines becoming more and more red. She took my hand with

> surprised [sic!] gentleness, and led me upstairs to my bedroom. There, she made me lie on my bed and she tested me. I mouthed the words to the Virgin Mother's Prayer: *Hail Mary . . . so full of grace. The Lord is with You . . . You are blessed among women . . . Holy Mary. Mother of God. Pray for us poor sinners.* In my mind, I tried to relive all the pleasant memories I remembered from my life. My special moments with Tante Atie and with Joseph and even with my mother. (*BEM* 84; italics in the original)

Sophie's fragmented rendition of the Virgin's Prayer confirms Cathy Caruth's assertion that "the [traumatic] event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth 1995: 4). As trauma initially defies or resists comprehension, it also resists conventional narrativization. In a retrospectively narrated but chronologically organized first-person narration like *Breath, Eyes, Memory* the traumatic event and especially the emotional responses it evokes may thus be represented as initially overwhelming the narrator-victim and resisting more detailed and direct modes of representation/narrativization through her (Vickroy 2002: 3; Whitehead 2004: 82). While the novel does not explicitly equate the testing custom with rape; Sophie's representation of the events suggests that she views herself as the victim of a kind of sexual(ized) violence, a violation that Martine, like her mother before her, justifies by her duty to "preserve their [family's] honor" (*BEM* 208).

Since the novel insists on a continuum between the state-condoned rape of Sophie's mother during the Duvalier regime and the violence of virginity testing to which all female members of Sophie's family have been subjected by their mothers, the *Bildungsroman* itself is far less conciliatory in tone than the explanatory author's note that Danticat chose to include in the second edition of her novel. Instead of representing a more traditionally gendered and therefore perhaps more palatable/acceptable dynamic of sexual violence and terror in a totalitarian patriarchal society in which men are perpetrators and women are victims, the novel implicates women and exposes and explores their double role as both victims and perpetrators by representing the trauma caused by the testing custom as that part of the matrilineal legacy of the Caco women that Sophie eventually rejects – both for herself and for her daughter.

The full extent of Martine's transformation from mother/victim into a perpetrator can best be gauged by looking at the implications of the story of the *Marassas*, which she tells Sophie in order to distract her from the act of violation/the testing (*BEM* 84-85). In

Martine's idiosyncratic rendition of the tale of the *Marassas*,[27] the well-known twins from Haitian folklore/voodoo tradition, who are often represented as children, become "two inseparable lovers" (*BEM* 84). According to Martine, "[t]hey 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" (*BEM* 84). She goes on to claim that "[t]he love between a mother and daughter is deeper than the sea" (*BEM* 85) and accuses Sophie of betraying her: "You would leave me for an old man who you didn't know the year before. You and I we could be like *Marassas.* You are giving up a life time with me" (*BEM* 85). Clearly, Martine envisions the kind of symbiotic relationship with her daughter that would not only force Sophie to replicate her mother's life but also make it impossible for her to achieve any kind of autonomy.

The testing causes a seemingly irreparable rift between mother and daughter and the scene's representation of sexual(ized) violence firmly establishes Martine as a traumatized victim turned 'monstrous' perpetrator. Even though Martine's own trauma has been well established in the narrative at this point, the rendition of the testing scene is clearly intended to provoke the reader to ask the question to what extent Martine is to blame for her actions. Since the reader's process of evaluation and reevaluation of this issue closely follows the narrator's, she, like Sophie, can, at the end of the narrative, choose not to assign blame to Martine.[28]

Having endured the weekly ritual of testing five times and not wanting to be tested ever again, Sophie defies her mother and in an act that involves self-liberation and self-mutilation and even self-sacrifice, breaks her hymen by inserting a pestle into her vagina:

> My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle into it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet. I took the pestle and the bloody sheet and stuffed them into a bag. It was gone, the veil that always held my mother's finger back every time she *tested* me (*BEM* 88; italics in the original).

Drawing on Susan Bordo's notion of "embodied protest" (Bordo: 1989: 20; quoted in Francis 2004: 84), Francis argues that Sophie's mutilation of her own body derives from

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[27] The Haitian *Kreyól* term '*marassa*' sometimes spelled '*marasa*,' expresses the idea 'twinship.' Bellgrade Robertson explains that the 'divine twins' hold an important position in the pantheon of Voodoo gods, since they are considered to be stronger than the *Lwas* (Bellgrade Robertson 2008: 654). Most importantly, the half human, half divine *marassas*, who are commonly represented as children, embody "the notion of segmentation of some original cosmic totality that must regain wholeness [;]" they are thus associated with "abundance, plurality, wholeness, healing, newness and innocence" (Bellgrade Robertson 2008: 654).

[28] The fact that the *Bildungsroman* enables and perhaps even requires the reader to participate in the protagonist's process of reevaluating Martine's trauma corresponds to Vickroy's claim that both the person/character who listens to the testimony – Dori Laub's 'listener' (Laub 1992) – and the reader can, "through careful absorption of testimony[,]" "participate in the process of translating traumatic experience and can take part in a process of re-evaluation that this experience demands" (Vickroy 2002: 22).

her recognition that her body is the only entity over which she exerts – some – control and with which she can express protest or resistance (Francis 2004: 84).

By taking her own virginity, Sophie not only ends the testing; by following Martine's subsequent command to leave and moving to Providence, RI with her African American boyfriend and later husband, Joseph, she is also able to put physical (as well as some emotional) distance between herself and her mother. The pestle-scene thus marks the beginning of a second phase of separation between mother and daughter in the novel, since it both forces and enables Sophie to leave her domestic sphere. This scene is, however, neither the end of Sophie's *Bildung* nor the end of the mother-daughter conflict, both of which are narrated as involving three more stages: one more reunion of mother and daughter (and grandmother and aunt) in Haiti about a year after Sophie marries Joseph, Martine's suicide and her murder of her unborn child by repeatedly stabbing herself in her stomach, and Sophie's acceptance and reclamation of parts of her matrilineage when she and Martine's boyfriend, Marc, return to Haiti to bury Martine. Martine's death and her final return to Haiti to be buried facilitate Sophie's own process of healing. Through their (partial) reconciliation and the spiritual reunion established through Sophie's recognition of their shared matrilineal heritage, she is able to set both herself and her mother free.

4.2.2 Breaking the Cycle: Reconstructing the Mother's Story and Liberating the Self

Since both the genre conventions of the *Bildungsroman* and those of the trauma narrative require some form of healing and reconciliation to take place, it becomes Sophie's task to heal herself and, to some extent, her mother by piecing together, telling and (re-) evaluating Martine's story. As in both *Brown Girl Brownstones* and *Lucy*, the understanding of the self is routed through the protagonist's contemplation and exploration of the mother figure.

As an adult, Sophie has become knowledgeable about Haiti's most recent history and is thus able to provide the kind of contextualizing information that enables the reader to view Martine's rape as both her individual trauma and as symptomatic of the socio-political structures during the Duvalier regime that are represented as having turned some average citizens into predators while making others their prey:

> In the fairy tales, the *Tonton Macoute* was a bogeyman, a scarecrow with human flesh. […] *If you don't respect your elders, then the Tonton Macoute will take you away*. Outside the fairy tales, they roamed the streets in broad daylight, parading their Uzi machine guns. *Who invented the Macoutes? The devil didn't do it and God didn't do it.* Ordinary criminals

> walked naked in the night. They slicked their bodies with oil so they could slip through most fingers. But the *Macoutes*, they did not hide. When they entered a house, they asked to be fed, demanded the woman of the house, and forced her into her own bedroom. Then all you heard was screams until it was her daughter's turn. (*BEM* 138-139; italics in the original)[29]

This passage explicitly participates in knowledge production about Haiti's recent past and can be understood as interventionist to the extent that it priorities the experiences, plight and vulnerability of those who are commonly absent from the official historical record or figure merely as a statistic. Kalisa reads Danticat's writing about the atrocities visited upon the Haitian people during and after the Duvalier regime, in both *Breath, Eyes, Memory* and *The Dew Breaker*, as war writing that documents the past and thus attempts to resist destruction (Kalisa 2009: 163) – and one should add historical misrepresentation.

Since Martine is unable to do so, it falls to Sophie to transform her mother's partial and rudimentary narrative of her violation – given at the beginning of the novel – into a more detailed and comprehensible narrative:

> My father might have been a Macoute. He was a stranger who, when my mother was eighteen years old, grabbed her on her way back from school. He dragged her into the cane fields, and pinned her down on the ground. He had a black bandanna over his face so she never saw anything but his hair, which was the color of eggplants. He kept pounding her until she was too stunned to make a sound. When he was done, he made her keep her face in the dirt, threatening to shoot her if she looked up. For months she was afraid that he would creep out of the night and kill her in her sleep. She was terrified that he would come and tear out the child growing inside her. At night, she tore her sheets and bit off pieces of her own flesh when she had nightmares. My grandmother sent her to a rich mulatto family in Croix-des-Rosets […]. My mother came back to La Nouvelle Dame Marie after I was born. She tried to kill herself several times when I was a baby. The nightmares were just too real. Tante Atie took care of me. […] It took four years before she got her visa, but by the time she began to recover her sanity, she left. (*BEM* 139)

Both the narrator and the reader are enabled and required to reevaluate Martine's actions – particularly her assault on Sophie – in light of her individual and her community's cultural

[29] Donette Francis explains that the militia's choice of name contributed to and reinforced its ability to terrorize and violate Haiti's citizens with impunity, particularly women: "Duvalier's willful choice of this name --- which translates 'mythological bogeyman' and suggests 'not real' --- for his militia force enabled him to camouflage his own violations against his citizens, especially sexual violations against women. Embedded in the very word is a cultural linguistic block that already discredits the reality of women's stories of sexual abuse by relegating abuse to the realm of the unreal, or condoning abuse as appropriate punishment for a subordinate who has misbehaved" (Francis 2004: 81).

traumas. The *Bildungsroman* stages this reevaluation in Haiti, thus representing Sophie's and Martine's country of birth as the site where both their shared trauma originates and where first attempts at confrontation, reconciliation and healing are made.

When Sophie unexpectedly returns to Haiti after the birth of her own daughter and her mother follows her there to take her and her infant daughter back to the U.S., the two women reestablish contact and a tentative reconciliation is initiated. But since Sophie needs to confront her grandmother, the revered head of the Caco clan, about the damaging effects the testing custom has had on her rather than Martine, she and reader come to re-evaluate Martine's actions. As the result of a conversation that involves both the grandmother's attempt to offer an explanation and her acknowledgement of pain caused and suffered, Sophie begins to see Haitian mothers' involvement and investment in the testing custom as a symptom of living in a patriarchal society that not only normalizes violence against women in all areas of life, but for centuries has also forced women into the role of perpetrators in the name of protecting girls' 'innocence' and their chances for a good marriage. Furthermore, the grandmother reminds Sophie that she is not as powerless as she believes herself to be: "'Now you have a child of your own. You must know that everything a mother does, she does for her child's own good. You cannot always carry the pain. You must liberate yourself.'" (*BEM* 157).

Sophie takes her grandmother's advice to heart. Back in the U.S., attending her group therapy sessions is one way in which Sophie seeks to liberate herself from her pain. Here she performs a ritual in which she acknowledges the pain her mother caused her while simultaneously forgiving her mother and vowing to protect her daughter:

> "I didn't feel guilty to burn my mother's name anymore. I knew my hurt and hers were links in a long chain and if she hurt me, it was because she was hurt, too. It was up to me to avoid my turn in the fire, it was up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares, and never had her name burnt in the flames" (*BEM* 203).

Sophie's return to Haiti and her conversation with her grandmother enable her to approach her matrilineal heritage not as a monolithic, unchangeable tradition but as a cultural and spiritual legacy that is hers to shape. While she certainly admires and seeks to preserve and pass on the famed strength of the Caco women and the resilience of spirit that her grandmother embodies, she has come to realize that it is her motherly as well as feminist prerogative to reject those parts of her matrilineal legacy that bring perpetuate oppressive and violent patriarchal structures, such as the testing custom. While, through Martine, the

narrative explores the dangers involved in clinging to an essentialist conception of national culture and customs as well as of national identity, it represents Sophie's successful *Bildung* as involving both the rejection of her mother's example and the negotiation of a truly bi-national or even transnational Haitian-American identity and heritage.[30]

When they are back in the U.S. mother and daughter remain in contact, but although Sophie again becomes Martine's only confidante, she is ultimately unable to save her mother. When Martine becomes pregnant with Marc's child, she begins to hear what she perceives to be the voice of the *macoute* who raped her from inside her womb (*BEM* 216-17). As she contemplates abortion, her mental health deteriorates so much that she kills both herself and the fetus while Marc is asleep (*BEM* 224). The *Bildungsroman* represents Martine as defeated by both her past and those societal structures and mores that have made it impossible for her to admit to her rape and traumatization to anyone but the Caco women.

Since Sophie is unable to accept the mother's defeat, her funeral preparations for Martine read as an act of rebellion that the daughter commits in her mother's name:

> It was too loud a color for a burial. I knew it. She would look like a Jezebel, hot-blooded Erzulie who feared no men, but rather made them her slaves, raped them, and killed them. She was the only woman with that power. It was too bright a red for burial. If we had an open coffin at the funeral home, people would talk. It was too loud a color for burial, but I chose it. (*BEM* 227)

Sophie is driven by the desire to see her mother free at last: "'She is going to Ginea,' I said, 'or she is going to be a star. She's going to be a butterfly or a lark in a tree. She's going to be free.'" (*BEM* 228). Implying that women as severely traumatized – and as marginalized in both the U.S. and Haiti – as Martine might not experience freedom while in this world in their human form (Adjarian 2004: 90), Sophie envisions her mother's liberation as a transformation. Not only does the transformation into a star, a butterfly or a lark already suggests transcendence or, at least, the freedom to move relatively unrestrictedly, but each of Sophie's choices, including comparing Martine to Erzulie (who

[30] Comparing *Breath, Eyes, Memory* to Julia Alverez's *Yo!*, Carine M. Mardorossian reads *Breath, Eyes, Memory* as "offer[ing] and revis[ing] a nationalist rather than transnationalist narrative of legacy which represents the fragmentation of identity as an obstacle that can be overcome rather than as a given" (Mardorossian 2002: 25). Unlike Mardorossian, I read the novel as invested in revising and challenging a nationalist tradition. Furthermore, I do not understand the novel as suggesting that the fragmentation of identity always represents an obstacle to be overcome. Rather, the narrative represents those fragmentations that are the result of traumatic violations as obstacles to be overcome.

in this passage reads as a combining features of Erzulie Fréda and Erzulie-gé-rouge),[31] connects Martine to the novel's embedded narratives. These narratives combine and adept elements from Haitian folklore into narratives of 'fakelore'[32] that correspond to and underscore important moments or developments in the plot. Whitehead has pointed out that both trauma fiction and postcolonial fiction use intertextuality to incorporate those voices that have hitherto been commonly marginalized or even silenced completely (Whitehead 2004: 85-86) Through their inclusion the *Bildungsroman* not only validates the Haitian oral tradition; it also demonstrates both the oral tradition's ability to be transformed and its power to transform and liberate.

The most important act of resistance and liberation prompted by Martine's death and Sophie's second return to Haiti takes place on the cane field – "a primal site of terror for the Caco women" (Francis 2004: 87) and a constant reminder of Haiti's history as a sugar plantation colony:

> I ran through the field, attacking the cane. I took off my shoes and began to beat a cane stalk. I pounded it until it began to lean over. I pushed over the cane stalk. It snapped back, striking my shoulder. I pulled at it, yanking it from the ground. My palm was bleeding. The cane cutters stared at me as though I was possessed. The funeral crown was now standing between the stalks, watching me beat and pound the cane. My grandmother held back the priest as he tried to come for me. From where she was standing, my grandmother shouted like the women from the market place, "*Ou libéré*?" Are you free? Tantie Atie echoed her cry, her voice quivering with her sobs. "*Ou libéré*!" (*BEM* 233)

Unlike traditional *Bildungshelden* and *Bildungsheldinnen*, Sophie does not "interiorize [the manifold] contradiction[s]" (Moretti 1987: 10; italics in the original) in her life and thus perpetuate dominant social and cultural structures and narratives, rather her narrative insists that Sophie liberates both herself and her mother by exteriorizing the pain these contradictions have caused both women. Although she does not remain bodily unharmed during her attack on the sugar cane, her violence is, for the first time, not directed against herself but against an emblematic site of multiple oppressions (Francis 2004: 87). Recalling Audre Lorde's assertions about the transformative uses of anger, particularly for

[31] There are a number of different incarnations of "Erzulie, the goddess, spirit or *loa* of love in vodoun" Dayan 1994: 6) Joan Dayan explains that she embodies both the Virgin and the Venus and that her most common Haitian incarnations are: "Erzulie-Fréda, the lady of luxury and love; […] Erzulie-Dantor, the black woman of passion identified in Catholic chromolithographs with the Mater Salvatoris, her heart pierced with a dagger and as Erzulie-gé-rouge, the red-eyed militant of fury and vengeance" (Dayan 1994: 6). Dayan also stresses that Erzulie in her multiple, contradictory incarnations is without "precedent in Yorubaland or Dahomey" (Dayan 1994: 6).

[32] See explanation in section 1.5.

women (Lorde 1984), the passage suggests that Sophie has both achieved liberation and successfully completed part of her *Bildung* by correctly identifying and rejecting the sources of her oppressions and her pain. Her empowering reconnection with her matrilineage – indicated by the presence of the Caco women as both witness and affirmative chorus in the cane field – her eclectic reclamation of her matrilineal heritage as well as its creative transformation within and into her narrative completes her *Bildung.* Her decision, at the very end of the novel, to forgive her mother and to emphasize their similarity rather than their difference ("My mother was as brave as the stars at dawn. […] Yes, my mother was like me" [*BEM* 234]), is both enabled and rendered convincing because it was preceded by necessary processes of reckoning and transformative reclamation.

4.2.3 Matrilineal Heritage and the African Diaspora Project

The new-found ease with which Sophie comes to either pass on or discard the Haitian cultural customs that are her matrilineal heritage is represented as being the direct result of the learning process initiated by her encounter with and exploration of the culture and history of the global African diaspora. Significantly, when she first tries to escape her mother's hold over her, both prior to and after the testing scene, she also begins to explore a different matrilineal heritage, that of the African diaspora. Through her interactions with Joseph, she begins to notice and comment on the similarities and differences between African American traditions and culture and their Haitian counterparts. In doing so, Sophie begins to establish both a sense of cultural identity as Stuart Hall (1990) characterized it[33] and a sense of belonging that has no direct connection to her biological mother but does not fully divorce her from the Haitian culture of her childhood either. Instead, she recognizes that she is connected to both the African American experience and the Haitian experience as well as – more tentatively – to an African and/or African diasporic one. Even though the words 'Mother Africa' are not explicitly stated in the novel, the notion is implicit throughout, since the *Bildungsroman* represents a dual, somewhat reciprocal

[33] According to Hall, "[c]ultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall 1990: 394).

process in which Sophie both loses and frees herself of her connection to her biological mother and begins to appreciate the cultural and spiritual interconnectedness in the African diaspora. Particularly those passages in which Sophie narrates how she met and fell in love with Joseph, her African American husband, enable the novel to incorporate and explore the/an African American experience. The inclusion of Joseph and an explicit – though in parts rather forced – discussion of commonalities between the African American experience and the Haitian one must be understood as an insistent literary attempt to bring closer or even reconcile two communities whose relationship the narrative represents as commonly characterized by lack of knowledge about and distrust of each other. This move also enables Danticat to explicitly indicate and perhaps in some way reconcile her affiliations to the two communities.[34]

Negotiating its multiple affiliations within an African diasporic framework, the novel emphasizes the significance that the African continent holds as point of common origin within a global African diaspora project:

> "I am not American," he said. "I am African American."
> "What is the difference?"
> "The African. It means that you and I, we are already part of each other." (*BEM* 72)

At the same time, the narrative insists that Sophie's and Joseph's connection as well as the connection between the communities that they represent transcends other political categories, such as nationality and citizenship. Since, throughout the narrative, the representation of 'an American experience' is relegated to the sidelines, Joseph's rejection of a(n non-hyphenated) American identity suggest that any African diasporic bond forged in the U.S. is forged in opposition to a monolithic American national identity. While Joseph is not represented as entirely disinvested in America, his investment in the pursuit of happiness rather than in the pursuit of material gain, as well as his association with creativity and mobility, characterize him and the idea of African Americanness he comes to embody in the text as markedly different from the default notions of 'WASP Americanness' that continue to underpin the U.S.'s narrative of its own national and cultural identity.[35]

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[34] It is fair to assume that, in the early 1990s, the incorporation and discussion of what could broadly be termed and marketed as 'African American themes' also helped Danticat's debut novel to find a bigger audience.

[35] As Ella Shohat and Robert Stam remark, "the Latin American and Caribbean discussion of national identity […] has generally been premised on radical multiplicity," whereas "the dominant North American vision of national identity has generally been premised on an unstated yet nonetheless normative 'Whiteness'"(Shohat and Stam 2014: 241).

The inclusion and prominence of the Joseph character, both the couples' discussion of African and (Afro-)Haitian elements in jazz and their discovery of similarities between Louisiana Creole and Haitian *Kreyól* as well as the birth and, specially, the naming of their daughter (Brigitte Ifé Woods) indicate the novel's investment in the idea of a global African diaspora – or at the very least an investment in an exploration of the concept. It is significant that the novel does not suggest that a common ground among different factions of the African diaspora can be established solely via a shared history of forced displacement from the African continent and a shared history of enslavement of people of African descent in different parts of the world. Instead, the novel seems to suggest that people of African descent with different ethnic backgrounds, like Sophie and her husband, are able to establish common ground based on cultural similarities especially in the realms of the arts and language which can then also facilitate communication and understanding. The depiction of the couple's marital and sexual problems and Sophie's inability to reveal the full scope of her trauma, however, also demonstrates that while cultural similarities within an African diaspora framework may initially help those who actively look for them to form relationships transnationally and transethnically, neither these similarities nor the desire to communicate and to reach mutual understanding guarantees success. Joseph's initial inability to recognize Sophie's traumatization as well as Sophie's inability to verbalize it indicate that – although "trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures" (Caruth 1995: 11) – the different individual and cultural traumas within the African diaspora, while not necessarily 'unspeakable,' certainly require careful transnational, transcultural and transethnic communication, mediation and negotiation. This is especially true if – as in the case of African Americans and Haitians – one group's predominant experience of trauma is a historical cultural trauma while the other group has recently experienced individual and cultural traumas.

The representation of Sophie's and Joseph's troubles thus enables Danticat to offer a nuanced and cautious reevaluation of the curative or transformative potential inherent in a rejuvenation of the idea of solidarity among different groups within the African diaspora in the U.S. or globally. Nevertheless, in *Breath Eyes Memory* the global African diaspora project – such as Danticat understands it – is presented as a desirable alternative to a situation in the U.S. that pits African Americans and diasporic people of African descent against each other and thus withholds sources of power and identity from the communities and making them exceedingly vulnerable to many forms of discrimination in the political arena. Sophie's all-female therapy group also allows the novel to represent and explore matters of solidarity among women, particularly diasporic women of color:

> There were three of us in my sexual phobia group. We gave it that name because that's what Rena—the therapist who introduced us—liked to call it. Buki, an Ethiopian college student, had her clitoris cut and her labia sewn up when she was a girl. Davina, a middle-aged Chicana, had been raped by her grandfather for ten years. (*BEM* 201)

The self-organized group therapy sessions bring together a heterogeneous set of survivors of sexual abuse and sexual(ized) violence who need to find their voices and learn to direct their pain, blame and anger at the true sources of their suffering. They have chosen to work through their individual traumas in ways that combine 'African' approaches, such as voodoo rituals, dancing and chanting, with more established approaches to trauma therapy. Thus, in this context too, healing is made possible or, at the very least, facilitated by the freedom to choose and claim those elements of the different traditions available both within the global African diaspora and the U.S. / the West that best serve the individual's needs. The celebration of this eclectic approach to culture as well as the idea that it is, at least to some extent, possible and necessary to transform old and create new cultural narratives and traditions escapes accusations of celebrating cultural appropriation, especially with regard to customs identified as 'African,' by having the African diasporic members of the therapy group introduce these cultural forms to the other women. Danticat's use, however, of the all-encompassing 'African' instead of the more specific (and perhaps even in 1994 more appropriate) Yoruba or Igbo makes her vulnerable to allegations of homogenizing experiences and histories on the African continent.

Unlike the novel's extensive exploration and creative transformation of elements from (Afro-)Haitian culture, its exploration of an African American culture and experience can be said to sometimes resort to stereotypes and to read as forced in parts. Although the text establishes commonality between Haitian-Americans and African Americans, or, better, their representatives, Sophie and Joseph, via a common African origin and thus via the originary trauma of the Middle Passage, the novel fails to explore in more detail to what extent the African American experience in the contemporary U.S. can be characterized as diasporic or as involving cultural or national alienation. Dictating a focus on the narrator/protagonist and her matrilineage (or community) as well as on the representation her relatively successful and complete processes of *Bildung*, the genre conventions of the female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman* impede not only a more detailed exploration of male African American and African diasporic experiences; they also prevent the novel from addressing more fully the complexities and sometimes irresolvable

contradictions that characterize contemporary African diasporic experiences. Not until her African diaspora novel, *The Dew Breaker*, is Danticat able to approach the African diaspora project in ways that allow her to represent and explore these issues in their multiplicities.

4.2 *The Dew Breaker*: Circles and Circularity in the Haitian *Dyaspora*

Published exactly a decade after *Breath, Eyes, Memory*,[36] Danticat's African diaspora novel, *The Dew Breaker* returns to, expands on and modifies the exploration of the Haitian *dyaspora* experience begun in her *Bildungsroman*. *The Dew Breaker* continues Danticat's engagement with Haiti's complex history in the twentieth century, but in contrast to the *Bildungsroman's* project of reclaiming and transforming the matrilineage, her African diaspora novel explores patrilineages without ever fully reclaiming them. Staging numerous geographical and affective returns, the narratives that comprise the novel reveal numerous points of intersection across space and time: not only between the author's native Haiti and the U.S, where most of the novel's characters reside, but also between a past marred by acts of violence and terror and a present in which the reverberations and repercussions of those acts are still shaping both the victims' and the perpetrators' lives. Those narratives that focus on and are focalized by female characters, such as "The Bridal Seamstress" and "The Funeral Singer," explore female (African) diasporic solidarity and female community. Both are represented as vital to the characters' survival in a diaspora setting in which their pasts continue to haunt them and their origins make them particularly vulnerable to discrimination, discursive marginalization and isolation. Although *The Dew Breaker,* like *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, represents characters' attempts to establish their trauma stories and the novel itself can also be read as attempting to serve witness to numerous traumatic acts of violence, both those suffered and those committed, the African diaspora novel, rather than exhibiting confidence that traumas may be overcome, suggests that the future of most of its characters will continue to be affected or even haunted by the trauma, loss and pain caused decades or, in some cases, even a generation earlier. While Danticat's *Bildungsroman* explores with some confidence the possibilities of easing or significantly reducing the existing tensions between diasporic Haitians in the U.S. and African Americans within and African diasporic framework, the

[36] In Haiti, the year 2004, which marked the bicentennial anniversary of the Haitian revolution, was a year of dramatic political upheaval following the U.S. intervention that forced democratically elected Haitian president Jean Bertrand Aristide to resign.

characters in *The Dew Breaker* privilege their ties to Haiti over less tangible and possibly less productive ties to people of African descent in the U.S. As past, present or future host- and/or home country of the novel's characters, the U.S. is represented as a highly ambivalent site that offers great opportunities and poses even greater challenges. For those characters who, like Dany and Claude in "Night Talkers," voluntarily return or are involuntarily returned to Haiti, the island, too, is represented as an ambivalent site where they feel welcome but ill at ease and have difficulty fitting in.

The Dew Breaker consists of nine story chapters: three first-person and six third-person narratives that are set in a time period between the 1960s and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Rebecca Fuchs observes that the lack of a "continuous narratorial presence" (Kennedy 1995: 196; qtd. in Fuchs 2014: 160) in Danticat's text requires the reader to actively seek the connections between the individual story chapters (Fuchs 2014: 160). In this way, active readerly participation is required by both the African diaspora novel's formal structure and its numerous intertexts, references and allusions that require the reader to employ and develop her diaspora literacy. The novel's title serves as a good example of the complex and intriguing processes of cultural, linguistic and political negotiation performed in the text and required of its reader. Those *Tonton Macoutes* who tended to carry out their operations or crimes in the early hours of the morning came to be known as "choukèt lawoze" (*TDB* 131). 'Dew breaker' is one possible translation of this *Kreyól* expression. In an interview Danticat has explained that she chose the serene sounding translation 'dew breaker' not simply because she wished to stay true to the original expression but because she hoped that the term 'dew breaker' would "echo the American expression ball breaker" (Turner n.d.). For readers who are familiar with Haitian literature, the novel's title also reads as an allusion to or play on the title of Jacques Roumain's (1907-1944) Marxist peasant novel, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1944), which was translated into English by Langston Hughes and Mercer Cook and published as *Masters of the Dew* in 1947 (Kaussen 2007: 201-202; Fuchs 2014: 139). Danticat has explained that, unlike dew breakers, the '*gouverneurs de la rosée'* are "people who govern the dew, who are kinder people, people of the land who nurture the land and try to control their destiny through the land" (Birnbaum 2017). Despite the availability of an English translation, Roumain, like most Haitian writers publishing in French or *Kreyól*, has remained relatively unknown in the English-speaking world. Thus the number of readers who could potentially appreciate all the nuances of the title when they first encounter the book in a non-academic context is rather small, whereas the number of readers who understand at least one of the references is relatively large. Of course, the novel does not

necessarily require any knowledge of Haitian literature or the tradition of the Haitian peasant novel in particular to be meaningful or even political in the broadest sense, but, as with all African diaspora novels discussed in this study, a number of references or certain levels of meaning will simply not disclose themselves to a passive reader unfamiliar with or uninterested in finding out about Haitian (Afro-Caribbean) culture and about Haiti's eventful history and often troubled relationship with the U.S. In this context it is also significant that even though the novel itself is written in English, *Kreyól* expressions and phrases can be found in important passages and dialogues throughout the book. These phrases are never literally translated but rather echoed or reiterated in English for the convenience of the non-*Kreyól* speaking reader. Kezia Page observes that Danticat produces a "Frenchified English" that "reads as though it is Kreyol that is being spoken in English or Kreyol that has been translated word for word into English" (Page 2014: 232). The occasional deviation from standard English syntax and diction does not only serve as a reminder of the novel's setting within a diaspora community; it also forces the reader to reconsider the primacy of English and asks her to, now and then, navigate a, in some cases, entirely unfamiliar cultural and linguistic terrain that, like the stories themselves, may be perceived as fragmented.

As in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, circularity and cycles play an important role in the novel. On the level of the plot, circularity is emphasized; *The Dew Breaker* represents and performs various spatial, temporal and emotional returns. Formally, its rhizomatically rather than hierarchically interconnected story chapters defy easy classification as either a conventional novel or short story cycle.[37] Even more so than Kincaid's novels, whose chapters and sections have been or could have been published as self-contained short stories,[38] *The Dew Breaker* exploits the representational opportunities offered by its refusal

[37] Kaussen (2007), and Kalisa (2009) discuss *The Dew Breaker* as a novel, while Fuchs (2014) offers a detailed discussion of it as a short story cycle. Jo Collins describes the text as "actually rest[ing] somewhere between a novel and a short story collection [,]" but she employs the term novel in her essay since the figure of the dew breaker "offers a kind of thematic coherence to an otherwise fragmented and disjunctive work" (Collins 2011:9). In *The Art of Death*, Danticat herself refers to *The Dew Breaker* as "[her] novel-novel-in-stories" (Danticat 2017: 99).

[38] James Nagel cites Kincaid's novel, *Annie John,* as "a quintessential example of the contemporary short-story cycle" and notes that this genre "offers a vital technique for the exploration and depiction of the complex interactions of gender, ethnicity, and individual identity" (Nagel 2001: 56, 10). The question what constitutes the generic differences between the novel and the short-story cycle, however, continues to be discussed controversially. While I agree with Nagel that the short-story cycle exists somewhere between a mere collection of short stories and a highly organized novel, I do not consider his criteria for differentiating between these genres to be particularly conclusive. Nor do I consider particularly useful his attempt to redefine and make relevant the genre of the short story cycle by reading almost all novels that deviate from the conventional novelistic patterns established in the nineteenth century as short story cycles. Unsurprisingly, I fundamentally disagree with his assessment of Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* as "a highly unified sequence of stories, set in Brooklyn, about an immigrant family from Barbados" (Nagel 2011: 7).

to fall into the conventional genre categories of either novel or short story cycle. Its generic ambiguities correspond to and underscore the numerous ambivalences it represents and probes on the level of the plot. Danticat has explained that these aesthetics stem from her desire to avoid what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has described as "the danger of a single story" (Adichie 2009).[39] I read *The Dew Breaker* as an African diaspora novel whose cyclical structure and formal ambiguity result from and correspond to its particular programmatic and aesthetic need to represent the African diasporic Haitian experience as one characterized by diversity and heterogeneity as well as, to a lesser degree, by similarity and unity.

On the one hand, the character of the dew breaker, whose life story, involving questions of guilt and im/possible transformation, is revealed in the first and the last story chapters ("The Book of the Dead" and "The Dew Breaker"), creates narrative unity since he offers points of connection with the seven remaining story chapters (Collins 2011: 9). On the other hand, the novel as a whole is characterized by a refusal to reveal and resolve completely either the questions posed or the tensions and dislocations created in the individual story chapters. In fact, *The Dew Breaker* thrives on the tension between moments of relative narrative closure at the end of each story chapter (as well as at the end of the novel) and moments of narrative openness at the beginning of each new story chapter. Although the novel's final chapter, in which the dew breaker's crimes during his last day as a *Tonton Macoute* are represented, formally concludes the novel, certain plot elements and the novel's formal dynamic suggest that Danticat's African diaspora novel could be significantly expanded and complemented by additional story chapters detailing cycles of violence, victimization and im/possible healing. I read the African diaspora novel's refusal of a more definitive ending as a conscious attempt to avoid the false impression that the engagement with either the global African diasporic experience or the more regionally and temporally confined traumatic experience of (diasporic) Haitians as it is represented in the novel can be completed and concluded. The novel's formal openness suggests that discursive and artistic engagements with these heterogeneous histories can be and must be continued. To the extent that the African diaspora novel incorporates trauma narratives, its refusal of definitive endings also serves to "preclud[e] the appropriation of the trauma by problematizing the accessibility of traumatic events to the audience" (Collins

[39] Danticat provides the following explanation: "So my own personal barometer is this: Am I telling a nuanced and complex story? Am I telling my version of the truth, which I know may not be somebody else's. We're not a monolithic group; no group is. […] Also, fiction is not journalism or sociology or anthropology. Every story is singular. The way we get depth is by putting a bunch of singular stories together to tell larger more complex and sometimes even contradictory stories. […] But what you don't get is, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie put it in her great TED talk, a single story" (Murphy 2013).

2011: 11), and Danticat's narrative strategies can be understood as attempting to "mediat[e] the epistemic violence of representing trauma" (Collins 2011: 14).

4.2.2 Patrilineages Uncovered, Destroyed and Refused

Seven of the nine story chapters in *The Dew Breaker* explore patrilineages. In addition to the three story chapters that are narrated or focalized by the members of the dew breaker's family or by the dew breaker himself, "The Book of the Dead," "The Book of Miracles" and "The Dew Breaker," four additional story chapters, "Monkey Tails," "Night Talkers," "The Funeral Singer" and "Water Child,"[40] also negotiate the question of how to come to terms with newly-discovered, difficult, enigmatic, disrupted, destroyed, refused or rejected paternal legacies. Although *The Dew Breaker's* style differs significantly from that of *Mr. Potter*, the two novels' explorations of the patrilineage are motivated by similar feminist investments in the present and in the future. But whereas issues of reconciliation play almost no role in *Mr. Potter*, *The Dew Breaker*, at least in some of its story chapters, explores avenues toward a tentative and certainly provisional, conditional reconciliation with the patrilineage.

Danticat's novel represents, witnesses to and accounts for Haiti's past in order to comprehend a present in which that past lives on in the form of (traumatic) memories as well as through the physical, side-by-side presence of both victims and perpetrators in Haiti and in its diaspora in the U.S. As *The Dew Breaker* explores the lives of different perpetrators, it acknowledges that characters can be made complicit in the terror regime and demonstrates that, at least in some cases, the differentiation between perpetrator and victim is difficult to uphold. The novel maps the evolution and dynamic of the Duvaliers' terror regime – which originated in, exploited and perpetuated structures of patriarchal oppression – in order to demonstrate that these same structures are also responsible for the terror that has characterized much of the post-Duvalier era. In "The Book of Miracles" the narrative both performs and counters the erasure of these more recent atrocities from public discourse as well as from individual and cultural memory:

> For months now, both Anne and her husband had been casting purposefully casual glances at the flyer on the lamppost in front of their stores each morning […]. They'd never spoken

[40] "Water Child" does not directly contribute to the portrayal of the dew breaker. But as part of a novel that focuses on patrilineages, its representation of the aftermath of an abortion that is represented as difficult or even traumatic, especially because the protagonist, Nadine, did not tell her lover about the pregnancy and is now unable to contact him, can be read as the narrative of a prevented or disrupted patrilineage. This story chapter is only very tentatively connected to the character of the dew breaker ; Nadine's lover, who is also the husband character in "Seven," is renting a room in the basement of the Bienaimés' house.

> about the flyer, even when, bleached by the sun and wrinkled by the cold, it slowly began to fade. After a while the letters and numbers stared disappearing so that the word rape became ape and the 5 vanished from 5,000 leaving a trio of zeros as the number of Constant's casualties. The demonic looking horns that passers-by had added to Constant's head and the Creole curses they'd scribbled on the flyer were nearly gone too, turning it into a fragmented collage with as many additions as erasures. (*TDB* 79).

In emulating the way that memories change over time – becoming less and less concrete, one thing morphing into another, before any coherent memory disappears completely – the passage effectively condemns how quickly Emmanuel "Toto" Constant's victims have been forgotten. Constant was the founder of FRAPH (Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti; French: *Front pour l'Avancement et le Progrès Haitien*), a Haitian death squad that in the 1990s terrorized supporters of then exiled president Jean-Bertrand Aristide (Kaussen 2007: 187) and is said to have been on the CIA's payroll (Collins 2011: 13). After the U.S. invasion of Haiti in 1994, he entered the U.S. and was temporarily arrested on immigration charges but eventually released from prison rather than deported to Haiti, where he was convicted *in absentia* for his role in the Raboteau Massacre (Girard: 2005: 332).[41] In addition to underscoring parallels between conditions in Haiti during and after the Duvalier regime, the figure of Constant invites questions about America's role in Haitian politics and enables the novel to criticize the ways in which the U.S. has systematically undercut Haiti's political and economic independence.[42] The narrative also establishes Constant as one of the dew breaker's doubles or his "haunting" in the novel (Page 2011: 52). His real but nonetheless telling last name can be read as a comment on the perpetrators' in/capability to change.

The Dew Breaker's first story chapter, "The Book of the Dead," introduces the Bienaimés (the dew breaker and his family) and establishes the novel's key themes as well as many of its key concerns. The narrative situation in this story is also significant because

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[41] After the publication of *The Dew Breaker*, Constant was convicted of mortgage fraud; he is currently serving a prison sentence in the U.S. (Semple 2009).

[42] *The Dew Breaker* also contains references to Abner Louima's and Patrick Dorismond's fates. In "Seven," the reader is formed that "[i]n the old days [read: before the 1997 attack], [Dany and Eric] had often gone dancing at the Rendez Vous, which was now the Cenegal nightclub. But they hadn't gone much since the place had become famous — a Haitian man named Abner Louima was arrested there, then beaten and sodomized at a nearby police station" (*TDB* 38). In the same story, the wife repeatedly hears the name Patrick Dorismond on the raido (*TDB* 45, 47). In 2000, Dorismond was shot by a policeman for resisting arrest. Although the shooting victim was unarmed he – and by extension the city's Haitian community – was demonized and blamed for his death (Collins 2010: 12-13). For the author's comments on the eerie similarities between the events referenced in *The Dew Breaker* and those recent acts of police violence that resulted in the formation of the Black Lives Matter movement, see Danticat (2014).

the first-person narrator's position vis-à-vis what is disclosed, like that of Aline Cajuste, the young journalism intern in "The Bridal Seamstress," comes closest to that of those readers who are relatively unfamiliar with Haiti's recent history and have little or no personal connection to the island. Unlike those chapters set (almost) entirely in Haiti, such as "The Dew Breaker," "Monkey Tails" and "Night Talkers," the first chapter of *The Dew Breaker* enables those readers to improve their diaspora literacy without potentially overwhelming them.

When the reader is first introduced to the character who is only later identified as the dew breaker and Mr. Bienaimé, he appears simply as the father of the narrator, Ka, a substitute art teacher in New York City and an amateur sculptor. In the story that she narrates, her father has suddenly gone missing during a trip to Lakeland, Florida, where they are meant to deliver a piece of art to the famous Haitian-American TV actress, Gabrielle Fonteneau (*TDB* 7). The actress is eager to buy Ka's first completed sculpture of "her single subject thus far – [her] father" (*TDB* 4):

> […] a three-foot mahogany figure of my father naked, kneeling on a half-foot-square base, his back arched like the curve of a crescent moon, his downcast eyes fixed on his very long fingers and the large palms of his hands. It was hardly revolutionary, rough and not too detailed, minimalist at best, but it was my favorite of all my attempted representations of my father. It was the way I had imagined him in prison. (*TDB* 6)

The *ekphrasis* not only establishes how Ka views her father but also creates the very readerly expectations about the victim-father that are challenged and/or completely revised in the course of this and later story chapters.

When Ka's father returns to their room after she has already informed the police and her mother back in New York about his disappearance, he takes his daughter to a lake where he informs her that he has sunk her sculpture and confesses to his past as a "hunter" (*TDB* 20) among the *Tonton Macoute*. Although he and his wife have established themselves as successful and inconspicuous owners of a barber shop and a beauty salon in the *dyaspora*, he lives in almost constant fear of being recognized, exposed and ultimately punished for the crimes that he committed more than three decades ago. Ka, who grew up believing that her father's recurrent nightmares were caused by his time as a prisoner and victim of the Duvalier regime, is forced to reevaluate her father's personality and her entire relationship to him when he confesses:

> "Ka, I don't deserve a statue," he says again, this time much more slowly, "not a whole one, at least. You see, Ka, your father was the hunter, he was not the prey." […] "Ka, I was

> never in prison," he says. […] "I was working in the prison," my father says. […] "It was one of the prisoners inside the prison who cut my face in this way," he says. My father points to the long, pitted scar on his right cheek. I am so used to his hands covering it up that this new purposeful motion toward it seems dramatic and extreme. Almost like raising a veil. "This man who cut my face," he continues, "I shot and killed him, like I killed many people." (*TDB* 20-22)

It is possible to read the drowning of the sculpture simply as "symbolic suicide" (Kaussen 2007: 199). But since Ka's father is represented as so deeply knowledgeable about and captivated by Egyptian concepts of 'duality' and 'twinship' that he not only calls Ka his *ti bon anj* ('little guardian angel') [43] but even named her after the Egyptian "double of the body [… ,] the body's companion through life and afterlife [that] guides the body through the kingdom of the dead" (*TDB* 17), it is also possible to view the sculpture as the father's very specific double and read its drowning not as an attempt to punish and kill his present self but rather as an attempt to externalize a past self and relegate it to oblivion. Unlike *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, *The Dew Breaker* does not employ Haitian folklore figures, such as the *Marassas*, to incorporate and address concepts such as 'duality' and 'twinship.' Even more so than Danticat's earlier novel, *The Dew Breaker* challenges essentialism and insists that cultural traditions are malleable rather than static and a choice rather than a destiny. In this regard, the incorporation of Egyptian culture functions in a number of different ways.[44] It can be read as a comment on the universality and inevitability of human suffering and mortality. The reader can also choose to interpret Ka's father's interest in Egyptian beliefs about death and the afterlife as an attempt to come to terms with his crimes and his guilt. Invoking a broader and more inclusive African diaspora framework than that established in the *Bildungsroman*, Ka's father's claim that the Egyptians were like the Haitians because they knew how to grieve their dead (*TDB* 12) establishes a similarity between Egyptians

[43] In Haitian voodoo it is believed that a person has 'many souls,' including the *ti bon anj* (also *ti bon ange*), which is said to represent the moral side of a person through which "the individual feels happiness or satisfaction, elation or guilt, joy or regret resulting from that individual's behavior toward others" (Desmangles 1992: 67). The *ti bon anj* has also been described as "as a spiritual reserve tank. It is an energy or presence within the person that is dimmer or deeper than consciousness, but it is nevertheless there to be called upon in situations of stress and depletion" (Brown 2006: 9).

[44] Drawing on Glissant's idea of 'relation,' Fuchs argues that the intertexts in *The Dew Breaker* "establish[e] a rhizomatic pattern of texts that represents the complexity of Caribbeanness and allows for examining conflicts such as a torturer's trauma of guilt" (Fuchs 2014: 138).While I take Fuchs's point, my reading of *The Dew Breaker* as an African diaspora novel includes but is not limited to the Caribbean region or the notion of Caribbeanness and examines how the novel simultaneous creates and exist in a rhizomatically connected global tradition of African diasporic texts.

and Haitians that enables the narrative to claim Egyptian culture as part of African diasporic people's legacy.[45]

Both the existence and the destruction of Ka's sculpture serve to problematize the aestheticization and appropriation of suffering. Collins draws attention to the fact that "the commercialization of what has seemingly been a damaging experience is problematic" since Gabrielle Fontaneau, who is drawn to the sculpture because she sees her own father in it, is able to completely detach it from the historical specificity with which Ka meant to invest it (Collins 2011: 10). Positioned in the first story chapter of the novel, the sculpture enables the narrative to foreground the pitfalls of the representation of the trauma and suffering of others and demands that the risks of different forms of misrepresentation be acknowledged. The reader is clearly encouraged contemplate parallels between Ka's wooden work of art and Danticat's African diaspora novel as a literary work of art. The first story chapter thus forces the reader to maintain or develops a critical distance to the narrative representation, especially in cases in which narrators and focalizers represent the suffering of others as well as in cases when they represent their own. Since Ka is both a daughter and someone who strives to be an artist, the novel suggests that in the future her newly-discovered patrilineage will require her to come to terms with this legacy in both capacities. In the direct aftermath of her father's confession, she represents herself as unable and perhaps also as unwilling to fulfill this requirement, since she feels overwhelmed by the complex processes of revaluation it has demanded of her. In addition to being tasked with the difficult responsibility of negotiating how to accept and even love a perpetrator-father, the American-born narrator, who speaks *Kreyól* but has never visited her parents' native island, is required to deal with both her father's individual past and Haiti's national past. Since her father's confession explains some of her parents' lifestyle choices, such as their relative seclusion and their refusal to visit to Haiti, Ka also begins to wonder if she should have suspected anything to be amiss about her father's representation of his past.

As Ka and the reader attempt to gauge the scope of her father's crimes, she is horrified to realize that his fascination with the Egyptian "Confession Ritual" in *The Book of the Dead* should have raised her suspicions and may now, in fact, help her to determine

[45] Notable examples of a similar discursive maneuver can be found in Fredrick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) and Langston Hughes's poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." In chapter three of *My Bondage and my Freedom,* Frederick Douglass's describes his mother as resembling the etching of Ramses II on page 157 of *Prichard's Natural History of Man* (1848) (Douglass 1855: 52). Langston Hughes's memorable lines read: "I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young. / I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep. / I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it. / I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset." (Hughes 1995: 257, ll. 4-7).

what type of crimes he committed and what kind of person he was in Haiti if she mentally deletes the negations:

> Now he was telling me I should have heard something beyond what he was reading. I should have removed the negatives. "I am not a violent man," he had read. "I have made no one weep. I have never been angry without cause. I have never uttered any lies. I have never slain any men or women. I have done no evil." (*TDB* 23)

Even though both Ka and the reader are forced to confront the father's crimes, their indirect representation in the story chapter points to Ka's inability to fully imagine and articulate these events involving her perpetrator-father. As a narrative strategy, the choice of an indirect mode of representation also avoids allegations of misrepresentation or appropriation of suffering. Although acts of traumatic violence are also represented in more direct and graphic manners in Danticat's African diaspora novel, the novel allows only direct participants, particularly the dew breaker's victims, to recall, 'speak' and focalize these events. Through their testimonial quality such passages repeatedly cast doubt on Ka's father's claim that he is a reformed man who "is still [her] father, still [her] mother's husband" and "would never do these things now" (*TDB* 24).The narrative questions whether the kind of transformation that he claims to have undergone is possible, even before, in the final story chapter, the reader is offered direct insight into his past as well as into the horrific sequence of events that made him quit the *Tonton Macoute* and led to the meeting of Ka's parents and their immigration to the U.S.

In light of the transformation of her paternal legacy of suffering and resilience into one of murder and guilt, Ka begins to tentatively reevaluate her father and thus also to call his 'truths,' especially his representation of his past, into question:

> And this to me is as meaningful a declaration as his other confession. It was my first inkling that maybe my father was wrong in his own representation of his former life, that maybe his past offered more choices than being either hunter or prey. (*TDB* 24)

The fact that the father frames both his role as father and the choices available to him in Haiti (hunter/prey) in essentialist terms sits uneasily with his simultaneous claim to have changed. Replicating patriarchal structures, the representation of the power hierarchies between father and daughter in the narrative suggests that Ka's father may not have changed as fundamentally as he claims. The narrative indicates that although he may not be as volatile as he used to be, he is still motivated by self-interest and resorts to acts of violence to eliminate perceived threats and limit his daughter's options and agency. But

since the narrative combines its representation of the father with a representation and critique of the ways in which patriarchy continually reasserts and reproduces itself – to the extent that the perpetrator-father can be said to symbolize the evils of patriarchy – it is, in fact, impossible to determine to what extent the father's behavior toward Ka points toward his individual inability to change and to what extent his actions result from the fact that he is constructed as the embodiment of the assertive, self-reproducing patriarchal father.

In the subsequent story chapters, every passage in which one of the dew breaker's victims recalls his actions as well as her or his suffering serves to challenge the perpetrator-father's claim that he has transformed or that he is reformed. Yet, it is only in the last chapter of the novel that a more coherent representation of his past emerges. The longest story chapter in the novel, "The Dew Breaker," offers the reader three interwoven, alternating narratives that are focused on and focalized by three different characters: the dew breaker himself, the preacher who gives the dew breaker his facial scar and becomes the last man he kills, and Anne, who is the preacher's step sister and later becomes the dew breaker's wife and Ka's mother. *The Dew Breaker's* textual economy clearly demonstrates where its priorities and affiliations lie. Even in the story chapter that most explicitly and graphically deals with the dew breaker's murderous past, the narrative allots more narrative space and attention to those who fall victim to or are in different ways affected by his crimes than to the perpetrator himself.

The novel's arguably most complex story chapter represents how one night in 1967 the dew breaker, who is represented as a high-ranking *Tonton Macoute* rather than just a follower, prepares to kill a Protestant preacher from the Bel-Air neighborhood. The preacher's fierce public criticism of the Duvalier regime on his radio show has made him a political enemy of the regime. Although he knows that he is in acute danger, since the regime has already had his wife poisoned, he chooses to celebrate evening mass with his congregation. There he is attacked and arrested by a group of *Tonton Macoute* led by the dew breaker, and eventually imprisoned in a cell of the *Casernes Dessalines* military barracks for 'questioning.' Even though the dew breaker is ordered to release the preacher because his commanding officers do not want to turn their enemy into a martyr, the torturer has him brought to an interrogation room, where, by chance, the preacher is able to attack the dew breaker. He slashes the dew breaker's face before the torturer is able to shoot him. Even though he is severely injured, the dew breaker is forced to flee the military barracks because he has disobeyed the direct order not to kill the preacher in the barracks. In front of the military buildings, he collides with Anne, who has come there to look for her missing step-brother. Although she cannot explain why she does so, she makes it her task

to take care of the dew breaker and nurse him back to health. When she hears of her brother's death on the radio, she stays with the dew breaker, and they immigrate to the U.S. While the first twelve of the narrative's thirteen sections are set in the past, section thirteen is set shortly after the dew breaker's confession to his daughter and Ka's subsequent bitter telephone call to her mother. In the last section of the narrative Anne recalls the couple's first years in the U.S. and contemplates how to answer her daughter's disbelieving question: "'Manman, how do you love him?'" (*TDB* 24, 239)

The first section of "The Dew Breaker" offers the reader the kinds of new insights into both the mind of the perpetrator character and the patrilineage that he represents that compel her to continue the process of evaluation of his character and his in/ability to transform begun in "The Book of the Dead." As the dew breaker waits and surveys the area around the priest's church from his car, the narrative portrays him as a man of many ambitions who as a result of his difficult youth – with a mother who disappeared and a father who had gone mad (*TDB* 191) – joined the *Tonton Macoute* in order improve his chances in life. Although he has plans to leave Haiti for New York or Miami even before the events of the night make it necessary to do so, he is also represented a loyal supporter of the system. He is invested in maintaining his own power, and the detailed description of his torture methods demonstrates that he derives sadistic pleasure from seeing his prisoners' pain and desperation:

> He liked questioning the prisoners, teaching them to play zo and bezik, stapling clothespins to their ears as they lost and removing them as he let them win, convincing them that their false victories would save their lives. He liked to paddle them with braided cowhide, stand on their cracking backs and jump up and down like a drunk on a trampoline, pound a rock on the protruding bone behind their earlobes until they couldn't hear the orders he was shouting at them, tie blocks of concrete to the end of sisal ropes and balance them off their testicles if they were men or their breasts if they were women. (*TDB* 198)

The novel insists that, unlike some minor perpetrator-characters in the novel, the dew breaker is a highly intelligent, effective and proactive agent in the terror regime rather than a complicit follower.

In the next two paragraphs in this section, the narrative refocuses the reader's attention on the dew breaker's victims by contextualizing the description of the dew breaker's *modus operandi* – which is focalized by him – through two proleptic paragraphs:

> When one of the women who had been his prisoner at Casernes was interviewed three decades later for a documentary film in her tiny restaurant in Miami's Little Haiti neighborhood, the gaunt, stoop-shouldered octogenarian, it was said, would stammer for an

> hour before finally managing to speak, pausing for a breath between each word. She couldn't remember his name, nor could she even imagine what he might look like these days, yet she swore she could never get him out of her head.
>
> "[…]. He used to call me by my name. He'd lean close to my ears to tell me, 'Valia, I truly hate to unwoman you. Valia, don't let me unwoman you. Valia, tell me where your husband is and I won't cut out your . . . I can't even say it the way he said it. I refuse to say it the way he did. He'd wound you, then try to soothe you with words, then he'd wound you again. He thought he was God." (*TDB* 198-199)

These paragraphs connect Haiti and the U.S as well as the past and the present, since they demonstrate effectively how the dew breaker's crimes are remembered, how they live on, how they are passed on, and how they are worked through in the present. The old woman's oral testimony in particular, is meant, at last, to offer the kind of victim's/survivor's point of view that is absent from the representation of the father figure's confession in "The Book of the Dead." While the reader is thus compelled to assess the temporal, spatial, psychological reach of the dew breaker's crimes, the novel chooses not to provide Ka with similar access to his victims' testimonies. Yet, the fact that the woman's testimony was given for a documentary suggests that these kinds of testimonies are being made available as parts of the (*dyaspora*) community begin to reckon with their collective history, including with the nation's violent patrilineage. The passages also demonstrate how the novel persistently foregrounds its feminist investments; even in a story chapter that represents the torture and murder of a male preacher, the female victim of state-sponsored sexualized violence and terror is not omitted, relegated to the sidelines or effectively silenced. Instead, her silences, represented by the ellipses, bespeak her resilience and resistance as well as her ability to regain agency by choosing not to speak (Fuchs 2014: 131-132).

Any attempt to reckon with Haiti's national patrilineage also entails a reckoning with the country's African diasporic heritage – particularly its voodoo tradition and its folk narratives – since the Duvalier regime claimed and exploited this heritage for its own purposes. The "The Dew Breaker" demonstrates how African diasporic culture came to be used as a justification of violence and terror. But it also illustrates how that culture has remained a source of both power and comfort to those suffering from and fighting against violence and terror. I read its exploration of this issue as an attempt to initiate the kind of discussion and (re)negotiation of the function, value and potential of African diasporic culture the text performs. When trying to justify his attack on the preacher, the dew breaker

echoes ideas and sentiments that can be characterized as typical of the Duvalier regime's ideological *noirisme*:[46]

> In slaying the preacher, he could tell himself, he would actually be freeing an entire section of Bel-Air, men, women, and children who had been brainwashed with rites of incessant prayers and milky clothes. He'd be liberating them, he reasoned, from a Bible that had maligned them, pegged them as slaves, and told them to obey their masters, holy writings that he had completely vacated from his mind soon after the raucous party his parents had thrown to celebrate his first communion. With their preacher gone, the masses of Bel-Air would be more likely to turn back to their ancestral beliefs, he told himself, creeds carried over the ocean by forebears who had squirmed, wailed, and nearly suffocated in the hulls of Middle Passage kanntès, nègriers, slave ships (*TDB* 188)

Identifying Christian religion as a source of oppression, particularly in the context of colonial and neocolonial endeavors on the island, the dew breaker frames a return to African (diasporic) ancestral beliefs as an act of liberation. Since what he envisions is, in fact, an act of destruction, not unlike those to which many of the forebears he evokes fell victim, it is easy to unmask his evocation of an essentialist African (diasporic) ancestral past as little more than an attempt to justify his gruesome crimes. While the narrative clearly condemns this kind of exploitative, self-serving reference to and evocation of a common, monolithic African diasporic past, its representation of healing rituals in the same story chapter demonstrates that it values particularly those communal rituals and narratives that have become part of Haitians' lived experiences through fluid processes of transformation hybridization and creolization.[47] "The Dew Breaker" establishes a correspondence between the suffering endured aboard slave ships and the suffering endured in the Duvalier regime's prisons in order to explore the significance of the experiences of the Middle Passage as well as of creolized ancestral culture for and in the present. Sections two and five of the story chapter represent the prisoners in terms that recall descriptions of how enslaved people were made to suffer as well as of how, during the Middle Passage, they were suspended in a nowhere space (Spillers 1987: 72) that killed

[46] Adjarian explains that, as a reaction against the American occupation of Haiti, Haitian intellectuals, particularly those who were part of the *griot* movement, sought to "assert pride in what a racist colonizer saw as an inferior people and culture" (Adjarian 2004: 95). Francois Duvalier was familiar with these ideas and "trained in the voodoo religion" that the movement revered (Adjarian 2004: 95). He also wrote essays in which he propagated embracing *noirisme* and the poet-sorcerer figure of the *griot* (Adjarian 2004: 95). Duvalier's regime was heavily influenced by his early Africanist militancy" and "transformed into what Dash has termed 'black Fascism' [Dash 1981: 111]" (Adjarian 2004: 95).

[47] For more information about creolization, see Müller and Uekmann 2013.

them, socially, if not always physically, by 'turning' them into chattel (Patterson 1982:5):[48] "From their skeletal frames and festering sores, he could tell that some of them had been there for a long time […]. Many of them were forgotten by the world outside, given up for dead. For indeed they had died" (*TDB* 225). The description of the prison's dark, confined spaces, too, is evocative of the "hulls of Middle Passage kanntès, nègriers, slave ships" in which the enslaved "nearly suffocated" (*TDB* 188) that the dew breaker recalls earlier in this story chapter.

The regime's prison is described, however, not only as a space of suffering but also as space in which the enslaved fight to and, in small ways, succeed in holding on to their humanity and a sense of community and communal responsibility. The narrative describes how the preacher's cellmates attempt to alleviate his physical pain by soaking his body in their urine. What, at first, reads like an act of humiliation is, in fact, a ritual of healing and an act of benediction:

> He was surrounded by the half dozen prisoners who had pissed on him. Others were curled on the filthy floor, sleeping. The ones who had pissed on him were exchanging a few words. From their garbled conversations, he gathered that they'd performed a kind of ritual cure. They believed that their urine could help seal the open wounds on his face and body and keep his bones from feeling as though they were breaking apart and melting under his skin. (*TDB* 219)

The narrative insists that it is due to "kindness of his cellmates, men of different skin tones and social classes all thrown together in this living hell and helping one another survive it" (*TDB* 225) that the preacher, in a last act of self-sacrifice and self-liberation, attacks the dew breaker and is able to meet death on his own terms. The narrative's representation of African diasporic people's Middle Passage legacy demonstrates that it values those aspects of this patrilineal as well as matrilineal legacy that recognize people's common humanity and promote a sense of community with and responsibility for the other.

In "Monkey Tails," the second first-person narrative in *The Dew Breaker*, Michel, one of the dew breaker's tenants, makes a recording for his unborn son. On the eve of the child's due date, he attempts to account for his own origin and patrilineage – for his sake as

[48] Orlando Patterson characterizes 'the slave' in the following terms: "Perhaps the most distinctive attribute of the slave's powerlessness was that it always originated (or was conceived of as having originated) as a substitute for death, usually violent death. […] Because the slave had no socially recognized existence outside of his master, he became a social nonperson. [… T]he definition of the slave, however recruited, [is that] a socially dead person. Alienated from all 'rights' or claims of birth, he ceased to belong to any legitimate social order. All slaves experienced, at the very least, a secular excommunication" (Patterson: 1982: 5).

much as for the child's. Since the narrator reveals the truth rather than the myth about his patrilineage, much of the narrative assumes the tone of a long-delayed but necessary confession. The recording represents a father's attempt to acknowledge and in some way reconcile himself with a patrilineage that refused to recognize not only his value but his entire existence. Although the narrator communicates his personal experience and memory of fatherlessness, his story is also representative of the patrilineages generated during and after the Duvalier regime:

> I was twelve years old, according to my mother, three months before my birth I had lost my father to something my mother would only vaguely describe as "political," making me part of a generation of mostly fatherless boys, though some of our fathers were still living, even if somewhere else—in the provinces, in another country, or across the alley not acknowledging us. A great many of our fathers had also died in the dictatorship's prisons, and others had abandoned us altogether to serve the regime. (*TDB* 141)

Rather than exploring how one boy's fatherlessness is caused by the actions of another boy's father, the African diaspora novel chooses to acknowledge the multiplicity of similar experiences of suffering in order to suggest that these experiences (should) unite rather than divide this generation of boys.

In his recording, Michel describes how, on the day that Jean-Claude Duvalier was "carr[ied] to permanent exile in Paris on an *American* plane" (TDB 140, my emphasis), his life changed forever because the experience of losing his best friend, Romain[49] in the subsequent political upheaval, initiated him into adulthood (*TDB* 164). He reveals that their unlikely friendship – Romain was six years older than Michel – was at least partly based on the fact that they both had living fathers, a *Tonton Macoute* and a local water-seller, who refused to acknowledge them. Both boys experienced ambivalent feelings for their fathers, ranging from love to indifference or contempt. Romain is constructed as Ka's male Haitian double in the text, since, like her, he feels guilty for caring and worrying about his *Tonton Macoute* father. The correspondence between the two characters enables the African diaspora novel to underscore yet again that the (African) diasporic Haitian experience needs to be viewed as a continuum that allows for difference and diversity, but that it is also characterized by the kinds of similarities that have the potential to create connection and unity. Michel describes how on the day that the supporters of the

[49] Fuchs reads Romain as a character recalling and commemorating Jacques Roumain's political activism for the liberation of Haiti's peasants (Fuchs 2014: 156). Accordingly, her reading of "Monkey Tails" through the lens of Jacques Roumain's novel, *Gouverneurs de la rosee,* identifies similarities between the two texts and emphasizes the reconciliatory elements in Danticat's narrative (Fuchs 2014: 152-159).

disempowered regime, especially the remaining *Tonton Macoute*, were hunted down and viciously attacked, both boys set out across the city but failed to find Romain's father, Regulus. The boys' unfounded – and on Romain's part half-hearted – speculation about how Regulus might transform in the wake of the fall of the Duvalier regime illustrates both their desire for reconciliation and the fact that the kind of fathering fostered during the regime makes any reconciliation extremely difficult:

> Maybe Regulus would survive and emerge from all this a new man, repent for all his sins, reclaim all his children, offer them his name - if they still wanted it - beg their forgiveness, both for what he'd done to them and for what he had done to his country. (*TDB* 154)

The fundamental utopian transformation and reformation of society that Michel longed for failed to materialize. Toward the end of the narrative he reveals that Regulus shot himself (*TDB* 163) and that he does not know what became of Romain. The narrative suggests, however, that Romain may have succeeded in leaving the country (*TDB* 161). Its description of post-Duvalier Haiti suggests that, despite the reversal of perpetrators and victims on the day that "[Michel's and Romain's] country had completely changed" (*TDB* 140), violence and crime had not diminished and the country was no closer to reestablishing either a civil society or a sense of community than during the dictatorship. In hindsight, the narrator explains that:

> [t]here was probably so much blood being shed in different parts of the country that morning, the blood of militiamen at the hands of former victims, the blood of former victims at the hand of militiamen battling for their lives no matter what their political leanings had been." (*TDB* 146-147).

Furthermore, he asserts that there were some men, such as his own father, the owner of the local water station, Monsieur Christophe, "who had always been and would always be powerful, maintaining authority through control of water or bread or some other important resource, as Romain might say, no matter what was going on politically" (*TDB* 146). It seems particularly significant that Christophe, who exploits his community by controlling their access to drinking water, is not only the sole survivor of the parent generation but also a father who has passed on his exploitative business model and his power over the community to his legitimate male heir, Tobin. Although the narrative attempts to balance Michel's rather gloomy and pessimistic recollections of the beginning of the post-Duvalier era with more hopeful passages, such as those that clearly allude to Jacques Roumain's novel, *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (Fuchs 2014: 152-159), Michel's account bespeaks his ambivalent feelings about his national and patrilineal legacy. Since his current situation as a fatherless and motherless young man in the diaspora makes the reconnection and

reconciliation with the Haiti of his childhood difficult to achieve, he pins his hopes on the next generation, represented by his soon-to-be-born son, whom he intends to name Romain.

Continuing the exploration of Haitian patrilineages and trauma, "Night Talkers" delves into issues of contemporary African diasporic immigration, deportation, dislocation and return. This story chapter narrates the story of Dany and Claude, two young men who have returned or been forcibly returned to the remote village of Beau Jour in the Haitian countryside and who represent another of the novel's pairs doubles. Dany's narrative combines an exploration of the ambivalences and conflicts involved in returning to a poor, rural community after having grown accustomed to living in the urban U.S. with an attempt to represent how his childhood trauma – the murder of his parents twenty-five years ago – continues to affect him as an adult. His unresolved trauma and his migration have made him a lonely, isolated man who is cut off from both his country and his community of origin. Unlike Michel's and Romain's patrilineage, which was denied them, Dany's patrilineage and matrilineage were violently disrupted when he was six years old. After having lived in New York for ten years, he comes back to Haiti to talk to his aunt, Estina Estème. He seeks to come to terms not only with the murder of his parents but also with the fact that the unacknowledged trauma of witnessing his parents' murder has almost turned him a murderer himself. Even though he did not kill Mr. Bienaimé, from whom he is renting a room, for fear of killing the wrong man, "making the wrong woman a widow and the wrong child an orphan" (*TDB* 107), this plot development enables the narrative to address issues of transgenerational cycles of violence and revenge. Having realized that a revenge killing is not going to answer the most fundamental question that haunts him, "[W]hy one single person had been given the power to destroy his entire life" (*TDB* 107), Dany has returned to Haiti to find answers. He believes that his aunt, who was blinded the night of the murder, is the only person with whom he can have the kind of conversation about his parents' death that he has avoided for decades. When he returns to Beau Jour, which is represented as an almost paradisiacal liminal space, his aunt and the community, welcome him home, since "[t]here are no strangers in these mountains" (*TDB* 92). Estina shows, however, "no interest in hearing what he ha[s] to say" (*TDB* 89) about the past, and, instead, sends him to talk to Claude, the other 'American' in the village in whom she has taken an interest.

An ex-addict, convicted of patricide at age fourteen and repatriated to Haiti on his release from prison, Claude has only recently settled in the village. His character enables

the narrative to explore the potential dislocations of the contemporary African diaspora experience. It also requires the reader to consider how U.S. immigration policy[50] affects those nations that are located in what has been described as its 'backyard.' Claude's felony, his use of slang language and his outer appearance mark him as the kind of 'undesirable immigrant' that opponents of immigration in the U.S. (and Europe) warn against: "A short, muscular boy, with a restrained smile and a firm handshake. The boy's brawny arms were covered with tattoos from his elbows down to his wrists, his skin a canvas of Chinese characters, plus kings and queens from a card deck" (*TDB* 100). But despite acknowledging Claude's 'imperfections,' the narrative insists that he was "too young, it seemed, to have been expatriated twice, from both his native country and his adopted land" (*TDB* 100). Challenging the reader to recognize the young man in the convicted murder, the narrative compares Claude to "a refugee lost at sea, or a child looking for his parents in a supermarket aisle" (*TDB* 118).[51] Its framing of the immigration/deportation issue forces the reader to consider the controversial question of a host country's responsibilities to and for its immigrant population. This is especially true in circumstances such as Claude's, since the reader learns that prior to his deportation he had been completely cut off from the Haitian part of his family and is even now only slowly learning to speak *Kreyól*. While Dany, as the narrative's focalizer, casts some doubt on Claude's assertion that prison reformed him and that he would have been an exemplary citizen had he been allowed to stay in the U.S. after his release (*TDB* 103), the narrative suggests that the U.S. as the host society in which he grew up and which shaped him has failed him by divesting itself of its responsibility for and to him. While the narrative chooses not to elaborate on the role of the Haitian-American diaspora community in this matter, it insists that Claude's mother has been instrumental in arranging his return to his maternal family in Haiti.[52]

Claude's return, like Dany's, occasions processes of reevaluation in which he learns about himself by learning about his personal and his community's history: "'It's like a puzzle, a weird-ass kind of puzzle, man,' he said. 'I'm the puzzle and these people are putting me back together, telling me things about myself and my family that I never knew or gave a fuck about'" (*TDB* 102). Ironically, it is through the appearance of the convicted

[50] Collins explains that according to the 1996 Anti-Terrorist Act, "[a]ny non-US citizen convicted of what the Act terms 'aggravated felony' is automatically deported after serving his or her American jail sentence. One result of this has been increased deportations of Haitian youths, some of whom have never visited Haiti, have no relatives there, and cannot speak Kreyòl" (Collins 2011: 15, FN 17).

[51] Danticat's short story, "Children of the Sea," published in *Krik? Krak!* (1995), explores the plight of Haitian boat people and establishes a correspondence between their experience and that of the Middle Passage.

[52] Page points out that remittances from Claude's mother in U.S. to her family in Haiti may have paved the way for Claude's return to the village community (Page 2011: 55).

murderer, Claude, that the narrative, which began as a narrative about trauma and revenge, transforms into one about community and the possibilities of reconciliation and forgiveness. The narrative's setting in a liminal space also enables and propels this development. "Night Talkers" not only represents Estina as the village's sage woman (possibly its voodoo priestess) skilled in midwifery, who despite or because of her blindness "can see, in her own way" (*TDB* 103), but also endows her and Dany with the abilities of *palannits*. As night talkers, "people who wet their beds, not with urine but with words" (*TDB* 98) they are finally able to have the 'semi-conscious (dream) conversation' for which Dany returned to Beau Jour and which is made possible only in the space it provides. When Dany asks Estina why his parents were murdered, she is unable to provide him with a satisfactory answer. She suggests, however, that his parents might have been mistaken for somebody else:

> Maybe they were mistaken for all of us. There is a belief that if you kill people, you can take their knowledge, become everything they were. Maybe they wanted to take all that knowledge for themselves. I don't know, Da. All I know is I'm very tired now. (*TDB* 109)

There are a number of ways in which the reader can try to make sense of Estina's multivalent statement: Dany's parents may have been mistaken for other people who were, in the broadest sense of the word, politically active in a situation where this was an inherently dangerous endeavor. Their murder may also have been a ritual killing. Estina may also be implying that in a regime characterized by omnipresent, arbitrary acts of violence, everybody could have become a target. The statement can also be taken to imply that the parents' death fulfills a kind of redemptive function in that they died for all those people who are still alive. In any case, her multivalent attempt to explain what remains the major unexplainable event in Dany's life enables the African diaspora novel to propose that one way of coming to terms with a traumatic individual and national past and working toward reconciliation may lie in attempting to move beyond the binaries of perpetrator/victim and cause/effect.[53] It is only in this framework that, in the wake of Estina's unexpected death following their exchange, Dany is able to acknowledge his similarities with Claude and develop a meaningful relationship to him.

> The only thing Dany could think to do for his aunt now was to keep Claude speaking, which wouldn't be so hard, since Claude was already one of them, a member of their tribe. Claude was a palannit, a night talker, one of those who spoke their nightmares out loud to themselves. (*TDB* 120)

[53] See also Fuchs 2014: 128-129.

Emphasizing the characters' connection rather than their differences, the narrative suggests that at some point Dany may even learn from Claude how to "*speak* his nightmares to himself as well as to *others*" (*TDB* 120; my emphasis).

4.2.3 Feminist Negotiations of (African) Diasporic Transgenerational Female Solidarity and Community

Both "The Bridal Seamstress" and "The Funeral Singer" negotiate questions of (African) diasporic transgenerational female solidarity and community in the *dyaspora*. The story chapters' lack of definitive connection to the dew breaker sets them apart from the novel's other seven story chapters. Challenging the reader to seek connections though ultimately refusing to provide her with definitive ones, these chapters intentionally disrupt *The Dew Breaker's* narrative flow. Yet, their feminist investments connect them to one another and to those passages in other story chapters that also foreground the novel's feminist concerns, such as the interview passage in "The Dew Breaker." While the exploration of individual and national patrilineages is continued in both "The Bridal Seamstress" and "The Funeral Singer," their all-female sets of characters allow these two narratives to present a decidedly feminist exploration of that part of Haiti's national patrilineage characterized by violence and terror against women. Although both narratives engage with the past when they represent this patrilineal legacy in detail, they are narratives of and about the present and the future rather than the past, since they probe which transformative potentials female solidarity and community may hold in the *dyaspora*. Emphasizing the women's status as refugees and exiles, both narratives posit female solidarity as a vital counterweight to the alienation and marginalization the women experience in the U.S.

In "The Bridal Seamstress," the journalism intern, Aline Cajuste, is sent to Queens to interview Beatrice Saint Fort for *the Haitian American Weekly* shortly before the bridal seamstress retires from her business. Initially, Aline intends to quickly conduct her interview and leave again. She is desperate to do well at her first paid job because she hopes to impress her much older ex-girlfriend rather than her editor. But the interview does not go according to plan, since neither Beatrice nor her life story will be rushed. In the course of the interview, Aline, the focalizer in this story chapter, learns far more about Beatrice's profession and gains profounder insights into the woman's life than she needs to complete her assignment. As Beatrice describes her work process and expresses her enthusiasm both for her creations and for her customers, the narrative establishes her as a

consummate artist. Her passion for bridal fashion must be read as an act of resistance against the regime that prevented her from marrying the person she loved rather than as an indication of her investment in the patriarchal institution of marriage (*TDB* 126). Her network of customers, whom she calls "my girls" (*TBD* 126), has become her substitute family in the diaspora. They call her 'Mother' and have enabled her to experience mothering although she is unmarried and childless. By dispensing life and beauty advice in addition to making the 'girls' look beautiful on their wedding days, Beatrice has established a loyal customer base that can be described as its own kind of non-hierarchical, rhizomatically connected matrilineage in the Haitian-American diaspora. For a short period of time Beatrice can be an "othermother" (Troester 1984: 13) to these women. As the narrative progresses, however, the reader realizes that Beatrice's alternative model of temporary 'othermothering' is under threat. She reveals that a prison guard whom she knew in Haiti lives in her street and that she intends to close her business because the *"choukèt lawoze" (TDB 131),* or dew breaker, always finds her and moves into her street. Since the American-born French major, Aline, initially fails to comprehend the possible implications of this statement, Beatrice tells the young woman more about her past:

> "He asked me to go dancing with him one night. […] I had a boyfriend, so I said no. That's why he arrested me. He tied me to some type of rack in the prison and whipped the bottom of my feet until they bled. Then he made me walk home, barefoot. On tar roads. In the hot sun. At high noon. […] You never look at anyone the way you do someone like this. […] No one will ever have that much of your attention. No matter how much he'd changed, I would know him anywhere" (*TDB* 131-32).

Despite describing Beatrice as "a bit nutty" (*TDB* 132) to her editor, Aline has become invested in Beatrice and her story and investigates the house that Beatrice has identified as belonging to the prison guard, only to find out that it has been uninhabited for a long time. When she informs Beatrice of this, the seamstress explains: "That is where he hides out these days, in empty houses. Otherwise he'd be in jail, paying for his crimes" (*TDB* 137). Although this particular story chapter chooses not to reveal whether Beatrice was tortured by Ka's father or another torturer, her statement gives the reader pause, since it has been established that men like Ka's father do not necessarily have to hide from prosecution in abandoned houses. In fact, they can even be business owners just like Beatrice. It is only through her contact with Beatrice that Aline, who has led a relatively sheltered life, learns of the existence of "men and women whose tremendous agonies filled every blank space in their lives" (*TDB* 137). She is captivated by Beatrice's struggle and determined to begin

writing stories about experiences like hers because as a partially closeted character, she discovers that she can relate to Beatrice's struggles to reconcile her vastly different life experiences: "Maybe there were hundreds, even thousands, of people like this, men and women chasing fragments of themselves long lost to others. Maybe Aline herself was one of them" (*TDB* 137-138). The narrative suggests that despite her initial lack of comprehension, Aline may, in fact, be well equipped to explore and write stories about people like Beatrice, since, at the end of the narrative, she takes on the role of 'listener' (Laub 1992) and just sits with Beatrice and waits for her story to reveal itself. The narrative's representation of their relationship suggests that – although Aline does not official become one of Beatrice's 'girls' – her actions as well as her intention to commit herself to the life stories of women (and men) like Beatrice should be read as an act of transgenerational female/feminist commitment and solidarity. Just as Beatrice temporarily becomes an "othermother" (Troester 1984: 13) Aline becomes an 'otherdaughter.' Here and elsewhere the African diaspora novel suggests that processes of witnessing to and working through individual and collective national traumas require transgenerational cooperation that need not be, perhaps even should not be, limited to the biological children of either victims or perpetrators. Those who in the proleptic paragraph in "The Dew Breaker" conduct an interview with Valia, the octogenarian, are both much younger than Valia and not related to her. Since Danticat's novel attempts to represent the individual and national traumas suffered and remembered in Haiti and in its *dyaspora* in their multiplicities and complexities, the novel itself can, of course, also be understood to be participating in these transgenerational and transnational processes and enabling and encouraging its readers to do the same.

Set in New York in the 1970s, "The Funeral Singer," the third first-person narrative in *The Dew Breaker*, maps the educational and emotional development of Freda, the narrator and title-giving funeral singer, and her fellow students Rézia, the owner of the only Haitian restaurant on the Upper West Side, and Mariselle, who fled to the U.S. after her husband was shot for painting "an unfavorable picture of the president" (*TDB* 172). Over the course of a 14-week semester, the women prepare to take their GEDs, learn each other's stories and become friends. Entitled "WEEK 1," "WEEK 2" and so on, the fourteen individual sections of the story chapter suggest the structure of an academic calendar or syllabus. The story chapter's form recalls and corresponds to *The Dew Breaker's* overall structure: Highlighting only key moments in the development of the women's friendship, its individual sections are relatively brief and only tenuously connected to each other, but

together they offer a complete narrative that is held together as much by its narrative frame as by Freda's memorable voice.

In addition to highlighting some of the linguistic, financial and legal challenges and triumphs involved in starting over in a new country, the narrative explores how the woman establish community and solidarity as a result both of similar experiences in their present and in in their pasts. "The Funeral Singer" reveals that Rézia, Mariselle and Freda each carry traumatizing experiences with them that complement those representations of trauma and traumatization in the preceding story chapters. Freda and Mariselle have to come to terms with the murders of loved ones; Rézia is a childhood rape survivor. In her role as the spokeswoman and storyteller, Freda represents Rézia's story as follows:

> This is Rézia's story: When she was a girl, her parents couldn't afford to keep her, so they sent her to live with an aunt who ran a brothel. […] One night when she was sleeping, a uniformed man walked in. She dug herself into the bed, but it did no good, so she passed out. "I can always make myself faint when I'm afraid," Rézia says, […]. "When I woke up in the morning, my panties were gone. My aunt and I never spoke about it. But on her deathbed she asked for my forgiveness. She said this man had threatened to put her in prison if she didn't let him have me that night." (*TDB* 173)

Although the narrative does not reveal whether or not Rézia forgave her aunt, the aunt's plea for forgiveness – an explicit plea for forgiveness by (a female) someone who was made complicit in the suffering of another – is a singular occurrence in the novel, noteworthy not only because of its singularity but because it asks the reader to contemplate the nature of forgiveness: Under which circumstance can forgiveness be granted? Could the decision as to whether or not to grant forgiveness in some way be crucial to the process of recovery? Freda's representation of Rézia's trauma allows the victim/survivor to speak part of her story, thus preserving the testimonial character of her narrative. It is striking that the narrator chooses to tell Rézia's story immediately after she has revealed her own story in the same section. Rather than asking the reader to evaluate the nature and degree of each woman's individual suffering, the simple juxtaposition of women's experiences establishes as sense of solidarity and equality between them. Yet again, the novel emphasizes that the victims/survivors of Haiti's national patrilineage of terror can choose to view their traumatic experiences as unifying rather than dividing.

Freda represents herself as having been "expelled from [her] country" (*TDB* 167) in her early twenties because, blaming the regime for her father's death/suicide, she refused to sing at Haiti's national palace. Her father, a fisherman, died after his fish stall

was taken from him and he was tortured by a *Tonton Macoute*: "The next night he took his boat out to sea and, with a mouth full of blood, vanished forever" (*TDB* 172).[54] As in "The Bridal Seamstress," the narrative chooses not to reveal whether or not Freda's father's torturer was the dew breaker. In any case, Freda turned to singing after her father's death in order to maintain a connection to him *lòt bò dlo*, or from across the water (*TDB* 173). The narrative suggests that through singing and storytelling Freda is also able to maintain her connection across the water to Haiti and Haitian culture from her new place of residence in the *dyaspora*. "'Brother Timonie,' a song whose cadence rises and falls like the waves of the ocean" (*TDB* 175) and which she sang during her first public appearance as a funeral singer at her own father's funeral, remains her personal favorite. Its lyrics speak to the exhausting state of uncertainty in which the three women find themselves in the *dyaspora*: "*Brother Timonie, row well, my friend. Don't you see we're in trouble? Brother Timonie, the wind's blowing hard. And we must make it back to land*" (*TDB* 166; italics in the original). Although they have physically arrived in the U.S., they have not done so emotionally. Freda represents them as avidly following political developments in Haiti, rooting for the U.S. opposition and hoping for the "poverty Olympics" and the regime's arbitrary killings to end (*TDB* 171, 173,174). Even more so than the diasporic characters represented in the other story chapters, the three women are represented as exiles who are forced to completely reshape their lives because a regime bars them from returning home. Recalling Mariselle's account of how only the year earlier her husband painted a portrait of Jackie Kennedy when visited Port-au-Prince harbor (*TDB* 177), Rézia remarks: "'Isn't it amazing?' […] 'Jackie Kennedy can go to Haiti anytime she wants, but we can't.'" (*TDB* 179). In addition to illustrating the women's desire for return, her statement must be read both as a critical comment on both U.S./western support for the dictatorship and the complicity of especially (wealthy) non-white women in political systems of oppression and marginalization. The narrative insists, however, that despite their struggles, including those with the English language and Math, all three women are taking steps to improve their situation. Rézia, the oldest of the group and already a business owner, will in all likelihood easily pass her GED; Mariselle finds a job in an art gallery, an occupation that allows her to maintain a connection to her dead artist husband (*TDB* 180) and simultaneously enables her to "unpac[k her] suitcases" (*TDB* 179) and settle in the U.S. more permanently. Finding a job proves most difficult for Freda, for whose occupation in Haiti there seems to be no counterpart in the U.S.

[54] Freda's representation of her father's death recalls the representation of Deighton's death in *Brown Girl, Brownstones.*

The narrative demonstrates that solidarity and emotional support in the form of advice, stories, songs and food from 'home' enables the women to both maintain crucial emotional connections to Haiti and navigate the new spaces that they now inhabit. The youngest of the women, Freda, whose name recalls "Erzulie-Fréda, the lady of luxury and love" (Dayan 1994: 6; Fuchs 2014: 176-177), is represented as the most vivacious and rebellious of the three. In *The Dew Breaker*, Freda is, however, represented as melancholy rather than as sexually alluring or demanding or as "jealous and spoiled" – characteristics commonly attributed to Erzulie-Fréda (Glover 210: 86-87). While the incorporation of the figure of Erzulie in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is staged in ways that suggest the narrator's desire to return the power of and over her sexuality to Martine, the reinterpretation of the Erzulie-Fréda figure in "The Funeral Singer" serves to underscore Freda's strength and her power to captivate others in ways that explicitly do not foreground her sexuality. When during a celebration at the end of their GED course, Freda half-jokingly suggests: "'I'm going back to join a militia and return to fight.' […] 'Look, it's the seventies,' […] 'Look at Fidel Castro. He had woman with him.'" (*TDB* 180), she is warned that no one will be left to sing at her funeral if she joins the militia, dies and makes the news. Since the other women's predictions about what might happen to Freda should she go back to fight the regime seem eerily accurate, she is asked to sing her own funeral song for and with Rézia and Mariselle. Although the narrative represents how her rendition of "Brother Timonie," turns into a communal ritual through which the women are enabled to leave "their terrible days" behind them (*TDB* 181), there are still many uncertainties ahead of them. While the narrative refuses to disclose whether they passed the GED or what will become of the singer who is delivering her "final performance as […] any kind of singer" (*TDB* 181), Freda's skillfully woven narrative proves that need not sing in order to fulfill her role as the group's modern-day diasporic non-nationalist *griot* or storyteller-historian. The insertion of the word 'sister' into the lyrics of "Brother Timonie" also suggests that the female community that the women have created and the sisterhood that they have found will continue to enable them not only to survive but to live.

Since *The Dew Breaker* focuses almost exclusively on the representation, exploration and negotiation of questions of patrilineage, community and im/possible reconciliation within the Haitian/Haitian-American community, its representation of female community, unlike that in *Breath, Eyes, Memory,* also chooses to call attention to issues of female solidarity and support within narratives that exclusively represent interactions among Haitian-(American) women. But since the isolation of the women in "The Funeral Singer" underscores their status as recent immigrants struggling against

linguistic and cultural barriers, I read the 'ethnic exclusivity' represented in these narratives as indicative of *The Dew Breaker's* thematic priorities and narrative demands rather than as indicative of any categorical rejection of the idea of a more 'ethnically inclusive' transnational African diasporic feminism. In fact, the novel's careful representation of specific experiences, differences and particularities within the Haitian *diaspora* community meets Chandra Talpade Mohanty's demand that transnational feminists must be attentive to the specificities and particularities of difference, since such knowledge represents a prerequisite in their endeavor "to theorize universal [transnational feminist] concerns more fully" (Mohanty 2003: 226).

5 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie – Introducing the New African Diaspora

> 'I'm not an Afropolitian [*sic*] I'm African, happily so, […] I'm comfortable in the world, and it's not that unusual. Many Africans are happily African and don't think they need a new term.' – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Barber 2013)

Since its publication in 2013, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's African diaspora novel, *Americanah* (2013), has come to be viewed as one of the quintessential novels about 'new African migration' and the experience of the those who have come to be known as 'new African diaspora' (Tunca and Ledent 2015: 4). Referring to the migration and diaspora experiences of mostly well-educated migrants, immigrants and sojourners who come to the U.S. (and Europe) from postcolonial African nations, the terms 'new African migration' and 'new African diaspora' describe relatively recent phenomena that have led to the kind of diversification of the population of African descent in the U.S. that requires an expansion, perhaps even a reconceptualization, of what the term 'African' in labels, such as African American and African diasporic, may mean (Berlin 2010: ch.5 esp. 207-210; Chude-Sokei 2014: 58-59). *Americanah*, which has been hailed (and has somewhat hastily, I would argue, been pigeonholed) as a celebration of 'Afropolitanism,'[1] represents a crucial and nuanced contribution to this ongoing discussion. Although Adichie's novel is clearly rhizomatically connected to the works of Paule Marshall, Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat through thematic and aesthetic similarities as well as through shared political investments, *Americanah's* insistence on and negotiation of the multiplicities of African diaspora experiences in the twenty-first century is also in significant ways dissimilar to those presented in Marshall's, Kincaid's and Danticat's novels. The novel thus serves as an important and timely counterpoint to the representations and negotiations discussed in the previous three chapters of this study. Reaching multiple global audiences, Adichie's novel not only illustrates what is at stake in the most recent (feminist) negotiations of the concept of the global African diaspora but also demonstrates persuasively that these negotiations need to move beyond the hegemonic Anglo-American framework within which they have tended to take place. *Americanah* thus lends itself to be discussed in the concluding chapter

[1] Taiye Selasi popularized the concept of "Afropolitanism" in her 2005 essay, "Bye-Bye Babar." For different conceptualizations of Afropolitanism, see Mbembe (2007), Gikandi (2011).

of this study – both because it represents a recent and thorough examination of the concepts and issues at stake in my discussion and because it suggests where artistic and critical engagements with and (feminist) negotiations of the African diaspora may be headed as the world continues to globalize and the need to account for its multiplicities becomes ever more acute.

While, as twice-diasporized authors with strong ties to the Caribbean, Marshall, Kincaid and Danticat tend to route their engagement both with Africa as an ancestral homeland and with twentieth-century African diaspora experiences in the U.S. through Afro-Caribbean history and culture, Adichie's novel compels the reader to engage with the specificities of postcolonial Nigeria in the twentieth and twenty-first century rather than with an entire continent's pre-colonial and pre-slavery past. Attuned to the global, often asymmetrical flows of people, (commodified) culture and ideas in the twenty-first century, *Americanah's* representation of un/successful female and male migration experiences both to the U.S. and Britain explores different modes of diasporized im/mobility in an ever more globalizing world. The juxtaposition of Ifemelu's and Obinze's experiences in their diasporas in the U.S. and Britain enables the novel to explore the dislocations and ambivalences attached to this new African diaspora experience in great detail. As both characters eventually return to Nigeria, the novel becomes a novel of return. As such, it carefully explores how feelings of acute discontent – described as "cement in [Ifemelu's] soul" – "piercing homesickness" and nostalgic longing for her first boyfriend drive Ifemelu 'home' (*A* 6). *Americanah* also details the emotional difficulties attached to and processes of re-adaptation necessitated by a permanent return to a country of origin that has changed in one's absence. Since Lagos is described as "full of American returnees" (*A* 14), the novel underscores the representative character of such a return and explores the ways in which both Ifemelu and Obinze have been irrevocably altered by their time in the diaspora.

Foregrounding issues of race, gender and class, the representation of how Ifemelu adapts to life in the U.S. enables the novel to hold a mirror to U.S. society's scripts, "tribalisms" and "mythologies" (*A* 136). In addition to employing Ifemelu's outsider/newcomer focalization to defamiliarize hierarchies of power and oppression, *Americanah* also relies on Ifemelu's blog "*Raceteenth or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*" (*A* 4)[2] to provide explicit social commentary on matters of race, gender and class in the first person. While the novel's framing narrative, set in an African hair braiding salon in Trenton, enables it to repeatedly probe the inner diversity and asymmetries of the new

[2] Following Ifemelu's return to Lagos, the blog is renamed "*The Small Redemptions of Lagos*" (*A* 418)

African diaspora in the U.S., it employs the representation of Ifemelu's romantic relationships to explore race relations in the U.S. Since "the thing about cross-cultural relationships is that you spend so much time explaining" (*A* 457), her relationship with Curt, an affluent white man whose connections enable her to secure a Green Card, enables the novel to explore how and when issues race and racism as well as class difference figure or gain significance in a(n interracial) relationship. Ifemelu's relationship to Blaine, an African American assistant professor of comparative (African) politics at Yale, as well as her interactions with other (male and female) African Americans enable the novel to probe the similarities and differences between U.S-born African Americans and those whom Louis Chude-Sokei has christened "the newly black Americans" (Chude-Sokei 2014: 53) and who figure as 'non-American blacks' in the novel. Acknowledging both experiential similarities and differences between these two groups, the novel requires the reader to recognize that viable, sustainable and potentially politically transformative solidarities cannot be based solely on (U.S.) constructs of 'race' and common experiences of racism in interactions with non-black people. While Ifemelu's encounter with key African American texts, such as James Baldwin's, in a U.S. university setting allows her to gain the kinds of fascinating insights into the history of U.S. race relations that later inform her blog posts, she is quick to recognize that, despite encountering U.S racism first-hand, her background and experiences differ significantly from those described in these texts. Simultaneously, the novel explores the question of whether common feminist ideals have the potential to unite white and non-white women (and men) in circumstances where race tends to divide them. The novel's careful mappings of genealogies of 'race' and feminism(s) in a U.S. context compel the reader to engage with both the construct of 'race' and key feminist ideas in ways that enable her, on Ifemelu's return home, to appreciate how feminism and 'race' both translate and fail to translate into a Nigerian context. The text thus compels the reader to think 'differently' – that is in the ways suggested by Braidotti's expansion on Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of the rhizome and rhizomatic thinking – about these issues. It requires its reader to contemplate the ways in Adichie's contribution to these discussions performs and calls for the necessary discursive and conceptual shift from a U.S. dominated framework to more inclusive and productive global feminist African diasporic framework this is first and foremost attentive to local particularities and needs. In addition to accounting for the ways in which allegedly universal formulations of 'race' and feminism work or fail to work in a global context, this framework also has to find a way to address the issue of how to accommodate the African diasporic experiences that cannot be accounted for within what Michelle Wright describes as the "Middle Passage

epistemology" (Wright 2015: 14). *Americanah* demonstrates that transnational feminism may be crucial in this endeavor, since transnational feminism insists that alliances and solidarities across differences require feminists to be mindful of and ready to accommodate difference and heterogeneity.

5.1 Moving Beyond the *Bildungsroman* - *Americanah* as Hybrid Novel

While *Americanah* has been described as a *Bildungsroman* in some reviews and discussed as a "migrant bildungsroman" by Mary Jane Androne (2017), it is so different from the female (ethnic) *Bildungsromane* discussed in previous chapters of this study that I read it as a hybrid novel whose significant reconfigurations of the *Bildungsroman* genre move it beyond the conventional female (ethnic) *Bildungsroman* and into the realm of the African diaspora novel. I argue that Adichie, unlike Marshall, Kincaid and Danticat, does not have to entirely abandon the genre of the *Bildungsroman* to address issues of the contemporary African diaspora experience in a sufficiently complex manner, since she can risk to represent and engage with the heterogeneity of contemporary African diaspora experiences is ways that Marshall, Kincaid and Danticat could not afford to in their *Bildungsromane*. In contrast to Adichie, who published *Americanah* in a period in her career when she had already established herself as a bestselling, award-winning author,[3] Marshall, Kincaid and Danticat published their *Bildungsromane* as first and second novels in which they – not entirely unselfconsciously – reconfigure the *Bildungsroman* to accommodate female ethnic/diasporic experiences of *Bildung* that underscore their protagonists' bi-national and/or transnational affiliations and identities. Although these *Bildungsromane* challenge U.S. society when they demand that the protagonists' (and authors') rights to representation, recognition and voice be recognized, they do so in ways that signal a desire to become and/or be recognized as part of U.S. society. As my previous discussions of their works have shown, Marshall's, Kincaid's and Danticat's *Bildungsromane* still address issues revolving around difference and heterogeneity as well as those revolving around the concept of the African diaspora; the self-imposed limits of their engagement with these issues bespeaks their authors' awareness of the fact that a broader engagement with African diasporic experiences risks to weaken their novels' demands for recognition and incorporation into U.S. society. Adichie's novel takes a more uncompromising and assertive stance, both since it takes U.S. society to task for its failure to recognize and

[3] Engaging patriarchy and the patrilineage, Adichie's debut novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), takes the form of a much more conventional contemporary postcolonial female *Bildungsroman* set in post-independence.

accommodate the heterogeneity of African diaspora experiences and because Ifemelu's return to Nigeria toward the end of the novel suggests that rather than being satisfied with the kind of incorporation and integration offered to immigrants (of African descent) in U.S., Ifemelu prefers to return 'home.'

In its representation of gender, trans/nationality and mobility, Adichie's negotiation of contemporary African diaspora experiences deliberately undermines and subverts traditional narrative patterns. Furthermore, it offers both the thematic focus on the contemporary African diaspora and the kinds of thematic and formal heterogeneities as well as the rhizomatic connections to other (feminist) African diasporic texts that are typical of the African diaspora novel. Rather than focusing on and negotiating Ifemelu's matrilineage or patrilineage, as Marshall's, Kincaid's and Danticat's novels do, *Americanah* revolves around Ifemelu's relationship to her first love, Obinze. As the novel stages the *Bildung* of its female protagonist as inextricably tied to her experiences of romantic love, the reunion of the lovers and the rekindling their relationship of equals conclude both Ifemelu's *Bildung* and the novel. Since, on a formal level, *Americanah* constructs Ifemelu and Obinze as doubles and affords considerable narrative space and focus to the male character, the novel reconfigures the tradition of the 'double *Bildungsroman.*' Expanding on Jerome Buckley's reading of *The Mill and the Floss* as a double *Bildungsroman (*Buckley 1974: 97), Charlotte Goodman introduces the concept of the "male-female double *Bildungsroman*" in her readings of *Wuthering Heights*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *My Antonia*, *The Mountain Lion* (Goodman 1983: 30). She explains that these *Bildungsromane* follow a circular trajectory that can be divided into three stages: the shared childhood of both protagonists, their separation as adolescents and young adults that enables the male protagonist to enter the world while the female protagonist is left behind, their reunion, which, to Goodman, indicates a "turning away from mature adult experience" (Goodman 1983: 30). She argues that "[t]he double form of the *Bildungsroman*, with its focus on both a male and a female protagonist, appears to be particularly congenial to the woman novelist who wishes to emphasize the way in which a society that rigidly differentiates between male and female gender roles limits the full development of women and men alike" (Goodman 1983: 31). Read in this light *Americanah*, can be said to reconfigure the *Bildungsroman* into a 'female-male double *Bildungsroman*.' This adaptation of Goodman's terminology reflects the fact that, despite Obinze's importance, *Americanah* prioritizes the representation of female experiences. In its representation of both characters' diaspora experiences, Adichie's novel deviates significantly from the pattern described by Goodman. While the novel initially details

biographical and attitudinal similarities between Ifemelu and Obinze and frames them as "good omens" (*A* 61), their later separation foregrounds the differences in their experiences. Although Obinze, who grew up devouring American literature, has long dreamt of making a life for himself in the U.S., it is Ifemelu who is able to both secure a scholarship to a U.S. college and obtain the required visa. Despite initial difficulties and some setbacks, such as experiencing student poverty and suffering from depression as a result of having been forced to prostitute herself once, her story is framed as a story of female achievement, upward mobility and success in the diaspora, since Ifemelu obtains a U.S. degree, finds work, obtains a green card and finally even becomes a successful author and homeowner. By contrast, the representation of Obinze's migration enables to novel to address issues of failure and forced (male) immobility (Androne 2017: 231-232). After Ifemelu has settled in the U.S and broken off contact to Obinze, he moves to the Britain illegally, since, the novel suggests, as a poor young male student (read: potential terror suspect) he will never be granted entry into the U.S. In a passage focalized by Obinze, the novel emphasizes that the reasons for 'choosing' life in the diaspora may be multiple and idiosyncratic rather than predicated on threats of physical violence and bodily harm: "[A]ll understood the fleeting from war, from the kind of poverty that crushes human souls, but they would not understand the need to escape from the oppressive lethargy of choicelessness" (*A* 276). Although Obinze can rely on the support of a network of Nigerian expat friends in Britain, his status as an illegal migrant significantly limits his employment chances and makes him vulnerable to a host of abuses. After almost three years in the diaspora, he attempts to obtain the status of a legal immigrant through a scam marriage to Cleotilde, a Portuguese woman with Angolan heritage. But his plan fails, and he is arrested and later deported. His forced return to the domestic sphere, which precedes Ifemelu's voluntary return to Lagos by almost a decade, enables the novel to explore developments in Nigeria after the end of the military dictatorship that drove not only Ifemelu and Obinze but also many of their friends and acquaintances into the diaspora. Yet again, the representation of Obinze's experiences of migration and return underscores the heterogeneity and simultaneity of the experiences represented in the novel, since his story calls on the reader to recognize parallels and differences between events in Ifemelu's life in the U.S. and events in his life in Nigeria. Ifemelu's and Obinze's middle-class background as well as Obinze's financial success after his return to Nigeria challenge 'Afro-pessimistic narratives' (Gikandi 2011: 9) about African nations as nations steeped in and solely defined by poverty, war, corruption and hopelessness. Rather than simply emphasizing certain similarities between life in the U.S. and life in Nigeria, these plot elements call on

the reader to acknowledge these similarities and contemplate their implication for a globalizing world.

The novel seeks to avoid the "danger of a single story" (Adichie 2009) not only on multiple levels of the plot and through the construction of its characters but also through its form. *Americanah's* thorough exploration of multiple, heterogeneous contemporary African diaspora experiences is enabled by its relative length and its intricate narrative structure that moves seamlessly between Ifemelu's and Obinze's focalization, between the present and the past and between different cities in Nigeria, Britain and in the U.S. Both the novel's framing narrative and its incorporation of Ifemelu's blog posts give structure and coherence to the narrative, while simultaneously enabling the novel to accommodate and explore additional experiences and perspectives. Encouraging polyvocality in its many forms, the novel allows for multiple rhizomatic connections to become visible and for new dialogues to emerge. Especially the blog posts allow the novel to insistently draw the reader's attention to those social and political phenomena that most urgently require new dialogues to emerge. As part of the novel's negotiation of the concept of a global African diaspora, Ifemelu's posts provide explicit social commentary that compares and contrasts the experiences of U.S.-born African Americans to those of "the newly black Americans" (Chude-Sokei 2014: 53) in a format, typography and voice that clearly distinguishes them from the rest of the narrative. Their significance and special status in the text is heightened by the fact that they are inserted into the narrative at points when they interrupt the chronological flow of the flashbacks in which Ifemelu's youth, and her immigration experience are narrated (Guarracino 2014: 14). Even though Ifemelu's interactions with her readers do not figure prominently in the novel, the blog format itself suggest a dialogical structure that calls on the reader to contemplate the possibility of participating in a dialogue about the problems and ideas presented in the blog posts (Guarracino 2014: 16). Since the emergence of the internet has fundamentally altered global flows of communication and information, the choice of the blog format also asks the reader to acknowledge the possibility that important contributions to the issues under discussion may, in fact, come from 'the periphery' or from those who originate from 'the periphery' rather than from those who seek to perpetuate colonial, neocolonial and patriarchal discourses in the traditional centers of former colonial and contemporary neocolonial power.

Americanah's investment in representing the heterogeneity of the African diaspora experience is also reflected in its use of different languages, varieties and accents. Though written in English*, Americanah,* more so than Marshall's and Danticat's novels, employs

code-switching between American English, Nigerian English and Igbo not only demonstrate the coexistence and equality of these languages/varieties but also to compel the reader to navigate an unfamiliar cultural and linguistic terrain, thereby allowing her to temporarily experience feelings of dislocation and disconnection that resemble those identified as characteristic of Ifemelu's first year in the U.S.

5.2 *Americanah's* Transnational Feminism

Unlike Adichie's feminist manifestos, *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) and *Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto* (2017), *Americanah* refrains from using the terms 'feminism' or 'feminist.' Yet, the novel's negotiation of the intersecting oppressions of race, gender and class demonstrates that a transnational feminist framework is required in order to reveal and criticize different iterations of systemic inequalities and oppressions within both Nigerian society and U.S. society. As the narrative recounts Ifemelu's youth in Lagos, the reader is repeatedly reminded of Nigeria's history of colonization. In addition to emphasizing how much importance Ifemelu's family places on a prestigious British education and British accents, the novel indicates that the experience of being colonized has continued to significantly influence Nigerian women's self-understanding and their beauty ideals. The novel suggests that the lingering effects of colonialism on Nigerian women can be best understood by observing "the different ranks of imperial femaleness" (*A* 77) to be found in a Nigerian hair salon. Suggesting similarities and synergies between patriarchal and colonial oppressions, the novel shows that Nigeria's independence has had little effect on the patriarchal structures that determine how women and men are supposed to interact with each other.

Americanah employs the character of Ifemelu's aunt, Uju, who is in many ways constructed as Ifemelu's foil and who becomes her substitute sister/mother figure in the U.S., to represent how patriarchal structures and the deprivations caused by the military regime both oppress women and make them complicit in the oppression of others. Although Uju has completed her medical degree she is only able to find a job at a Lagos clinic because she becomes a general's mistress. While the narrative insists that Uju becomes "more consumed by The General himself than by her new wealth" (*A* 74), her relationship to a high-ranking and influential man in the military regime is represented as the major reason why, in a situation where corruption runs rampant, both her economic situation and that of Ifemelu's family improves considerably. Despite financially

benefitting from Uju's relationship, Ifemelu quickly begins to view her aunt's relationship with suspicion: "[…] she wished that she could wrest Aunty Uju away, shake her into a clear-eyed self, who would not lay her hopes on The General, slaving and shaving for him, always eager to fade his flaws" (*A* 83). In retrospect, Ifemelu comes to view Uju's relationship with The General as the kind of unequal and harmful relationship that she seeks to avoid in her own life, since "[t]hat relationship destroyed [Uju]. She became a different person because of The General and she couldn't do anything for herself, and when he died, she lost herself" (*A* 422). When in the wake of The General's death during a coup, Uju and her son Dike are forced to leave the country she joins the ranks of the 'new African diaspora' in the U.S. But even though Uju, whose immigration precedes Ifemelu's by some years, becomes an important source of support and knowledge for Ifemelu when she moves to the U.S., Uju's life and her relationships remain the foil against which Ifemelu can develop her own understanding female autonomy and equality in relationships.

When Ifemelu first joins Uju in her Brooklyn apartment, she is both "overwhelmed by a sense of newness" and eager to discover the U.S. (*A* 106). While the novel attentively represents the insecurities and ambivalences that result from her new diasporic status, it is precisely Ifemelu's outsider/newcomer perspective on U.S. society that enables her not only to identify and describe but also to criticize and challenge those customs, beliefs, constructs and behaviors that discriminate and oppress women and minorities. The representation of Ifemelu's process of adaptation suggests that racial and patriarchal oppressions do not only intersect but are almost inextricably interconnected.

Both in the narrative proper and in a blog post, the novel insists that in a first act of oppression, U.S. society 'races' Ifemelu: "I came from a country where race was not an issue. I did not think of myself as black and I only became black when I came to America" (*A* 290). The U.S. construct of 'race' also attempts to rob her and other foreign-born people of African descent of their particular national and cultural identities as Nigerians, Jamaicans or Senegalese. In spite of their pronounced cultural, linguistic and experiential heterogeneity, in U.S. public discourses on race, all these people are grouped together and identified as 'black.' While the novel itself can be read as seeking to rectify this reductive homogenization and misrepresentation of diverse experiences, the narrative suggests that individual attempts to reject the label or insist on a more accurate one are rarely successful. In fact, if non-African diasporic characters notice or remark on Ifemelu's Nigerian origin, which manifests, for instance, in her accent, they do so in ways that serve to single her out or even humiliate her (*A* 133).

Tellingly, the novel employs the setting of a college classroom to educate both Ifemelu and the reader on the misunderstandings and conflicts that can arise among U.S.- and foreign-born people of African descent. As the class watches scenes from the film adaption of *Roots* and discusses historical representation in film, U.S.-born and foreign-born students of African descent cannot reach an agreement on the question of whether the n-word should be uttered or bleeped out. Since the different positions presented can be traced back to divergent processes of identification with the historical experience of the Middle Passage, this passage in the narrative underscores that rather than unite African diasporic people, the history of the initial formation of the African diaspora can potentially deepen the divide between them, particularly between those who identify as the descendants of slaves and those who form the new African diaspora. As the narrative continues to explore differences between U.S.-born African Americans and foreign-born people of African descent, Ifemelu is introduced to the African Students Association and becomes friends with its president, Wambui. Ifemelu forms a lasting friendship with the Kenyan woman who later encourages her to embrace African/Nigerian culture and to share her observations about America's obsession with race on the internet. Enabling both Ifemelu and the reader to recognize that the differences between U.S.-born African Americans and foreign-born people of African descent are multiple and significant, the representation of the Association's meetings, calls on the reader to acknowledge limits of comparability and relationality within the African diaspora. As the novel progresses, Ifemelu's interactions both with her boyfriend, Blaine, and with different U.S.-born African American women underscore this insight.

In passages that recall Kincaid's representation of Lucy's relationship to her employer, Mariah, *Americanah* stages how, in interactions with her employer, Kimberley, and Kimberley's sister, Laura, Ifemelu begins to challenge those (white) American women who consider themselves feminists but are entirely unable to acknowledge their own positionality, privilege, and complicity in structures of oppression.[4] While Kimberley is represented as a well-meaning but misguided white feminist for whom the poor are blameless (*A*149), who feels compel to describe black woman as 'beautiful women' – regardless of their looks (*A* 147), and refers to non-Anglo-European cultures as 'rich cultures' (*A* 146), her sister is represented as a woman who – influenced by Afro-pessimistic media narratives about Africa – remains highly suspicious of Ifemelu's

[4] I read the following lines from a blog post as directly alluding to Kincaid's critique of a similar behavior on Mariah's part. "So if you are that blond, blue-eyed woman who says 'My grandfather was Native American and I get discrimination too' when black folk are talking about shit, please stop it already" (*A* 337).

character and motives for the duration of her employment as a babysitter for Kimberley's children. The narrative insists that 'white feminism' as Kimberley conceives of it fails to unfold any transformative potential in a transnational or global context. The novel reinforces its critique of 'white privilege' by returning to the issue in a blog post that even mentions Peggy McIntosh by name (*A* 346-347).

As Ifemelu herself advances to a more privileged social position first through Curt's support and later through the success of her blog, she acknowledges and reflects on her privilege vis-à-vis other African diasporic women, such as her friend Wambui, who "was working three jobs to raise the five thousand dollars she would need to pay an African American man for a green card marriage" (*A* 202), and the hair braiders in the framing narrative. The representation of Ifemelu's interaction with the women in the hair braiding salon is significant on a number of levels. The framing narrative repeatedly calls the reader's attention to the fact that Ifemelu's story of success in the diaspora does not represent the norm. Originating from the former French colonies Senegal and Mali, the hair braiders, Mariama, Hamila and Aisha, are represented as more vulnerable to abuses and discrimination because they lack both adequate English-language skills and the kind of advanced formal education that Ifemelu obtained while still in Nigeria. While Ifemelu usually moves in decidedly middle-class and intellectual circles and the novel thus largely refrains from representing subaltern groups, her visit to the hair salon enables the novel to explore why the encounter "in this shared space of their [diasporic] Africanness" (*A* 103) can spark only a tenuous and temporary connection between Ifemelu and the women whose language/accent, class and legal status mark them as inferior to Ifemelu in the U.S. diaspora space they all occupy. Nevertheless, the narrative suggests that, in the face of outside challenge, ridicule or discrimination, particularly by white people, the woman regard each other as sharing in a sisterhood of diasporic Africanness (*A* 103). In the last sequence of the framing narrative (*A* 363-365), the novel stages a moment of recognition in which Ifemelu acknowledges "a sense of kinship" (*A* 363) with her hair braider, Aisha. Ifemelu's feelings of kinship and solidarity arise in equal parts from the women's shared African origin and the fact that they have both endured the hardships involved in immigration. As Aisha reveals her troubles more fully, Ifemelu is reminded of her good fortune and begins to feel some degree of responsibility for and obligation toward Aisha. Since Ifemelu's plans to get in touch with Aisha the next day are thwarted by Dike's suicide attempt, the novel does not have to find an answer to complicated question of how Ifemelu's newly discovered sense of responsibility could translate into action. While Ifemelu is not represented as as self-centered as Kincaid's Lucy, both characters share a

talent for shrewd analysis and a relative reluctance to become involved with the emotional needs of others. As a result, *Americanah* identifies points of contention, describes where and why limits of relationality make themselves felt, and points toward new approaches and possible remedies without having to enact them in the narrative.

Ifemelu's relocation to Lagos represents both the end of her *Bildung*, since she has, "finally, spun herself fully into being" (*A* 475), and a liberation, since her move to a region where "[r]ace doesn't really work" (A 476) releases her from the obligation to engage with this construct. Since Nigeria's patriarchal structures and customs are represented as undercutting and even threatening Ifemelu's independence, she discovers that she will have to engage with and even promote feminist ideas and a feminist lifestyle if she wants to maintain the kind of autonomy that her life in the diaspora has afforded her. While she does not stay an 'Americanah' or outsider in Nigeria, her diaspora experience has irrevocably altered her. In addition to enabling the kind of *Bildung* that allows her to recognize the importance of female autonomy and gives her the confidence to negotiate a feminism that is responsive to her particular needs as a returnee to Nigeria. The novel suggests that although Ifemelu is not able to initiate a paradigmatic shift toward feminism among her friends and acquaintances, she is still able to sow the seeds of change. The novel thus casts the former emigrant not in the role of strict teacher but in that of the role model who leads by example and, ideally, enables others to formulate feminisms that responsive to their needs.

As *Americanah's* negotiation of transnational feminism in an African diasporic framework demonstrates, the complex issues involved in this negotiation will benefit from future intellectual and artistic engagements. As my discussion of a developing canon of explicitly feminist and transnational African diasporic literature has demonstrated, the rhizomatically connected works that form this canon do not only enable further discussions and negotiations of these issues, they also offer points of connection beyond the U.S. context that serves as a frame of reference for my study. In order to remain relevant and viable, future artistic and scholarly engagements with the African diaspora in transnational feminist framework need to continue to find new ways to move the discussion beyond the Middle Passage paradigm in order to explore the political potentialities of the diaspora concept on an a grander global scale. In light of recent global political developments, it will be crucial to find way to connect existing conceptualizations and negotiations of African diaspora experiences to those that are currently unfolding.

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