

WANDERING BODIES: THE DISRUPTION OF IDENTITIES IN JAMAICA  
KINCAID'S *LUCY* AND EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S *THE FARMING OF BONES*

BY

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## **DEDICATION**

For my mother, Janice Burke-Martin, who has been my greatest supporter throughout this process and my lifetime. I love you.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationship between migration and identity in two Caribbean novels, Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*. Through these female characters, I analyze the process of migration as a disruptive force that complicates Lucy's and Amabelle's various identities. The issues they face because of their transition inspires a process of self-discovery. As a result, they choose to reside in spaces of emptiness, allowing them to have no identity placement at the end of their journeys. The ideal solution would be to join their new and old identities together in order to create their individuality. However, they fail in taking that route and instead the authors perform this hybridization of cultures through both novels and in return exemplify what it means to have a Caribbean identity.

## PREFACE

*Sometimes it is important to be personal. Despite the calls in the scholarly world to retreat to a safe distance from subjectivity, we know, as women, that it is the submerged life which orchestrates both our strengths and our difficulties.*

*—Carol Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, Out of the KUMBLA*

One day I received a call from my mother and instead of telling her how much I missed her, I explained that she had abandoned me and I no longer wanted to speak to her. That day she was deeply hurt by my truth and made a decision that changed my life forever; she made me leave what I had always known for the unknown and the uncertain. I left a small island in the Caribbean—my birth country, my place of origin, what the world knows to be Jamaica—at six-years-old. My destination was the land of the free, the United States of America, and I had come to live in unison with my recently emigrated parents. Since my departure, I have not had the opportunity to return.

For the past seventeen years, I have juggled two cultural identities, never knowing how to answer the question, “Where are you from?” Whenever I am asked that question, I want to tell them the truth—that I am Jamaican. Would it not be obvious when I speak Patois, eat Ackee & Saltfish regularly, and jam to Reggae and Dancehall music? I also want to tell them the *other* truth—that even though I am not an American citizen, I grew up in Queens, New York and have assimilated quite easily into American culture. So then what do I say? “I’m from Jamaica *and* New York City?” Is it possible to come from two places? Do I then have more than one cultural identity? Am I a Jamaican-American? And to what country do I remain loyal, the one where I live or the one where I was born? These questions have haunted me for years and what happens to be more troubling is that I still do not have the answers to any of them. Undoubtedly, I have struggled with

identifying my cultural identity because it has made self-discovery incredibly difficult. There are moments when I just want to be on one side. It would be easier. I would be certain. My reality, however, is that I cannot choose a side, and quite frankly the desire to do so is something I do not have either.

Since New York is also a place I call home, when I moved to North Carolina to pursue my college education, another cultural identity was forced upon me. If you have ever traveled between the North and the South, you are well aware that there are significant differences between the two regions, differences that create subcultures, smaller pieces to a bigger American culture. Once I realized this, I came to understand that these cultural identities were not being placed on me without cause, but the fact that I continued to move was the source of this problem. Now, I am no longer surprised when I leave one place to go to another. Whether it be country to country, state to state, city to city, or even work to home, pieces of my identity are put on hold or exchanged for something else. For this reason, I have come to accept the fact that once I keep on moving, naturally my identity will do the same and I will forever be a human being in transition.

So here I am—the immigrant, the traveler—writing this in honor of both groups of people, but specifically for those who have been forced out of their homelands and those who have left their countries seeking something greater than what they have always known. I cannot tell you that the journey will be easy because it will not be. I cannot reassure you that you will always feel that you belong somewhere because it will change. But what I can offer you is the possibility to choose and by choosing I simply mean deciding that you are in full control of who you say you are. You can choose to be one,

both, all or none, the possibilities are endless. But in choosing, remember that you are the one that will have to deal with the realities of that decision. I, for one, have chosen to accept and embrace all of the cultural identities I have found and will continue to find on my journey. They are the missing pieces to this puzzle I know as my life.

## INTRODUCTION

“Migration, Identity and the Caribbean”

*How does one understand a Caribbean and define a Caribbean identity in a region that is multiethnic, multilingual, multicultural, and ideologically plural? – Gordon Rohlehr*

In her book, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, Caribbean feminist and critic, Carole Boyce Davies, argues that black women’s writing should be understood through boundary crossings and not fixed categories. She perceives black American writers and black Caribbean writers to share common ground as it relates to race, gender, and migration. Therefore, their writings ought to be read intertextually instead of placing them in individual genres. Davies also provides analyses about the identity formation of the migrating black female subject. “The re-negotiating of identities,” she states, “is fundamental to migration as it is fundamental to black women’s writing in cross-cultural contexts. It is the convergence of multiple places and cultures that negotiates the terms of black women’s experience that in turn negotiates and re-negotiates their identities” (Davies 3).

Considering her analysis that migration is a source that aids in negotiating identity, locating home, then, becomes an additional concern. She explains:

Migration created the desire for home, which in turn produces the rewriting of home. Homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home or the longing for home become motivating factors in this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it. Still home is contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation. (Davies 113)

She uses the term 'rewriting' in reference to black women writers across the globe that create narratives around issues of displacement and homelessness.

In various ways, black women writers use the novel form to not just expose the realities of exile but to rethink the home space. The notion of home becomes complicated, being both physical and cultural and at times being neither. Antonia MacDonald-Symthe in *Making Homes in the West/Indies* further explains this:

Home accrues a range of meanings in these various contextualizations. It relates to geographies: home is an island, a community, a house. It becomes a political term: home describes Africa, the New World and the nation-state. It is an ideology: home is the imagination, a safe, nurturing space, a place where one can speak freely. But home can be a prison, a grave, a cage. It can be a place where one is silenced. Home can be both center and margin. Multiple and shifting, home is nevertheless a site for the construction of identity. (MacDonald-Smythe 1)

These ever-shifting home spaces, then, have the ability to complicate the identities that are formed in them which also assumes the idea that home is the primary source of identity formation. Since home defines identity, when the home space is abandoned or replaced by choices of migration, the identities that have been pre-created will also face abandonment or exchange.

In the same way that migration converges place and culture in order to negotiate and re-negotiate the black woman's identity, the Caribbean identity is, too, altered through the shared experience of exile. While it is easy to associate Caribbean identity

with the Caribbean region, it is also argued that this cultural identity goes beyond geographical locations and functions as a notion that combines various identities as a way of being. Richard Allsopp suggests, “the term identity in [the Caribbean] context cannot refer to an ethnicity or nationhood....we must beware of concluding that it is a purely geographical, culturally vague term” (Griffith 34). Eddy Souffrant argues that “the Caribbean condition...is one of relation. It consists in the relationship of a multitude of cultures and persons in transition. It is arguably the condition of diasporic peoples” (Griffith 119). And as Odile Ferly points out “Caribbean identity [is] in perpetual transformation and enriched by exchange, notably through syncretism, creolization, and immigration” (Ferly 103).

If Caribbean identity is not, as these scholars suggest, a fixed geographical identity but a multicultural way of being, migration is fundamental to the creation of it. It is through movement and being displaced from ones primary homeland that people endure the Caribbean experience. By navigating different spaces and enduring cultural exchange, the joining of the smaller identities negotiated by that movement is necessary to the contribution of the ideological plurality (stated in my epigraph) that make the Caribbean multiethnic, multilingual and multicultural. Gordon Rohlehr explains that: “The Caribbean people are juxtaposed to each other more closely in diaspora contexts than they are in actuality in the Caribbean regional setting. It may be our contemporary way of doing what we used to do in the colonial period, that is, to relate more closely as Caribbean peoples living in “exile” in another country than we relate to each other back “home” in the Caribbean” (Griffith 56). Understanding this, Caribbean people as a whole “straddle a space between old and new homes, and inhabit two (or more) “half homes”

simultaneously,” (Griffith 79) creating “a new kind of spatial homelessness that paradoxically makes for at-homeness anywhere” (Griffith 81).

Since exile generally influences cultural adjustment, along with that comes “an adaptation process leads to a redefinition of identity” (Ferly 151). This study will analyze the effects of physical displacement as it relates to identity formation. Migration, a process that many people go through in their lives, has the ability to disrupt one’s national identity because they are displaced from their primary home spaces. This disruption often problematizes the process of self-discovery. Therefore, a larger problem presents itself prompting questions about the two: national identity and individuality. How does national identity influence how one determines their individual self? Is it possible to have one without the other? What happens when the national identity duplicates, does that make room for a more complex individual self? Directing my focus to the experiences of black Caribbean women in literature, I focus on how navigating more than one cultural space problematizes the overall identity of the characters in the novels.

The two novels I have chosen to further discuss these issues, Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* and Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*, both reveal issues of cultural displacement caused by migration. These novels discuss the cultural exchanges between America, Antigua, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, countries who are all considered to be a part of the Caribbean region. However, the displacement in the characters’ lives that is caused by political force is what creates room for a hybridity that is a reflection of the Caribbean identity. Lucy, for example, leaves Antigua to go to the U.S. and struggles with finding a sense of home. Along with that battle of homelessness are problems of

understanding who she is as an individual. By disturbing the relationship between home and self, *Lucy* provokes ideas about whether one can truly have selfhood without a sense of belonging. Lucy fails in her attempt to achieve individuality without a cultural identity because she resorts to a space of isolation instead of welcoming the various identities she acquires as a part of creating her individual self. Amabelle, on the other hand, straddles national boundaries between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. In a technical sense, she does leave Haiti for the Dominican Republic but due to the fact that the two countries share one piece of land, Amabelle's national identity becomes far more complex than Lucy's. As a result of an unclear borderline which leaves national identities to be just as ambiguous, Amabelle also has a hard time understanding herself as an individual and fails in her attempt to achieve liberation and identity in death. Though the characters fail in making sense of the relationship between their migration experience and their convoluted identities, Kincaid and Danticat are doing what the characters could have done: they embrace multiple ways of being as a result of writing in and about exile. In other words, they participate in a multicultural conversation that produces the Caribbean experience and exemplifies what it means to have a Caribbean identity.

In chapter one, I analyze Lucy's journey in the new world after her migration has already taken place. By targeting elements of memory, race, and history—aspects that are all influential in her transition—I demonstrate how Lucy's attempt at self-discovery confines her to a space of isolation. Rather than combining pieces of the two cultures she experiences, Lucy rejects both cultural influences in the name of creating herself. At the cost of her individual identity comes a lack of home and belonging but more specifically,

Lucy reveals in her confinement that she possesses no cultural identity. Failing to be culturally placed only proves Lucy's new found selfhood to be an illusion.

Chapter two provides an analysis of Amabelle's journey between the two countries. With this novel, it is crucial to highlight the historical and geographical elements that surround her narrative. More specifically, I look at the in-between space she inhabits (seeming to be neither here or there), memory and loss as well as the trope of death. I prove how these factors determine the fate of Amabelle. Based on circumstance, Amabelle like Lucy chooses to find her individuality rather than embrace a national identity. After realizing the lack of opportunity to be an individual, Amabelle resorts to being identity-less by facing death which in the end prevents her from having both life and identity.

In my conclusion, I draw upon the failure of both characters which instead of liberating them, confines them to a space of nothingness. Like Evelyn O'Callaghan, I argue that "the access to multiple cultures and language varieties and traditions can be seen as liberating" (Griffith 79) more so than rejecting all cultures like Lucy, or choosing death like Amabelle. I also shed light on how both writers participate in contributing to the genre of Caribbean literature by writing about different countries while living in another. Both narratives are useful critiques of the migrations that disrupt and conflate the cultural identities that in return create what we know to be a Caribbean identity.

## CHAPTER 1

“A Quest for Selfhood in Kincaid’s *Lucy*”

*I wish everyone would stay where they come from because when we go to other places, you eventually exploit. – Jamaica Kincaid*

Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* is a crucial source that should be examined when discussing notions of displacement caused by migration. Told from the position of a marginalized female subject, the eponymous protagonist grapples with the physical transition she has chosen to endure, leaving her native Caribbean island and moving to a rather large city in the United States, not for a temporary visit, but for a more permanent stay. In this novel, Kincaid critiques the history of Antigua’s colonization by Great Britain. She examines Britain’s colonial power through the mother-daughter relationship, also considering the mother-daughter dynamic to be a relationship between “the powerless and the powerful.” More importantly, Kincaid highlights both cultural experiences between the U.S. and Antigua in order to create a multicultural literary experience that defines and redefines Caribbean identity.

Voyaging from hot and sunny Antigua, Lucy arrives in cold New York City ready to start her new life as an au pair for her white upper middle class employers, Mariah and Lewis. While her responsibilities are to care for their four small girls in the daytime, Lucy also attends school at night to follow through with her plans of becoming a nurse. As she settles in this new environment, the façade she had of life in the U.S. as well as Mariah and Lewis’ fairytale marriage unfolds, allowing her to believe that her past and present have no significant differences. Because we have missed the physical journey of

Lucy's migration from the Caribbean to the United States, I am interested in exploring the aftermath of her displacement, the mental journey she experiences in the new world.

This chapter provides analyses of Lucy's post-migration experiences in order to demonstrate how she resorts to a space of isolation at the end of the novel. In particular, I examine her constant remembering of the homeland and the cultural tension that is created by her black body and the history of black people in America. Her memories of Antigua are reminders of the primary source of her cultural identity. These memories, though not always pleasant, help Lucy to embrace her position as an Antiguan woman and also invite other possibilities for the future. Race, on the other hand, disrupts Lucy's Antiguan identity when the African-American identity is imposed upon her by those in America. Lucy does not embrace this imposition that could invite an Antiguan-American identity and perpetuates the cultural tension between the two. I argue that Lucy takes on pieces of the black American identity even though she does not perceive herself that way. I also bring attention to the relationship that she has with her biological mother that is a reflection of Antigua's historical past and the master-servant dynamic she has with Mariah. This element of being the powerless in relation to the powerful is what initially sparked Lucy's migration. Assuming that she could avoid this problem in the U.S., Lucy is disappointed when Mariah takes on the similar position of colonial authority. In response to this overbearing mother-daughter relationship, I demonstrate how Lucy in resisting both cultures achieves a false sense of liberation. As a result, Lucy rejects the possibility of a multicultural identity for a position of solitude that is only beneficial for selfhood and leaves her without cultural placement.

## Memory and the Homeland

Thinking of Richard Allsopp's words that "Caribbean identity is instantly defined when one is not in the Caribbean," it is evident that Lucy's constant reflection of the homeland is due to her absence from it. Her Antiguan identity can only take form when she is in America, and as a result, she suffers from the longing to be there. As she learns to navigate this foreign space, she finds herself comparing her previous world to the one she currently inhabits, unintentionally creating a twoness she does not yet have the ability to understand. The change in weather, for example, is the first disruption of what Lucy knows to be normal. She explains: "Seeing the sun, I got up and put on a dress, a gay dress made out of madras cloth—the same sort of dress that I would wear if I were at home and setting out for a day in the country" (5). She then realizes that "it was all wrong. The sun was shining but the air was cold...but I did not know that the sun could shine and the air remain cold; no one had ever told me...I realized I was no longer in a tropical zone" (5). The difference in climate caused by her physical displacement becomes a factor that contributes to a shift in her identity. Where she had to dress for hotter climate before, she now has to be conscious of a colder one. Once this realization of difference comes upon her, Lucy declares that her life became "like a flow of water dividing formerly dry and solid ground, creating two banks, one of which was my past...the other my future" (5). This is an appropriate moment to consider how the cold climate disrupts Lucy's sense of origin, and therefore, invites other possibilities of being. Unlike the tropical zone which she is accustomed to that grants her the privilege of living in an unchanging physical environment, New York City goes through a variety of seasons per year and requires commitment to adjusting to each season. I imagine that Lucy's identity

reflects this in the same way because when she lived in Antigua she only knew one way of life, opposed to her life now in the U.S. that offers possibilities of living that are endless. Not to mention the fact that the certainty of her past is also being challenged by the unforeseen things inside her future.

Lucy adapting to the climate change is not the only adjustment she must make. Immediately upon her arrival, Lucy talks of her first experiences of getting into an elevator, living in an apartment, and eating already prepared food. She tells us, “In the place I had just come from, I always lived in a house, and my house did not have a refrigerator in it. Everything I was experiencing—the ride in the elevator, being in an apartment, eating day-old food that had been stored in a refrigerator...was all so new that I had to smile with my mouth turned down at the corners” (4). The frown upon Lucy’s face is due to the reminder “of how uncomfortable the new can make you feel” (4). Lucy also expresses her desire to not want to take anything else that was new in, which indicates a sense of being overwhelmed by all the changes that have occurred due to her re-location. These changes in her physical environment are not only hard to understand, they evoke an element of nostalgia. “Oh, I had imagined,” she notes, “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...in the past, the thought of being in my present situation had been a comfort, but now I did not even have this to look forward to, and so I lay down on my bed and dreamt I was eating a bowl of pink mullet and green figs cooked by my grandmother” (6-7). Now that Lucy’s past-present<sup>1</sup> has become her past, she is discontent with the present of being in a country that she is unfamiliar with.

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<sup>1</sup> I use this term to describe the thoughts Lucy had imagined in the past that she is currently experiencing.

She longs for home, for the sunshine it offers, for the food it produces, and for the feeling of solidarity she once possessed.

Even in moments of nostalgia, Lucy demonstrates ambivalence towards home. Her longing for the homeland becomes misconstrued when she begins to express her lack of desire to return to Antigua. Shortly after acknowledging her homesickness, Lucy assures us that: “An ocean stood between me and the place I came from, but it would [not] have made a difference if it had been a teacup of water [because] I could not go back” (9-10). It is important to note that Lucy *can* go back home, but she chooses not to. She makes this decision in effort to forget the people and memories she left there. “I wondered,” she says, “if ever in my whole life a day would go by when these people I had left behind, my own family, would not appear before me in one way or another” (8). She also admits, “I walked around with letters from my family and friends scorching my breasts...it was not from feelings of love and longing that I did this; quite the contrary. It was from a feeling of hatred” (20). Lucy, in this moment, fails in her attempt to forget home by intentionally carrying around elements that remind her of it. By representing the people at home, the letters represent pieces of her cultural identity, and are a reminding source of origin that she is unwilling to part with. If she disposes the letters it will only be assumed that Lucy is also getting rid of her previous self. With no desire to do so, Lucy straddles the line in-between. In the same way she holds on to her memories of home, with no plans of returning to see the people she loves, Lucy desires to maintain pieces of her cultural identity without physically being on the island. This twoness that was initially caused by her migration begins to affect other areas of her life as she continues to explore new possibilities in the foreign space.

## **Cultural Tension in the U.S.**

The process of migration is not only responsible for evoking memories of the homeland but it successfully contributes to the disruption of Lucy's cultural identity. Though *Lucy* is very much about the Antiguan experience, it is also about the American experience—an experience that becomes complicated by cultural difference and racial similarities. Kincaid, however, suggests that Lucy is exempt from, or rather should be excluded from, the conversation surrounding issues of race. When Moira Ferguson inquires about the parallels between her work and that of African-American women writers like Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, Kincaid responds, “I don't think American women have much we [Caribbean women] can draw from. I mean the use of language is different, and their concerns are much different” (Ferguson 164). I, on the other hand, am suggesting that language cannot be a cultural barrier between African-American women writers and Caribbean women writers, particularly in the case of Kincaid's writing being that all of her novels, like theirs, are written in English. Needless to say, the concerns of black people in America and the Caribbean prove to be the same, that of oppression by a ruling power. In my opinion, Kincaid's argument that black Americans are obsessed with a nationality that asserts their presence of being black in an predominantly white space proves to be a similar reflection of the Caribbean problem, being extremely concerned with the fact that their identity is a replica of someone else's. Evidently, both cultural groups are consumed and defined by the more dominant group; therefore, conversations about the two ought to bring more similarities than differences.

In light of that, Kevin Meehan acknowledges that there is a sort of tension between people of the Caribbean and African-Americans, a tension that can be “a

hindrance to the development of [a] Caribbean American identity” (Meehan 259).

Despite Kincaid’s beliefs, Lucy is a product of such an identity. Her decision to be a permanent visitor in the United States requires that she lives in America and identifies with a specific group of people. In America, it is impossible to discuss notions of identity without first discussing race. “Where” Lucy comes from does not have as much significance as believed because a black woman in America will always be identified by race first while her nationality comes after. Even if Lucy does not accept the identity of the African-American woman placed on her by those in the U.S., (which she does not) it is an identity she cannot escape.

“Racial identity,” Meehan points out, “appears as a learned concept, or a social construct, rather than something that is natural, inevitable or obvious” (Meehan 262). In Lucy’s case, it seems to be both because of her black body and how it determines her social class. Taking a moment to think of physical space once again, Lucy expresses with dissatisfaction that the room she lives in is like “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” (7). Lucy is placed in this room by her white employers because of her social position as a poor black woman. This imagery of being moved, particularly like cargo—an inanimate object, or even property—certainly draws conclusions that relate to the history of slavery for people of African descent. What Lucy is also saying here is that she is not “cargo,” meaning that she has no connection to the identities of slaves in America who after certain historical movements became African-Americans. It is then clear that she acknowledges the history of African-

Americans but does not want to accept that the racial qualities she shares with them could have resulted in her sharing their history as well.

Furthermore, Lucy's resistance of the black American identity that is being imposed on her fails tremendously in her role as a domestic laborer. Her position, in the eyes of Dinah, is "the girl who takes cares of the children," (58) which also gives reason to Dinah's question, "So are you from the islands?" (56). To a person like Dinah, white and superior to minorities in any context, Lucy has no individual identity, therefore, she must belong to the community she most resembles, the black community. Even so, Lucy differs in perception. She is "the young girl who watches over the children *and* goes to school at night," (7; my emphasis) opposed to the young girl who just watches the children. Lucy's ability to receive an education that might grant her an opportunity outside of the domestic work space is what she believes separates her from the "mammy" identity generally given to poor black women who are domestic laborers in America. However, this nanny-like identity is more impactful than she presumes it to be. In taking care of Mariah's four children, Lucy then becomes a sort of "other-mother" to the girls. With the youngest daughter in particular, Miriam, Lucy expresses that, "I loved Miriam from the moment I met her...I couldn't explain it. I loved this little girl" (53). This illusion of a mother-daughter relationship only highlights the relationship between black women in America and the historical effects of slavery that forced them to be the primary care-givers of white women's children.

In her book *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*, Sharon Harley focuses on issues surrounding black women's labor in America. Harley begins by giving a historical overview of black women's labor during slavery in order to discuss the transition that

produced the work opportunities that black women have today. She states: “Almost every act enslaved black women performed could be considered labor [that] denied ownership of their personhood...their work benefited their employers” (Harley 1). Black women during that time did not have ownership of themselves and therefore could not receive compensation for their labor, making their owners the only beneficiaries in their economic exchange. Even when enslaved black women became free, in “the first few decades of the twentieth century [they] were still concentrated at the bottom of the economic ladder” (Harley 4). Harley explains that the nature of their work always resembled the work they performed during slavery, which indicated employment relating to household work and child care. As a result of her racial identity, the history of black women in America has helped place Lucy in the role of care giver to Mariah and Lewis’ four children. Although she is not under the circumstances of slavery and has full ownership of herself, I think it is interesting that Lucy’s domestic work proves to be mostly beneficial to her employers because the education that she is receiving along with it means nothing to her. She was sure that “whatever [her] future held, nursing would not be a part of it” (92). Harley also points out that slave women found ways to work for themselves because the survival of their families depended on their labor, an obligation to bear their family’s economic burden that followed black women into the twentieth century (Harley 2-4). This can even be a reminder of Kincaid’s initial purpose in coming to America. She reveals, “I left because of economic reasons. We thought I’d be able to help my family by going away, and perhaps get an education...my education [in Antigua] was cut short because I was supposed to go and help my family”<sup>2</sup> (Vorda 15). If we

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<sup>2</sup> I use this quote from an interview Kincaid does with Allan Vorda because *Lucy* is considered an autobiographical novel which Kincaid has admitted to.

believe that Lucy's character migrated to the U.S. for that reason, due to the autobiographical similarities to Kincaid's life, it becomes true that like black women in America, the survival of her family in Antigua also depends upon her role as a laborer. The obligation to her employer and her family, therefore, keeps Lucy in a position of servitude, a role that African-American women generally find themselves in. In the words of Harley, "Although black women were now legally free, their postbellum work differed little from that of their enslaved and free ancestors" (Harley 4).

On another occasion, Lucy's physical resemblance to African-Americans problematizes the way she is seen by others and the way she sees herself. Mariah decides to take Lucy and the children out of the city and to the rural region to witness the beauty of the Great Lake, one of her favorite pastimes as a child. The train ride to the country becomes an experience of observation for Lucy. She recognizes the freshly plowed fields, another reminder of the enslavement of blacks in America, and states with relief, "Well, thank God I didn't have to do that" (33). Lucy is aware of the blackness that she shares with the African-American community but insists on highlighting their differences instead of their similarities as a form of rejection. As they are dwelling in the cafeteria on the train, Lucy notes that "the other people sitting down to eat dinner all looked like Mariah's relatives; the people waiting on them all looked like mine" (32). Mistakenly, she says, "They were not at all like my relatives; they only looked like them. My relatives always gave backchat" (32). Lucy is suggesting here that African-Americans live a passive subservient life when it comes to their relationship with white people, while people from the Caribbean maintain a more aggressive attitude with those they are serving. Oddly enough, Lucy finds herself in a similar predicament of not being able to

give “backchat.” Mariah becomes angry when she learns that Lucy will be leaving and living on her own. She speaks to Lucy harshly and even creates new rules for her to follow. In response, Lucy obeys Mariah’s requests claiming, “It was a last resort for her—insisting that I be the servant and she the master,” (144) an alternative to what she considers a friendship between the two of them. Still, in this instance, Lucy fails to see the reality of her relationship with Mariah. In a naïve way, she imagines that her being Mariah’s employee and living in Mariah’s house is completely different from the servitude demonstrated by the waiters on the train. It could even be said that because of the love she has acquired for Mariah, Lucy believes that their acquaintance surpasses the economic exchange between them. Unfortunately, their relationship does not reach into the personal in the way that Lucy imagines it does. For these reasons, the cultural tension presented in the novel is perpetuated by Lucy because of her inability to embrace the shared experiences between herself and the black people in the U.S.

Contradicting her rejection of the black American identity, Lucy joyfully participates in the sexual component of it. She finds promiscuity to be an avenue towards freedom, but fails to understand that for black women in an American context, promiscuous behavior is actually expected of them. If we consider Lucy to be, in Gary Holcomb’s words, “a sexually emancipated traveler who willingly accepts the identity of a slut,” (Holcomb 297) then it is essential to think of this new found identity as an additional element to Lucy’s resemblance of the stereotypes concerning African-American women. Because I will address Lucy’s sexuality as a form of cultural resistance in constructing her own identity later on, I would like to make a brief point about Lucy’s promiscuity. Over the course of the year that Lucy resides in the U.S., she

explores sexual relationships with various individuals. First, there is Dinah's brother, Hugh, who when "thinking about his hands and his mouth could make [her] feel as if [she] were made up of an extravagant piece of silk" (71). Along with Hugh, there is Paul, the "pervert," whom she and Peggy would attain the marijuana they smoked from. Though Paul is who she maintains a sexual relationship with for the longest amount of time, Lucy also engages with Roland, the photographer she purchased her camera from and Peggy, her roommate who she explores the art of kissing due to boredom.

Cornel West, in *Race Matters*, examines the issues of race in an American society, particularly as it concerns black sexuality being seen as "disgusting, dirty, or funky and considered less acceptable" (West 83). Having their perceptions tampered by sexual myths about black men and women, white Americans view black sexuality with disgust and because of this, black female sexuality is more devalued (West 90). In a similar fashion, Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Sexual Politics* explores the history of black female sexuality in America, referring to instances of slavery in which masters found it "impossible to rape Black women because they were already promiscuous" (Collins 101). Collins also reminds us that the myth about black women being promiscuous and lacking sexual restraint is due to slave masters desire for high fertility amongst black female slaves in order to produce more property, better known as children. Though Lucy might not fit the description of the "breeder woman" because she is without child, her desire to be a sexual traveler positions her into the same category that states it is natural for black women to be promiscuous, for they do not have the ability to control themselves. Let us not forget that Lucy professes to her mother that "life as a slut was quite enjoyable" (128). Therefore, Lucy's impulsive response to sexual encounters that are presented to her,

whether it is with strangers or someone familiar, indeed classifies her as *the* promiscuous black woman.

The pursuit of the promiscuous identity that her mother and society argues against, only confirms the conceptualization of black women as sexually unstable, and eliminates the cultural differences that she insists is most obvious outside of race. If Kincaid, arguably speaking, decides that Lucy should not be categorized with such being that this novel is supposed to be about the Caribbean identity seen within Lucy, then it is only fair that we ask Meehan's question to Lucy: "How do you get to be a person of color in New York City who only hangs out with white people?" (Meehan 263) or rather disassociate yourself with the very people who look like you? It is fair to say that like the society in the novel, I am arguing that Lucy is an active participant in the black American community, whether she accepts it or not. The reality of Lucy's new life is that racial identity surpasses nationality in the American world and requires that she considers taking on some if not all pieces of being a black American. Lucy is under the impression that she can live in the U.S. and still maintain all of her Antiguan identity without ever being influenced by American culture. She is wrong. Lucy is welcome to choose whatever pieces of the African-American identity she desires; she does not have to accept it in its entirety. What she cannot do successfully is pretend that her blackness does not associate her with the other black people living in America. If she accepts being a promiscuous woman, it is important for her to know that she is also accepting part of the black woman experience in America, and therefore needs to be conscious and open about it. If this is not the case and Lucy is interested in separating her Antiguan identity from the American one she is given then she is better off returning to Antigua where there is

no other cultural identity to conflict with the one she is desperately trying to keep. Lucy must know that even if she never accepts the shared experience of being a black woman in America, the American people will do it for her.

### **The Mother(land)**

Lucy's initial desire for migrating to the U.S. was to escape the past of her country as well as the past with her mother. Both country and mother are symbols of power and authority that determine who Lucy is and what she does. Resembling one another so closely, Lucy feels powerless in relation to them and anticipates a sense of freedom in America that will allow her to be an individual. She is highly disappointed when feelings of oppression follow her half way across the world and reveal themselves in her relationship with Mariah. The relationship developed between Lucy and her employer, a wealthy white woman whose life embodies the American dream in a picturesque way, illustrates the complexities of the master-servant relationship and its impact on Lucy's past, present, and future identity. Described as the "(surrogate) mother-(immigrant) daughter relationship," (Rodriguez 22) Mariah and Lucy's bond is "infused with ambivalence and contradiction" (Majerol 18) due to Mariah's desire for Lucy to see things from her perspective and Lucy's refusal to do so. When Mariah brings up the idea of daffodils in spring time, for example, Lucy struggles with the effects of her colonial education. She reflects on a poem about daffodils by Wordsworth that she was forced to memorize in school. After reciting it perfectly to an audience full of eager parents, teachers and students, Lucy expresses, "I was then at the height of my two-facedness: that is, outside false, inside true. And so I made pleasant little noises that showed both modesty and appreciation, but inside I was making a vow to erase from my mind, line by

line, every word of that poem” (18). Not too long after Lucy tells Mariah this story of her childhood, Mariah decides to introduce her to the same flowers discussed in the poem. Covering Lucy’s eyes with a handkerchief in order to take her to a garden, Mariah hopes that Lucy will find beauty in the daffodils despite the trauma of the poem. Angered by her gesture, Lucy asks Mariah, “Do you realize that at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen?” (30). Mariah’s inability to answer Lucy’s question suggests an impossibility (due to privilege) to imagine what Lucy considers “a scene of conquered and conquests; a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes” (30). Mariah cannot identify the problem Lucy sees with the daffodils because she has never had to consider anything in her life from a marginalized position. Lucy reminds us that, “Mariah was beyond doubt or confidence... things must have always gone her way, and not just for her but for everybody she has ever known from eternity; she has never had to doubt, and so she has never had to grow confident; the right thing always happens to her; the thing she wants to happen happens” (26). Intrigued by this sense of privilege unknown to her, Lucy continues to ask the question: “How do you get to be that way?” Despite all that, Lucy recognizes that Mariah has good intentions for introducing her to what she thinks are beautiful flowers, but “nothing could change the fact that where she saw beautiful flowers [Lucy] saw sorrow and bitterness. The same thing could cause [them] to shed tears, but those tears would not taste the same” (30). In this way, Mariah disrupts Lucy’s present by conjuring up her past, ultimately mimicking behavior that is a reminder of her traumatic upbringing caused by historical influences.

According to Betty Joseph, Lucy and Mariah's relationship should be understood through the "belatedness of the other woman—one who is always coming into a world that has already been made for her" (Joseph 74). If Lucy is the other woman, then it is evident that Mariah is the authoritative figure responsible for shaping the world that Lucy is in, representing the colonizer. However, Mariah does not exactly fit the description of the brutal and wicked colonial power. Instead she assumes what Albert Memmi calls "the colonizer who refuses." Memmi explains that "the colonizer partakes of an elevated world from which (s)he automatically reaps the privileges" (Memmi 13) and when (s)he decides that they do not want to be associated with the rest of the group, "(S)he [still] participates in and benefits from those privileges which (s)he half-heartedly denounces" (Memmi 20). When Mariah informs Lucy, for example, why she is skilled at fishing, she announces: "I was looking forward to telling you that I have Indian blood, that the reason I'm so good at catching fish and hunting birds and roasting corn and doing all sorts of things is that I have Indian blood" (40-41). Lucy listens to her say this as if "she were announcing her possession of a trophy" and wonders, "How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?" (41). Here, Mariah confirms Memmi's analysis by reaping the privileges of the oppressor even when she tries to identify with the oppressed. Her role as a liberal feminist also does not exclude her from this system. Even in her effort to introduce Lucy to ways that will free her from social constructs of gender normatives, Mariah in some ways still participates in Lucy's oppression. Their relationship will always be what Brooke Lenz calls "a relationship of economic, social, and personal inequality—a relationship that precludes the kind of personal freedom and social equality that "being a part of things" requires" (Lenz 103). Certainly, Mariah

believes that introducing Lucy to new experiences will allow her to feel included into American culture, but at the same time, Lucy “flouts [her] postcolonial authority” (Ferguson 5) because colonization from Britain had “blanketed her with a false identity, language, and culture,” (Lang-Peralta 36) and she is not willing to be deceived in such a way again.

At the beginning of this mental journey Lucy, still struggling to adjust to her displacement, was only capable of rejecting the American identity being given to her. Now that she has become familiar with the foreign space and understands that Mariah’s influence is just as imposing, Lucy begins to reject her as well. As Lucy approaches a point of change, it is easy to recognize how the resistance moves towards her mother. Lucy’s lack of desire to go home, or rather, her determination not to, demonstrates that rejection. “It had been six months now,” she notes, “and I knew that I never wanted to live in that place again, but if for some reason I was forced to live there again, I would never accept the harsh judgments made against me by people whose only power to do so was that they had known me from the moment I was born” (51). Obviously, Lucy has feelings of hurt that is caused by her mother’s betrayal. As a result, Lucy communicates these emotions of pain through distance. When her mother sends her letters, she refuses to open them allowing the anger that lives inside her to fester. In conversation with Mariah about forgiving her mother, Lucy reveals that she is not an only child but the oldest of three brothers who are still living at home. It was only after her mother began to have male children that Lucy’s parents began to discuss, with great enthusiasm, the plans for their sons to become well educated professionals in society. Disappointed by their sexism, Lucy tells how she really feels:

I did not mind my father saying these things about his sons, his own kind, and leaving me out. 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. (130-31; my emphasis)

The mother-daughter dynamic, in this instance, is understood through being biologically and emotionally equivalent. Because Lucy recognizes herself as the identical offspring to her mother, the disappointment she feels from the lack of support is unbearable.

Therefore, the only way to deal with such sorrow is to distance herself from the cause of it. Creating this distance between what she knows to be herself (her mother) to find a new identity is “the end of a love affair, perhaps the only true love in [her] whole life [she] would ever know” (132).

Acknowledging Mariah’s ability to evoke the historical past helps Lucy to recognize the similarities between her mother and her employer. She states, “The times that I loved Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother. The times I did not love Mariah it was because she reminded me of my mother” (58). Ambivalence in the mother-daughter relationship presents itself because Lucy, in the words of Moira

Ferguson, “is confronted with a sense of doubled colonial aggression” (Ferguson 112). Both mother figures take on that colonial authority by wanting Lucy to see and experience the world through their eyes. She explains, “I had a mother who loved me, and I had come to see her love as a burden and had come to view with horror the sense of self-satisfaction it gave my mother to hear other people comment on her great love for me” (36). Lucy continues to express that, “I had come to feel that my mother’s love for me was designed solely to make me into an echo of her; and I didn’t know why, but I felt that I would rather be dead than become just an echo of someone” (36). Overwhelmed by the relationship that she had with her mother, Lucy leaves Antigua with hopes of finding her individuality. In the same way, Mariah’s overbearing tendencies create a desire within Lucy to separate herself and be completely independent.

“There is always a ruling power,” says Kincaid, “that behaves like the colonial power,” (Vorda 11) therefore, Lucy’s biological mother is also a representation of the native home space. In the same ways that Lucy desires to separate herself from her mother, she feels the same level of discomfort when it comes to her (mother) country. Helen Scott makes an important observation that “the colonial system inflicted much damage, even beyond its formal reign” (Scott 982). This proves to be true because Lucy is miles away from her homeland yet still finds that she cannot completely eradicate the anger that she feels towards the historical past of her country. For instance, in a letter her mother had written telling Lucy that it had not rained since she left, Lucy responds:

I did not care about that any longer. The object of my life now was to put as much distance between myself and the events mentioned 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 work spoken, every face? (31)

The hundreds of years of imperialism from Great Britain drives Lucy practically insane, to know that her entire culture, and her entire being is based on the ideologies of someone else. Her knowledge of this disrupts the ability to understand her cultural and individual identity, influencing her to harbor a great amount of anger towards her mother, her country and any other authority that resembles them. For this reason, Lucy aims to rid herself from all of their influences. She says, “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” (95). To Lucy, “national identity is pictured as prisonlike” (Nichols 192) and due to feeling constrained she resorts to exile, the only solution for her to have complete freedom from cultural identity. If we think of her two mothers and how they are symbols for the two cultures she inhabits, American and Antiguan, Lucy is being pressured to embrace both. Unconcerned with either, Lucy shows more interest in creating her own individuality and accomplishes that through cultural resistance that leads to solitude and isolation at the end of the novel.

### **Cultural Resistance**

Most obvious about Kincaid’s *Lucy* is that it goes beyond the surface. It is not just about the powerful and the powerless, it is about the separation of two cultural identities in order to formulate individuality. Maria Rodriguez argues that “Lucy positions herself

as a pilgrim...to search for or create a value system more in tune with her own beliefs, even if they're still not fully formed" (Rodriguez 25). Kattain Barnwell believes that, "[Lucy's] journey, in physical terms...becomes a metaphor for the psychological voyage of discovery and recovery which culminates in the (re)claiming of the self" (Barnwell 452). Drawing a solid connection between Lucy and the origin of her name, Zarina Plath points out the way in which Lucy echoes the Bible's opening line and "tries to play God (just as her namesake Lucifer had done), but rather than creating a world, her goal is the creation of herself" (Plath 27). In this conversation about Lucy's self-discovery, it is evident that Lucy makes it a priority to rid herself from the cultural norms and expectations of society. I am more interested in whether Lucy is successful in doing so. But first, I would like to draw attention to some of the qualities seen in Lucy's character, qualities that appear to be odd and without purpose, or unusual in a performative way. These elements become important parts of distinguishing Lucy's individual character without attaching aspects of culture.

It is no secret that Lucy has a peculiar relationship to her sense of smell. She reflects on some memories shared with one of her distant cousins, Cuthbert, by pointing out that "his breath always smelled as if it were morning and he had just got out of bed—stale and moldy." While most would consider this to be offensive, Lucy begs to differ. She admits, "I liked that smell so much that whenever I had to talk to him I used to position myself so that the smell of his breath would come my way" (116). Not much different from how she perceives Mariah's "pleasant" scent, Lucy claims, "But that's the trouble with Mariah—she smells pleasant. By then I already knew that I wanted to have a powerful odor and would not care if it gave offense" (27). As seen in both examples,

there is something quite extraordinary about Lucy's ability to embrace strong odors over scents that would be pleasing to most people. The instance with her cousin assumes an innate quality opposed to her desire to carry a powerful odor in order to offend people intentionally. I imagine that in her maturity, these obscenities become a genuine part of Lucy's character because Lucy is too honest at this stage in her life to be performing a role.

In other ways, Lucy demonstrates that she is not a player of society's game. She "vow[s] that if I ever had children I would make sure that the first words out of their mouths were bad ones" (13). She finds fault with Mariah and Lewis' physical qualities because "she was a little shorter than he, and that looked so wrong; it looks better when a woman is a little taller than her husband" (47). Lucy even embraces the dangerous moments of life that many, if not all, people initially try to avoid. She says, "Eventually I got so used to being afraid to walk through the woods that I did it by myself and began to see that there was something beautiful about it; and I had one more thing to add to my expanding world" (55). Last but not least, the hints of promiscuity in Lucy's childhood are intriguing elements that contribute to her extraordinary persona. Reminded of Myrna, "the picky-haired girl" (102) from her childhood, Lucy reflects on the story Myrna told her about Mr. Thomas "put[ting] his middle finger up inside her" (104) underneath a breadfruit tree. Jarringly, Lucy remembers being overcome with jealousy after hearing this story. She wondered, "Why had such an extraordinary thing happened to her and not me? Why had Mr. Thomas chosen Myrna as the girl he would meet in secret and place his middle finger up inside her and not me?" (105). A response certainly unheard of when it comes to child molestation, Oczkovicz statement that Lucy "is a mental outcast and a

moral convict” (Oczkowicz 146) proves to be true. In relation to this, I assumed that Lucy’s discovery of the taste of Tanner’s tongue was the first experience in which she explored physical intimate pleasure. She describes the moment plainly, “I was sucking the tongue of a boy named Tanner, and I was sucking his tongue because I had liked the way his fingers looked on the keys of the piano as he played it, and I had liked the way he looked from the back as he walked across the pasture, and also, when I was close to him, I liked the way behind his ears smelled” (43). Maybe if the factors of age and maturity were to be considered here, Tanner’s tongue as an object of interest to Lucy would not appear so vaguely. In any case, this does reveal that Lucy gravitates towards more idiosyncratic ideas, which could foreshadow the willingness to create an identity of her own that we see at the end of the novel.

Since I have already been discussing Lucy’s sexuality, I will now classify her, borrowing Holcomb’s idea, as “an *immigrant* who becomes a *traveler*” (Holcomb 297). Through this lens, it only makes sense to explore the journeys in which she has traveled, and by journeys I am referring to her sexual voyages. Understanding the difference between immigrating, re-locating to a desired location, and traveling, moving with no intention of settling in one place, Lucy does embody this idea in her sexual relationships. Her relationship with Hugh, for example, shows no interest of superseding the present moments they share. She confirms:

But I was not in love with Hugh. I could tell that being in love would complicate my life just now. I was only half a year free of some almost unbreakable bonds, and it was not in my heart to make new ones... Yet if I were told that he had left unexpectedly on a trip and would not be back for

a long time, I would have to say too bad...and accept it with no more than a shrug of my shoulders...to latch on to this boy—man I suppose—who liked the way the tightly curled hair on my head and other parts of my body trapped his fingers was not for someone my age, and certainly not for me. (70-71)

Uninterested in the idea of love that is often associated with sexual relations, Lucy develops a sense of power over her individuality. To her, engaging in love would require giving up pieces of her identity in the way that she had always done as it concerned her mother. Therefore, Lucy does not request the emotional bond that women are assumed to desire in a romantic relationship because she is only interested in committing herself to one person, and that person is, without any doubt, herself. Agreeing with Nichols, “Lucy is a visitor from the start; her intention is always to depart, to keep moving. The suffocating fear of being trapped motivates Lucy’s mobility” (Nichols 191). This feeling of imprisonment, as I have mentioned before, also pertains to feeling constrained to her colonial past. As a result, Lucy utilizes her sexuality as an avenue for liberation from the mother (country).

Quickly passing through her sexual relationships with Roland and Peggy, more so Roland because she never once implies going beyond the kissing stage with Peggy, Paul is the person she maintains the longest relationship with. All is well on her sexual journey with Paul until he gives her a picture of herself, naked and standing over a boiling pot of food. “That was the moment” she says, “he got the idea he possessed me in a certain way, and that was the moment I grew tired of him” (155). Here, the picture represents permanent possession and Paul’s ability to control the content of the picture (her) because

he is the photographer. Lucy only recognizes this because of her unwillingness to submit to any authority. This resistance is seen again in her first-ever sexual encounter. Once they finished “doing everything they wanted to do” (82) on the floor of his room, Tanner smiles and says, “Oh,” to the blood stain seen on the towel. To maintain her winner’s card, Lucy lies and says, “It’s just my period coming on” (83). It’s important to note that Lucy does this not because she is ashamed of her virginity—“I did not care about being a virgin and had long been looking forward to the day when I could rid myself of that status,”—but because “when I saw how much it mattered to him to be the first boy I had been with. I could not give him such a hold over me” (82-83). Sustaining authority over her sexuality is influenced by her ability to move on. Her ultimate desire for Tanner, and like every other person she engages with is for them to know that she can exist without them.

Important to the creation of her individuality is Lucy’s physical and economic freedom. As known, she moves from Antigua to the United States to create permanent distance between herself and her mother (country). Not fully liberated from an authority other than her own, Lucy must also leave her employer, Mariah. Feeling physically and economically trapped, Lucy says, “I began to feel like a dog on a leash, a long leash but a leash all the same” (110). So, after learning of her father’s death, a clear symbol of rebirth<sup>3</sup>, Lucy quits her live-in job and moves out on her own to live in an apartment with Peggy. She does this having wondered often, “Would it not be nice if I no longer had to live in Mariah and Lewis’s apartment and take care of their children, if I could have a life

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<sup>3</sup> I consider Lucy’s father’s death as a symbol of rebirth because death is often assumed to not be the end, but the beginning of another life. If a piece of Lucy dies (her father) that leaves room for something else to be born (her new life).

of my own and come and go at my own convenience when it pleased me?" (110). She also chooses to live with Peggy because of "the same restlessness, the same dissatisfaction with [their] surroundings, the same skin-doesn't-fit-ness" (145) that they share. Since her new found independence, Lucy enjoys waking up in a bed that she paid for, living under a roof that she pays rent for, and choosing the "loud, showy" curtains with flowers for her window arrangement. Considering supernatural authority and whether or not she is willing to obey one, Lucy learns about herself, "But no longer could I ask God what to do, since the answer, I was sure would not suit me. I could do what suited me now, as long as I could pay for it...that phrase soon became the tail that wagged my dog. If I had died then, it should have been my epitaph" (147). Economic power becomes a driving force for Lucy to maintain her independence. She realizes that as long as she has money, she is in control over where she spends it, and who she answers to, hence, her new secretarial position for a private photographer.

Having undergone a complete transformation, Lucy embraces her new self, an individuality that still has room to develop. "I had been a girl" she reminds us, "of whom certain things were expected, none of them too bad: a career as a nurse, for example; a sense of duty to my parents; obedience to the law and worship of convention. But in one year of being away from home, that girl had gone out of existence" (133). Lucy successfully alters her career plans by dropping out of nursing school, makes a conscious decision never to return home or communicate with her family again, and most importantly, marches to the beat of her own drum, a beat not constructed by society. She also recognizes, "One day I was a child and then I was not" (136) concluding that "the things I could not see about myself, the things I could not put my hands on—those things

had changed, and I did not yet know them well [but] I understood that I was inventing myself, and that I was doing this more in the way of a painter than in the way of a scientist” (134). As she examines her important documents—passport, green card and birth certificate—Lucy observes that they are not good sources for trying to understand her character either. “These documents showed everything about me,” she says, “and yet they showed nothing about me” (148). Though her name, photograph, birthday and other pieces of information give her a concrete identity, one that society holds on to, Lucy knows that none of these things matter because only she can hold the responsibility of telling the story about who she really is.

Brooke Lenz offers an interesting analysis of standpoint theory as it reflects Lucy’s maturation process. Lenz argues that standpoint theory is always going to be from the position of the marginalized, a position that fits Lucy very well. Most importantly, a standpoint, she says, “is an intellectual achievement that reflects political consciousness” (Lenz 98). Considering Lucy’s intellectual accomplishments by the end of the novel, it is fair to say that she has gained new insight on the person she has become. In other words, “the contestation and change in Lucy’s identity formation simultaneously alters her standpoint, moving it from a kind of responsive observation, a “not wanting to know what she is doing,” to a politically engaged consciousness” (Lenz 108). Before completely detaching herself from Mariah’s life, Lucy notes that “everything remains the same and yet nothing is the same” (78). She explains further, “I had come to see the sameness in things that appeared to be different. I had experienced moments of great happiness and a desire to imagine my own future, and at the same time I had a great disillusionment” (91). Here, Lucy comes to terms with the fact that her life in Antigua is

not much different from the one she has in America. Where she had assumed that there would be significant changes, she now knows that it is all the same and she cannot escape any of it unless she moves to a confined space. She confirms this once more, “I used to make a list of all the things that I was quite sure would not follow me if only I could cross the vast ocean that lay before me; I used to think that just a change in venue would banish forever from my life the things I most despised. But that was not to be so. As each day unfolded before me, I could see the sameness in everything; I could see the present take a shape—in the shape of my past” (90).

There is an unfortunate reality to Lucy’s new identity as a liberated young woman—“a self-imposed exile as opposed to one inflicted on her” (Barnwell 453) and the “suffer[ing] from loneliness and unhappiness for the sake of her personal freedom, freedom which, so far, has been defined primarily by rejection, separation, and alienation” (Oczkowitz 155). Evie Shockley calls it “gothic homelessness,” (Shockley 49), which she explains as “the state of the individual who is unwilling and/or unable to achieve or maintain performances of ideologically privileged norms and as a result, comes to be located socially outside or on the margins of domestic space and the communities privileged by domestic ideology” (Shockley 49-50). Lucy is conscious of her role as an expatriate when she states, “I am alone in the world, and I shall always be this way—all alone in the world” (93). Having chosen to live her life in complete solitude, Lucy acknowledges as “for actual happiness, I had been experiencing a long drought” (86). She goes on further explaining that she would never truly be a person who experiences happiness:

I used to lie in my bed at home, surrounded by all the things they say make for a contented life—a loving family, a safe full of food, harmonious surroundings—and not feel contented. I longed then to live in a place like this: bars on the windows to keep out people who might wish to do me harm, and unfriendly climate, uncertainty at every turn. History is full of great events; when the great events are said and done, there will always be someone, a little person, unhappy, dissatisfied, discontented, not at home in her own skin, ready to stir up a whole new set of great events again.

(146)

Home, in a physical and emotional sense, is filled with all the things that create culture: community, food, and memories. Home does not fulfill Lucy in anyway, so she rejects the idea of belonging. As a result, Lucy resides in loneliness. She reiterates again, “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” (161). It is important to remember that Lucy does not migrate in search of a home because she already had one; she moves to find herself and loses her home in the process. As for happiness, it can only be said that nothing can make Lucy happy; she is and will always be unhappy at home and away from it.

In attempt to find a solution to the problem of cultural identity, Lucy thinks herself to be successful in her role as “an artist figure of disidentification” (Majerol 18). This false sense of liberation does allow Lucy in some way to separate herself from both Antiguan identity and American identity, proving Maria Lima’s observation that “Lucy seems permanently displaced, both here [New York] and there [Antigua], and neither

here nor there at one and the same time” (Lima 863). However, I would argue that she consumes a multicultural identity that feeds her permanent homelessness because she creates herself out of the very cultural identities she rejects. In struggling to find her individuality “Lucy’s standpoint changes and multiplies” (Lenz 111). What multiplies is her understanding of two cultures, allowing her to experience what Linda Lang-Peralta calls “cultural schizophrenia” (Lang-Peralta 33). Yes, she achieves solitude and a sense of individuality but Lucy can never be just Antiguan, for that would give no credit to the American experience also responsible for shaping her. It is obvious that Lucy does not accept this fate for herself and my imposition likely detracts from what she believes to be a great accomplishment and open up questions about who is responsible for the creation of identity, the individual or the imposer. Nevertheless, despite Lucy’s effort to welcome the various cultural influences that have shaped her individuality, Kincaid successfully demonstrates that Caribbean identity can only be achieved through movement and cultural exchange as it is what allows *Lucy* to be an Antiguan-American entity. As for Lucy, maintaining selfhood without cultural influences require that she stays in transition. It is the only way she can truly mean: “I did not think of [America] as home, only as the place where I now lived” (156).

## CHAPTER 2

“The Journey to Nowhere: Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*”

*People still do travel to “find themselves,” [however] travel often terrorizes them... thus travel is not always voluntary or liberating. –Edwidge Danticat*

*[Amabelle] is a young woman without an identity. –Patti M. Marxen, “The Map Within”*

If we take a look at the island of Hispaniola, one of the many land masses across the world that inhabits two disparate countries, it is no surprise why there are issues of national identity when it comes to Haiti and the Dominican Republic<sup>4</sup>. Dominican dictator, Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina thought it necessary to make a clear distinction between the two countries, and doing so by any means necessary. Out of his desire to keep the country pure, in October of 1937, Trujillo ordered the deaths of approximately 15,000 Haitians living in the border regions of the Dominican Republic. This violent historical event is called by many names. Dominicans refer to it as *el corte* (the cutting), Haitians call it *kout kout-a* (the stabbing), while English-speakers understand it to be the Parsley Massacre (Vargas 1164). Richard Lee Turits, in an historical recount of this massacre called “A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed,” points out that many of the Haitians that were slaughtered “were mostly small farmers, many of whom had been born in the Dominican Republic (and thus were Dominican citizens according to the Dominican constitution) and some whose families had lived in the Dominican Republic for generations” (Turits 590). This observation further complicates national identity as it relates to place and belonging and raises questions about cultural authenticity. Specifically, as it concerns these two countries: How do you

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<sup>4</sup> Most countries are separated from one another because they have their own land space. When two countries share the same land, borderlands become necessary for distinction. In the case of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, their borderland happens to be a river.

define Haitian identity? What separates it from Dominican identity? And is it possible to be consumed by both? Critic Donette A. Francis offers a solution that says: “Nations need borders, and since Haitians and Dominicans share the seemingly permeable ‘borderless’ land mass of Hispaniola, difference in language and race constructed as means of defining borders” (Francis 172). With this in mind, it becomes clear that issues of identity cannot be resolved in a physical space without distinct borderlands.

Gloria Anzaldúa tackles the problem of borderlands in her book, *Borderlands /La Frontera: The New Mestiza*<sup>5</sup>. “Borderlands are physically present,” she says, “wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (Anzaldúa Preface). She further explains that:

borders are set up to define places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. (Anzaldúa 3)

Anzaldúa’s understanding of borders also assumes the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Evidently, Trujillo was interested in distinguishing the country from their neighbors on a piece of land that failed to do so physically, and because of it, the border regions in which he ordered the deaths of all Haitians surfaced as a problem when it came to identifying who was Haitian and who was not. In the process of trying to

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<sup>5</sup> Anzaldúa discusses the borderland between Texas and Mexico calling it a “third country.”

eliminate Haitians from the Dominican Republic, he ended up murdering his own people. Even though Trujillo believed that “the only “legitimate” inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with the whites,” (Anzaldúa 3-4) race was not a good enough difference to justify his anti-Haitianistic ideals, so as a result, he utilized language as a means to differentiate one from the other. Ultimately, being “locked into the fiction of white superiority, [allowed Trujillo to] seize complete political power, stripping [Haitians] of their land while their feet were still rooted in it” (Anzaldúa 7).

The reality of traumatic events, such as this one, and its impact on cultural and national identity has surfaced in literature. Award winning author, Edwidge Danticat is believed to be “Haiti’s literary voice...the voice of the Haitian-American diaspora” (Marxen 140) because she dedicates most of her work to exposing the struggles of living in Haiti. Danticat is mostly known for exploring the relationship between migration and identity (national, cultural, and individual) in many of her works—her novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, and her memoir, *Brother, I’m Dying*, being prominent examples. Because migration can often be traumatic, her novel, *The Farming of Bones*, offers a crucial perspective on the effects of displacement. Constructing a narrative around the massacre I just mentioned, Danticat gives us a protagonist named Amabelle Désir who after watching her parents drown in the river that separates her homeland, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, is taken in by a prominent Dominican family as a servant. The town of Alegría has Dominican natives as well as Haitian laborers who tend to their sugar cane fields. When rumors that Trujillo is planning to obliterate all Haitians from the area surface, Amabelle and her lover, Sebastien make a plan to return to Haiti and start a new life there together. Sebastien disappears when soldiers arrive to fulfill the president’s

orders and Amabelle goes on a long journey back to Haiti in search of him. Experiencing a great degree of violence on her way back alters Amabelle's identity in more ways than she had imagined. Once she arrives in Haiti, Amabelle comes to the realization that there is no home there for her. Instead of trying to build a new life, she travels back to the Dominican Republic to make amends with her former employer, Señora Valencia, in hopes of finding a sense of home. By the end of the novel, Amabelle comes to a conclusion that home is not a thing that exists for her and if home does not exist then neither does she. As a result, Amabelle resorts to suicide as a way of freedom—freedom from the disruptive forces that complicate her identity. She also redefines death as a new home space that allows her to be with those who she has loved and lost. By being with them in death, Amabelle assures herself that she will finally belong somewhere and gain some knowledge of who she is.

This chapter reveals effects of migration that are different yet similar from that of Lucy's. I explore the various migrations in Amabelle's life as they are disruptive forces that complicate her national/ cultural, and individual identity. First, I discuss the master-servant/family relationship that she has with her mistress, Señora Valencia, and how it places her in a state of in-betweenness. This relationship that consumes Amabelle, in a very different way that it consumes Lucy, is also influenced by components of race, class, and ethnicity. Secondly, I draw analyses about memory and loss and how they function within the novel. Amabelle, who lives most of her life in the past cannot, or rather chooses not, to evaluate the present for what it seems to be. This lack of consciousness, so to speak, problematizes Amabelle's national authenticity allowing her to stay in a neutral state that does not identify her as Haitian or Dominican. Loss in the same way

seems to disrupt her overall identity, whether it is the loss of her parents, Sebastien, or her physical beauty and for this reason forces Amabelle into a position of endless searching to make up for all the things that have been taken from her. Lastly, I discuss the notion of death, emphasizing death as a journey and death as a solution. Amabelle, on a mental journey that is influenced by her physical movement, travels towards death. While loneliness is a factor that contributes to the mental illness she develops, the end result of the journey lies in her suicide, ultimately illustrating death as a space of freedom as well as a space that is nowhere.

Though Amabelle consumes herself into a space of emptiness instead of utilizing her experiences between Haiti and the Dominican Republic as elements of identification, Danticat performs a multicultural work through *The Farming of Bones* that conveys the Caribbean experience that is also seen in Kincaid's *Lucy*. Like *Lucy* who collectively joins the American and Antiguan experience together, Danticat employs this novel to convey a Haitian-Dominican reality that is a reflection of Caribbean identity. From the multiple migrations that negotiate the other social identities in Amabelle's life, Danticat invites each experience to be a part of the hybridization that defines her as the Caribbean subject.

### **Master-Servant/Family: The Space In-Between**

Like Gloria Anzaldúa, Amabelle is a "border woman."<sup>6</sup> At the young age of 8-years-old, Amabelle is found by a Dominican family sitting on a big rock in front of the Massacre River, the river that separates the two neighboring countries and the same river

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<sup>6</sup> Anzaldúa considers herself a border woman because she grew up between two cultures.

in which her parents drowned. When asked who does she belong to, Amabelle points to her chest to indicate that she only belongs to herself and that she is indeed homeless. Eager to have a companion the same age as her, Señora Valencia begs her father, Papi, to bring Amabelle back to Alegría to live with them. This is the first moment of displacement in Amabelle's life, the migration that alters her cultural identity as well as her individual one. Amabelle leaves Haiti, a place of origin and memories, and moves to the Dominican Republic to gain a new lifestyle with new people. By living with the Valencia's, as what Carolyn Duffey calls a "sister-servant," (Duffey 86) Amabelle takes on a social identity as a domestic laborer in the Dominican Republic. This master-servant/family relationship remains complex due to issues of race, ethnicity and class. It is better understood during the opening pages of the novel when Amabelle is left to help Señora Valencia deliver her first child.

As a Haitian living in the Dominican Republic, Amabelle navigates a Haitian-Dominican cultural space. In the same way, she represents the family-worker in her relationship with the señora, never being one or the other, but always somewhere in between. For instance, when Señora Valencia goes into labor with what we learn to be fraternal twins, intimacy between the two women is revealed but remains complicated by the master-servant dynamic. As her labor pains heighten, Papi, in a stage of panic leaves Amabelle to take care of her so that he can go find Doctor Javier. She explains, "He shoved me back towards the señora's bed...to trust his only child's life to my inept hands" (6). She continues, describing the intimate bond between her and the señora that had grown from childhood. "We sat for a while with her fingers clinging to mine, like when we were girls and we both slept in the same room. Even though she was supposed to be

sleep in her own canopy bed and I was to sleep on a smaller cot across from hers, she would invite me onto her bed after her father had gone to sleep” (6). It is obvious that Amabelle and Señora Valencia share a loving sisterly bond that is complicated because of their social positions. First, there is the intimacy of touching that I will address later. Then, there is the fact that Amabelle is welcomed into the personal space of her employers—she has a small cot in the same room as the señora—however, even in the intimate setting she is still separated from Señora Valencia, illustrating that she is not a complete part of their family. Before, Amabelle maintained a solid relationship with her parents, never having to question where she belonged or who she belonged to. Now, in a foreign space, she straddles the line between being an employee and a family member.

Amabelle also undertakes a fluctuating position between being an independent and a dependent. In other words, based on the situation she is in, Amabelle is obligated to be depended on or to depend upon someone else. For instance, when she begins to think of natural remedies to ease the labor pains of the señora, Amabelle realizes she cannot leave her side to retrieve the necessary household items because “anything could happen in [her] absence, the worst of it being if a *lady of her stature* had to push that child out alone” (7; my emphasis). Amabelle explains, “I had to calm her, to help her, as she had always counted on me to do, as her father had always counted on me to do” (7). April Shemak points out that, “when she is about to deliver her first baby, she does not want to have to actually perform the childbirth herself” (Shemak 89) instead she tells Amabelle to do it saying, “If Doctor Javier doesn’t come, you’ll have to be the one to do this for me!” (7). The dependency on Amabelle in this moment is a requirement for the master-servant

relationship, a requirement that keeps Amabelle oppressed and the señora powerful.

Amabelle displays her awareness of this interdependent relationship on other accounts:

Working for others, you learn to be present and invisible at the same time, nearby when they needed you, far off when they didn't, but still close enough in case they changed their minds. (35)

Working for others, you were always rushing to or away from them. (292)

Because of the ambiguity in Amabelle's role as a servant in the Valencia household, she is never in a consistent space. For this reason, her social position as a domestic laborer can also be seen in the realm of the in-between, presumably another kind of borderland, if I were to use Anzaldúa's definition.

Nadège Clitandre speaks of the post-colonial subject being "consumed, oppressed, marginalized and "othered" by Western ideological discourses of the Black body and voice" (Clitandre 31). Haiti, which was previously colonized by France has inhabitants that are a reflection of such. Clitandre notes that "the physical differences of Black people...promote and heighten the stereotype of Black barbarity and inferiority, and, in effect, position the Haitian subject as the negative other" (Clitandre 32). Amabelle's racial characteristics place her into this position of the post-colonial subject as other and oppressed. "Body and voice," Clitandre continues, "have been instrumental factors in the denigration and oppression of peoples of African descent...they are outward sites of cultural difference" (Clitandre 31). With attention to this, Amabelle's social identity as domestic laborer and her cultural identity (which she does not totally accept) as a Haitian are both dependent upon her racial identity. The darkness of her skin dictates her role as a

servant and more specifically, explains why Señora Valencia depends upon Amabelle for the most help; it is the only way they can maintain their relationship as master and servant, oppressor and oppressed.

Since race is an important factor between the oppressed and the oppressor, it can be seen that Señora Valencia represents an ideal of Whiteness that is in opposition to Amabelle's Blackness. Papi, for instance, argues with Doctor Javier about the purity of the Valencia family bloodline when the doctor suggests that one of the babies is seemingly darker than the other. Papi proclaims, "It must be from her father's family...My daughter was born in the capital of this country. Her mother was of pure Spanish blood. She can trace her family to the Conquistadores, the line of El Almirante, Cristobal Colón. And I myself was born near a seaport in Valencia, Spain" (17-18). Papi displays great pride about the racial purity of his family in effort to support systemic beliefs that define "Haitians as a dark barbarous people" (Clitandre 32). Once she has delivered both babies, Señora Valencia, too, realizes that her son has a "cherimoya milk color," (11) whereas her daughter's complexion resembles Amabelle's. "And my daughter favors you," she says, "My daughter is a chameleon. She's taken your color from the mere sight of your face" (11). With deep concern about the darkness of her daughter's skin, the señora asks, "Amabelle do you think my daughter will always be the color she is now? My poor love, what if she's mistaken for one of your people?" (12) A mark of shame, Señora Valencia asks this question knowing that the possibility of her daughter not being accepted into their anti-Haitian society because of being a shade too dark is certainly there.

As a whole, the Valencia's treat her as inferior, but Amabelle's personal relationship with Señora Valencia, outside of the domestic space, often negates that inferiority. Having lost her mother as an infant, in the same way that Amabelle lost her parents as a child, creates room for the two of them to bond as parent-less women. However, this sisterly relationship can only operate in the private sphere, where the social matters of their society do not exist. As seen in the moment previously mentioned, the señora can only have Amabelle sleep in her bed when her father is not present. Papi represents the patriarchal society that constructs the very ideologies about race, class and ethnicity that complicate their relationship. Señor Pico, Señora Valencia's husband and a head officer in President Trujillo's army, also embodies that hegemonic masculine ideal. Therefore, once a male figure is present, the sisterly bond they share is completely overlooked and their social positions return as they were. Another example of this would be the moment in which Señora Valencia is thanking Amabelle for never leaving her side during labor:

“I am grateful to you, Amabelle, for what you did today.” She reached over and squeezed my hands. When her husband entered the room in his sleeping robe, she quickly dropped my fingers. (41)

This allows me to address the intimacy of physical touch that is seen between these two women. It is demonstrative of love and belonging. Here, Señora Valencia displays a sense of warmth and love for Amabelle when she squeezes her hands. Their ability to touch one another is a way of showing positive emotions that is generally not seen in their master-servant relationship. It provides an understanding of their friendship that is based on the fact that they are both women without their mothers, and therefore, have a

unique emotional tie to one another. There is no barrier of race or social status that separates them in the private sphere and Amabelle utilizes that particular communication between them as a means of belonging and home. She often defends Señora Valencia and their entire family. She does so because they are the only family she has known since the death of her parents. Sadly, this feeling of solidarity and wholeness does not last long. Men are always intruding and disrupting their intimacy and as a result, separating them from one another. Once Señor Pico comes into the room, the freedom for physical touch is removed, and Amabelle is propelled to forsake her position as friend to the señora.

As a result of wavering between being an employee and a sister to Señora Valencia, Amabelle is aware that even if she does not have a complete and consistent identity, the señora does. During childbirth, Amabelle assures her, “Señora, this child will be yours...you will be its mother for the rest of your days. It will be yours like watercress belongs to water and river lilies belong to the river” (9). Señora Valencia responds, “Like I belonged to my mother” (9). The relationship between mother and child offers a sense of belonging and home, two things that Amabelle seemingly lacks. The señora’s identity is attached to many things that allow her to maintain a sense of self. She has an actual home space, her father, her husband and now her children to make up for her mother being absent. Amabelle, on the other hand, lacks all of the above, which further minimizes her sense of self to nothing. After Señora Valencia’s son dies, she prepares his coffin to bury him. Amabelle admits, “Somehow I envied her. At least she could place her hands on it, her son’s final bed. My parents had no coffins” (93). The fact that her parents had no coffins confirms the idea that they have no identities and if they are without identity, naturally Amabelle is without identity, too.

## Memory and Loss

“Nostalgia,” says Danticat, “is part of the life of every immigrant” (Lee 164). Considering this, memory plays an essential role in *The Farming of Bones* due to Amabelle’s constant reflection of the past. Danticat’s purpose in using Amabelle to tell this story is also a form of remembering. Amabelle, says Renée Larrier, “provid[es a] testimony...a written record of her ordeals, leaving evidence for posterity” (Larrier 51). This narrative is given to us as readers so that we remember the horrific experience of the Parsley Massacre. Larrier argues that “Amabelle functions as a sister witness for those who died tragically” (Larrier 57). Certainly true, our protagonist who is always drawn to her past forces us to do the same with the past of the Haitian people. “Having lost her belongings in her escape across the border her sole possession is her knowledge of the massacre” (Larrier 57). In similar ways, Amabelle holds on to the memories of her past (memories not of the massacre) because they give her true ownership. These memories, unlike other things, become more difficult to lose.

Upon introducing her love affair with Sebastien, Amabelle informs us that, “He comes most nights to put an end to my nightmare, the one I have all the time, of my parents drowning” (1). Witnessing the death of her parents is a traumatic experience that Amabelle cannot eradicate from her memory. I would even go as far to say that it problematizes her ability to see the present clearly. For instance, Sebastien argues with her, pointing out that she “never believed [the Valencia’s] could injure [her]” (143). “Even after they killed Joel,” he says, “you thought they could never harm you” (143). Amabelle thinks to herself, “Perhaps I had trusted too much. I had been living inside dreams that would not go away, the memories of an orphaned child. When the present

itself was truly frightful, I had perhaps purposely chosen not to see it” (143). Not only does she hold on to the image of her parents drowning, Amabelle holds on to the memories of her childhood growing up with Señora Valencia, seeing their family as her only system of support, even though they treat her inferior to themselves. For this reason, she has failed to imagine that they are not on her side, or so it seems.

Never considering her youth, Amabelle had not imagined herself getting older and having particular experiences that come with old age, motherhood, being one of them. She says, “Perhaps because my parents both had died young, I never imagined myself getting older than I was, much less living long enough to bear my own children. Before Sebastien, all my dreams had been of the past: of the old country, of places and people I might never see again” (32). Amabelle is used to living her past in such a way that it compromises her vision of the present and the future. Sebastien is perhaps the only element of the present that she wishes to hold on to; him and her somewhat stable life in Alegría with the Valencia’s. Death is awakened in Amabelle’s memory again when she learns that Señor Pico kills a field worker on his way back to the village; he was rushing to see his new born children. Amabelle looks to her past to comfort her, to reassure her that it was not Sebastien who had been killed. “I did something I always did,” she says, “at times when I couldn’t bring myself to go out and discover an unpleasant truth. (When you have so few remembrances, you cling to them tightly and repeat them over and over in your mind so time will not erase them.) I closed my eyes and imagined” (45). Amabelle’s imagination presents itself as a safe place, a place free of pain and danger.

As a result of living in her imagination, Sebastien suggests that Amabelle is unable to recognize the tension between the Dominicans and the Haitian field workers. I

believe that she does recognize it, and with that I would argue that she chooses not to take a side. This also means that she forsakes her Haitian identity in order to remain a part of the neutral party. In her mind, I imagine a level of discomfort in choosing a side. She was born in Haiti, yes, but she was also raised in the Dominican Republic by Dominicans. How, then, can she choose one identity over the other when she truly belongs to both? Mimi, Sebastien's younger sister, for example, is in just as much of an uproar as the rest of the field workers about Joël's death. She embraces her national identity as a Haitian woman, she believes in fighting against the oppressor. "An eye for an eye," she says, "a tooth for a tooth," supporting any method of revenge that would grant justice for her fellow Haitian, Joël. As she discusses her frustration with Amabelle, she purposely refers to her employer by her first name. Amabelle questions her, "Do you always call her Beatriz?" (63) Mimi responds, "I don't have to christen her 'Señorita' in your presence, do I? I don't call her 'Beatriz' in her presence. But what would be so terrible if we did say only their Christian names?" (63) Amabelle then responds, "It would demonstrate a lack of respect. The way you'd never call one of these old women by their names. You call them 'Man' even though they're not your mother" (63). Amabelle draws a comparison here that favors age over ethnicity. It does not matter if Beatriz is not Haitian, she is older than Mimi, therefore, Mimi should respect her in the same way that she would respect an elderly Haitian woman. However, Amabelle contradicts her own argument in her thoughts: "I thought of Señora Valencia, whom I had known since she was eleven years old. I had called her Señorita as she grew from a child into a young woman. When she married the year before, I called her Señora. She on the other hand had always called me Amabelle" (63). Amabelle makes a note not to say this out loud

because she knows very well age is not the only factor that determines respect. She overlooks the minor age difference between her and the señora, fully aware that she calls her Señora Valencia because of differences in race and social status. Under these circumstances, Amabelle does not offer a bias solution for attaining justice. She simply states, “No eye for no eye. We cannot start a war here” (66). Amabelle admits to herself later on that she was not oblivious to what was occurring between the two communities. She states:

I was never naïve, or blind. I knew. I knew that the death of many was coming. I knew that the streams and rivers would run with blood. I knew as well how to say “pesi” as to say “perejil<sup>7</sup>”...But it must be known that I understood. I saw things too. I just thought they would not see me. I just thought they would not find me. (265)

In the words of Patti M. Marxen, “the search for place in the present is anchored in an awareness of the past” (Marxen 141). It is no secret that Amabelle is desperate to belong somewhere and to someone because of the loss she has endured in the past. Belonging would give her a sense of identity, a sense of community. In a literal sense she belongs nowhere, for “I had no papers to show that I belonged here or in Haiti where I was born” (FOB 70). She has also suffered tremendously from loneliness. “Playing with my shadow,” she says, “made me, an only child, feel less alone” (FOB 4). Because she cannot fully achieve a sense of belonging in the relationship with the señora, she clings tightly to her lover, Sebastien; he is her source of meaning, comfort, and stability.

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<sup>7</sup> Trujillo’s regime utilized language as a determining factor in separating Dominicans from Haitians. If Haitians were asked and could not trill their ‘r’ in the word *perejil* (which means parsley) like the Dominicans, they were to be killed.

Sebastien allows her to feel what she felt with her parents: love and wholeness. Expressing the fear of being invisible, she says: "I am afraid I cease to exist when he's not there. I'm like one of those sea stones that sucks its colors inside and loses its translucence once it's taken out into the sun, out of the froth of the waves. When he's not there, I'm afraid I know no one and no one knows me" (2). From Amabelle's words, I would argue that Sebastien becomes Amabelle's god. She worships, adores, and lives for him because he gives her sustenance like no other thing or person in the world. In like manner, Magdalena Cohen argues that he becomes her savior and draws an analysis of Sebastien being like Jesus. I agree with Cohen to a certain degree. Without doubt, Sebastien "is the only human entity she truly believes in" (Cohen 213). Amabelle confirms this, when "[Juana] asked me if I believed in anything...all I could think to say was Sebastien" (65). However, Sebastien is incomparable to Jesus because he does not sacrifice his life to save Amabelle. Sebastien's death is never fully learned in the novel, it is only assumed that he dies with the other cane workers who were taken away. The stories shared about him after the massacre are unconvincing of any truth. But once Sebastien disappears from Alegría and the rest of Haitians begin to seek out a way to leave before they get killed, Amabelle makes a conscious decision to leave with them, something she had never considered before, for who would Amabelle be without her god, Sebastien? She says, "I had never desired to run away. I knew what was happening but I did not want to flee. "Where to?", "Who to?" was always chiming in my head" (264). She obviously does not consider Haiti to be home if she has to ask these questions. Who, could easily be answered as her fellow Haitians, where, could also point to her place of origin, Haiti. Amabelle does not see it this way and therefore confirms her understanding

of herself to be physically homeless. Home, then, takes an internal route in the relationship she builds with Sebastien and becomes the source of courage for Amabelle's new traveling plans.

Losing Sebastien further perpetuates the cycle of losing value, identity, and meaning in Amabelle's life. To say the least, Amabelle's greatest loss remains in the death of her parents because they are her original source of identity; once she lost them, she also lost herself. On a Friday, a market day, Amabelle, her mother and her father cross the Massacre River to go into Dabajón (the first Dominican town across the river) to buy cooking pots made by Moy, the best Haitian pot maker in the region. Once they have gotten their shiny new pots, Amabelle's father suggests that they cross the river quickly even though a storm has started and it could heighten the dangers of the current. Amabelle's father plans to transport her mother on his back across the river first and then he will return to escort Amabelle. It is when they enter into the river the current gets worse and determines their fate of death. Amabelle recalls: "The water rises above my father's head. My mother releases his neck, the current carrying her beyond his reach. Separated they are less of an obstacle for the cresting river" (52). Realizing that they are gone, Amabelle screams and throws the pots in the river with the intention of going in it to join them in death. Fortunately, two river boys were there to stop her. "Unless you want to die," they warn her, "you will never see those people again" (52).

The act of crossing the river in this particular scene is a process of migration that disrupts Amabelle's identity and goes beyond her family's initial desire to purchase cooking pots. First, they leave Haiti by crossing the river to go into Dabajón. This reads as they are leaving their place of origin to go to a foreign space to find the things they

truly need. This brings to mind Danticat's words about the immigrant experience, "leaving a place you know for some place you don't know, just hoping that it will be better, traveling just on faith" (Lee 162). An exchange of cultural resources, I would call it, due to the fact that they cannot find authentic Haitian pots in their own country and must leave to find it elsewhere. But does this not raise questions about placement and authenticity? Questions such as: How do you begin to deconstruct an idea of a Haitian potmaker in the Dominican Republic? Are the pots then authentically Haitian if they are made in a different country? Secondly, in their attempt to return home after receiving the goods they traveled for, they end up losing themselves literally in the midst of the movement (the river). Now, Amabelle is left on the side of the river she does not know to be home and without parents. The physical displacement disrupts her national identity, for she is not on the Haitian side of the river. Never crossing over to go back to Haiti, she forsakes her Haitian identity, even though the Dominican people impose it on her<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, being without parents, a source of identity and origin that children usually need to understand themselves, Amabelle also lacks individuality. Danticat enlightens us on this family dynamic in an interview with Sandy Alexandre. She says, "Migration changes many things for us. One of the most visible effects of migration is how it changes family dynamics, how we lose familial connections—sometimes with extended family members, sometimes with immediate family members" (Lee 166). She also asks, "How do you define yourself when you're removed from your family," (Lee 166) pointing out that "a quest for family is a big part of Amabelle's character in *The Farming of Bones*...She is not only looking for a new country, but a new family as well" (Lee 166). In response to Danticat's question about family, I would argue that unless Amabelle has

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<sup>8</sup> In the novel, there is no evidence that Amabelle accepts her Haitian identity.

the will to create her own individual identity like Lucy, she will not be able to define herself outside of her family. There is a possibility that she could define herself through cultural identity, but as seen, Amabelle is unconcerned with choosing her country over herself. Some might argue that there is a chance for her to have an identity through Sebastien, but then I would ask, what happens when he is also gone? We see what happens to Amabelle when she realizes that she will never see Sebastien again. She consumes herself into a bubble of emptiness, still searching for him and meaning to life in all the wrong places. Therefore, it is her lack of desire, or privilege one could say, to create an identity for herself why Amabelle ends up, like Patti M. Marxen says in my epigraph, without an identity.

As seen in various examples thus far, loss generally occurs through Amabelle's relationships to something or someone—her homeland, her parents, and Sebastian, being a few reminders. There is, however, one particular kind of loss she experiences that disrupts her physical identity. The loss of the external shell only worsens the internal self that is already seeking to be identified, making her existence completely void. For Amabelle, there is hope in having one without the other, exterior without interior. However, there is no hope having neither body nor interiority. With the intention of looking for Sebastien, Amabelle sets off on a journey back to Haiti. Along with many other refugees, Yves, Sebastien's friend included, Amabelle ends up in Dabajón, the Dominican town closest to the river. Faced with a crowd of Dominicans cheering on President Trujillo for his dedication in solving the country's "Haitian problem," Amabelle and all the other Haitians in the vicinity become targets of violence. After Yves and Tibon find themselves in a physical altercation with some of the soldiers, Amabelle

explains: “Yves and I were shoved down onto our knees. Our jaws were pried open and parsley stuffed into our mouth. My eyes watering, I chewed and swallowed as quickly as I could, but not nearly as fast they were forcing the handfuls into my mouth...I told myself that eating the parsley would keep me alive” (193). She continues, “Someone threw a fist-sized rock, which bruised my lip and left cheeks...A sharp blow to my side nearly stopped my breath” (194). Once the violence subsided, Yves and Amabelle are rescued by Wilner and Odette, their fellow travelers, and taken to the river. After crossing the Massacre River, something Amabelle has not done since she was found there as a child, she finds herself in the house of Yves’ mother, Man Rapadou. Immediately upon her arrival, Man Rapadou offers Amabelle healing methods for her wounds. As she follows the directions given to her, Amabelle claims:

I could hear some of the courtyard children giggling as they peered at me through the holes in their doorways. In spite of their curiosity, I knew that my body could no longer be a tempting spectacle, nor would I ever be truly young or beautiful, if ever I had been. Now my flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament. (226-227)

Jennifer Vargas understands the body in this novel to be “a vehicle of expression [that] talks,” (Vargas 1773) a “medium for recording injustice” (Vargas 1175). Vargas also argues that, “as a “map” the corporeal scars narrate a route,” (Vargas 1176) a route that Cherie Meacham calls “the new middle passage” (Meacham 137). Amabelle also thinks of Sebastien’s return which “made me wish for my hair to grow again—which it had not—for the inside of my ears to stop buzzing, for my knees to bend without pain, for my jaws to realign evenly and form a smile that did not make me look like a feeding mule”

(229). In these moments, Amabelle recognizes the changes in her physical body that has altered how she was once perceived. A sense of beauty that might have been possible before the journey back to Haiti is now completely removed due to her aching bones and wounded body. The scars that are present are indeed markers of historical trauma, like Shemak suggests, but most importantly they are permanent reminders of a journey she had never planned on taking. Like the middle passage, Amabelle's journey is one that is forced, some might say by political order, others might argue by love. Regardless of the force that lead her to move, the journey she embarks upon is now embedded into her memory, just like the nightmare of her parents drowning. The problem with moving in Amabelle's life lies with the fact that once she decides to migrate anywhere some part of her identity is inevitably compromised. In this particular case, she risks almost losing her life to find her lover, and in the process loses an essence of her physical features that she once appreciated, an able body that can function without pain as well as a body completely free from scars.

### **Death: A Journey and a Solution**

Considering the title, *The Farming of Bones*, which refers to “the cane life, travay tè pou zo,<sup>9</sup>” (55) death consumes the life of the people in this novel. The characters seemingly end up running towards death, trying to avoid it, and some of them even live through it. I consider death to have multiple meanings in this text. Death is a journey, a process, a movement that occurs; death is also a space to be inhabited, a space that provides freedom and peace. As I will prove, Amabelle has an interesting relationship

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<sup>9</sup> I believe the cane life could be viewed as work that leads to death. Therefore, the farming of bones could only mean the production of death and the farmers of these bones, presumably the cane workers, are working towards their own deaths.

with death that follows her from the beginning all the way to the end. She starts off by telling us that, “Births and deaths were my parents’ work” (5). A kind of knowledge that is passed down from her parents, Amabelle knows more about death than she does about life. This is true because she is and has always been surrounded by it. There is the death of Senora Valencia’s son, the death of Kongo’s son, the death of the travelers she witnesses going back to Haiti, and certainly the death of her parents. Suffocating from so many deaths in her life, it is better understood why Amabelle asks Mimi, “Do you think you and I will live long enough to be as old as Dona Eva?” (60) failing to believe that she could live long enough to experience old age. For Amabelle, longevity is a privilege, one that she had never imagined that she could afford.

There are many death-related moments in this novel that prepare the reader for Amabelle’s final destination. Since death is a common factor in the lives of these characters, it is mentioned quite often throughout the story. For instance, Amabelle shares that Sebastien’s dislike for silence is because “silence to him is like sleep, a close second to death” (13). In one of her many dreams, Amabelle’s mother says to her, “I am sure you will live to be a hundred years old, having come so close to death while young” (58). Even when she is fighting for her life alongside another traveler on her journey from Dabajón, Amabelle says, “I closed my eyes against her blood, thinking this would be the last time I would see someone dying, so sure was I that when the doctor said, “She’s not going to live,” he was also talking about me” (207). Last but not least, there is the speech by Sebastien’s mother, Man Denise that is given to Amabelle during a home visit. Man Denise’s elongated speech goes as follows:

Those who die young, they are cheated. Not cheated out of life, because life is a penance, but the young, they're cheated because they don't know it's coming. They don't have time to move closer, to return to home.

When you know you're going to die, you try to be near the bones of your own people. You don't even think you have bones when you're young, even when you break them, you don't believe you have them. But when you're old, they start reminding you they're there. They start turning to dust on you, even as you're walking here and there, going from place to place. And this is when you crave to be near the bones of your people. My children never felt this. They had to look death in the face, even before they knew what it was. (242)

What Man Denise is saying here is that age plays a significant factor in how someone perceives death. If the individual is young, death is not something they could imagine opposed to someone who is older who is always expecting death to come. Here, youth inspires thoughts about life, while old age evokes the opposite, thoughts about death. Apparently, this belief remains untrue for Amabelle because her mind is generally clouded with thoughts of passing on. As a novel with death seeping through the pages, it is more than easy to see that Amabelle herself is slowly dying. Once she resettles in Haiti after journeying from the Dominican Republic, the after effects of the trauma she experienced proves to bring her closer to death than ever before. Though I will address the physical death she experiences later on, I will first discuss the mental/spiritual death she undergoes.

Having lost every important person in her life Amabelle suffers from extreme loneliness. She is displaced for the second time without anyone or anything familiar to comfort her.<sup>10</sup> Sebastien has disappeared, the Valencia's are no longer present in her life, and even though she lives with Yves and his mother Man Rapadou, Amabelle refuses to embrace them as replacements for her lost loved ones. She sleeps in the same bed with Yves for example, but pretends as if they are in separate worlds. "I never saw him," she says, "but only heard him undress and slip into bed at night when he finally came home" (230). She continues, "Since we'd come back, we hadn't spoken of our situation, never even talked of changing it in a way that would make us both more comfortable at night" (230). The distance and silence between Yves and Amabelle perpetuates her loneliness more so than his. Yves still talks to his mother and his friends in the neighborhood. After all, it is the home he had always known. Amabelle, on the other hand, hardly speaks, and when she does it has little to no meaning. She explains, "For twenty-four years all of my conversations with Yves had been restricted to necessary prattle. Good-morning. Good-night. What goes? Good-bye," (270) confirming that, "He and I both had chosen a life of work to console us after the slaughter" (274) instead of choosing each other. As for Man Rapadou, Amabelle does not convey an emotional attachment to their relationship. Instead, Man Rapadou serves as a physical presence that helps her get through each day. She explains, "Man Rapadou had been essential to me in the simple routine of my life. We'd wake up together at the same time every morning after Yves had left for the fields and she would help me with my sewing. I treasured my sewing" (268). Here, Amabelle's appreciation is geared more towards the physical act of sewing, with no regard to Man

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<sup>10</sup>Even though Haiti is her place of origin, when she left the first time she exchanged it for a new home in the Dominican Republic. Now that she has returned, it reveals itself to be a foreign place because she has been away for so long.

Rapadou as a friend or mother-figure. With little to no communication with Yves and no emotional bond with Man Rapadou, Amabelle displays a disheartening level of loneliness. Presumably, it is the first stage of her journey towards death. Not only does loneliness destroy her ability to communicate effectively, it also leads to issues of mental instability. In the words of W. Todd Martin, “Amabelle also suffers a type of madness. Wounded more than physically from her experience during the genocide, she retreats into herself, seeking to escape into the sameness of routine” (Martin 249).

Desiring a routine of everyday life, one that provides normalcy, Yves spends his time working in the fields, hoping to gain a harvest while Amabelle stays at home with his mother and assists her with the miscellaneous household duties. “All I wanted was a routine,” she explains, “a series of sterile acts that I could perform without dedication or effort, a life where everything was constantly the same, where every day passed exactly like the one before” (262). Disappointed by the circumstances of not having a routinized life influences Amabelle’s transition into insanity. Reading her mental illness as depression, Man Rapadou reminds Amabelle that “everything you knew before the slaughter is lost,” (228) aiming to inspire Amabelle to move on with her life. However, Amabelle fails to accept this truth and her failure to do so leads to internal destruction that is only understood through her feelings. Saddened by the loss of opportunity to tell her individual story to the Justice of Peace, Amabelle expresses, “I sat in the yard with my arms around the traveler’s tree, trying not to pound my head against it...I wanted to cry, but couldn’t. I wanted to scream, but summoning the will to do it already made me feel weak” (244). Amabelle’s desire to physically harm herself comes as a result of not knowing how to deal with the various emotions she is feeling. I imagine that she feels

trapped in this moment, wanting to release but not having the opportunity to do so. She goes on further explaining:

I ached inside in places I could neither name nor touch. I could not accept that I'd never see Sebastien again, even though I knew it was not possible, just as I would never see my mother and father again, no matter how many times I called them forth both with my own loud voice and the timid one inside my head. When it came to my parents, the older I became, the more they were fading from me, until all I could see were the last few moments spent with them by the river. The rest blended together like the ingredients in a too-long-simmered stew: reveries and dreams, wishes, fantasies. (245)

This moment confirms Danticat's belief that "pain and trauma can be a powerful muse" (Lee 165). Amabelle is in so much pain that she is unable to accept the fact that she will never see Sebastien or her parents again. Her memories are slowly vanishing and eventually turn out to be one big blur. Amabelle no longer envisions life realistically instead she lives it through her dreams. This, I consider to be madness caused by emotional distress. She expresses later on:

I too felt and lived my own body's sadness more and more every day. The old and new sorrows were suddenly inconsolable, and I knew that the brief moments of joy would not last forever...I dreamed of the life without pain that [Sebastien] might have brought me, the tidy parlor and spotless furnishing that our young children would not be allowed to touch, except to dust off on Sundays. (276)

Amabelle's imagination takes on the form of madness when she begins to envision moments with Sebastien that are surreal and quite impossible to experience. Here, she dreams up a painless life with tangible things like a house filled with furniture and children. In another moment, she seems to be in a trance that allows her to communicate directly with Sebastien. She explains, "Sometimes I can make myself dream him out of the void to listen. A handsome, steel-bodied man, he carries a knapsack woven from palm leaves as he walks out of the cave into the room where I sleep" (282). When she imagines Sebastien in the room, he comes to her bringing gifts, "remedies for [her] wounds" (282). In this dreamlike state, Sebastien speaks to her and she speaks to him, assuring him that perhaps soon they will meet again. This also brings attention to the fact that Amabelle does not convey her feelings to the people she is around. She has only been transparent with Sebastien about her inner most feelings and now that he is gone, she remains in silence about her pain or confesses them to him in her dreams. Because she resides in her mind at all times, her inability to communicate to others the kinds of emotions she is feeling influences her isolation. Feeling emotionally alone prompts Amabelle's madness, a mental illness that predetermines her death at the end of the novel.

Interestingly, W. Todd Martin analyzes the end of *The Farming of Bones* as a reconnection to the past, claiming that the water is too shallow for Amabelle to drown (Martin 250), as if it is impossible for her to lie in the water without the intention of letting her body go. I, like Clitandre, understand the final pages of the novel to be Amabelle seeking peace inside death, and doing so by the act of purposely drowning herself in the Massacre River. Given her constant thoughts of dying, the fate of Amabelle's character comes as no surprise; she provides numerous hints to this

conclusion throughout the novel. Apart from physically harming herself with the tree as I previously mentioned, Amabelle initiates death quite often. She does this with Yves: “When he climbed onto the bed, I pretended to be asleep—or even dead” (250). She also spends a lot of time sleeping. “Sleep had been a comfort to me for the last two decades,” she claims, “It was as close to disappearing as I could come” (287). Not to mention that in one of her many dreams about Sebastien, she tells him, “Two mountains can never meet, but perhaps I can meet you again. I am coming to your waterfall” (283). To be more specific, I would like to draw attention to one of the few conversations she has with Yves. She asks him, “How did you keep on with the planting, even when nothing was growing?” (247) He responds, “Empty houses and empty fields make me sad. They are both too calm, like the dead season” (247). In this moment, Amabelle is seeking answers to help her continue planting even though nothing in her life seems to be growing. When she realizes that in order to avoid the dead season, she must plant more things, Amabelle decides to travel again. She goes looking for Father Romaine, Doctor Javier, and Señora Valencia, hoping to find pieces of the past that would fulfill her troubling present.

Leaving empty after visiting both Father Romaine and Doctor Javier, Amabelle hopes that returning to see her beloved employer/sister would bring back moments of joy into her life. Once she arrives in Alegría, Señora Valencia has trouble believing that it is Amabelle who comes to visit after two decades. “That she did not recognize me,” says Amabelle, “made me feel that I had come back to Alegría and found it had never existed at all” (294). Amabelle is then forced to tell the señora stories of their childhood to confirm that it is truly her. This makes Amabelle question, “Was I that much older, stouter? Had my face changed so much? How could she not know my voice, which, like

hers, might have slowed and become more abrupt with age but was still my own?” (295). Señora Valencia’s inability to decipher that it is Amabelle without the recollection of their childhood memories goes to show that Amabelle’s presence in her life never really had meaning. I, like Amabelle, am asking the same question: how could she not know that it was Amabelle when they spent so many years together building a somewhat solid relationship? Amabelle concludes, “All the time I had known her, we had always been dangling between being strangers and being friends. Now we were neither strangers nor friends. We were like two people passing each other on the street, exchanging a lengthy meaningless greeting. And at last I wanted it to end” (300). For this reason, they part ways and Amabelle leaves Alegría for the last time, empty yet confident that there is nothing there left for her.

Faced with the dead season after not finding anything in her life worthy of planting, Amabelle’s final destination is the Massacre River. “The dead season,” she states, “is one never ending night. I dream all the time of returning to give my testimony to the river” (264). Her desire to return to the river indicates that she is indeed ready to pass on. She believes that by giving the river her testimony she will find peace. She also admits that “the more I think about their graves, the more I see mine: a simple stone marker with written on it only my name and the day I die” (265).<sup>11</sup> Amabelle approaches the river remembering Man Rapadou’s words that “there are cures for everything except death,” (277). In Amabelle’s mind, death is the cure. So in the “coal black darkness of a night,” (308) Amabelle walks down to the river bank. She explains, “I thought that if I came to the river on the right day, at the right hour, the surface of the water might provide

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Their’ in this context refers to all the people she knew who have died (Joël, Odette, Wilner, and Sebastien). Though her parents have no graves, this is also applicable to them.

the answer: a clearer sense of the moment, a stronger memory. But nature has no memory. And soon, perhaps, neither will I” (309).<sup>12</sup> In this moment, Amabelle also claims to see a ghost, the *pwofesè*, another name for “crazy man,” with a smile on his face. She closes her eyes and attempts to “imagine the fog, the dense mist of sadness inside his head,” (309) asking, “Would the slaughter—the river—one day surrender to him his sanity the same way it had once snatched it away?” I imagine that Amabelle asks this question in relation to herself, wondering if the same death/river that stripped her from her loved ones could also restore them once she joined in. She admits this saying, “I wanted to ask him, please, to gently raise my body and carry me into the river, into Sebastien’s cave, my father’s laughter, my mother’s eternity” (310). Eventually, Amabelle slips into the river with the *pwofesè* because “he, like [her], was looking for the dawn” (310).

As seen, water maintains a significant presence in this novel. It is representative of the beginning and the end. Amabelle is found near the river and she dies inside the river. Thinking in biblical terms, water also represents life in this text, in the same ways that it represents death. Marxen believes it to be “equivalent to [the] Christian concepts of Heaven as a place where all ancestors reside” (Marxen 146). It is “a sense of place, a kind of heavenly homecoming to which one can return when all else fails and be soothed by the waves of time” (Marxen 150). In a similar manner, Cohen argues that “water is a physical presence, nearly a human character” (Cohen 201) and goes on to explain why “water is an all-knowing godlike presence that has the power to hurt, to heal, to grant life and to take life away,” (Cohen 201) drawing specific attention to the drowning of Amabelle’s parents. According to Cohen, “the river is victorious. It has violently taken

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<sup>12</sup> Amabelle is looking for the answer to whether or not her parents wanted her to jump in the river and die with them, or to go on living without them.

lives, foreshadowing the violence that will take place in the coming years, and echoing the violence and bloodshed of the past...it lives up to its name: the Massacre River” (Cohen 206). Having said all of this, I argue that the river assumes the end to Amabelle’s journey. It personifies death and at the same time it is also a space that she inhabits, a space that allows her to be free from the pains of life. Uniquely designed by Danticat, Amabelle’s relationship to water is surely complicated. Señora Valencia notes that whenever Amabelle went missing, she always knew where to look for her, “peeking into some current, looking for [her] face” (303). This explains Amabelle’s reasoning for death as a solution. In order to truly be content and have an identity, she must congregate with the people who she considers to be major contributors to her happiness and wholeness, and join them by any means necessary, even in death. Amabelle states, “Heaven—my heaven—is the veil of water that stands between my parents and me. To step across it and then come out is what makes me alive” (264-265). By the end of the novel, Amabelle is uninterested in the veil that disturbs the relationship between her and her parents, influencing her to step in it instead of across it, not caring if she ever came out or stayed alive.

If we consider Amabelle to be, in Danticat’s words, a survivor (Adisa 350), I pose a question that asks: A survivor of what? I truly agree with Marxen that “migration is more than a physical journey” (Marxen 141) because although Amabelle made it through the physical, she failed to survive the mental component of her migration. Yes, she is a survivor in every other way, having lived long after her first and second displacement between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. But in surviving physically, Amabelle’s inner being is compromised in more ways than one. She ends up not fully embracing

either national identity and most importantly, she leaves the page without a clear sense of individuality. Sadly, though Amabelle seems to have found peace in death by being with all of her loved ones, she still ends up in a pool of nothingness. At the cost of her mental freedom comes her inability to live in the physical with that freedom, leaving us to wonder about all of the journeys she has taken and where they have led to—a place that inevitably seems to be nowhere. Ultimately, this all confirms Amabelle’s belief that “it’s either be in a nightmare or be nowhere at all. Or otherwise simply float inside these remembrances, grieving for who I was, and even more for what I’ve become” (2).

## CONCLUSION

*I think whether you are an immigrant or not, whether you spend your whole life in your country of origin or not, identity is fluid. It's something that changes with every single experience we have. Migration forces some striking experiences on you.*

– Edwidge Danticat

Davies and Elaine Savory Fido in *Out of the KUMBLA: Caribbean Women and Literature* point out that “unlike male-authored Caribbean fiction, the quest in women’s writing usually ends in withdrawal and isolation and/or flight and evasion, rather than confrontation” (Davies and Fido 45). Even more in Francophone female Caribbean writing, Davies and Fido state, “the journey, except in rare instances, takes the form of journey-as-alienation. Self-knowledge often leads to self-destruction” (Davies and Fido 45). Furthermore, “French Caribbean women’s writing, in general, reveals rather a pattern of rejection, resistance, and attempted liberation, followed by failure and deeper alienation because of the aborted attempts at revolt...the narrative form is non-linear. It traces a closed circle and the heroine is in the same hopeless situation (or worse one) at the end as at the beginning” (Davies and Fido 46). Considering the end of both novels, it could be said that there is a significant difference between the Anglophone experience and the Francophone experience whereas Amabelle’s journey is undoubtedly a more grievous transition than Lucy’s. However, my desire is to not separate the outcome of each protagonist because that would detract from my larger argument about Caribbean identity being a multicultural entity. I am more interested in the similarities of difference presented by Kincaid and Danticat that Lucy and Amabelle set out on “a journey within, to self-awareness” (Davies and Fido 47) and end “with an inability to face the harsh realities they find. They cannot accept either the external or the interior reality and

instead choose the escape/alienation of madness or death” (Davies and Fido 50). There is a realm of emptiness that these two women enter because of their inability to create a hybrid identity that offers true freedom.

Living in isolation and succumbing to death (spaces of nothingness) are more confining than liberating despite what Lucy and Amabelle may believe. Isolation keeps Lucy from the reality of her life where both cultures play a significant role in the construction of her selfhood. By staying in solitude, Lucy cannot embrace the parts of each culture that contribute to the perception she has of herself and therefore makes the individual identity she creates void. This freedom in isolation, then, presents itself as an illusion because Lucy can have no individual identity without first acknowledging the influences of Antiguan and American life. Lucy lacks interest in a multicultural identity because of her desire to locate an authentic fixed identity which she believes will grant her knowledge of her primary source of origin, knowledge she may never fully attain. With the conflation of her cultural identity, Lucy chooses isolation as a form of liberation from both cultures and ends up confining herself to space that does not give her true clarity or definition. The tears that “caused all the words to become one great big blur” (164) on her page, also assumes the position of the final page of the novel that we as readers walk away from *Lucy* with no real understanding of where to place her culturally. This happens because Lucy truly belongs nowhere and everywhere simultaneously. By doing this, Kincaid is demonstrating how the hybridity of cultures that is often due to migration produce what we call Caribbean identity. As she writes inside the U.S. about Antiguan life through *Lucy*, Kincaid as an author is also participating in the blending of cultures that produces her Caribbean work.

In a similar fashion, residing in death eradicates not only physical life for Amabelle but also the possibility of an individuality that can be formed from her experiences as a Haitian-Dominican subject. I imagine that if the opportunity to embrace both cultural identities had been presented to her, Amabelle would not have chosen suicide as the final solution. Amabelle might believe that the home space of death is the perfect avenue in which she can attain freedom but death imprisons her in a way that confirms the fact that she still has no identity. Although Danticat's initial purpose of having Amabelle narrate the story is to individualize the Haitian experience, Amabelle as the individual narrator fails in finding her individuality as a character, leaving her with only a literary identity. It is for this reason we know who Amabelle is in *The Farming of Bones*, but we never get the chance to understand Amabelle Desir as a woman. She leaves the page with no understanding of herself in the same way that Danticat leaves us as readers with no understanding of this young woman. Danticat joins Kincaid in critiquing the effects of migration and how it challenges the formation of cultural and individual identity by bridging the gap between the two cultural identities and creating a Haitian-Dominican experience. *The Farming of Bones* is not restricted to being about Haitian identity or Dominican identity. Instead, it invites another way of being which allows room for a multicultural identity to flourish. The joining of the two makes this novel particularly about the Caribbean experience and how one comes to a Caribbean identity. Danticat who also writes from the U.S. about Haitian life successfully contributes to this ever-shifting genre of Caribbean literature.

Like the novels, Caribbean identity goes beyond regional boundaries and is a composition of various identities that are formed through a shared experience of history

and movement. Both novels demonstrate the effects of movement in the lives of two female characters as they navigate different cultural spaces and result in an unclear definition of self and home. In the same way, each novel reflects the formation of Caribbean identity that, too, has no fixed and authentic definition being that it invites numerous identities to be a part of the larger identity. In the Caribbean, “home is always under construction. Home is here, elsewhere, nowhere, [and possibly everywhere],” (MacDonald-Smythe 14). Davies also states, “Caribbean identities...are products of numerous processes of migration...[it is] a cultural construction based on a series of mixtures, languages, communities of people” (Davies 13). From this understanding, Caribbean identity surpasses the national and individual identity. It is a shared space that invites all components in order to participate in the hybridity of cultures.

Ultimately, the migratory experiences of these two characters have led me to conclude something else: that migration is not just a disruptive force in Lucy’s and Amabelle’s life but that the novels overall demonstrate how migration is a continued disruption in the lives of people across the world that will forever adjust and readjust their cultural placement. This, in return, can only mean that Caribbean identity, as Michelle Cliff says, “does not exist as an entity, it exists all over the world” (Schwartz 597). Migration, then, becomes a process that aids in the construction of identity across the globe and is the most significant factor in what we know as multiculturalism.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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#### EDUCATION

**Wake Forest University**, Winston-Salem, NC, May 2015

Master of Arts in English with a concentration in Caribbean Literature

Thesis: "Wandering Bodies: The Disruption of Identities in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*"

GPA: 3.6

**Johnson C. Smith University**, Charlotte, NC May 2013

Bachelor of Arts in English with a minor in Communication

Thesis: "Female Extraordinaire in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*"

Summa Cum Laude

#### RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Migration and identity in the Caribbean
- Immigration in the United States

#### RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

**Wake Forest University**, Department of English, Spring 2015

*Master's Thesis*

Advisor: Judith Madera, PhD.

- Conducted research on Caribbean identity and migration through literature reviews, scholarly criticism, and theory
- Defended 66 page thesis titled "Wandering Bodies: The Disruption of Identities in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy* and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*" as graduation requirement

**University of California**, Riverside, Department of English, Summer 2012

*Lindon Barrett Scholars Program*

Advisor: Weihsin Gui, PhD.

- Completed coursework for a graduate level seminar on African-American Literature
- Completed GRE prep course
- Conducted research on African-American literature through literature reviews and relevant academic criticism
- Constructed portfolio for graduate school applications
- Participated on conference panel with four undergraduate students and presented 16 page paper titled, "Double Identity in Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*"

**Johnson C. Smith University**, Department of English, Spring 2012

*Senior Investigative Project*

Advisor: Sharon D. Raynor, PhD.

- Conducted research on Caribbean author Jamaica Kincaid and her novel *Lucy* through literature reviews and scholarly journals
- Composed and presented 22 page paper titled “Female Extraordinaire in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*” to the faculty and staff in the department of English

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

**Office of Personal and Career Development**, Wake Forest University, August 2014 – Present

Resume Reviewer

- Assist all undergraduate and professional students with revisions on their resumes, cover letters, CVs, and LinkedIn profiles
- Assemble professional photos for students’ LinkedIn profiles

**Z. Smith Reynolds Library**, Wake Forest University, August 2013 – Present

Supervisor

- Open and close library weekly
- Assist university faculty, staff, and students with their inquiries and special requests
- Oversee 5-7 student workers with their assigned tasks
- Train new student employees
- Handle monetary transactions and perform other administrative duties

Media Room Attendant

- Process the checking in and checking out of all library materials
- Organize and transport library materials from circulation to the appropriate browsing area

Circulation Assistant

- Maintain the organization of 13,400 films
- Assist Media Coordinator with allocating specific materials for course reservations

**OTHER EXPERIENCE**

**Tickle Me Pink Scholarship**, Charlotte, NC, October 2012 – May 2013

Founder

- Developed initiative for high school seniors to receive dormitory furniture for their first year in college
- Created flyer and application as required materials for application process
- Reviewed applications for selection process

**Student Support Services**, Johnson C. Smith University, August 2011 – May 2013

Mentor/Tutor

- Assisted undergraduate students with developing their writing skills
- Provided emotional support for first-generation college students in their transition from high school to college

- Recommended the necessary resources to address mentee’s desires and concerns
- Co-interviewed prospective mentors and tutors for the following academic year

**Sanders Hall**, Johnson C. Smith University, August 2009 – May 2013

Office Assistant

- Filed and organized documents for the Residence Hall Coordinator
- Answered phones and directed callers to appropriate representatives
- Assisted residents with communication and access to building
- Examined common areas to maintain a neat and orderly appearance

## **PUBLICATIONS**

“Double Identity in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*.” *Explorations*. August 2013.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

**University of California Riverside, Riverside, CA**

“Double Identity in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*.” *Communal Coffers: African-American Literary Pasts and Futures*. Lindon Barrett Scholars Mentoring Program. Riverside, CA. August, 2012.

## **SKILLS**

**Computer:** Proficient in Microsoft Office; possess typing speed of 71wpm

**Social Media:** Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat; WordPress and BlogSpot

**Language:** Working knowledge of Spanish (oral and written)

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