

## THE FORMATION OF FEMALE MIGRATORY SUBJECTS IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S *KRIK? KRACK!*

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**Abstract:** This paper theorizes Edwidge Danticat's book *Krik? Krack!* within the Black Atlantic framework which Danticat supplements with her focus on the Caribbean region and female experience, absent from Gilroy's agenda. She goes against the grain of contemporary postcolonial criticism by demonstrating that the achievement of positive female subjectivity is not contingent on exile. Dislocation is not regarded as a virtue in itself, and readers are reminded that the Black Atlantic is and has always been a place of perilous human traffic.

**Key words:** Paul Gilroy, Black Atlantic, Black Diaspora, Caribbean Feminism

This article will explore Caribbean female writing in the context of Black diasporic criticism most eloquently articulated by Paul Gilroy in his seminal study *The Black Atlantic*. The Black Atlantic paradigm had a powerful impact on the narratives of Caribbean feminism which supplemented it with a new focus on the Caribbean region as well as on female experience and intellectual tradition that were absent from Gilroy's agenda. Since the early 1990s a number of feminist critics such as Carole Boyce Davies and Myriam J. A. Chancy managed to deflect the sway of Black Atlantic criticism, *re-routing* it to the Caribbean and altering its gender configuration. Their respective books — *Black Women, Writing and Identity*,

*Migrations of the Subject* (1994) and *Searching for Safe Spaces, Afro-Caribbean Women in Exile* (1997) — focus on the figure of the Black Caribbean migrant woman journeying through the Black Atlantic world. Both Boyce Davies and Chancy look closely at the routes of contemporary postcolonial women from the West Indies and examine how they construct their identities as hybrid persons straddled between different worlds. In the words of Chancy (1997: 13): “Afro-Caribbean women writers in western societies work at self-definition as they recuperate their histories of lost African cultures, enslavement and exploitation through neo-colonization in the countries to which they had emigrated.” In other words, being between nations or camps, as Gilroy would put it, and having multi-positional status makes women more aware of different forms of oppression and enables them to move from victimization to consciousness. Therefore, as Boyce Davies (1994: 4) insists:

Black women writing [ . . . ] should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing. In cross-cultural, transnational, trans-local diasporic perspectives, this reworking of the grounds of Black women writing redefines identity away from exclusion and marginality. Black Women writing/existence, marginalized in the terms of majority-minority discourses, within the Euro-American male or female canons or Black male canon [ . . . ] redefines its identity as it re-connects and re-members, brings together black women dislocated in space and time.

The purpose of this article is to complement Chancy’s and Boyce Davies’s persuasive readings of contemporary diasporic African Caribbean women writers with my own reading of a number of diasporic tales written by the young and highly acclaimed Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat, who made her literary debut after Chancy and Boyce Davies completed their studies. I will attempt to theorize Edwidge Danticat’s short story collection *Krick? Krack!* within the Black Atlantic framework. It is my argument that in this short story cycle Danticat explores a variety of diasporic voices of “black women dislocated in space and time,” to use Boyce Davies’s words again, and in this way she “remembers” and “re-connects” women across the black Atlantic world. Her stories speak from different places and times and in this way they build bridges between places and temporal frames. They spin a web of connections between rural and urban Haiti and between Haiti and its “tenth department” — the diaspora in the United States. Rocio G. Davis (2001: 73), who calls this collection a mother-daughter short story cycle, contends that Danticat’s protagonists understand their place in the community “through the bonds with women.” They are drawn into a supportive community of mothers, daughters, aunts and sisters who negotiate strate-

gies of survival and identification and pass on to their daughters their feminine and cultural identity. As Davis (2001: 74) claims:

[the] women [. . .] are primarily responsible for perpetuating culture and bonds with the lost homeland. The mothers play major roles in the daughters' lives and growth, a role that provides the daughters with models for self-affirmation. Although the mothers have different names and individual stories they seem to be interchangeable in that their role of mothers supersedes all others.

Davis (2001: 76) argues there are many stories in this collection where this vital bond has been broken, but he nonetheless concludes: "[though] these stories reflect loss and a sense of a lack of affiliation, the overwhelming movement is towards reconciliation and pertinence, confirming the necessity and the possibility of seeking connection even after death." *Re-membering*, which is involved in this process of making connections, recuperates the past and cures the wounds on the often *dis-membered* bodies of women.

Danticat, who moved to New York at the age of twelve, is widely considered a spokesperson for the one million Haitians living in exile in the United States. She has experienced the feeling of loss and confusion that comes as a consequence of migration: "when I first came [to the United States]," confessed Danticat, "I felt like I was in limbo, between languages and cultures" (Farley 1998: 78). However, ultimately, like other diasporic subjects described by Gilroy, Chancy and Boyce Davies, Danticat ([http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/farming\\_of\\_bones.htm](http://us.penguinroup.com/static/rguides/us/farming_of_bones.htm)) found the condition of "limbo" enabling:

I think being an immigrant, you get to look at both your own culture and the culture you come to with fresh eyes. This is a great point of observation from which to examine both cultures, a very good space from which to write. I write both about Haiti and the United States as an insider/outsider. This makes me work harder to understand both cultures. I take nothing for granted about either place. Everything I write starts with my own personal quest for a better understanding of both places and their different culture.

Danticat's words resonate with Edward Said's (2001: 186) conceptualization of an exilic awareness that is "contrapuntal":

Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, awareness that — to borrow a phrase from music — is *contrapuntal*.

Danticat's collection *Krick? Krack!* consists of nine stories that are held together by recurrent characters and motifs such as violence, migration and sur-

vival. The book begins in Haiti with a poignant story entitled "Children of the Sea," reporting the fate of two lovers separated by the political turmoil following the military *coup d'état* which deposed President Aristide from power in 1991. It closes with "Epilogue: Women like Us" in which the narrator, probably Danticat herself, pays homage to her female ancestors — the kitchen poets, which is also an obvious allusion to Paule Marshall — Danticat's literary foremother. In between, there are several interlocking stories that are set in different places: the Haitian village of Ville-Rose ("Nineteen Thirty-Seven," "The Missing Peace," "Seeing Things Simply"); in Port-au-Prince or its shantytown ("Between the Pool and Gardenias," "A Wall of Fire Rising," "Night Women"); or in the United States ("New York Day Women," "Caroline's Wedding"). All the stories are about Haitian women trying to understand their difficult and troubled relationship to their motherland.

The narrative structure that brings their distinct voices together creates a collective protagonist — a community of women who are linked by their personal tragedies and by their struggle to survive in various adverse circumstances in and away from Haiti. In this way the form and composition of the book enhances the hybrid character of Danticat's diasporic subjects. As Davis (2001: 72) observes, "the short story cycle is itself a hybrid, occupying an indeterminate place within the field of the narrative, resembling the novel in its totality, yet composed of different stories." The short story cycle can be seen as a "form that itself vacillates between two genres" (Davis 2001: 72) and thus mirrors the concept of cultural or ethnic hybridity. The cycle has an episodic and un-chronological method of narration and a non-linear plot — different temporalities and characters are intertwined into a network that unites several generations of women with different experiences but similar traumas. In Evans Braziel's words (2005: 80), this network is "a *dyaspora* across space and times, across geographical boundaries and historical, temporal divisions."

Even though Danticat rarely joins in theoretical debates about "creolization, transculturation, hybridity and diaspora" or "contact zones of nations, cultures and regions" (Clifford 1994: 303), she does seem to endorse in her writing the ethos of "*maroonage culture!*" (René Despestre's expression). In one of her interviews Danticat stated: "I'm maroonage" (Shea 1997: 49). The motif of the maroon that signals the migration of black people across five hundred years of Caribbean history also taps into the dialectic of the Black Atlantic. Maroonage then can be seen an alternative descriptor to creolization, and thus it can be viewed as another way of conceptualizing and grounding the discussion of the diasporic movement and displacement of the Caribbean people.

*Krick? Krack!* maps a politics of cultural identity that is embedded in Maroonage and mobility: "Our identities expand," claims Danticat (1995: 6), "the

more places we go, the more it expands, the more we add to our own Créolité." Danticat's female protagonists not only cross national boundaries but also move between the rural and urban setting. A number of tales in this collection narrate the stories of country women who abandon their villages in search of a better life in the city of Port-au-Prince, where they encounter prejudice and oppression. They are often suspected of being *vodouissants* practicing black magic and are accused of "[flying] in the middle of the night, [slipping] into slumber of innocent children, and [stealing] their breaths" (Danticat 2001: 37-38). In these tales the village appears to be a secure environment associated with a more ethical and meaningful African cosmology. The city, on the other hand, is associated with modernity and the Western ideals of the homogeneous nation state that strives to impose uni-centricity on the Haitian cultural melting-pot. With each move Danticat's characters make, they are faced with new ideas and values which they have to come to terms with, and the stories often capture their moments of negotiation between their folkloric past and a new set of assumptions associated with the urban center. Their dislocation results in severing the connections to their mothers who stand guard over Haitian cultural sovereignty. The daughters try to find their bearings in a world that is growing increasingly more complex as a result of displacements and separations by finding their agency in re-membering their mothers and re-connecting with their rural, ritualistic world. Numerous stories in this cycle emphasize the importance of looking back to one's cultural past through matrilineal connections, female bonding and the tradition of storytelling that "educates people in imaginative history and community values, [and] provides a link between that past and the lives of the people in the present" (Davis 2001: 69). In this way storytelling celebrating matrilineal connections becomes an important component in the new migratory location of culture that bridges the gap between the folkloric past and the urban/nationalistic or metropolitan/diasporic present and contributes to the hybrid identity beyond cultures.

In *Kri k? Kra k!* there are numerous stories of the imprisonment and political persecution of women by the Haitian government in its strivings to suppress the indigenous culture in order to win respectability in the eyes of the white world. These stories are interspersed with episodes of flight, escape, and agency. These forays are successful provided that the migratory subjects are able to take with them all the vital parts of their cultural past as they embark on their journeys. What Davis (2001: 76) says about the impact of exile and displacement seems to be true for all Danticat's female protagonists, for those who traverse both local and national boundaries:

[exile], which implies the loss of an original place, banishes belonging to memory and often causes dislocation from both the old ways and the new home. The process of diasporic self

formation is presented through growing distance between mother and daughter who struggle to define new identities and decide what to keep and what to relinquish.

In *Krick? Krack!* the fates of these women who do not migrate are juxtaposed with those of women who negotiate new identities in the broader transatlantic context. Some of the stories, such as "New York Day Women" and "Caroline's Wedding", deal with the need of re-establishing bonds between different generations of women living in separate worlds as a result of migration. As Chancy (1997: 32) puts it, "in the Caribbean context, the particular and short term consequences of migration have resulted in the physical, psychological and emotional alienation of young girls from older women." In these stories the daughters and mothers inhabit different cultural spaces and as a result they suffer a rupture of cross-generational bonds. In "New York Day Women" it is the mother who has a secret life and who withdraws from her American-Haitian daughter's public life for fear of shaming her with her Haitian peasant background. As the daughter stealthily follows her mother through the streets of New York she tries to solve the puzzle of her mother's identity.

In "Caroline's Wedding," it is the American-born Caroline who creates a distance between herself and her mother by insisting on marrying a non-Haitian man in blatant disregard of the old country's rules. Caroline was born in the United States and her only visible connection to the migrant past is the stump she has instead of her left arm, which is a result of a shot her pregnant mother was given in the "immigration jail" (Danticat 2001:158). She occasionally suffers from phantom limb pains, which can be seen as a metaphor of the emotional price she pays for her detachment from a Haiti that she knows only at second hand from her parents' stories. In spite of her deformation, she is said to be a "miracle baby," one that can boast American citizenship as her lawful birthright. Her sister Gracina (called Grace), born in the shantytown of Port-au-Prince but raised in the United States, is by contrast called by her parents a "misery baby" — she is the one who tries to solve the puzzle of her identity.

While Caroline takes for granted the fact that she has American citizenship, Grace's sense of identity is contingent on becoming naturalized and receiving an American passport. The whole procedure is described using the imagery of fight and battle. When Gracina receives her naturalization certificate she wants to run to her mother "waving the paper like the head of an enemy rightfully conquered in a battle" (Danticat 2001: 157), with the enemy being the American administration and its bureaucracy. Her sense of security and belonging is defined by this document, so when she has to part with it for a while "[she] suddenly [feels] like unclaimed property" (Danticat 2001: 158). Finally when she receives her passport she says "it was like being in a war zone and finally receiving a weapon of my

own, like standing on a firing line and finally getting a bulletproof vest" (Danticat 2001: 213). The war has taken its toll on the entire family, as Grace explains with sarcasm: "We have paid dearly for this piece of paper, this final assurance that I belong in the club. It had cost my parents' marriage, my mother's spirit, my sister's arm. I felt like an indentured servant who had finally been allowed to join the family" (Danticat 2001: 214). Citizenship, then, is like membership in an elitist club; by entering it she feels she will be finally on a par with her family in terms of class and status and will finally be able to benefit from the privileges that her family have already had. Her passport also gives Grace the right to travel across geographical borders and this freedom of movement is what differentiates her from other travelers — especially third world illegal immigrants or the "boat people" whose plight is described in another story in "Children of the Sea" and commemorated in the remembrance service that Grace and her mother attend. Her citizenship allows her to disassociate herself from the plight of the Haitian boat people and immigrants "without papers." But as will eventually turn out, the passport will not provide a solution to all the predicaments and anxieties that a diasporic subject has to face.

Like the female characters of earlier stories, who had to leave their country homes for Port-au-Prince, Grace is suspended inbetween two disparate worlds. The first one is represented by her Haitian mother Mrs. Azile, who considers herself Haitian in spite of her residence in the US, and by her father Mr. Azile who died ten years earlier but often appears in Grace's dreams. The other world is represented by Caroline, who considers herself American in spite of her Haitian heritage, to which she lacks any sense of attachment. Caroline is dismissive about her mother's Haitian customs and ostentatiously refrains from participating in the life of the Haitian community. Grace is literally caught in the conflict between her mother and her sister, who for her represent the two ends of the spectrum, between which her own identity has to be defined. As she tries to create a compromise between Mrs. Azile and Caroline, she engages in the process of self-negotiation to see where on that continuum her own identity is placed. She wavers between her allegiance to her parents and her approval of her sister's decision to marry the man of her choice, between her dedication to the collective memory of her Haitian past that she shares with her mother and her new privileged position as an American citizen with its vistas of conformity and forgetting.

The tension between these two positions, between the traditions and memories of the past and the immediate demands for cultural assimilation, is expressed through the motif of a recurrent dream in which Grace remembers her deceased father and seeks his approval. The dream reveals the pain of negotiating his hybrid identity, the traps that are set for immigrants, some of which the father seemingly had not avoided. In the first dream, Grace can see her father but

is not seen by him — thus symbolically he refuses to grant her the recognition that she so much wishes to obtain. As he walks through a deserted field, Grace and her sister are left behind, not able to catch up with him. The dream might suggest his gradual growing apart from the family which was a consequence of their long separation, during which, we are told, Mr. Azile stopped loving his wife. This motif of desertion, broken relationships and betrayal is reinforced by the second dream, in which Grace sees her father enjoying himself at a ball at a French château — he is in the company of other women, which again might be read as an allusion to his being “unfaithful” to the memory of the familial past. When one of the women turns out to be Caroline, the suggestion is that both he and Caroline seem to belong to the same “camp,” whereas Grace feels left out, like her mother whom he stopped loving. As Grace tells us, her father and her sister even looked alike — like “one head on two bodies” (Danticat 2001: 177). The implication then is that Mr. Azile shared ideas and loyalties with Caroline.

In the third dream, the dynamics of the relationship between the father and the daughter changes; — the father not only sees and recognizes Grace but also has a voice and speaks to her. Both of them are in precarious situations — she is hanging from a cliff, while he tries to save her, putting his own life in danger. In the last and most frightening dream, Grace is traveling with her father. They are camping near what seems to be the Massacre River — its waters are blood-red. This is when the father starts a game of questions — the same game Grace’s mother and other women belonging to a secret society of *vodouissants* used to play. Thus the father comes closer to the values embodied by his wife and by other women to whom Mrs. Azile is related: “[Mrs. Azile’s] mother belonged to a secret women’s society in Ville Rose where the women had to question each other before entering one another’s houses. Many nights while her mother was hosting the late-night meetings, Ma would fall asleep listening to women’s voices” (Danticat 2001: 165). Therefore the father’s efforts to rescue Grace might be viewed as an attempt to stop her from making the same kinds of mistakes that he and his American-born daughter Caroline fell prey to. It is an about-face, a return to old allegiances.

The questions that the father asks pertain to cultural choices: “Which landscapes would you paint,” “How would you name your sons?” “What kind of lullabies do we sing to our children at night? Where do we bury our dead?” “What kinds of legends will your daughters be told?” (Danticat 2001: 211). When the confused Grace turns to her mother for answers she finds out that there are no ready answers and she has to find them herself. As Davis puts it, the daughters, who carry on with this ritual, must be “creative and constructive” (Danticat 2001: 64). The questions and answers are not predetermined. On the contrary, they are open-ended: “the hidden meanings in their mother’s verbal games form a signif-



icant starting point from which they can develop their own voice and autonomy because a space is created within the inherited contest in which their own representation is possible" (Davis 2001: 69). The daughter can "construct and claim their own subjectivity in this way" (Davis 2001: 70).

This story makes it particularly clear that Danticat contests the idea that to form diasporic identity daughters must grow away from their mothers. Conversely, she shows that in order to strike a balance between the Haitian and American component of their subjectivity, the daughters have to remember their mothers. The last question in the game that the mother poses to her daughter is: "Why is it that when you lose something it is always in the last place you look for it?" The reply is: "Because of course, once you remember you always stop looking" (Danticat 2001: 216). Grace will stop looking for her identity once she remembers her past and puts herself in the role of a mediator between the tradition of the past and the multicultural present.

This is precisely how Danticat envisions her role as a writer. "I look to the past — to Haiti — hoping that the extraordinary female storytellers I grew up with — the ones that have passed on — will choose to tell their stories through my voice. For those of us who have voice must speak to the present and the past" (quoted in Davis 2001: 68). As Chancy (1997: 33) emphasizes, "remembering our mothers in poetry, fiction and personal writings is a means by which the reparation of the rift between the younger and the older generation of Black women can still be achieved." Honoring the ordeals of these women through writing — a modern form of telling stories — "forges bonds between women by preserving tradition and female identity as it converts stories of oppression into parables of self-affirmation and individual empowerment" (Davis 2001: 68).

Due to her commitment to the recovery of Haitian female voices, Danticat shows the politics of nation and diaspora from a female perspective. She highlights the female diasporic experience, thus filling an important void in the gender configuration of the Black Atlantic paradigm. According to Clifford (1994: 258-259), "diasporic experiences are always gendered," and "when diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than placement, traveling rather than dwelling then the experiences of men will tend to dominate" (Clifford 1994: 313). By showing different trajectories of Haitian women and illuminating the specificity of gender operation, both in the Haitian nation and in diaspora, Danticat offsets the imbalance in the attention bestowed on male and female travelers.

Danticat's stories not only heal the trauma of the generation gap and bring about the recovery and recognition of female history but also propose a new model of diasporic Haitian femininity, one that takes into account the folkloric past but is at the same time transformed by new modalities such as time, space,

language and education. Writing used to be an activity forbidden for Haitian women: "And writing? Writing was as forbidden as dark rouge on the cheeks or a first date before eighteen. It was an act of indolence, something to be done in the corner when you should be learning to cook" (Danticat 2001: 219). Danticat makes it plain that for a diasporic woman writing is indispensable for survival — it replaced the folkloric tradition of storytelling as the Haitian culture went from local to global. In the "Epilogue," Danticat argues with older women who see her desire to write as a betrayal. We can hear the voices of these women who say: "We are a family with dirt under our fingers, do you know what that means? [. . .] That means we've worked the land. We're not educated" (Danticat 2001: 222). When the narrator announces her desire to become a writer and storyteller, an older woman condemns and disavows her: "*I would rather you had spit in my face,*" she says (Danticat 2001: 222). "Are there women who both cook and write?" asks the narrator, and she answers: "Kitchen poets they call them. They slip phrases into their stew and wrap meaning around their pork before frying it. They make narrative dumplings and stuff their daughters' mouths so they say no more" (Danticat 2001: 219-220). Though the mothers may want to silence their diasporic daughters, these young women "modulate their identities depending on the situations they find themselves in, tapping into plurality and finding it very resourceful and rich" (Schleppe 2003: 3). They refuse to be circumscribed by domestic labor and they see cooking and writing as in a reciprocal relationship: the act of cooking is a poetic act, the act of writing is a "survival soup." Writing is also compared to another female occupation, that of hair braiding, during which mothers tell stories to their daughters and each braid is named after nine hundred and ninety-nine women who "are boiling in [their] blood." Writing is like bringing unity to "unruly strands" — it means bringing cohesion to the disruptive experience of dislocation, to conflicting cultures and traditions.

*Krick? Krack!* examines the relation between what Said called the politics of identification and the politics of location (Said 1993). It combines Danticat's interest in the local with the focus on the black diasporic experience, as she describes the journeys and pilgrimages that take place both within the island and between the island and the metropolitan center. In this way it shows that Danticat is as much interested in "roots" as "routes." All the narratives, those that are geographically embedded as well as migrant tales, are "rooted" in oral stories and folklore — the foundational narratives of the Haitian village. They evoke the richness and beauty of the rural world that Haitian immigrants to the US had to leave behind. This world is not abandoned by her diasporic female characters, who celebrate diasporic continuity through a sense of loyalty to their ancestors. The women in *Krick? Krack!* are spiritually and emotionally attached to their foremothers even though they reside in different places. Cultural distinctiveness is

maintained even as de-territorialized, transformative identity is established. This imagined matrilineal community that transcends geographic space and national structures makes belonging possible despite women being situated far away from their ancestral homeland. In this way Danticat's interest in the local defies the claim that "the Black Atlantic epitomizes the hybrid, syncretic, mobile, de-territorized cultural space [. . .]" (Donnell 2006: 78).

Danticat is concerned as much with the emancipatory experience of traveling as with cultural belonging. In her focus on both the traveler and the dweller, she expands the Black Atlantic model by showing that the village can also be a place of liberating cultural exchange. Such stories as "Seeing Things Simply" or "The Missing Peace" reveal that cross-cultural encounters can also happen in the village. In "Seeing Things Simply" we can see how the village community becomes trans-local, how it accommodates diverse experiences, people and traditions. Among its characters, we can find a teacher from the Sorbonne and a cosmopolitan painter from Guadeloupe who comes regularly to Rose-Ville to paint her pictures. They both influence the maturation of a sixteen-year-old girl named Princess, who poses for Catherine — the painter — as a model, and who uses this experience to recreate her identity through art. Her encounters with the exilic intellectuals who come to the village encourage her to become an artist — someone who "sees things simply." "Seeing" can be treated as a metaphor for a healthy voyeurism whose aim is to produce art "something to leave behind even after she was gone, something that showed what she had observed in a way that no one else would after her" (Danticat 2001: 140). As the story opens and ends with images of blood and killing it becomes clear that, for Princess, and by extension for Danticat, art is a way of overcoming death and building ties between the antecedents and the posterity.

The same anxiety animates the characters of the story "The Missing Peace," in which an exilic Haitian woman, Emilie, comes back to Haiti to look for the grave of her mother killed by "the new regime." If she could mourn at her mother's grave, she would find the "peace" that she "misses" so much. Though her quest is aborted, she nevertheless reconciles herself to the loss of her mother, thanks to her young Haitian guide — a girl named Lamort — who, like Emilie, is an orphan. Her name "Lamort" — meaning death in French — was given to her by her grandmother, who in this way punishes the girl for her mother's death in childbirth. The grandmother is conventional and deeply suspicious of all diasporic outsiders who, unlike her and her granddaughter, can read and write. The cross-cultural encounter of Emilie and Lamort liberates them both from the grip of the past — while Emilie finally starts to think about the future, Lamort finds strength and courage to successfully defy her grandmother and claim her mother's name as her lawful birthright.

These two stories demonstrate that the acts of crossing are as important as the specific locations where the crossings begin and sometimes end. The village of Ville Rose, where the stories are set, is a localized and diasporic place — it is a place where diasporic subjects come into being. Thus it is not only the metropolis that is a contact zone for different cultures; the village also can be a place where the tides of the Black Atlantic crisscross. Border-crossing and migrancy are indeed liberating, but as those who left come back the whole community benefits.

This intersection of the local and the global fills an important void in Gilroy's paradigm. Danticat proves that the achievement of positive female subjectivity is not necessarily linked to the condition of exile. As Danticat explores the lives of those who stayed, she challenges the idea that their lives were impoverished because they did not migrate, but on the other hand, she seems to believe that personal development and empowerment hinge on cross-cultural intercourse and exchange, on borrowing and lending across cultural boundaries. In the words of Donnell (2006: 87), who often contests Gilroy's praxis, "the kinds of trans-cultural and intercultural work that Gilroy locates as somehow exceeding and even deconstructing the nation can actually be located within the Caribbean nation, city or even village." But in Danticat's fiction it is the village, not the city, where cultural plurality is allowed to thrive. In this way Danticat goes against the grain of much contemporary postcolonial criticism. Most postcolonial and Caribbean critics, to quote from Donnell again, are "both profoundly suspicious of pastoral motifs which they see as promoting a mystifying narrative of the recovery of a lost essence and therefore obstructing a more direct entanglement with the actual conditions of Caribbean life." These critics "tend to associate pastoral with a regressive politics, and in general, scholars of Caribbean literature celebrate a turn away from pastoral setting in favor of more urban ones" (Phillips Casteel quoted in Donnell 2006: 103). Danticat, on the other hand, obviously gives preference to rural settings, but her village is not static or regressive, and it is not posed in opposition to the liberating condition of migration and exile, but in contrast to the city, which is a forcibly monolithic place, a place of "cultural insiderness," dedicated to the dream of "ethnically homogenous object," to use Gilroy's words. Thus her interest in rural and urban Haiti turns the tables on the Caribbean critics and enables us to think about the location and diaspora in new ways.

Also, the experience of dislocation is described without going into raptures and is not regarded as a virtue in itself. Life beyond Haiti is often described more in terms of loss than of success. The opening story "Children of the Sea" dramatizes the fate of the boat people who are lost at sea and never reach the shores of Florida. This story shows another dimension of the Black Atlantic crossings, rem-

inherent of the traumatic experience of the Middle Passage. It proves how unwilling Danticat is to subjugate her art to any theoretical agenda. In her investigation of the connection between history and travel and the dynamics of cultural exchange, Danticat refuses to treat Atlantic crossings as merely an intellectual odyssey. As Alison Donnell (2006: 97) aptly remarks: “[the] sea is not charged with cross cultural flows or tides of intellectual exchange but with the fears and hopes of the ‘Illegal Immigrant’ and the ‘stowaway’ whose identities are lost at sea with no certainty of landing.” As the travelers — the children of the sea — sink into their “watery graves” we are reminded that the Black Atlantic is and has always been first and foremost a place of perilous human traffic.

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